

Toward a New Vision for Language Training in the Public Service

A Discussion Paper Prepared for the ADM
Working Group

by

James R. Mitchell
Sussex Circle

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I. Introduction: This Project

Background

In March 2003, the government decided to carry out a review of governance and service delivery arrangements for official language training in the Public Service. The review is aimed at developing a model for the national delivery of high-quality, cost-effective official language training that will meet current requirements and also be adaptable to the future needs of the Public Service.

The three elements of the review are:

- a new vision for the language training delivery model of the future;
- a study of current system effectiveness (including testing) by CAC; and
- the preparation of appropriate transition and business plans.

This paper is intended as a step toward fulfilling the first task¹. It is intended to enable senior officials to articulate a vision for language training in the Public Service that is forward-looking, realistic, grounded in the experience and values of the Public Service, and sustainable over time.

The paper is based on interviews with 20 senior public servants and others who work closely with the Public Service². Their contribution to the thinking that went into this paper is much appreciated. They were selected for interviews because each has had relevant experience with language training – either as a senior manager of an institution trying to live up to its obligations under the *Official Languages Act* and the policies of Treasury Board, or as a provider of language training services to government institutions. Many have had personal experience as students of the other official language. All care deeply about the importance of Canada's two official languages to the country and to a well-functioning Public Service. As they were interviewed in confidence, I have not attributed views to individuals.

This Paper

It is important to recognize at the outset what this paper is not:

- *It is not an evaluation of the current state of language training in the Public Service, nor is it an historical study of federal experience with language training, though it does point to the experience of the past 35 or so years as a reference point for thinking about what to do, and what not to do, in the future.*
- *It is not a report of survey results.* While the experiences and ideas of some 20 interviewees constitute a crucial input to the present paper, those views

¹ The detailed terms of reference for this project are attached as Appendix I.

² A complete list of interviewees is set out in Appendix II. Interviews were conducted in both English and French. To respect the confidentiality of those discussions, all quotations have been rendered in English.

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also reflect almost as many different visions of what should be done with language training in the future. The recommendations in this paper are largely mine, informed by these diverse ideas and opinions. Where a particular idea or insight came from someone to whom I spoke, it is credited to “an interviewee”.

- *It is not a paper about official languages in the Public Service*, though it must of necessity start from the *Official Languages Act* and describe both the present state and future vision of the Public Service from an official languages perspective.

Rather, the paper aims to set out a positive vision for language training that is well grounded in fact and experience and that can serve as a credible basis for thinking about how to move forward.

The paper must be, in some ways, deliberately provocative – inevitably, it makes claims that it cannot hope to prove in the short space of this paper; it must point beyond our present systems and practices, while remaining faithful to the continuing vocation and enduring values of the Public Service. Above all, in describing a vision for language training in the Public Service, it must respect the values, principles and requirements of the *Official Languages Act*. It must reinforce a vision of a country in which both of our official languages are used and fully respected in service to the public and language of work³.

In some ways, then, this vision for language training carries with it assumptions about the kind of Public Service we are trying to create. This larger objective is not simply a matter of fostering technical competency in French or English. Rather, it must be about encouraging the living presence of our two official languages in the operation of federal institutions and the working lives of public servants.

³ It is obvious that anglophones and francophones have different perspectives on the issue of language training. For one thing, many francophones arrive in the Public Service already bilingual, or at least with a base competency in English that enables them quickly to attain functional (often highly functional) bilingualism. This is not true for most anglophones. Second, the fact that the working environment everywhere but Quebec is English-dominant means, in practice, that francophones have an easier time acquiring and retaining second language competency in the workplace. The result? Francophones are given nowhere near the same access to language training as anglophones; indeed, almost none has the privilege (if that is the right word) of spending a year or more on full-time language training. Yet even if they never enter a classroom, francophones are affected significantly by the characteristics and weaknesses of the present training system: they must cover for anglophone colleagues who are away on training; they must put up with anglophone supervisors who are too often barely competent in French; they are too often obliged to receive official documents in English with “French to follow”.

Key Messages

If one were to assemble a single composite message that emerged from the 20 interviews, it would be this:

“Canada’s commitment to linguistic duality is too important to be hostage to our present approach to language of work and our present system of language training. The language training system is costly, inefficient and inflexible. It is not producing people who are truly functionally bilingual or have a continuing personal engagement with their second official language. Too many of those who exit language training quickly lose whatever fluency they had acquired. Too many come out with their attitude toward their second language soured by months of language training and successive failures on the test.”

“We need a new approach to language training characterized by:

- a more equitable balance between the responsibilities of the employer and those of the employee
- greater flexibility in approaches to training and testing
- stronger commitment by individuals and by institutions to the reality of two languages in the federal Public Service
- closer integration of language training with learning and career development
- political commitment to the practical implications of linguistic duality in the Public Service and effective leadership by senior managers to realize that commitment in the workplace and in service to the public.”

This, in summary form, is the vision for language training that is articulated in this paper.

II. Where are we today and how did we get here?

Current Responsibilities

The *Official Languages Act* was proclaimed in 1969 and substantially updated and expanded in 1988. The *Act* reiterates the Charter commitment to the equality of English and French as official languages of Canada and sets out a comprehensive statutory regime governing what that constitutional commitment to linguistic duality means in relation to:

- the rights of citizens and those of federal public servants
- the workings of federal institutions (including the courts)
- the role and authorities of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and
- the role and responsibilities of the Treasury Board.

