



The Single Window Networks of the Government of Canada



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I. INTRODUCTION

Two major “single window” networks have been put in place by the federal government to facilitate for all Canadians their day-to-day needs for information on government programs and services: the Canada Business Service Centres (CBSC) Network and the multi-channel one-stop network, which includes the 1-800-O-CANADA line for telephone service, the Canada Web site and 229 Service Canada access points for in-person service.

The CSBC initiative is a cooperative arrangement among 37 federal business departments, provincial and territorial governments and, in some cases, the private and academic sectors. The CBSCs reduce the complexity of dealing with various levels of government by serving as a central resource for Canadian business information. The network is composed of 13 main centres, one in each province and territory, and an extended network of 378 regional access partners in smaller communities across the country. CBSC partners include: business or economic development corporations, Community Future Development Corporations, provincial and federal local offices of business departments or ministries and Chambers of Commerce. Toll-free telephone access, the Internet site and e-mail are all handled from the CBSC main centres or “hubs.”

The CBSC National Secretariat (in Industry Canada) provides support and coordination for the network of CBSCs on behalf of the four lead federal agencies accountable for the operation of the CBSCs in their respective part of the country: Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) in the four Atlantic provinces; Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions (CED) in Quebec; Industry Canada in Ontario, Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon; and Western Economic Diversification (WD) in the four western provinces.

On April 2, 2002, responsibility for managing the Service Canada Access Points (SC-AP) network was transferred to Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) from the Treasury Board Secretariat (responsible for the pilot project). HRDC has committed resources to retain 59 of the 122 pilot Service Canada sites (which had been in operation for the better part of two years) to which it added 170 sites for a total of 229 (including some sites managed by Canadian Heritage), until March 31, 2004. No source of funding to continue the 156 Canada Post satellite access centres has been identified beyond December 2003. HRDC hopes that within the next year, the Government of Canada will develop a long-term vision for service delivery, upon which decisions can be made with respect to the future of the Service Canada initiative. We share in this hope, especially considering the importance of the single window initiative in terms of providing official language minority communities with easier access to information in their own language.

The Access Points are found across the breadth of rural and urban Canada, at the service of all Canadians, in both official languages. The network has the underpinnings of the 1-800-O-CANADA line and the Canada Web site.

II. PURPOSE

Although no longer in its infancy, “single windows” is a relatively new way of serving Canadians. The purpose of this study was to examine the federal government’s Single Windows initiative in order to determine the extent to which information on programs and services is equally accessible in both official languages and whether “single windows” serves to support the advancement of Canada’s official language minority communities, in line with the government’s commitment. The study sought to identify any problem areas and to bring these to the attention of the responsible federal institutions.

III. LEGISLATIVE BASIS

This study was conducted in light of the provisions of Part IV and Part VII (section 41) of the *Official Languages Act*. Part IV stipulates that the public has the right to communicate with federal institutions and receive services from them in the official language of their choice, at their head or central office and at their offices in the National Capital Region; or in Canada or elsewhere, where there is significant demand for services in that language. Section 41 states that:

“The Government of Canada is committed (a) to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; (b) and fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society.”

Application of Part VII in the “single windows” context requires that the needs of official language minority communities be taken into account both in terms of the choice of location and organization of the various service points.

The right of the public to communicate with and receive available services, as provided for under Part IV, as well as the government’s commitment to the full recognition of English and French in Canadian society (Part VII) must be reflected in agreements with the provinces and territories.

IV. METHODOLOGY

We began our study by visiting a number of federal, provincial and municipal government Web sites, including certain private sector sites. We then met with key members of both the CBSC National Secretariat and the Service Canada Implementation Team. We decided with these teams that the study would focus on the ability of the CBSCs and the SC-AP to serve the official

language minorities in New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta. In all cases, the hub CBSC for that province was selected, as well as a total of eight organizations which are part of the CBSC network of 378 regional access partners. Two of these were in the planning stages. For each centre visited, we also examined documentation pertaining to the operations of the centre.

As for the SC-AP, our observations were based primarily on the work of the Treasury Board Secretariat pilot Implementation Team and the Service Canada pilot network of 122 access points. Our observations have been updated based on new information and comments received from federal institutions on our preliminary report.

In the course of our study, we decided to examine the situation in Saskatchewan in light of a proposal by the Assemblée communautaire francosaskoise (ACF) for funding of a single windows satellite network in its community.

We wish to thank those who participated in this special study for their cooperation and thank the institutions for the comments they provided us in a very short delay.

V. OBSERVATIONS

A) THE CANADA BUSINESS SERVICE CENTRES NETWORK

The CBSCs began as pilot projects in 1992. The collaborative arrangements with the provinces/territories, and in some cases municipal and private sector organizations, allow the CBSCs to bring all information together in one place. The federal involvement in the CBSCs ensures that, in these arrangements, services are made available throughout the network in both official languages. The CBSC National Secretariat plays a key support role to all the Centres and provides

guidance in the area of official languages.
(See Figure I.)

Each one of the lead federal partners, referred to as a “managing partner,” has negotiated federal/provincial or territorial agreements, or in some cases other agreement documents with third parties, such as the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal and the Yukon Chamber of Commerce. In each agreement, there are clauses delineating the requirements under the *Official Languages Act* and how associated costs will be handled.

