

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ENTITLED *AIMING HIGHER: INCREASING BILINGUALISM OF OUR CANADIAN YOUTH*

INTRODUCTION

In spring 2013, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages (the Committee) undertook a study on best practices for language policies and second-language learning in a context of linguistic duality or plurality. The Committee's report, entitled *Aiming Higher: Increasing bilingualism of our Canadian youth*, was adopted by the Senate on June 19, 2015. On February 18, 2016, the Senate passed a motion requesting a government response.

The report contains ten recommendations intended for the Department of Canadian Heritage, two of which call upon the Department to work with the provincial and territorial governments. The Government of Canada (the Government) supports the general thrust of the report, which entails identifying best practices for supporting the promotion of bilingualism by fostering second-language learning in Canada. The Government Response groups the ten recommendations in accordance with the report's four thematic priorities, namely: 1) Active promotion of bilingualism; 2) Increased official-language proficiency; 3) Innovative practices; and 4) Funding. The Response underlines the Government's commitment, which is evident in its substantial contributions to second-language learning. This entails working jointly at the intergovernmental level with the provinces and territories and involves other measures and mechanisms to encourage the use of official languages in Canada.

ACTIVE PROMOTION OF BILINGUALISM

Second-language programs accessible to everyone, everywhere

The Government has been working steadfastly for over 40 years to support the learning of both official languages and spares no effort to make this learning a reality for everyone, everywhere.

The Government's action respecting second-language learning primarily focuses on Canada's education system from the primary to the post-secondary level. The Government's cooperation with the provincial and territorial governments in an area that comes under provincial and territorial jurisdiction has been a great success since it began 45 years ago. We have the same objectives, which are to provide Canadians in each province and territory with an opportunity to learn their second official language and to enjoy the culturally enriching experience that contact with the other official-language community provides. Intergovernmental agreements give a concrete form to this support by integrating specific initiatives within six areas of action: student participation; provision of programs; student performance; enriched school environments; access to post-secondary education; and support for educational staff and research.

This long-standing intergovernmental cooperation has been responsible for substantially improving access to, and the quality of, second-language programs in Canada. Today, over 2.4 million young Canadians are learning English or French as a second language. The Government is very much encouraged by the increasing number of young people registered in French immersion programs outside Quebec. The number has increased by almost 40% in ten years, up from 282,839 in 2003 to 392,430 in 2013–14. The new teaching methods that have been put in place throughout almost the entire country, such as intensive or post-intensive French, will also enhance young Canadians' knowledge of both official languages.

Although, in the various provinces and territories, second-language learning programs are not necessarily mandatory or become optional halfway through secondary school, all thirteen provinces and territories invest large sums of money each year to provide second-language learning in their territory, a sign of their willingness to develop bilingualism or young people.

The Government is willing to take action to ensure all Canadians can benefit from second-language learning in Canada beyond the realms of the formal education system. To this end it recently made a commitment to establish, for the benefit of all Canadians, a free, online service for learning and retaining English and French as second languages. The Government is currently looking at a number of options for providing this online learning service so that all Canadians who wish to do so can become more proficient in their second official language.

The Government also engages with non-governmental organizations to increase the production and dissemination of knowledge, methods, research and tools to support second-language instruction. To do so, it supports the involvement and continued efforts of not-for-profit organizations to advance second-language learning activities. For example, with support from the Government, the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers provides second-language teachers with hundreds of educational resources and professional development tools. The Association has also produced a kit that gives teachers a variety of practical ways to evaluate students' language proficiency. Meanwhile, thanks to funding from the Government, the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers provides such things as development workshops for teachers as part of its annual conference, which attracts some 700 participants.

The Government also works with the French Second-Language Partner Network, a group of national organizations that share an interest in the learning of French as a second language. The organizations in question are the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers, Canadian Parents for French, French for the Future and the Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges in Canada (now called Experiences Canada). The French Second-Language Partner Network serves as a resource to help the Government and other stakeholders expand official bilingualism through the promotion of French as a second language by spreading knowledge and available expertise in a way that promotes linguistic duality.

Individual bilingualism is central to the Government's initiatives respecting official languages. Making opportunities to learn French and English more accessible for Canadians will, therefore, continue to be one of the Government's priorities in the years ahead.

Awareness-raising and promotion

Under the *Official Languages Act*, the Government has made a commitment to promote full recognition and use of English and French in Canadian society. The joint efforts of all federal institutions in this regard are reflected in the daily life of citizens in federal services provided to Canadians, the activities of our major cultural institutions and special activities such as sporting events, Canada Day celebrations and citizenship ceremonies for new Canadians. Thus, Canadians witness, observe and participate in the linguistic duality of the country.