The Treasury Board, now acting through the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada, is responsible for the “general direction and coordination” of the policies and programs of the government relating to communications with and services to the public, language of work, and equitable participation in the Public Service of anglophones and francophones⁴. That policy role includes responsibility (largely delegated to the PSC and to departments) for determining the language requirements of individual positions in the Public Service.

Language training of federal public servants is one of the means by which the Treasury Board works to fulfil its obligations under the *Act*. For many years, and for good reason, the Treasury Board has delegated its program responsibility in relation to language training to the Public Service Commission⁵. For over 40 years, the Commission has been responsible for a training function that is known today as Language Training Canada (LTC)⁶.

Departments and deputy heads also have a substantial responsibility in relation to language training. Here the history is one of increasing departmental autonomy with respect to language training in the 1980s, resulting in a lessening of demand for language training and a consequent gradual reduction of the central training capacity represented by LTC⁷. Treasury Board retained its statutory responsibility and policy authority, and it exercised that authority in 1998 when it decided that departments must

⁴ Section 46.

⁵ Just as it delegated program functions in other areas of human resource management such as selection and recruitment, and training and development generally. Treasury Board has long recognized that as a central agency, it is ill-equipped to operate programs.

⁶ This dates back to a statutory mandate give to the former Civil service Commission in 1961. Most of the PSC's program responsibilities and associated resources in the area of language training are being transferred to the Canadian Centre for Management Development (soon to become the Canada School for Public Service).

⁷ LTC's teaching establishment has been reduced over time from some 1300 FTE in 1975 to 185 at present [check figures].

ensure that the more rigorous language requirements of positions in bilingual regions were met by new EXs within two years and by incumbents as of April 1, 2003.

A Short History of Language Training

In the decade that followed the passage of the *OLA*, the Public Service geared itself up for the massive exercise of training many thousands of public servants in the other official language⁸ with the aim, over-optimistic in retrospect, of creating within a generation a federal Public Service that would be capable of providing services to Canadians in the official language of their choice, wherever numbers warranted, and also capable of functioning, in bilingual regions, with two official languages in the workplace.

History

This effort began in the mid-sixties. The number of students handled by the PSC's *Bureau des langues* increased from 42 in 1964 to over 4000 in 1968 and some XX by 1975 [check figures]. In the 1970s and 80s, the *Bureau des langues* (now Language Training Canada) and *the Bureau de perfectionnement et de formation du personnel* (now Training and Development Canada) were separated, rejoined and then separated again.

Throughout this period, LTC flowered not only as a centre for the delivery of training, but as a world-class centre of research and product development in the teaching of French and English. There was money and there was a general spirit of enthusiasm.

With the deepening fiscal problems of the later 70s and 80s, resources for language training government began to diminish. At the same time, departments began taking on greater responsibility for the developmental requirements of their staff, including language training. In addition, the Public Service stopped growing. As a result of these factors, and declining demand from departments, LTC began to shrink. Today, it trains some XX students per year on a base budget of \$16M, plus approximately \$12M per year in short term funding from the *Plan d'action pour les langues officielles*. That funding expires in 2006.

Finances

With the exception of a brief period in the early 80s, compulsory language training for public servants (i.e., training a public servant to meet the requirements of a bilingual position) has been centrally funded, provided it is taken at LTC⁹. This on the grounds that only by paying the costs of training could the government ensure there was no financial incentive for departments and agencies to restrict the number of bilingual positions on their establishment. The problem was that *central* restraints meant that LTC was itself perpetually under-funded, with the result that public servants seeking language training for a bilingual position could not all be accommodated.

⁸ In the vast majority of cases, this meant training anglophones in French, as it does today.

⁹ Departments have the flexibility to go to the private sector, but if they choose to do so, they have to pay.

The Private Sector

LTC in its various incarnations has not been, of course, the only provider of language training services to departments and agencies. There is a vigorous private sector language training industry in the NCR, and at least some similar capacity in most larger Canadian cities. There is also a growing (though variable) language training capacity in the provincial community college systems.

There is a natural and enduring tension between LTC and the other providers of language training services.

- LTC spends effort and money in developing tools and techniques for training; the latter often use LTC materials and methodologies without compensation.
- Conversely, LTC often recruits new professors from the ranks of the private sector firms and from the colleges.
- Private sector firms claim they deliver higher success rates of equal quality at lower cost than LTC. LTC disputes this.
- There is a perception on the government side that private firms promise quicker results (almost always aimed at “passing the test”) than they can deliver. Then students fail the test and feel resentment about the whole language training system.

It cannot be denied that there is private sector capacity, at least in the NCR and in the other larger cities, that is a key element of the current language training equation. Nor can the future role of the private firms be denied – they offer flexibility and sensitivity to client needs that would be difficult for any public sector institution to match. Yet no one – least of all the private sector – would argue that those firms could ever do it all.

A Changing Public Service

When the government of Canada proclaimed the new *Official Languages Act* in 1969, the federal Public Service worked almost entirely in English. Only in Quebec did the federal government provide services to Canadians in both official languages. Francophones were greatly under-represented at senior levels and in the professional ranks of the government. And anglophones were only beginning to awake to the implications of working in a national institution in which members of both linguistic communities could participate on an equal footing, and in which both of Canada’s official languages would be respected as languages of work.

The passage of the *Act* was one of the early achievements of the new Trudeau administration. The new government engendered a sense of optimism about the country and a new commitment to the importance of linguistic duality in Canada. Nowhere was this more apparent, or more important, than in the Public Service.

