



Industry
Canada

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Official Languages Audit Report Service To The Public

Final Report

Audit and Evaluation Branch

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Canada 

Background

In 1994, the Commissioner of Official Languages (COL) undertook a study to determine the extent to which federal institutions were complying with the provisions of the Official Languages Act (OLA) and the Regulations. In his report, the COL made recommendations to improve service delivery in both official languages at designated offices.

On March 17, 1995, the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) asked federal institutions to analyse the two-language capability of each office that is required to serve the public in both official languages. Institutions were also requested to draw up action plans for offices with unsatisfactory performance and report to TBS on their implementation. This exercise was completed in March 1996.

During the period of 1996-2000, a study was conducted by COL to follow up on the implementation of the recommended corrective measures. This follow-up was conducted region by region over a three-year period. Separate reports were prepared for each province and territory as well as for the NCR. Its purpose was to determine whether there had been improvement since 1994 and to assess the extent to which good quality services were offered and available in both official languages in these offices. Another goal was to efficiently correct any deficiencies in the offices being audited. To that end, specific recommendations were made for each office where there were shortcomings. Again departments were requested to prepare action plans to address the observations. Since the last study, the COL has not conducted a follow-up on the management actions proposed by departments to address the observations and recommendations identified by the study.

Audit Objective and Scope

The objective of this audit project was to follow up on the actions taken by departmental management to address the deficiencies identified by the Commissioner of Official Languages (COL) in its study. This was done to ensure that those who deal with the public are aware the public has the legislated right to be served in the official language of their choice. The audit covered the various Industry Canada offices in the regions for which observations and recommendations were raised by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Audit Methodology

- Interviews were held with various staff members in the department, as required, to obtain information on the implementation status of the actions proposed by management to address the deficiencies identified in the COL's study.
- All relevant documentation was reviewed including reports from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and documentation provided by departmental management that support the actions taken to address the deficiencies noted in the COL's study report.

- Questionnaires on the current status of the actions taken to address the observations raised by the COL were developed and distributed to the various regions for completion. These were subsequently reviewed and analysed.
- Anonymous telephone calls were made to the Atlantic, Ontario, Prairie and Pacific Regional Offices as well as a number of those offices identified by the COL in their 2000 report. These included Halifax, Sydney, Dartmouth, Moncton, St-John, Toronto, Kingston, Don Mills, Sudbury, Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Vancouver and Whitehorse. This was done to assess the ability of the offices to serve the public in both official languages.

Audit Findings

In the 1999-2000 follow-up audit report, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL) identified a number of offices where improvements were needed to ensure that service to the public was assured in both official languages. The observations raised dealt with the lack of documentation available in both official languages, the inability of employees to greet the public, either in person or by telephone, in both official languages, the lack of bilingual signage in reception areas and bilingual information in telephone directories. The offices mentioned included those in Moncton, St-John, Sydney, Dartmouth, Kingston, Sudbury Don Mills, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon and Whitehorse in the Atlantic, Ontario, Prairie and Pacific regions.

Our audit findings revealed that since the OCOL's follow-up audit, offices in the regions have improved their ability to serve the public in both official languages as indicated in the following.

Ontario Region

For the Kingston, Sudbury, Don Mills and Toronto offices in the Ontario Region, they have not had any complaints since 2000. Documentation is available in both languages and, for those offices designated who serve walk-ins, a pictogram is posted advising them that they can be served in either of the official languages. These findings were confirmed by the offices when a status of the implementation of the OCOL's observations was requested. When we placed a telephone call to these offices, the call was answered with a bilingual greeting and, in the Regional Office, when information was requested in French, the receptionist forwarded the caller to an employee who could provide information in the French language.

No recommendation is necessary.

Prairie Region

For those offices designated as serving walk- ins, a pictogram is posted advising clients that they can be served in either of the official languages. Telephone listings indicate the telephone number to call for service in the French language. These findings were confirmed by the office. Telephone calls placed to the Winnipeg Regional Office, the Regina office and the Saskatoon office, were answered with a greeting in both official languages. However, the recording at the Legal Metrology office in Regina was in English only.

Recommendation:

It is therefore recommended that management ensure that the recording for the Legal Metrology office in Regina be reworded to include a French version as well as an English version in its message.

Management Response:

Management confirmed that the Measurement Canada (Legal Metrology) Regina office has implemented the recommendation. The Regina office phone greeting message is now bilingual, offering immediate and bilingual service through their Saskatoon Office.

Pacific Region

In the Whitehorse office, documentation is available in both official languages. No complaints have been received by the office since 2000. For those offices designated as serving walk- ins, a pictogram is posted advising clients that they can be served in either of the official languages. To ensure that service is available in both official languages, the office entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Heritage Canada which provides bilingual reception services. Again these findings were confirmed by the office in their status report on the implementation of the OCOL's observations. Telephone directories were updated to indicate where service in the French language is available. Calls placed to the Regional Office in Vancouver and the Whitehorse office were answered with a bilingual greeting and were able to provide information in the French language.

No recommendation is necessary.

Atlantic Region

Regarding the offices in the Atlantic Region, no complaints have been received by them since 2000. For those offices designated as serving walk- ins, a pictogram is posted advising clients that they can be served in either of the official languages and documentation is available in both languages. These findings were confirmed by the offices when a status of the implementation of the OCOL's observations was requested. In the Halifax, Sydney, Dartmouth, St-John and Moncton offices, when telephone calls were placed to them, the greeting was in both official languages and when information was requested in French, the information was provided in the French language or the call was directed to an employee who could provide the information in French.

No recommendation is necessary.