Through Department of Canadian Heritage programs, the Government will continue to help organizations in various sectors to perform activities that foster better understanding of or appreciation for linguistic duality and help build stronger ties among members of the two official-language communities. The Government will also encourage offering services in both official languages for the purpose of building bilingual capacity within non-governmental organizations and will help the organizations with interpretation and translation to promote the use of the official languages at public events.

Furthermore, the Department of Canadian Heritage has developed a guide entitled *Making Your Organization Bilingual* to provide tools and strategies to organizations that would like to promote a new bilingual organizational culture and to organizations that want to improve the services they offer in Canada's two official languages. Content may be adapted to organizations in the private, public and volunteer sectors.

With respect to the promotion and appreciation of second-language learning, the Government, through its provincial and territorial action plans, supports activities to raise Canadians' awareness of second-language programs offered in their area and to help them make informed decisions. For example, this may include local or provincial/territorial promotional campaigns or the distribution of promotional material and information sessions to parents, employees or school administrators. In addition, the Government is continuing to work hand in hand with parent and teacher associations, which have a role to play in ensuring that appropriate information on second-language programs is provided and accessible to Canadians. For example, the Government provides assistance to Canadian Parents for French to inform parents in various regions of Canada about their options with respect to the various French as a second language programs available to them. As for teacher associations, the Government supports their efforts to promote and enhance the status of their profession.

The Committee recommends that the Government work together with partners to develop a Canada-wide strategy to promote bilingualism and official-language learning. The Government would like to establish a provincial and territorial second-language

discussion forum to move forward initiatives that could benefit all provinces and territories. Thus, in 2014, due to financial assistance from the Government, the provinces and territories, through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, agreed to initiate discussions on specific intergovernmental cooperative courses of action on French as a second language. Provincial/territorial ministries of education explored the possibility of undertaking specific collaborative projects to improve second-language instruction across the country. This project is a formal collaborative effort by the authorities in the field of French second-language instruction.

In general, the Government will have a number of opportunities to promote the official languages over the next few months. First, public consultations will begin in 2016–17 on the next federal official languages strategy. Then the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017 will be an opportunity to celebrate the communities, bring Anglophones and Francophones together and encourage them to fully participate in activities promoting what it means to be a Canadian: namely to be part of a diverse, inclusive country that is proud of its cultural richness and bilingualism.

INCREASED OFFICIAL-LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Measurement of language skills

Increasing bilingualism among young Canadians is a goal that the Government shares with the Committee. Over the last few decades, many efforts have been made to do so. Since the beginning of federal investments in official-language instruction, less than two generations ago, the percentage of bilingual young people aged between 15 and 24 years old has increased from 39% in 1971 to 55.6% in 2011 for young Francophones, and from 9.3% in 1971 to 13.4% in 2011 for young Anglophones. Although this is a promising development, the bilingualism rate of the latter remains a challenge to be dealt with.

The Committee would like to establish a common language skills framework for all provinces and territories. The Government feels that using a standardized framework to measure language skills throughout the country would greatly contribute to the promotion of our two official languages. At the present time, the only data available on bilingualism at the pan-Canadian level are census data. This involves using an imperfect method as it is based on respondents' self-assessment of their ability or of their children's ability to carry on a conversation. Assessment of language skills needs to be more sophisticated and consistent.

From a coordinating, intergovernmental collaborative and standardization perspective in this context, provincial and territorial governments agreed, under the 2013–18 Protocol between the Government of Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), to pay special attention to various efforts demonstrating progress in the acquisition of language skills and promoting the sharing of best practices.

The Government remains confident that the provinces and territories will continue regional cooperation to have common objectives in this regard. This is the case for

Ontario and the Atlantic region, which have adopted the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as their reference framework for language teaching, learning and assessment with respect to their students registered in official second-language programs. Although they did not specifically adopt the CEFR, the six ministries of Education of the western provinces and the territories developed a *Cadre commun des résultats d'apprentissage en français langue seconde - immersion (M-12)* for the purpose of standardizing second-language learning results.

The Government will continue to work with the provinces and territories to identify ways of measuring students' language skills. Through their action plans, the provinces and territories will implement measures to increase the proportion of bilingual young people graduating from high school based on their own objectives and using tools developed in their regions.

Continuum of second-language learning opportunities

The Committee's report stresses the importance of strengthening the capacity of post-secondary institutions to further develop official-languages programs. The broadening of the continuum for second-language learning to get young people to study their second language after high school is a desirable orientation supported by the Government for motivating and keeping young people in high school and for improving their second official-language proficiency as young adults.