Some Progress

Much has been achieved with respect to official languages in the Public Service since 1969:

- Perhaps most importantly, there is almost complete endorsement by public servants of the values and objectives of the *OLA* as it applies to the federal Public Service – people agree that Canadians have a right to service in the official language of their choice and they agree that French should be respected and used as a language of work¹⁰.
- Whereas 35 years ago there were relatively few bilingual anglophones at senior levels, the vast majority today are at least officially functionally bilingual. Virtually every anglophone EX in the NCR and other designated bilingual areas is at least passively bilingual.
- Whereas young bilingual anglophones were relatively rare 35 years ago, years of French immersion education means that today it is possible to recruit young anglophones who are functionally, even if not perfectly, bilingual.
- 35 years ago, meetings of departmental senior management committees took place only in English; today, such meetings regularly take place in both languages in some institutions and at least nominally in all.
- 29% of federal service delivery points are designated bilingual, and of those, 76% offer high quality bilingual service. Electronic information and services are similarly offered in both languages.
- Before the *OLA*, internal documents (and most external documents) were produced only in English; today, the rule (even if not consistent practice) is to produce documents intended for general distribution in both languages.

A Vision Unfulfilled

Much has been done. Yet notwithstanding the many positive steps, the consensus from my interviews is that Trudeau's dream has been only partially fulfilled, and in that respect the history of the past thirty or so years has been in many ways a disappointment¹¹. According to a recent study by the Commissioner of Official Languages¹², despite the progress of the past thirty years, "French remains underused as a language of work within bilingual regions". According to that study:

- in the NCR, bilingual anglophones use French only 13% of the time, while bilingual francophones use English 54% of the time;

¹⁰ Indeed, there is clear evidence from the latest report of the Commissioner of Official Languages that the views of anglophones on the latter point are essentially the same as those of francophones – both want to see greater use of French in the workplace and more opportunity to speak and use French.

¹¹ As one interviewee put it, "We're frozen in time – still trying to transition from an anglo Public Service to a truly bilingual Public Service".

¹² See *Walking the Talk: Language of Work in the Federal Public Service*, published by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, March 2004.

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- working documents in federal departments and agencies are prepared largely in English;
- many francophones either feel obliged or find it advantageous to use English rather than French in written work and in dealings with their managers.

These survey findings are borne out in the experience of most people working in the Public Service. They were also echoed in the comments of the people interviewed for this paper. There is no doubt that, despite the requirements of the *OLA* and the ambitions of the government's official languages policy and program, French has not attained the status of a real language of work inside government.

This cardinal fact shows two important things about language training in the Public Service:

- Language training as practiced to date has not achieved one of its primary goals, namely to really equip public servants to work in both official languages;
- The working environment in which people are expected to apply the linguistic competencies they have acquired in training, is not – for a variety of reasons – conducive to the use of both languages.

Regrettably, recent governments seem to have stopped investing in language training as a key tool for achieving the larger, continuing objective of a government and Public Service in which linguistic duality is respected and realized.

Appearance and Reality

In fact, it is this gap between the ostensible purposes of language training and the reality of the result that is one of the most obvious and painful characteristics of the present situation. Despite the large amounts of money devoted to the whole enterprise¹³, whether through the budget of LTC, the additional funds provided in the 2001 *Plan d'action pour les langues officielles*, or the millions being spent by departments on private teaching, the language training system is simply not working as it should¹⁴.

There is another gap worthy of mention, and that is the gap between the lofty goals of the *OLA* and the largely instrumental sense in which too many public servants view

¹³ It is impossible to cite a reliable global figure for expenditures on language training because the central systems that tracked departmental spending for these purposes were eliminated in the mid-90s Program Review. As noted, LTC has an A-base budget of \$16M per year, plus short-term funding in the amount of \$12M per year until 2006. It has also received regular injections of additional money from TBS to address short term requirements.

¹⁴ I should emphasize that the weaknesses of the current system should not be attributed to the skills or efforts of the professionals at Language Training Canada or those who work in the many private sector firms providing services to federal public servants. Indeed, many of the people interviewed for this paper commented on the world-class language training capacity and technologies to be found both inside and outside the government. Nor are they the fault of the many students who approach language training with enthusiasm and who invest considerable effort in attaining a level B or C. The problem with our system is much deeper, and relates more to public sector ethos, leadership, systemic sclerosis, institutional rivalry and weaknesses in recruitment and career development.

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language training and the acquisition of competency in the other official language.¹⁵ Instead of regarding the acquisition of competency in French as a skill essential to their effectiveness as public servants and to their own career development, they focus on 'passing the test', as if obtaining the certificate were simply an obstacle to be overcome¹⁶. This lack of personal engagement with the language skills they are seeking to acquire can only be explained by a broader ethos in a Public Service in which French is not generally respected or used as a language of work, and in which the acquisition by anglophones of competency in French is seen as essentially the employer's responsibility¹⁷. Until that ethos changes, it will be hard to change the attitudes of public servants toward the acquisition and retention of second language capability.

What are some of the other features of the Public Service today, by contrast with the situation that prevailed when the government first committed itself in a major way to official languages and to large-scale language training?

Changing Demographics

One factor cited by many of the people to whom I spoke is the changing demographic profile of Canada and, increasingly, of the Public Service. Canada's population is much more diverse than it was 35 years ago and, to a somewhat lesser extent, so too is the Public Service. This affects the issue of language training in several different ways.

It means the Public Service is recruiting:

- from a population that may have had less exposure to Canada's linguistic duality than in the past;
- people for whom English may be their second or third language, (and French their third or fourth);
- people whose first language may be non-cognate with English or French, which makes the acquisition of either of the two official languages more difficult in a classroom setting.

A further consideration is that the Public Service is much more respectful of people with various sorts of learning difficulties than it was in the past. This means that people who once would have been rejected for training must now be accommodated.