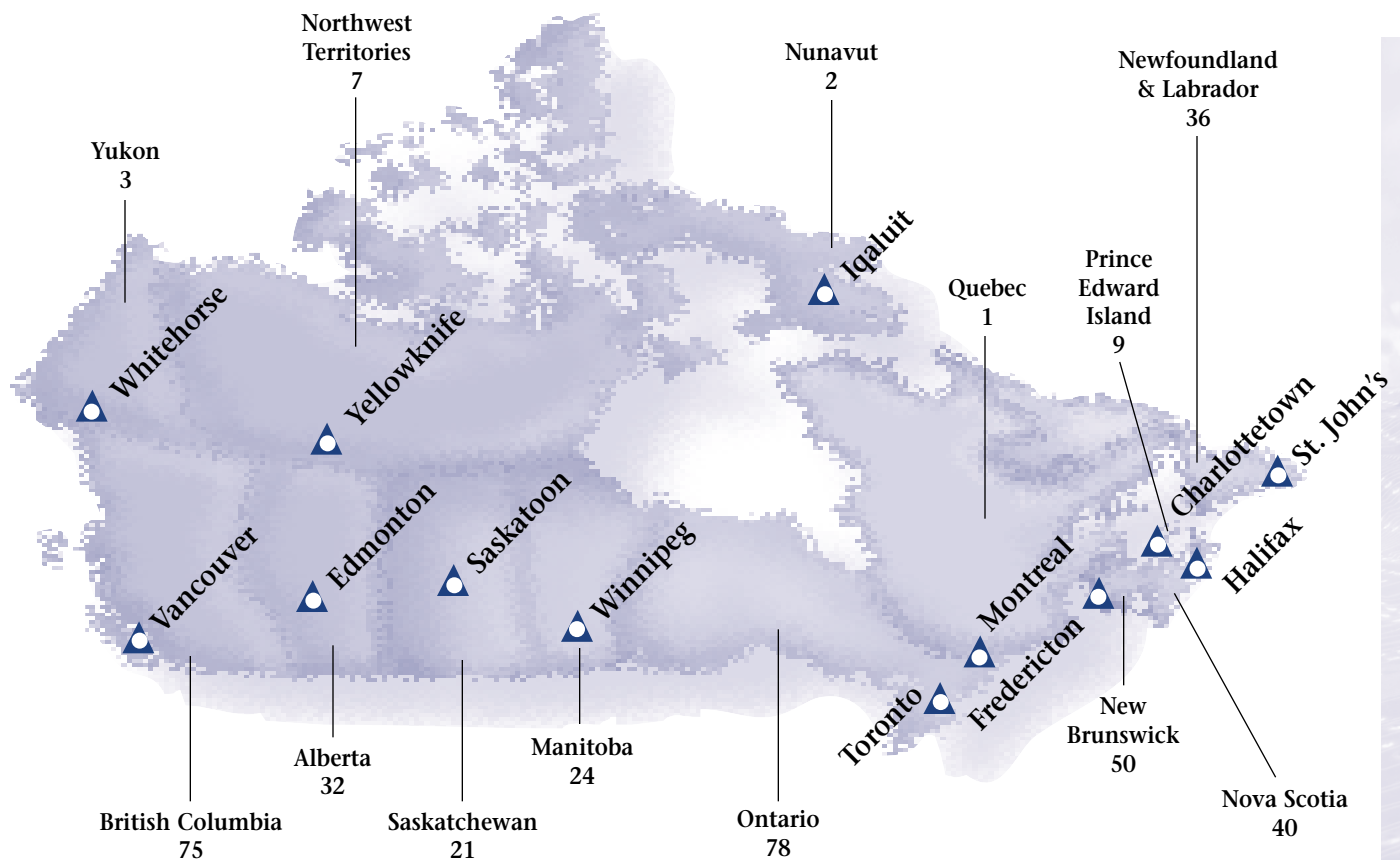
Operational practices and procedures outlining the obligations of federal institutions under the *Official Languages Act* in this partnership context

are provided to each centre. The CBSC National Secretariat has developed a succinct but complete Managers’ Guide on official languages practices and procedures. It has been shared with all CBSCs, who in turn have shared it quite extensively with their regional access partners. Our study revealed that the Guide is a well-known document, which is generally respected and which offers clear guidelines on official languages obligations, including those outlined in Part VII (section 41) of the Act.

Although, as already mentioned, there are clauses in agreements, those found in funding agreements are very brief. For example, the clause in the agreement between WD and the Calgary Business Information Centre (CBIC) reads as

FIGURE I
Regional Distribution of CBSCs

▲ HUB



follows: “CBIC will provide services in English and French languages as directed by Canada.” It is essential that centres such as the CBIC know precisely how to carry out their official languages obligations and are held accountable in this regard. We believe that official languages clauses in funding agreements should state explicitly that funded business service centres must comply with the official languages practices and procedures outlined in the Manager’s Guide.

The Commissioner of Official Languages therefore recommends that the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Industry Canada and Western Economic Diversification:

- 1. ensure that all official languages clauses in new partnership or funding agreements include the requirement to respect the official languages practices and procedures outlined in the *Manager’s Guide – Official Languages Act, Network of Canada Business Service Centres.***

The Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) considers that the above recommendation is legitimate in cases where the federal institutions responsible for managing CBSC sites have entered into contractual agreements with private organizations which have committed themselves to providing the information in both official languages. In our view, funding must be conditional upon acceptance of this commitment.

Industry Canada has asked the CBSC National Secretariat to revise the standard clause related to official languages used in agreements so that the Manager’s Guide is reflected in future agreements. The Guide is periodically amended as new best practices are developed or as changes in other important access policies, such as the recent federal Common Look and Feel and communications policies and the Federal Identity Program, are introduced. Industry Canada points out that the wording of the clause will therefore have to reflect the fact that the Guide is not a

static document and may be revised in the course of an agreement.

