



**STUDY OF THE QUALITY OF FRENCH SERVICES
OFFERED BY FEDERAL OFFICES
IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**

2012

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INTRODUCTION

Under the Official Languages Act, federal government institutions across Canada are required to provide French services and make those services available to the country's francophone and Acadian communities.

The Official Languages Act has long been the foundation of official bilingualism in Canada. The act seeks to ensure the equality of the English and French languages within the Government of Canada. In 1969, the Official Languages Act was passed under Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, in response to the recommendations of the **Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism**. In 1988, the act was amended in order to clarify the obligations of federal institutions with regard to public services (Part IV). The concept of significant demand was better defined, allowing departments to identify which of their offices must provide services in both official languages.

Since that time, central and regional offices designated as bilingual have been required to offer services in both official languages and ensure that they are adequately staffed with bilingual employees.

Too often, French-speaking Canadians complain that they cannot receive services in their own language.

The Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador (FFTNL) has undertaken a study to determine how well offices designated as bilingual in Newfoundland and Labrador are fulfilling their obligation to offer French services. In doing so, the FFTNL has followed an approach developed over the last several years by the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FANE).

Building on the preparatory work done by the FANE in 2012, the FFTNL prepared an assessment form to evaluate the quality of French services offered by federal offices designated as bilingual.

The results of this study will soon be available on the website of the FFTNL (www.francotnl.ca/fftnl, in the "Documents" section).

This initial study also hopes to serve as a baseline for evaluating changes over the coming years.

METHODOLOGY

All of the offices included in our sample are designated as “bilingual” according to the “Burolis” database of Government of Canada facilities, maintained by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) and available online at www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ollo/appollo/burolis.

Serving as researchers for the study, adult citizens visited federal offices and presented themselves as unilingual francophones seeking service in their own language. They reported the results by completing the assessment form.

Each office was evaluated twice for in-person service and twice for telephone service. When the results of the two evaluations were different, a third evaluation was completed in order to identify a trend.

The researchers completed the following forms:

- Annex A – in person: for evaluations done in person
- Annex B – by telephone: for evaluations done by telephone

All evaluations were done during the regular business day, at various times between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. (local time).

DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES INCLUDED IN THE STUDY

The following ten departments and agencies, which all maintain offices in the province, were included in the study. All of the offices that were evaluated are designated as “bilingual” in BUROLIS, a database maintained by the Government of Canada.

- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Parks Canada
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Marine Atlantic Inc.
- Canada Revenue Agency
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Canada Post Corporation
- Public Safety Canada

Selection of government departments:

The following criteria were used to select departments for evaluation:

- Importance of the department for the everyday life of a citizen
- Lack of logistical barriers to doing in-person evaluations

Please note: Marine Atlantic was selected in spite of the distance involved, because of the great importance the ferry service has for citizens living on the island of Newfoundland.

RESULTS

Evaluation of Telephone Service

Department	Active Offer – Welcome	Adequate Service
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada	N	N
Parks Canada	Y	Y
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	Y	Y
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada	Y	N/A
Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Y	Y
Marine Atlantic Inc.	Y	Y
Canada Revenue Agency	Y	Y
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	Y	N
Canada Post Corporation	Y	Y
Public Safety Canada	N	N
Results for telephone service	80%	60%

(1)

(1) telephone service is no longer available.

Analysis of the Results

Despite the fact that their offices are clearly identified as bilingual in BUROLIS, two of the ten departments provided neither an active offer nor adequate service. Their total lack of French services is very disappointing.

In general, although an active offer was made in 80 percent of cases, there is much work to be done in terms of ensuring an adequate level of French services, which are currently provided in only 60 percent of cases.

Evaluation of In-Person Service

Department	Active Offer – Visual	Active Offer – Welcome	Adequate Service	
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada	N	N	N	
Parks Canada	Y	Y	Y	
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	Not Evaluated	Not Evaluated	Not Evaluated	(2)
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada	Y	Y	Y	
Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Y	N	Y	
Marine Atlantic Inc.	Not Evaluated	Not Evaluated	Not Evaluated	(3)
Canada Revenue Agency	Not Evaluated	Not Evaluated	Not Evaluated	(4)
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	Y	Y	Y	
Canada Post Corporation	Y	N	Y	
Public Safety Canada	Y	N	Y	
Results for In-Person Service	86%	42%	86%	(5)

- (2) the CMHC offices are currently closed to the public because of ongoing renovations
- (3) the FFTNL was unable to plan in-person visits because of the travel distance and difficulty finding citizens who were planning to use the ferry service during summer or fall 2012
- (4) the FFTNL was unable to evaluate the in-person services provided by this office because, contrary to the information provided in BUROLIS, the office is not open to the public
- (5) the percentages only take into account offices that were actually evaluated

Analysis of Results

Once again, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada stands out for its complete lack of French services.

Public Safety Canada exceeded the level of service it provided by telephone, posting a visual active offer and providing an adequate level of French services.

In general, a visual active offer was posted in a respectable number of cases (86 percent). However, a **very significant effort** is required with regard to welcoming citizens with an active offer, something that occurred in **only 42 percent of cases.**

With a rate of 86 percent, the provision of an adequate level of French services was also respectable. Once Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada begins properly fulfilling its obligations, the results will be much more satisfactory.

CONCLUSION

The Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et Labrador (FFTNL) is left with mixed feelings at the conclusion of its first study of the quality of French services offered by federal offices in Newfoundland and Labrador. In particular, we find it regrettable that only one of the departments involved succeeded in satisfying all of its obligations under the Official Languages Act.

The FFTNL will distribute a bilingual version of these results to all of the departments involved in the study, to all federal offices designated as bilingual in BUROLIS, and to the members of the Federal Council in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The FFTNL will also inform the Treasury Board Secretariat of the results of this study and ask that the following urgent improvement be made to the BUROLIS database:

- The public must be properly made aware of the database
- BUROLIS must be updated and numerous errors must be corrected
- The database must be made easier to use

If these changes were made, BUROLIS might actually be used by citizens on a regular basis. Sadly, this is not currently the case.

The FFTNL requests that the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages treat this report as an official complaint on behalf of the community for all the shortcomings noted above. We further request that the results of any investigations related to this complaint be made public in 2013.

In conclusion, the FFTNL would like to congratulate the only department whose office had a perfect record in providing French services: **Parks Canada**.

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