We should be clear – for Canada in 2004, diversity is not just a characteristic, it is a strength, and it is seen as such by most public servants and by everyone I interviewed in

¹⁵ A reminder: these remarks focus on the perceived attitudes of anglophones to the training they receive in French. Francophones generally regard competency in English as a skill essential to their effectiveness as public servants and to their own career prospects. They are glad to be able to speak and write English; what they don't like is not being able to use French in the workplace, not seeing French respected as a legitimate language of work, and not having the same kind of access to English language training as their anglophone counterparts have to training in French..

¹⁶ In fairness to individuals, we should also observe that many departments and agencies are similarly focused on the test rather than on real functional bilingualism as the objective of language training.

¹⁷ As one person put it, "we're operating a welfare model – government will take care of you from zero to C/C/C".

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this project. Yet as one person observed, “our distinguishing feature as a society is our capacity to respect diversity, and the starting point for that is respect for both official languages”. Sadly, it appears we may have at least as far to go in respecting linguistic duality as we do in respecting the reality of a multicultural population.

A further point about demographics relates to the changing age profile of the Public Service. Some 35 years ago, the Public Service was entering a period of unprecedented expansion. The generation that had joined after WWII was retiring and being replaced by many thousands of new public servants, most of whom bought into the Trudeau vision of a bilingual Public Service. Many of those younger public servants embraced language training with enthusiasm and they were personally ready and committed to acquiring a new set of skills.

Today, the Public Service is going through a similar generational turnover¹⁸, which presents its own challenges for second language acquisition and retention. For example, new entrants to the Public Service are used to learning with technologies that have not been widely applied for learning purposes in government. Many, and especially those with high levels of education and specialized skills have a different sense of their own careers than did previous generations. Today, young people are looking for opportunities to learn, grow and contribute, rather than for a 35-year career in government service. Departments are also recruiting at mid-career levels to find people with particular skills. These new employees may be less inclined to accept full functional bilingualism as a requirement for a decent job in the federal Public Service.

Yet despite the problems, and the widespread unhappiness with the current language training system at the federal level, there are public sector institutions where linguistic duality is recognized in the workplace, and where anglophones do commit to the acquisition and use of French as a key element of their professional development. Some, such as CIDA, Canadian Heritage and the Department of Justice, have, for historical reasons, always been hospitable to francophones and have given anglophones the opportunity to work in French. But others such as Statistics Canada have come to be seen as exemplary because of stable and committed leadership, and the integration of language training into long-term career development. There are important lessons to be learned from all these cases, lessons to which we shall return.

Conclusions

Neither anglophones nor francophones today are satisfied with the practical reality of official languages in the Public Service workplace, and still less with language training. Everyone is convinced that we need to change:

- how we train people in their second official language;
- what we do to encourage use of both languages in the workplace;
- how we test for competency; and

¹⁸ Interviewees commented that the system is now training more older people than in the 70s, though this will change with the push toward imperative staffing.

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- what we expect of individuals and of the employer in relation to second language acquisition and retention.

Those directly involved in, or affected by, the current system of language training in the Public Service feel that present arrangements have lost their *raison d'être*. They see no unifying vision of what we are trying to achieve or why. We seem trapped in a system that is complex, bureaucratic, perceived to be unfair and uncaring, and in which language training and testing is divorced from the widely-accepted principles and goals of the *Official Languages Act*.

If the Public Service is to live up to its obligations to Canadians, this has to change.

III. Issues to be Addressed

The present language training system has lost its sense of purpose. Everyone agrees that there is something fundamentally wrong with a system in which serious people are obliged to invest a year or more in language training simply to pass a test, rather than to acquire a skill that should be seen as career-enhancing and personally enriching.

In the words of one interviewee, “language training needs a ‘mid-life refit’”. What, then, needs to be fixed?

A) Institutions

Language of Work

There are two dimensions to this issue. One concerns standards and expectations, and the other leadership.

In terms of standards and expectations, there is a need for a new and much clearer consensus on just what is meant by full, functional bilingualism¹⁹. On this point, there were widely differing views among the people with whom I spoke:

- Some feel there is too high an expectation of what is implied by C-level competency in French. They see colleagues and subordinates who, as far as they are concerned, are certainly bilingual enough for the purposes of effective management and communication, going off to be tested and failing repeatedly.
- Others believe our expectations of linguistic competency are too low. They see people coming back from training with a ‘C’ who are far from functionally bilingual, and who can neither manage nor communicate effectively in their second language.

Both of these differing *perceptions* are probably accurate. The real issue is what we can reasonably expect of public servants (mostly managers, front-line officers and senior people) who are occupying bilingual positions.

- Some people would be happy with simply functional, reading ability and oral bilingualism, however imperfect.
- Others would settle for much more ‘passive’ or receptive bilingualism, and for a workplace in which capacity to read or to understand what is being said should be sufficient.
- Still others observe that a language cannot live in the workplace unless it is written, and written reasonably well. Their expectations can probably only be met through the recruitment and development of people who already meet a fairly high standard of bilingualism or who are otherwise personally committed

¹⁹ I am using this term as a substitute for the rather complex definitions currently applied by the PSC Personnel Psychology Centre for what is meant by C-level competency in speaking, oral comprehension and writing.

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to acquire a high standard of fluency after entry to the Public Service.²⁰

These questions will require policy decisions by Ministers after careful consideration at senior levels of the bureaucracy. The key points for the purposes of this vision paper are:

- Language training can only be justified if it has practical effect in the workplace and in the quality of service to the public.
- There are obvious limits to what can be achieved through formal language training, in the absence of a strong personal commitment by the individual to perfecting his or her linguistic skills, and personal engagement with the French fact in Canada (culture, literature, community, etc.)