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) points out that the CBSCs are presently part of ACOA and do not have a contractual relationship with the Agency and as such there is no funding agreement. The Agency is responsible for providing the resources and tools to the centres and to incurring any costs associated with the production and delivery of these resources. Furthermore, the employees working in the centres are ACOA’s and, therefore, the official languages obligations are communicated to them in the same manner as employees working in the rest of the Agency. ACOA is considering for the future the option of a third party service provider. If this becomes the case, ACOA will have to take this recommendation into account.

i) Web sites

The management of the CBSC National Secretariat and the managers of the hub CBSCs visited all clearly indicated the importance of choosing satellite partners carefully in terms of their willingness and ability to carry out their official languages responsibilities where required. Our review of CBSC Web sites showed that CBSCs include a notice on their home page under “Important Notices” stating that they are bound by the *Official Languages Act* and relevant Treasury Board policies and that, although all federal programs, services and regulations are available in both English and French, users should be aware that some information from external sources is available only in the language in which it was provided. The Commissioner’s special study of June 2002 entitled: *Official Languages Requirements and Government On-Line* highlights the need for a policy requiring that a portal be treated as a service and that information provided through a federal government portal be made available in both official languages, even though it may be coming from other orders of government and the private sector. (In the case of

the CSBCs, the federal government is the portal manager.) This question is being addressed by TBS' Official Languages Branch as part of its policy review.

TBS points out that one of the aspects of its current review of official languages obligations as they relate to federal portals consists of making a distinction between, on the one hand, a portal which consists of information stemming from other sources and, on the other, a Web site which, as a matter of courtesy, establishes hyperlinks in order to facilitate access to other sites. Viewed in this way, a hyperlink in no way signifies that there exists a partnership between the federal institution and the organization (a non-federal entity) to whose site the hyperlink refers. We concur with this assessment.

For the most part, the Web sites of the various federal departments participating in the business venture of the CBSC network are available in both official languages and are of satisfactory linguistic quality. Last year, in keeping with the federal government's Government On-Line (GOL) goals, the network of CSBCs focussed on web-based services. Since official languages requirements are an important aspect of these services, the Commissioner invites the CBSC managing partners to acquaint themselves with the issues and recommendations contained in her GOL study, which is available on the Office of the Commissioner's Web site at www.ocol-clo.gc.ca.

As mentioned, we visited the provincial Web sites of New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba. The Web sites of New Brunswick are bilingual and are of comparable quality to that of federal Web sites. Many Quebec sites are not yet bilingual. Ontario and Manitoba are making fair strides at "bilingualizing" their Web sites, although the French on Ontario's sites is often of poor quality. To address this problem, the manager of the Canada/Ontario Business Service Centre (C/OBSC) is planning to set up an on-staff linguistic service, designed to help improve the quality and coordination of French documents.

The Web site of the Business Link in Edmonton is fully bilingual. Moreover, since bilingualizing their Web site, the number of requests in French coming into this Centre has greatly increased. As we were preparing this study, we suggested that the Web site of the Calgary partner, the CBIC, be fully bilingualized and that has been done.

In light of the preceding observations, the Commissioner of Official Languages recommends that Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Industry Canada and Western Economic Diversification:

- 2. take measures so that by June 30, 2003, their respective provincial government Business Service Centre partners in Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba render their Web sites fully bilingual and, in so doing, harmonize them with the Government of Canada Web sites, in respect of Part IV and Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*.**

Industry Canada believes that there is little that the CBSC initiative can do to effect a change of language policy of provincial/territorial Web sites, as it is outside the scope of its collaborative arrangements. According to the Department, our observations and recommendations do not seem to acknowledge this reality and in fact attempt to leverage its partnerships to fulfill an agenda beyond the authority of the CBSCs. We do not advocate a change of language policy in this regard; however, we do not believe that it is outside the scope of collaborative arrangements to negotiate the inclusion in partnership agreements of provisions aimed specifically at ensuring that Canada's two official language communities receive equal treatment. It is also all federal institution's responsibility to foster the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society in compliance with Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*.

The Department further points out that the CBSC Web sites in each province and territory provide a unique federal/provincial and territorial Internet collaboration for Canadian business wherein a great deal of common content is developed integrating the programs, services and compliance requirements of both orders of government. These CBSC sites are bilingual as defined in the Guide. As such, CBSC Web sites have increased access to business information in both official languages immensely - information that would otherwise be in one official language only.

Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions has stated that it does not believe that it is possible to require that other orders of government and the private sector comply with the requirements of Part IV or respect the government's commitment outlined in Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*, since the Act generally applies only to federal institutions.

TBS points out that the above recommendation deals with three questions which, although interrelated, warrant separate consideration. These are: respect of official languages obligations in partnerships, disclaimers under Important Notices and federal portals.

TBS supports the intent of the above recommendation to the extent that it is aimed at the same partners as those referred to in recommendation 1 and provided that we are referring to organizations which have signed an agreement which obliges them to comply with the same official languages requirements as federal institutions which are subject to the *Official Languages Act*. While we confirm that this is in fact the case, again we expect that organizations which receive funding will be required under the terms of the agreement to provide services in both official languages.

TBS considers that it would be difficult to support the idea that the notice informing users that information available through a hyperlink linking a federal site to a non-federal site may not

be available in both official languages be suppressed because it is impossible to exclude the possibility that certain partners establish hyperlinks from their sites which lead to other sites which are not subject to the *Official Languages Act*. Thus by posting such a notice as required by TBS' policy on the use of official languages on electronic networks and the directives related to the standardization of Internet sites, users will be informed that they will not be able to expect that all of the information made available through a hyperlink linking a federal site to a non-federal site will be available in both official languages. In TBS' view, to give an impression to the contrary could be perceived as a false active offer on the part of the federal site. We agree.

As already mentioned, we agree with the distinction made by TBS between a portal which consists of information stemming from other sources and a Web site which, as a matter of courtesy, establishes hyperlinks in order to facilitate access to other sites. Thus a hyperlink does not mean that there exists a partnership between the federal institution and the non-federal organization to whose site the hyperlink refers.