The Government, through intergovernmental agreements, supports more than 20 post-secondary institutions in this regard. Over \$22.3 million is annually invested to help minority post-secondary institutions strengthen their capacity and their infrastructure, and more than \$6.8 million is specifically invested in second-language instruction. The provinces and territories, in collaboration with these institutions, determine the best mechanisms for improving access by student and adult clientele to French as a second language post-secondary programs. This may include developing a strategy targeting students from immersion programs, using technology for remote training, language upgrading to keep young people in programs, financial incentives such as bursaries or scholarships, or establishing partnerships between post-secondary institutions to maximize their capacity and the scope of what they offer.

The Government provides support for developing and delivering initial ongoing courses and training programs for second-language teachers. At the present time, the activities supported include career development opportunities and the awarding of bursaries or scholarships to improve their second-language proficiency and their knowledge of new second-language teaching methods.

The Government also provides support to non-governmental partners that offer scholarships or bursaries to encourage students enrolled in French second-language programs to continue their studies in French at the post-secondary level. This is the case with French for the Future that provides a scholarship to one of the participating universities as a prize for the winners of its national essay contest.

Offering more cultural and exchange possibilities or opportunities to practise the second language through authentic experiences in and out of school improves students' language skills. Contact with speakers of a language is important, and therefore the involvement of Francophone minority communities is invaluable. The Government intends to continue its support of these initiatives as this helps bring the two language communities together and provide access to authentic learning experiences.

The Government funds various programs providing cultural and language exchanges and job opportunities where participants have the opportunity to practise their second language and build confidence in their use of this language. These programs include the Odyssey monitor program, which allows about 300 young people per year to work full time as teaching assistants; the Explore bursary program that enables about 7,000 young people each year to take five-week courses at post-secondary institutions in Canada; the Interchange Canada Program where over 300 young people have the opportunity to practise their second official-language as part of an exchange, a forum or a summer job with groups such as Experiences Canada and the Forum for Young Canadians; or the Young Canada Works program in the two official languages providing some 690 students and recent graduates with summer jobs and internships where they can work in their second official language.

The Government will also continue to support similar initiatives established by the provinces and territories as part of their action plans. All provinces and territories promote second-language linguistic and cultural activities, including summer and weekend camps, language exchanges between French and English schools, or inter- or intra-provincial exchanges. In addition, more than 100 young people annually take part in the one-semester exchange program between Quebec and the other provinces, twinning Quebec's Secondary IV Francophone students with Anglophone students in Grades 10 and 11 from other provinces in order to improve their second language. Students who successfully complete this exchange can sometimes receive credits towards their secondary school diploma.

The Government values student achievement, and it will continue to support initiatives that promote the development or enhancement of second-language post-secondary programs while supporting second-language learning outside the classroom.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

Modern educational approaches

The Government is pleased to see that many best practices and "success stories" highlighted in the report, including the TV5 Québec-Canada Francolab media tool, are among the projects and initiatives that have been supported by the Department of Canadian Heritage through federal-provincial/territorial agreements or through the Department's funding of non-governmental organizations.

The digital universe modernizing educational approaches and new technologies is increasingly at the centre of activities funded by the Government, through the development of online courses or programs, the development of media or digital resources, and the development of homework support mechanisms.

Furthermore, the Government is seeking to help develop and disseminate educational resources and audiovisual equipment that make its generous bank of data and resources available to the Canadians public in general and to teachers in particular. For example, the National Film Board (NFB) launched CAMPUS in 2012, providing teachers with media and browsing tools to show over 2,500 NFB films in both official languages in a classroom setting. A number of provincial ministries of Education now have licences to use CAMPUS. Public Services and Procurement Canada's Language Portal of Canada, launched in 2009, provides Canadians with a single point of access, free of charge, to a wide range of language tools and resources, including Francolab. In 2013–14, this website was consulted more than four million times.

But we must and can do more. The Committee stressed the importance of all Canadian students having access to second-language virtual courses. The Government feels that it is important to encourage and promote use of the official languages in Canadian society, and using digital platforms is the ideal way to reach a wider public. The Government's proposed free online service to learn and retain English and French as second languages will strengthen the tools that Canadians currently have at their disposal.

The Government also invests, through many mechanisms, to support research to guide the establishment of innovative pedagogical approaches for teaching second languages in Canada.