Leadership is another (and equally important) matter. In discussions with interviewees, the point was made repeatedly that progress in making French a real language of work²¹ depends heavily on the signals sent by the senior leaders in the department, starting with the Deputy Minister. Unless Deputies actively encourage and, where appropriate, require the use of both languages in meetings, written products and interaction with peers and subordinates, many of the goals of the *OLA* will remain unfulfilled.

Leadership is also important in shaping departmental approaches to professional development. Only if employees see second language proficiency as a necessary element of their own personal learning plan will they make the investment of effort over time that is required to acquire and retain the second language.

LTC and the Private Sector

It would be a mistake to think of language training as being all about Language Training Canada and how to change what it does or how it does it. The issue, and the problems at stake in the issue, are much bigger than this. Rather, LTC should be seen today as the federal government's civilian language school. It does many things in addition to just teaching French and English, and it does them well²².

The real question is, what does the government need from its language school in the future? How does LTC fit into the larger picture? And what capacities and resources will it need in order to do what is expected of it?

Private language schools live with considerable frustration under the present system. They have emerged to fill a real need for language training, often tailored to the needs of

²⁰ Given the spread of French immersion education over the past 30 years, and the well-recognized principle that a senior career in the Public Service requires competency in both official languages, such a requirement would not mean discriminating against new entrants from any particular *region* of Canada. It would, however, mean that only particular kinds of individuals from those regions could hope to meet this standard.

²¹ To repeat the point – this is a chicken-and-egg problem, Unless French is respected as a real language of work, most people's investment of time and effort in language training will have little purpose; anglophones will have no reason to use the skill they have acquired. But unless people feel confident about using their new linguistic skills, French will not emerge as a language of work.

²² For example, LTC also develops new methodologies and new technologies for teaching, and makes these available to departments and to some of the larger firms in the private sector.

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individuals, and they are proud of what they do. Yet the Public Service too often treats them as camp followers and does not really respect them as partners with a legitimate role in a national enterprise. It is not clear whether LTC wants to work with them, or wants them to go away. It is also not clear that departments are getting what they want from the private sector firms.

Departments and Agencies

Public Service institutions are obviously key players in any future model for language training: first, because they do, and will continue to do, at least some language training themselves; second, because they pay for other language training both for compulsory requirements and as part of broader professional development programming; and third, because what they do about language of work and career development is a key to individual engagement with language training.

The Future Role of LTC

This will need to be decided. One can imagine broadly three different roles for the government's language school in future²³:

1. The first is a probably-unsustainable status quo in which LTC is funded to do compulsory training for as many people as it can accommodate, with the remainder put in waiting lines or passed to the private sector. This approach addresses none of the perceived weaknesses of the present, nor does it address the dissatisfactions of departments and individual clients.
2. The second role one could imagine would be something like the Department of Justice model for its lawyers, where LTC is formally the 'home' to the governments language teachers, but where most are assigned to departmental language training units. They would receive policy direction from LTC, as well as tools, professional development and career management. But they would live in departments, identifying with those employees as colleagues and becoming familiar with the linguistic needs and operational reality of the host institution.
3. The third model would take LTC out of the operational language training business, and confine it to a central responsibility for:
 - setting standards
 - evaluating and certifying departmental and private sector programs of language training
 - research
 - developing technologies and methodologies for training
 - serving as a national centre for leadership in language training

²³ These are discussed again on page 21.

B) Systems

Financing the Program

This is a complex issue that cannot be treated adequately in the present paper. Briefly the situation at present is this:

- pursuant to its obligations under the *OLA*, the government funds LTC to provide compulsory training (i.e., training for individuals in jobs designated as bilingual).
- departments are responsible for paying for non-compulsory training, and they often *choose* to pay themselves for the compulsory training required to bring EXs up to the standard for their positions (virtually all of which, in bilingual regions, are now designated CBC).
- individuals may pay (and seek reimbursement) for language training courses from private firms, colleges, L'Alliance française, etc. as part of their own program of professional development.

Three key issues need to be addressed:

1. What should the government pay for centrally (e.g., through LTC) and what should departments be funded to do?
2. Should LTC operate, in whole or in part, on a cost-recovery basis?
3. To what extent, if any, should individuals be responsible for paying for the cost of maintaining a given level of bilingualism, once it has been attained?

Testing

Testing is a sensitive and difficult issue, especially today. Amid anecdotal evidence of people who have been taken training for months and been tested a dozen times without passing, there is a widespread belief among students and Deputies that:

- testing is much more rigorous than it was a few years ago (and unfairly so)
- testing is unfair and needlessly subjective
- people are being tested to a standard that bears no relation to their jobs
- the whole testing method is unnecessarily stressful and artificial²⁴

Those who operate the testing system dispute all these assertions. Yet there is clearly something wrong when everyone thinks the system is broken except those who operate it. And there is a growing concern that, whatever its virtues or faults, the present testing system risks creating an anti-French language backlash in a Public Service that otherwise entirely accepts the fundamental importance of bilingualism at senior levels and in service to the public.

²⁴ One interviewee observed that our current testing regime reflects in one important way the fact that testing has been the responsibility of the PSC, the central agency responsible for staffing. This person said that, like the staffing system itself, our approach to testing is unnecessarily rigid, uniform and formalized.

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There is also increasing concern that the present testing system is unable to accommodate fairly people with learning disabilities²⁵, people who simply have profound difficulty in learning another language, or people for whom English is not their first language.