We trust that the foregoing has served to clarify the responsibilities of the managing partners in this regard.

ii) Business documentation

The business documentation centres/libraries in the various provincial CBSCs strive to reflect Canada's linguistic duality within the breadth of their collections. This is most in evidence in the centres in Manitoba and New Brunswick. The Ontario CBSC in Toronto is fast tracking the French elements of its collection to bring holdings in that language up to speed. Info entrepreneurs, the hub CBSC in Quebec, ensures that virtually all their documents are available in both English and French. The collection is composed of both government publications and material from commercial sources.

The documentation shelves provided by the CBCSCs to their regional access partners in Manitoba and New Brunswick have a good balance of English and French holdings. Ontario has recently reexamined the documentation shelves provided to their regional access partners and has ensured that the small collections have a good representation of French-language titles.

iii) In-person and telephone services

The staffs of the CBCSCs included in the study were found to be adequately bilingual and to always make an active offer of service in both official languages in Fredericton, in Montreal, in Toronto and in Winnipeg, as well as in Calgary and Edmonton.

We would like to mention a few salient examples of quality service in both official languages. Overall the Canada/New Brunswick Business Service Centre (C/NBBSC) in Fredericton and its regional access partners in Bathurst (Chaleur Regional Development Commission Inc.) and Bouctouche (ADEL-Kent-LEDA Inc.) offer an exemplary level of bilingual service, and the management has put extra effort into ensuring that work is carried out effectively in both official languages. Info entrepreneurs, the hub CBCSC for Quebec through a collaborative arrangement between CED and the Montreal Board of Trade, is a model of good federal/private sector cooperation. It helps its staff with business vocabulary in both English and French and reaches out to both English- and French-speaking university students who want to go into business in Quebec. The Canada/Ontario Business Service Centre's (C/OBSC) partner in Sudbury, the Sudbury Regional Development Corporation offers its services in both languages and has organized a program on "Planning a business" for senior secondary school students which is to be offered in both official languages province-wide.

The outreach activities developed and offered by the Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre (C/MBSC) in concert with its service delivery partner (the Chaboillé Community Development

Corporation) include a French-language business series that is rolled out twice a year at various locations in Franco-Manitoban communities. In Manitoba, two Franco-Manitoban Service Centres (in which the CBCSC is a major participant) have been launched and a third is in the works, with plans that are greatly appreciated by the Franco-Manitoban community. (See section below entitled "Service Canada Access Points Network.")

In Edmonton and Calgary, ties have been forged between the Business Link, the Calgary Business Information Centre and the *Chambre économique de l'Alberta* and other Franco-Albertan partners which have facilitated a good level of service in French to the Francophone business community not only in Alberta, but also in the Northwest Territories. The Business Link also actively participates in trade fairs such as the *Forum économique* organized by the *Chambre économique de l'Alberta*. This organization is one of four Francophone Economic Development Organizations supported by WD to provide business and economic development services to the Francophone communities of western Canada.

We wish to point out that in North Bay the general organization of the C/OBSC partner to meet official languages obligations has not yet been given adequate consideration. In particular, the North Bay centre has not been ensuring an active offer of bilingual service over the phone and its staff has yet to actively meet with the minority Francophone business associations in the Blue Sky Region to understand how their needs can be better served.

The Commissioner of Official Languages therefore recommends that Industry Canada:

- 3. by March 1, 2003, work out a plan in consultation with the Canada/Ontario Business Service Centre in order to help its North Bay regional access partner to comply fully with the obligations set out in Part IV and Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*.**

Industry Canada points out that CBSC regional access partnerships are considered as enhancements to the in-person channel and not the toll-free telephone or Internet channels which are provided directly by each CBSC. The primary objective of the extended CBSC network is to build cost efficient in-person access to CBSC information through partnerships. The Department interprets our recommendation within these limits. (We agree with this interpretation.) Regional access partners are selected because of their mandates, services and established reputations in the business community. In communities where there is a requirement to provide services in both official languages such as North Bay, partners must be willing and able to do so during an in-person session. Many CBSC regional access partners operate in small centres such as North Bay where bilingual staff may be difficult to find and occasionally there are challenges to meeting the requirements. Back-up service arrangements are in place through the CBSC toll-free telephone channel or the "Talk to Us" service available at partner locations. "Talk to Us" connects clients through a collaborative Internet and telephone session with fully bilingual business information officers in the CBSCs in a regional access partner's site.

Industry Canada has informed us that the Canada-Ontario Business Service Centre (C/OBSC) will work with the North Bay regional access partner to ensure an active offer of bilingual service is made for in-person service. We wish to underline the fact that the C/OBSC is responsible for ensuring that once an active offer is made, the capacity exists to follow through on the offer by providing an equivalent level of service to members of both official language communities. The C/OBSC must ensure that the back-up arrangements currently in place do not become the norm for providing service to the official language minority.

iv) Monitoring and control

In our view, it is essential that the CBSC management framework include the necessary control mechanisms for ensuring compliance with official languages requirements within the CBSC network. Thus it is incumbent on the CBSC managing partners to ensure that the network functions adequately from an official languages perspective. To this end, the responsible federal institutions must monitor the capacity of the business centres to effectively meet the requirements of the *Official Languages Act* and take appropriate corrective action as required.

