

Still difficult to work in French in the federal public service PUBLISHED ON MAY 10, 2017

Description

OTTAWA – The number of Francophones working in the federal public service remained stable in 2016, but their ability to work in the official language of their choice remains a challenge, according to a report by the Clerk on the Public Service of Canada.

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“Many employees, especially Francophones, feel they can not write or do their work in French, or use the language of their choice at meetings. Some mentioned that they rarely heard their leaders, including deputy ministers, speak French. Senior managers have the ability to set an example for an organization as a whole. We must do better and we can,” wrote the Clerk of the Privy Council and head of the public service, Michael Wernick, in its 24th annual report on the Public Service of Canada.

The document, released on Monday, May 7, revisits the 2014 Public Service Employee Survey, which already revealed that not all employees in the federal public service felt comfortable expressing themselves in their official language choice.

“I am not surprised to hear that,” says Magali Picard, Regional Executive Vice-President of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) for the Quebec Region. “It does not happen a week without hearing a colleague tell me that he can not work in French.”

Slight decline in Francophones

As of March 2016, there were 28.5% Francophones in the federal public service, compared to 28.7% in 2015.

To improve the situation, Mr. Wernick said he set up a task force that consulted with hundreds of public servants across the country, from each department and from all levels and classifications.

While welcoming the fact that since 2003, federal organizations have strengthened their capacity to develop bilingual workplaces, notably by increasing the number of bilingual positions in the public service more than ever, he recognizes that this is “not enough” To create bilingual working environments “.

“We have to distinguish between the language in which customers are served, which is often the language of their choice, and the language in which public servants work. This is a continuing problem, in part because a higher level of language proficiency is required for public servants, which ultimately

serves only to ensure that francophones work in English. ”

According to Ms. Picard, it would be time to do a better needs analysis to truly ensure that bilingual positions are designated only where they really are needed. It also advocates translation tools that can be used internally, such as [the linguistic understanding tool currently offered to 40 departments after many twists](#) and [turns](#) , to enable French-speaking public servants to work in French.

In his report, however, the head of the public service cited a few organizations that have put in place effective measures to improve the capacity of public servants to work in the language of their choice, as provided for by law.

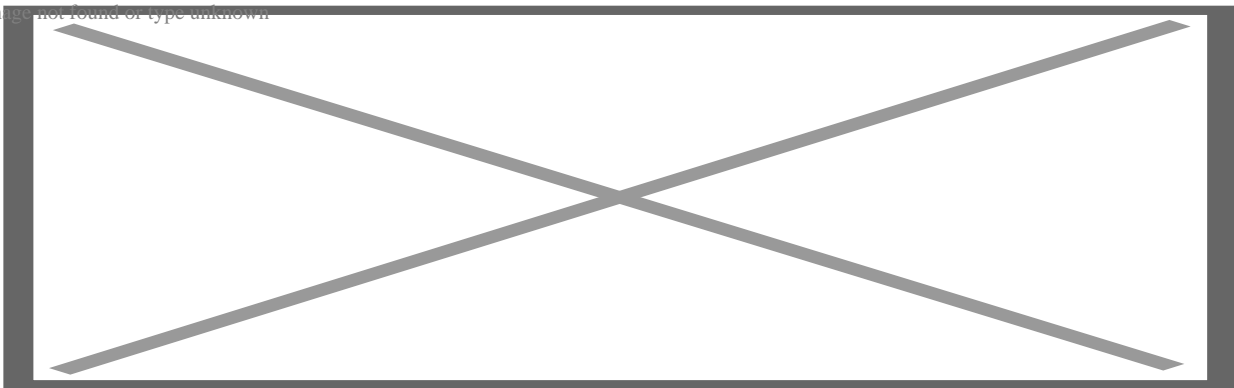
An example is the Public Service Commission's internal telephone directory, which allows employees to indicate their preferred language of communication, the bilingual meeting chairperson's manual created by the Canada Council for the Arts or the initiative Of the Public Health Agency of Canada, which has put in place a program to “lend” employees who want to improve their French to Acadian or francophone organizations.

Two weights, two measures

But for Mrs Picard, the recurrence of the problem comes from the lack of enthusiasm to actually regulate it.

“There is a double standard in the federal public service. Employees are required to have an exemplary level of bilingualism, but it is much more flexible with senior management, which makes it difficult for employees to work in the official language of their choice when their manager does not speak it. ”

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In management positions, the proportion of Francophones has also declined slightly from 31.1% in March 2015 to 30.5% a year later.

“Managers should be assessed by employees on their ability to work in the official language of their choice.”

The Official Languages Spokesperson for the New Democratic Party (NDP), François Choquette, sees

it as a problem of leadership on the part of the government.

“It had already been denounced by the former Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada, Graham Fraser. Often working papers, drafts, are not translated, which impairs the ability of public servants to work in the official language of their choice. It is a question of leadership. [When you have a prime minister who answers in English to a question asked in French in Ontario and the opposite in Quebec](#) , it does not set an example. There is an urgent need to address the issue. ”

In total, the number of employees in the federal public service increased from 257,034 in March 2015 to 258,979 a year later.

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