C) People

Responsibilities of Employees

As noted earlier, a key issue for the future is determining the respective responsibilities of the employer and the individual with regard to language training. Almost everyone to whom I spoke in this project felt there is a widespread problem with lack of individual commitment to the acquisition, retention and use of French as a second language. Some of this problem can be attributed to institutional factors – culture, leadership, etc. But a good part has its roots in the premise that training a person to a certain level of linguistic ability is essentially the responsibility of the employer. In too many cases, employees fail to make a strong personal commitment to real functional bilingualism, in part because they see no professional or personal advantage in becoming truly bilingual.

The personal side is beyond the scope of this paper. The professional dimension needs to be reflected in institutional approaches to bilingualism as a necessary skill for those who aspire to certain sorts of jobs and a certain kind of career.

- One way to do this is to integrate language training into departmental approaches to career development and into individual learning plans (see below)
- Another is to deliberately shift the balance of responsibility between employer and employee by making it the attainment of bilingualism more of a partnership between employer and employee. This could be done, for example, by:
 - declaring and enforcing a policy that the government will pay for an employee to attain a certain level of bilingualism, but *retaining* that level is the responsibility of the employee
 - declaring that the government will pay centrally for a certain block of hours of language training –say 2000 hours in a career; after that, the cost of further instruction falls to the department or the individual
 - making it clear on initial entry what the department's expectations are with respect to bilingual capacity, so that employees begin to make this personal investment at an earlier stage of their career

One thing is clear – if the government is to impose a greater responsibility on public servants for acquiring or retaining skill in the other language, then it must at the same time make renewed investments in tools and opportunities for employees to do that.

²⁵ See, for example, the APEX case study entitled *Language Training and Testing: APEX Discussion with a Group of Executives with Dyslexia*, March 2004

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This means such things as free lunch-time courses on departmental premises, e-learning tools for use at home, opportunities for work in the other language, etc.

A related point is getting the incentives right. Today, the system pays 100% of the cost of “reactive” training – i.e., training to meet the requirements of a job. But it pays very little for “proactive” training – i.e., the kind of training that an individual could undertake on their own initiative to equip themselves for a career in the Public Service. This needs to change.

Integrating Language Training with Professional Development

This point came up in many conversations: if language training is to be relevant to employees, it must be integrated into their personal learning plans and into their department’s longer-term approach to professional development. This sounds obvious, but it is far from commonplace today, and this for several reasons:

- most departments and agencies have been reluctant to do much in the way of career planning and development generally, or to make it clear to new entrants that proficiency in both languages is essential to a senior career
- the past ten years have seen a great deal of institutional upheaval and turnover, both in terms of retirements and moves at senior levels and new hires below. The result has been uncertainty about individual futures and broader institutional instability that has made career planning difficult
- beginning in about 1985, and except for the infusion of funds in the *Plan d’action pour les langues officielles*, resources for language training have been constrained. Departments are reluctant to oblige employees to do things for which there is little funding.

Yet the example of Statistics Canada shows that this desired integration can be achieved. The keys to success are:

- stable leadership
- commitment at senior levels to institutional bilingualism
- institutional commitment to career development of employees
- commitment to language training as an integral aspect of career development
- a reasonable degree of stability in the workforce²⁶
- a willingness to spend the money required for initial training and then for in-house tools, training, etc.

²⁶ Stats Canada is fortunate in that it is essentially Canada’s only employer of the kinds of professionals whom it uses in senior positions. Essentially, this means that if you want to work there you start there at the beginning of your career and work up. And most people stay. This makes career development, including language training, much easier to institutionalize and manage than in many other public sector organizations where staff come and go.

IV. A New Vision

What are we aiming for?

As more than one interviewee said, “we’re not looking for perfection”. Rather, the broad objective should be to build a Public Service in which both official languages are respected and used in the workplace and in the service of Canadians. A necessary condition for this is clarity about expectations and practical effectiveness. Functionally bilingual anglophones should not only be encouraged to use French, they must be *expected* to do so. And whether they speak perfectly should be less important than whether they can communicate effectively and generally demonstrate through their actions and their attitude that they work in both languages because that is part of the job²⁷.

Principles

To this end, it is worth setting out some principles that could guide future thinking on a language training model for the future. Some of these have already been mentioned:

1. *Language training should be an integral part of career and professional development for public servants in bilingual regions and for those who aspire to senior careers.* It is not an add-on; nor is linguistic competency a badge to be acquired and then put away in a drawer. It is something to be lived in the workplace.
2. *In thinking about a new system for language training, it is essential to be clear on what government should do, and what it need not do.* Think hard about leaving the second category to the private sector and the colleges.
3. *Be explicit about the respective responsibilities of the employer and the employee,* and make those responsibilities clear to every employee at the outset of his or her employment.
4. *Seek a new, senior-level consensus on a modern, flexible language testing system,* one that is adapted to:
 - a. the requirements and expectations of the workplace
 - b. the needs of the public being served
 - c. the circumstances and needs of employees²⁸

²⁷ Having a stronger expectation of what is meant by full, functional bilingualism should not be taken to exclude greater respect for so-called receptive bilingualism – that is, for a workplace in which francophones can speak French, knowing that they are understood by their anglophone colleagues.

²⁸ We should bear in mind that developing this kind of system is no easy task, not least because individual interests hang heavily on whether someone passes or fails. I found no consensus among the 20 people I interviewed about what a fairer and more useful testing system might look like

Specific Actions

Bearing in mind these principles, what are some specific steps that should be taken under any credible new approach to language training?