The Commissioner of Official Languages therefore recommends that the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Industry Canada and Western Economic Diversification:

- 4. by March 31, 2003, put in place the necessary control mechanisms to ensure full compliance with the requirements of the *Official Languages Act* within the Canadian Business Service Centres network.**

Industry Canada considers that the necessary control mechanisms are already in place. The CBSCs for which Industry Canada is responsible are covered in the departmental audit and evaluation program like all departmental services. In addition, as a new initiative, all CBSCs have been routinely evaluated over the last nine years. The national evaluation framework covers service standards and official languages requirements. CBSCs develop annual plans and report on their section 41 activity as part of normal departmental reporting. The C/OBSC routinely monitors a sample of calls for all aspects of telephone quality including official languages. Lastly, Industry Canada, provides Managers and staff with explicit procedures and instruction in the Managers' Guide. In our view, periodic monitoring of all aspects and modes of service delivery is essential in order to ensure that deficiencies are detected and corrected on the spot. We encourage Industry

Canada to pursue its periodic monitoring of all aspects and modes of service delivery in order to ensure that deficiencies are detected and corrected on the spot.

Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions considers that, since they view any shortcomings regarding clients' respect of their contractual obligations with respect to official languages as a breach of contract, the control mechanism already exists. We do not share this point of view. In our opinion, control must be exercised through periodic monitoring in order to determine whether there is a breach of contract and what corrective measures are required.

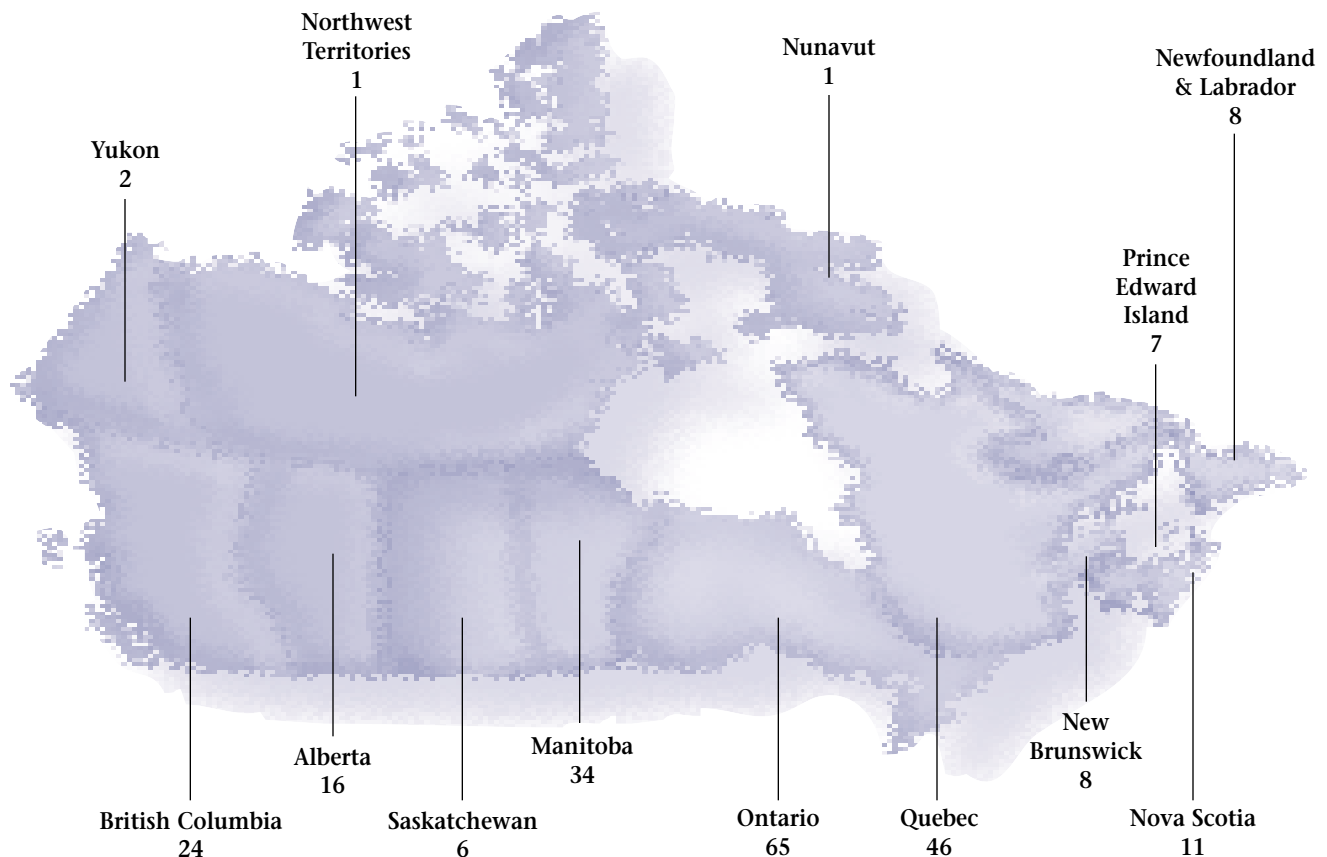
Western Economic Diversification expressed the view that while they agree that the necessary control mechanisms be put in place, substantial strides have been made in the pursuit of this goal.

B) SERVICE CANADA ACCESS POINTS NETWORK

The new network of Service Canada Access Points is located at 64 HRDC-managed sites, 9 Canadian Heritage sites and, as already mentioned, 156 Canada Post sites. Official languages obligations were taken into account for the 122 pilots, and attention has been given to ensuring full compliance with official languages obligations in the new network. (See Figure II.)

FIGURE II

Regional Distribution of Service Canada Access Centres



In Manitoba, two pilot Bilingual Service Centres have been launched. On April 19, 2002, the first tri-partite Bilingual Service Centre opened in St. Boniface. Its aim is to improve service delivery in Manitoba communities with a high concentration of French-speaking citizens. The 30 bilingual employees on site from all three orders of government offer a wide range of bilingual services, including referral to government programs and services. Manitobans can access the services in person, by telephone or electronically.