On the one hand, the Government supports research relating to the acquisition and retention of second-language skills through bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories. Whether through academic research institutions such as New Brunswick's Second Language Research Institute of Canada or the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (University of Toronto) or through provincial and territorial ministries of Education, research will be conducted during the 2013–18 period. The research will include studies on integrating language and materials into immersion programs at various academic levels, on best assessment practices (including CEFR), on developing interactive second-language skills by using new technology, and on the causes of gradual losses of students (i.e. attrition) in French second-language programs. All this research will help provincial and territorial governments establish their future orientations.

On the other hand, the Government subsidizes a number of research that has an impact on current thinking on second-language learning, such as the study done in the past on the feasibility of implementing the CEFR in Canada. Moreover, from an open government perspective, the Government is now distributing many data files on official languages to the general public on the Open Government portal of the Treasury Board Secretariat, including English-French bilingualism rates in various geographical areas.

Like the Committee, the Government feels that research on official languages is important for increasing understanding of issues relating to linguistic duality and second language learning. Based on government commitments to research and evidence-based data, the Government will closely examine ways of following up on the Committee's recommendation on this issue when a new official-languages plan is developed.

The Government will continue to encourage the establishment of innovative programs, especially programs helping to develop underdeveloped sectors or that are unique or special as well as programs that enable limited resources to be optimized (for example, in isolated areas or environments). The Government will also leverage practices from other countries operating in a context of linguistic duality or plurality.

FUNDING

Ongoing funding for second-language instruction

The Government understands the importance that various educational stakeholders attach to ongoing federal funding. In this regard, the Government feels that it has shown leadership. For nearly a half century, the Government has been providing financial assistance to provincial and territorial governments so that they can assume the additional costs arising from second-language instruction services in their respective jurisdictions.

The 2013–18 Protocol and the resulting intergovernmental bilateral agreements were renewed at the same funding level as the previous Protocol (2009–13), namely \$259.5 million per year, including \$235.5 million for provincial and territorial action plans and \$24 million for Canada-wide scholarship/bursary and monitor programs (the *Explore*, *Destination Click* and *Odyssey* programs).

Accountability for federal-provincial/territorial agreements

Transparency is an important principle behind this long-term intergovernmental collaboration. As per Treasury Board policies and directives, transfer payments are made in accordance with the principles of sound management, integrity, transparency and accountability. When these payments are made to provinces and territories, they must respect the unique nature of federalism and the jurisdiction, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms of each level of government. It is in this spirit that the requirements under the bilateral agreements with provincial and territorial governments were established.

When negotiating bilateral agreements, the Government takes into account the purpose and size of its contribution to each initiative submitted by the provinces and territories in order to ensure that its funding is used optimally, in accordance with Canada-wide official languages objectives. Then every payment is linked to the receipt and acceptance by the Government of annual financial reports or periodic reports that reflect expenditures incurred and the implementation status of each activity in relation to targets and indicators set by provincial and territorial governments in their action plans.

The Government promotes the dissemination of information relating to intergovernmental cooperation. The bilateral agreements stipulate that the provinces and territories will make copies of action plans and reports available to the public, including evaluations, audits and other reviews relating to their respective agreements. Stakeholders interested in activities conducted under these agreements always have the opportunity to relay their requests to the appropriate government officials.

The provinces and territories have also, through the CMEC, committed themselves to jointly preparing, during the period covered by the Protocol, two reports on Canada-wide results containing content from reports from each provincial and territorial government. Similarly, the Government issues an annual report on official languages highlighting provincial and territorial initiatives and provides enrolment statistics from Statistics Canada. This report is tabled in Parliament and is available on the Department of Canadian Heritage's website.

The Government is of the opinion that the mechanisms put in place support enhanced accountability for public funding and the obtaining of the best outcomes for Canadians, bearing in mind the fields of jurisdiction of the provincial and territorial governments.

CONCLUSION

The Government thanks the members of the Committee for the important work that they have done to identify challenges and best practices with respect to the promotion and learning of official languages in Canada. The Government appreciates the informed perspective of the people who participated in this study. The Government shares the Committee's commitment to increasing the bilingualism of our young Canadians. This goes without saying in a country where all people can celebrate their rich cultural diversity, their experiences and their common values.

This review is very timely as it comes during the lead-up to consultations planned under the renewal of the Protocol and the federal official-languages plan. The work of the Committee will enhance the thinking process for future approaches to the preparation of a new official-languages plan. With respect to the next intergovernmental collaborative cycle regarding the teaching of official languages, the approaches identified will also be included in future discussions with provincial and territorial governments so that progress can be made towards the major objective of increasing bilingualism in Canada.