One thing that should be done under any scenario for the future is to modernize (a) our *standards for linguistic competency* and (b) our *delivery systems* for language training.

- Deputies need to look seriously at the level of competency they are expecting of their employees, and especially of managers and supervisors. Is it, as some have suggested, “a strong B”, or is it “a weak C”? Is there really any difference between the two? Or, ought we really to be aiming for a much stronger “C”, one that would truly signify full, functional bilingualism.
- With the support of the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency and the Treasury Board, Deputies need to look individually at their requirements for particular jobs. For example, does every EX job in the NCR need to be classified as CBC? How many jobs outside bilingual regions should be classified as bilingual, yet aren't?
- The language training system needs to know where the government stands on these sorts of issues before it can reasonably be expected to respond.

The issue of modernizing delivery systems touches everything from the use of e-tools to in-house delivery of teaching, to refresher courses, to devices for encouraging the use of French as a language of work. These kinds of support systems are not a new idea, but they require money and continuing institutional support.

Models for LTC

As noted on page 16, a decision will have to be taken about how best to deploy the institutional capacity of LTC in support of the new model. A few points to bear in mind:

- *The status quo is probably not sellable.* There is a general view that the government is not spending its money as effectively as it could on language training and that the talents of the people at LTC are not currently being applied to the best advantage of the Public Service. The issue is how to make better use of them.
- *It would be foolish to think the government could do without a central capacity in language training.* There is nowhere outside government that one could turn for new tools, methodologies and standards in this specialized field. Moreover, official languages are a central underpinning of the Canada that is defined in our constitution. For the federal government not to affirm and invest in this core responsibility would send the wrong signal to public servants and to Canadians generally.
- *The models described on page 16 are not rigid.* For example, it may be possible to combine a new vocation for LTC as a central agency for language training with some continuing “core” teaching responsibilities – e.g., for EXs, or for people with learning disabilities.

Keys to Success

Culture is central to effective language training in the future. The discussion in this paper has shown that there are really three keys to creating a new Public Service culture in which both official languages are respected and used.

Leadership

Visible, consistent leadership that shows itself in practice as well as rhetoric is the starting point for meaningful change in the workplace. Without leadership, francophones will remain cautious about using their first language and anglophones will lack any incentive to apply the language skills they have acquired in training.

“Responsabilisation”

Developing a sense of personal accountability for acquiring and retaining the second language is essential to a new approach for the future. Unless individual public servants accept their responsibility for investing in language skills as a *necessary* element of a senior career, we cannot hope to change the linguistic culture of the Public Service.

As we have seen, accepting this point is not to say that the employer has no responsibility for training. Rather, it is seek a better, clearer balance between the respective responsibilities of the two, ultimately in the interests of giving practical effect to the lofty ambitions of the *Official Languages Act*.

Adapting to the Learner

The final point to be noted as a key to future success is making training relevant to the learner. One thing this means, as we have discussed, is integrating language training with career and professional development. It also means an approach to training and testing that is focused on job-relevant language skills and the realities of life in a particular department or agency. It also means making available new technologies for learning and retention, and generally making public sector institutions as supportive of second-language acquisition and retention as possible.

The Language Training System in 2010

What kind of language training system does all this add up to? Bearing in mind that there are choices to be made even within this proposed new vision, and that new resources cannot be guaranteed, the kind of system I could imagine moving to over five to ten years would look like this:

“The Centre” (i.e., Treasury Board, PSHRMAC, PSC, LTC) will:

- have articulated and implemented a revised policy on language training that will clearly spell out the responsibilities of departments/agencies and their employees
- require departments/agencies to:

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- appoint or designate language training coordinators
- submit annual plans for language training and report on results. Language training plans should be integrated with departmental policies on career development and individual learning
- re-mandate and equip LTC to serve as a national (i.e., not just federal) centre of excellence in language training, responsible for:
 - setting standards for training
 - certifying training methodologies and institutions (including private sector schools)
 - evaluating federally employed teachers
 - approving tests and evaluating testers
 - auditing and evaluating departmental language training programs and plans
 - core teaching for specialized purposes
- accept that much (even most) language training will be delivered by non-governmental institutions (colleges, private schools, etc), working according to standards set by the centre
- certify linguistic proficiency through tests that are more adapted to departmental circumstances and more sensitive to individuals

Departments and Agencies will

- foster and encourage the use of both languages in the workplace
- develop and implement language training plans as required by the centre
- integrate language training into their overall approach to recruitment, career development and learning
- encourage employees to invest in language training as part of their own professional development
- offer training supports and opportunities for training
- shift the balance of their investment in language training from reactive training to proactive

Individual Employees will

- understand and accept that proficiency in both official languages is a requirement for certain kinds of jobs and careers in the Public Service
- invest in language training as part of their own professional development
- feel supported and encouraged in their own use of the other official language in the workplace

Getting There: Obstacles and Risks

My interviews revealed a few common concerns about the obstacles to realizing a new vision of language training in the Public Service.

- One obvious challenge in bringing forward a new model is finding the resources to support a more effective program of language training in departments and, if so decided, centrally through LTC. Departments too will have needs for new tools to support language acquisition and retention.
- A second hurdle to be overcome is reaching a consensus on things like desired levels of competency, and especially on testing. This will not be easy. Well-intentioned senior people will have differing views about objectives and how best to attain and measure them.
- A third challenge is obtaining the political support to make changes to a language training system that is to some extent a prisoner of the history of the past 35 years. Many people have a stake in the status quo; others are simply fearful of change. These different sorts of reluctance will have to be addressed honestly if the government is to hope to move to a new model.
- But the biggest risk facing deputies as they think about these issues is the temptation to regard language training as a problem rather than as a critically important opportunity to build the Public Service of the future.