A second Bilingual Service Centre, the first in rural Manitoba, was launched on October 11, 2002 in Saint-Pierre-Jolys. This collaborative arrangement among the governments of Canada and Manitoba, the Chaboillé Community Development Corporation in Saint-Pierre-Jolys and Winnipeg Child and Family Services is aimed at providing residents of the Red River region with services in the official language of their choice. A bilingual staff of 18 will provide a wide range of bilingual community and government services under one roof.

The above centres will also house a business counselling satellite office of the Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre. A third Bilingual Service Centre is planned for Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes.

Service Canada has brokered a relationship between Communication Canada, HRDC and Treasury Board Secretariat to continue the multi-channel one-stop network of the Government of Canada. This includes, as we have already said, the 1-800-O-CANADA line, the Canada Web site and the 229 in-person access points. Of the 122 Service Canada pilot access points, 59 remain (including those that were visited in the course of researching this study: the Post Office of Bouctouche, the *Café Jeunesse* in Montreal, and the Access Point in the Human Resource Centre in North Bay). As for the Service Canada site in

Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, Manitoba it will be integrated into the new Government Service Centre which is under construction in that locality. These sites, as well as the Canada Place display booth in Moncton and the access points in Canada Place in Edmonton and Calgary, generally offered a satisfactory service in both official languages and staff members were familiar with the Service Canada official languages kit and were aware of their linguistic obligations.

Service Canada has been negotiating a good urban/rural balance for the new network of 229 access points. Forty-five percent of these nationally are located in small and rural communities. At least 30% of access centres within each province and territory are located in small and rural communities.

Service Canada's new network of 229 access points should, from its inception, generally be able to meet its obligations under the *Official Languages Act*. Compliance with the Act is clearly written into the Memoranda of Understanding among all the partners. As in the case of the CSBCs, we believe that those responsible for the Service Canada access points need to be well-equipped to carry out their official languages responsibilities. The Commissioner of Official Languages therefore recommends that Human Resources Development Canada:

5. by March 1, 2003, ensure that Service Canada In-Person Access Points are provided with the official languages practices and procedures kit prepared by the Treasury Board Secretariat Implementation Team.

HRDC has informed us that it will ensure that, by March 1, 2003, new Service Canada access centres are provided with the same official languages practices and procedures information that was provided to access centres by the TBS implementation team.

i) Web sites

The Government of Canada Web sites underpinning the information on services and programs used by the Service Canada sites, as we have already mentioned, are virtually all available in both official languages. Moreover, the assistance offered by the 1-800-O-CANADA line is made actively available in both official languages wherever the user may be calling from. However, in the sites visited, particularly the three New Brunswick sites in Fredericton, Bouctouche and Moncton, it was noted that the keyboards of the computer terminals being used did not display the French accent signs, and the software used was not able to easily produce them. Moreover, the Office of the Commissioner has received complaints concerning the same situation for the Service Canada sites in Saint John and Fredericton.

The Commissioner of Official Languages therefore recommends that Human Resources Development Canada:

- 6. by March 1, 2003, examine the keyboards that are being used in the Service Canada Access Centres and ensure that they display the French accent signs and that the software used can easily produce them, in full compliance with the Treasury Board Information Technology Standard.**

HRDC has informed us that three of the four access centres mentioned above are no longer part of the new Service Canada network. The Department will confirm the use of computer keyboards displaying the French accent signs in compliance with the Treasury Board Information Technology Standard by March 31, 2003.

Canada Post, for its part, has installed a bilingual keyboard displaying French accents in Bouctouche and has begun an audit of other offices providing single window services to ensure that all keyboards are in compliance with the standard.

ii) Communication strategy

The importance of publicizing the availability of the network must not be underestimated. The pilot access points have been under-utilized by both official language communities. "One-stop shopping" is of particular advantage to official language minority communities in that it allows them to have easier access to information in their own language without having to try to get that information from many different sources, some of which may not be geared to help them in their own official language. A well-orchestrated communication plan has helped Montreal's *Café Jeunesse* be a success, and personal commitment and clever ways of getting the word out without much expense helped the pilot Service Canada Access Points in North Bay and Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes become popular with members of their communities. Most of the other pilot access points, however, have had little funding to communicate their important offer of service.

In light of the foregoing, the Commissioner of Official Languages recommends that Human Resources Development Canada:

- 7. by March 1, 2003, develop a communication strategy for making the network of Service Canada In-Person Access Points well known to Canadians and ensure that the strategy clearly takes into consideration the needs of the minority official language communities.**

According to HRDC, the Budget of the Government of Canada has not provided any funding to support the operations of the Service Canada network since the end of the Treasury Board pilot project. HRDC and its partners in the in-person service delivery have had to reallocate internal resources to keep the initiative alive until such time as funding is secured. As a result, resources will remain limited until at least 2004-2005.

HRDC has informed us that, in spite of these limited resources, Service Canada service partners and access centre managers have demonstrated their continuing commitment to marketing and promotion and undertook, in the first six months of 2002-2003, over 1,300 low-cost activities to promote the initiative, such as radio, television and newspaper advertising and attendance at community fairs and events. HRDC's regional coordinators for Service Canada have worked with local managers to develop marketing plans and coordinate participation in promotional opportunities, such as fairs and exhibits.

HRDC will continue to work with its various partners at all levels to develop communication plans to improve awareness of the initiative among Canadians in the communities served. The activities undertaken will reflect the resources available to support them and will take into consideration special needs of particular population groups, including those of official language minority communities, among others.

iii) Monitoring and control

We believe that HRDC, as manager of the SC-AP network, has a responsibility to ensure that the network functions adequately from an official languages standpoint. To this end, the Department must monitor the capacity of the SC-AP to effectively meet the requirements of the *Official Languages Act* and take appropriate corrective action as required.

The Commissioner of Official Languages therefore recommends that Human Resources Development Canada:

- 8. by March 31, 2003, put in place the necessary control mechanisms to ensure full compliance with the requirements of the *Official Languages Act* within the Service Canada Access Points Network.**

We have been informed by HRDC that the requirements of the *Official Languages Act* with respect to Service Canada have been highlighted within the directions given by the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery, to HRDC Regional Executive Heads, in terms of meeting their Performance Accord obligations. In addition, since the time of the OCOL visits to Service Canada access centres, HRDC has developed a new site monitoring program. Official languages requirements are one of the elements evaluated in the program. So far in 2002-2003, 23 access centres have been visited. We view HRDC's initiative as a step in the right direction and we encourage the department to pursue its monitoring program.

C) THE NEED IN SASKATCHEWAN

Since 1999, the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise (ACF) has been working diligently to make known the need for a single window satellite network in its community, more particularly in 12 community and cultural centres in Saskatchewan. According to the ACF, there is a pressing need to combat the erosion of language rights in Saskatchewan, made worse by the lack of access in French to the products and services of federal departments in this province. The ACF contends that its initiative is vital and embodies the main elements of "single windows," notably to provide a multi-service centre and act as a go-between in helping Canadians get the services they need quickly and easily in the official language of their choice.

The ACF demonstrated in its document entitled *Un nouveau vecteur de développement* - May 2002 ("A new perspective on development" - our translation) that it is responding to the challenge in several ways. The ACF gives as an example its capacity to provide, on a priority basis, information in French on the services and programs of the federal government to official language minority Canadians in rural and urban

areas who otherwise would probably not have access to this information as easily. This information would also be provided to the local majority population of target communities who request it.

The ACF views this venture as important in terms of developing a sense of pride in a community small in numbers by having it play an active role in its area in fostering a partnership with government organizations for the delivery of an equitable information service in such areas as employment, human resources, health, justice, immigration and industry, as well as in terms of helping small town and rural official language minority Canadians get “connected” to the Internet and the federal government.

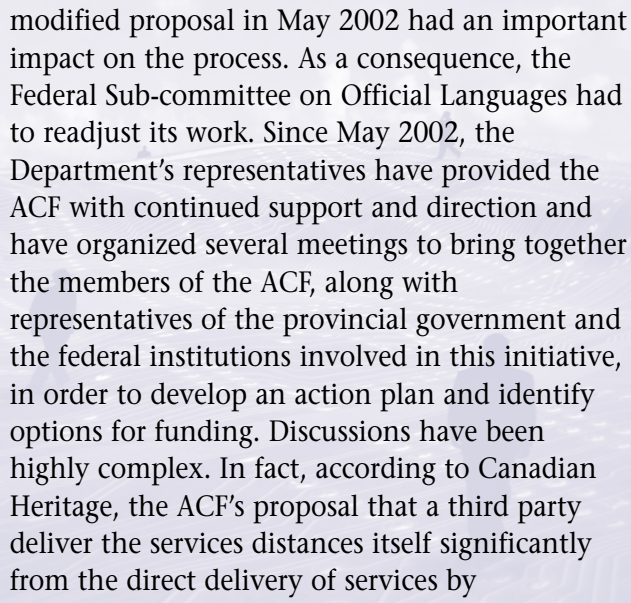
The ACF, through a funding agreement with the Province of Saskatchewan, has set up two pilot single window satellites and an administrative centre to assist the province in meeting certain of its human resources obligations. A satellite centre in St-Isidore-de-Bellevue serves the northern region of the province and another in Gravelbourg serves the southern region. The services currently offered in the area of employment have been very successful, and the demand for “real” access to federal government services is increasing. Federal funding for implementation of the network has been anxiously awaited for more than two years but has not yet materialized.

In January 2002, considering the importance of this issue for a minority official language community, as well as the fact that the single window satellite network is very much in keeping with the intent of section 41 of the *Official Languages Act*, the Commissioner wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury Board and the deputy ministers of Canadian Heritage, Human Resources Development Canada, Western Economic Diversification, Agriculture and Agri-foods and Industry Canada underlining the importance of this issue and asking them to get on board.

Under the leadership of Canadian Heritage, talks have been underway between the Federal Sub-committee on Official Languages in Saskatchewan and the ACF since early 2002 to find avenues for helping the ACF successfully establish their network of single window satellites. The parties involved, including the ACF, have confirmed their commitment to improving both the access and the quality of services in French in Saskatchewan. They also agreed to continue the work in order to find the approach that best suits them. They are reflecting on such issues as the need to improve access in French to the products and services of target federal departments, as well as the need for the single window network to take into account both the urban and rural realities in Saskatchewan. Canadian Heritage and HRDC, which has been responsible for the Service Canada network since April 2002, have a key role to play in this matter.

The Commissioner fully supports the Assemblée communautaire francosaskoise in establishing their network of single windows. In fact, in June 2002, she recommended in a letter that the Deputy Ministers of Canadian Heritage and Human Resources Development Canada ***take the lead, in cooperation with the Assemblée communautaire francosaskoise, in developing a strategy and a timetable for federal participation, by October 2002, in the establishment of a viable network of single window operations in Saskatchewan, and that the necessary funding for that single window network be found by the various federal partners.***

In August 2002, the Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage replied to this recommendation that her Department was coordinating the federal response in this matter, both through the Federal Sub-committee on Official Languages in Saskatchewan and within the national framework of inter-ministerial partnerships with official language communities. The tabling by the ACF of an updated and



modified proposal in May 2002 had an important impact on the process. As a consequence, the Federal Sub-committee on Official Languages had to readjust its work. Since May 2002, the Department's representatives have provided the ACF with continued support and direction and have organized several meetings to bring together the members of the ACF, along with representatives of the provincial government and the federal institutions involved in this initiative, in order to develop an action plan and identify options for funding. Discussions have been highly complex. In fact, according to Canadian Heritage, the ACF's proposal that a third party deliver the services distances itself significantly from the direct delivery of services by government, as well as from the model put in place by Service Canada. Moreover, the formula suggested by the ACF presents significant financial and accountability challenges.