Language training is too easily seen as something that can be ignored in favour of other more pressing matters. It is time to give this critical issue the attention it deserves.

Jim Mitchell

Appendix I: Terms of Reference

“A New Vision for Language Training in the Public Service”²⁹

Official language training in the Public Service is a complex set of activities that is:

- operated according to TB policies,
- managed within the government by Language Training Canada, soon to be part of the new Canada School of Public Service,
- delivered by both public and private sector training entities, and
- tested by the Public Service Commission.

Proficiency in Canada's two official languages is a requirement for 38% of jobs in the Public Service, and 79% of EX positions. 84% of the bilingual EX positions are in the NCR. In recent years, there has been some controversy within executive and other ranks as many employees have been obliged to undergo intensive language training to meet the requirements of current or prospective EX positions. Some EXs have repeatedly failed the required test at the end of their training. There are also concerns about access to training by employees who are not in the Executive Group, and about possible barriers to advancement as there are reductions in non-imperative staffing and an increase in bilingual imperative staffing.

There is widespread concern at senior levels, among the EX community, and in the interested public, that something is wrong with the government's approach to the whole issue of official language training. The costs are substantial, the results uneven, and language training is not adequately integrated into the broader career development framework of the Public Service. The current language training model is reactive (i.e., after staffing) rather than proactive, like most other aspects of career development.

In addition, it is not clear what the balance is between the duty of public sector institutions to provide language training to their employees, and the obligation of the employees themselves to develop proficiency in the other official language as part of their investment in their own careers. The bottom line is that Public Service language training needs to be re-thought.

Proposed Scope of the Vision Paper

The vision project should touch on the following major issues:

- **The new environment – both social and technological – of public service work in Canada in 2004**, and how it differs from the corresponding environment of the 1960s and 70s when the current language training policy and model were developed and introduced.
 - How has the country changed in ways relevant to the issue of second language acquisition and retention, and the use of both official languages in the workplace?

²⁹ This section is extracted and slightly adapted from the proposal submitted for this project.

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- How have the Canadian population and Public Service workforce themselves changed?
- How does the availability of new technologies for learning bear on the appropriate language training model for the future?
- **The principles and implicit assumptions (e.g., “employer pays”) that underpin our current model for language training**, in order that the principles and premises of the future model can be seen clearly in contrast.
 - Is there in fact a “vision” underlying the current model?
 - Why is second language skill virtually the only competency that the Public Service is prepared to build extensively after entry?
 - The vision of training in the Public Service has evolved over the past 30 years. Has the vision of *language* training evolved with it?
- **The interests, expectations, responsibilities and future role of public sector institutions** in official language training (i.e., LTC, departmental language schools).
 - What is the employer’s duty to employees in terms of language training?
 - What expectations do departments and agencies have about bilingual capacity? On that basis, how can they realistically hope to ensure they have it?
 - What are the respective roles of institutions and employees with respect to language training as a part of career and professional development?
- **The corresponding responsibilities and role of individuals**, both serving public servants and those who seek careers in the Public Service.
 - What responsibilities should fall on individuals to equip themselves to function in the other official language?
 - What incentives and rewards can be offered to foster second language acquisition and retention?
 - Which costs could reasonably be paid by the employer, which by the department, and which by the individual?
 - What aspects of language training should be considered “core”, and which more directly related to specific job needs and as such requiring adaptation? Who should be responsible for what?
- **The role of “non-educational” instruments** in the acquisition and retention of the second language for federal public servants.
 - e.g., what elements of the workplace are conducive (or not) to second language acquisition and retention?
 - What sorts of things would help to make “language of work” work for both the

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already bilingual and those completing language training?

- **The criteria by which the government should assess issues of affordability and sustainability.**
 - What would a sustainable model have to look like in broad terms, bearing in mind that sustainability is not simply a financial matter?
 - What kind of investment model do we want language training to work under? (e.g., should the government only train once, then invest in maintenance?)
 - What should be the linkages between the language training system and the testing system (currently separate regimes)? How can we move to a more integrated system more closely reflecting 'real' job needs?
- **The impediments to realizing this vision** of language training for the future.
 - What obstacles and risks must we take care to avoid or overcome with respect to the Public Service language training system?

Appendix II: List of Interviewees

Michelle Chartrand, President, Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada

Janice Cochrane, President, Canada School for Public Service

Maria Barrados, President, Public Service Commission

Jim Judd, Secretary of the Treasury Board, Treasury Board Secretariat

Ivan Fellegi, Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada

Oryssia Lennie, Deputy Minister, Western Economic Diversification Canada

Marie-Lucie Morin, Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Foreign Affairs

Diana Monnet, Vice-President, Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada

Denise Boudrias, Senior Vice-President, Canada School for Public Service (plus Yves Dupuis and Garth Manson)

Jacques Pelletier, Vice-President, Public Service Commission

Greg Gauld, Vice-President, Public Service Commission

Patrick Borbey, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services, Health Canada

Yvette Mongeon, then-Director General, Language Training Canada (plus Pierre LeBrun)

Carole Theauvette, Senior Director, Service Industries Branch, Industry Canada

LCol Jean-Yves Caron, Commandant, Canadian Forces Language School

Pierre de Blois, Executive Director, Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada

Jim Jones, Regional Director General, Gulf Region, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Private Sector

Gonzalo Peralta, CEO, BabelFish, and Board Member of Canadian Association of Private Language Schools

Louise Charest, Directrice, École de langues de l'Estrie

Michel Caron, Président, École de langues Caron Ltée