The Deputy Minister of HRDC responded in July 2002 to the Commissioner's recommendation that his Department cannot consider supporting a third party "single window" initiative or any further expansion of the Service Canada network beyond what is already planned. According to HRDC, circumstances have not changed materially since that time. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada have informed us that their officials have reviewed the ACF's proposal and determined that it does not meet their funding program requirements.

The Commissioner maintains her position that any "single window" initiative in Saskatchewan in which the federal government participates, should necessarily be carried out in partnership with the ACF. In keeping with the government's commitment outlined in Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*, federal institutions have a responsibility, when planning or revising programs and services, to work with official language minority communities in determining the most effective means of meeting their needs.

The Commissioner of Official Languages therefore recommends that the Department of Canadian Heritage:

- 9. pursue, in cooperation with the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise and federal and provincial government representatives, efforts at developing, before April 30, 2003, a strategy and a timetable for federal participation in the establishment of a viable network of single window operations in Saskatchewan, and that the necessary funding for that single window network be found by the various federal partners.**

VI. CONCLUSION

“Single Windows” and its CBSC and SC-AP networks have undeniable advantages for Canadians as a way of getting access to information on government programs and services. These advantages are even more apparent for the official language minority communities: “one-stop shopping,” as already mentioned, allows them to have easier access to information in their own language. Single Windows also allows federal organizations to concentrate their efforts in a smaller number of service access points and thus to maximize the use of their bilingual resources.

Our study has shown that official languages requirements have been taken into account in the development of both the CBSC and SC-AP networks. This is evidenced by clauses in the partnership and funding agreements and the Manager’s Guide and official languages information kit. However, official languages clauses in these agreements ought to be reinforced to include the requirement to respect the guidelines and procedures, and these must be distributed to all partnership and funded single window centres.

The lack of a good communications strategy has left many Canadians, who in fact need information on the programs and services offered by their federal government, “out in the cold” and not knowing how to get “connected.” The level of service has been better developed for the official language minorities where they form a more significant part of the population (New Brunswick, Montreal, Northern Ontario, Manitoba), but has not yet always been of the same quality where the minority is smaller. (Cases in point are the difficult situation for the ACF in Saskatchewan and the C/OBSC regional access partner in North Bay.) The Web sites of Business Service Centre partners are not fully bilingual and not all keyboards in Service Canada Access Centres may yet display French accent signs.

Federal departments must consult with official language minority associations in order to ensure that the single windows networks put in place meet the requirements of the *Official Languages Act*. They must strive to meet the particular needs of official language minority communities and, in so doing, they ought to consider alternate solutions in the case of small official language minorities, such as those in Saskatchewan, where the needs of the community warrant special consideration.

The Single Windows managing partners must monitor the capacity of the business centres and access points to effectively meet the requirements of the *Official Languages Act* and take appropriate corrective action as required.

Finally, since our study clearly revealed the importance of the single window initiatives in terms of providing official language minority communities with easier access to information in their own language, we encourage the government to take this in consideration in its decision to continue or not its initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commissioner of Official Languages recommends:

1. that the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Industry Canada and Western Economic Diversification ensure that all official languages clauses in new partnership or funding agreements include the requirement to respect the official languages practices and procedures outlined in the *Manager's Guide – Official Languages Act, Network of Canada Business Service Centres*.
2. that Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Industry Canada and Western Economic Diversification take measures so that by June 30, 2003, their respective provincial government Business Service Centre partners in Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba render their Web sites fully bilingual and, in so doing, harmonize them with the Government of Canada Web sites, in respect of Part IV and Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*.
3. that Industry Canada, by March 1, 2003, work out a plan in consultation with the Canada/Ontario Business Service Centre in order to help its North Bay regional access partner to comply fully with the obligations set out in Part IV and Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*.
4. that the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Industry Canada and Western Economic Diversification, by March 31, 2003, put in place the necessary control mechanisms to ensure full compliance with the requirements of the *Official Languages Act* within the Canadian Business Service Centres network.
5. that Human Resources Development Canada, by March 1, 2003, ensure that Service Canada In-Person Access Points are provided with the official languages practices and procedures kit prepared by the Treasury Board Secretariat Implementation Team.
6. that Human Resources Development Canada, by March 1, 2003, examine the keyboards that are being used in the Service Canada Access Centres and ensure that they display the French accent signs and that the software used can easily produce them, in full compliance with the Treasury Board Information Technology Standard.
7. that Human Resources Development Canada, by March 1, 2003, develop a communication strategy for making the network of Service Canada In-Person Access Points well known to Canadians and ensure that the strategy clearly takes into consideration the needs of the minority official language communities.

8. that Human Resources Development Canada, by March 31, 2003, put in place the necessary control mechanisms to ensure full compliance with the requirements of the *Official Languages Act* within the Service Canada Access Points Network.
9. that the Department of Canadian Heritage pursue, in cooperation with the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise and federal and provincial government representatives, efforts at developing, before April 30, 2003, a strategy and a timetable for federal participation in the establishment of a viable network of single window operations in Saskatchewan, and that the necessary funding for that single window network be found by the various federal partners.



