Observations of service over the Internet

Background

The observations of service to the public conducted by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (Office of the Commissioner) are one of many tools used to measure the performance of federal institutions with respect to Part IV of the *Official Languages Act*, which deals with service to the public. The Office of the Commissioner observed three types of service provided by the institutions: service in-person, by telephone and over the Internet. This document describes the methodology used for the observations of service over the Internet.

For the second year in a row, the Office of the Commissioner gathered data using a variety of methods for communicating with federal institutions over the Internet. In keeping with the digital shift, observations were conducted on various platforms, including computers and mobile devices.

Federal institutions use a number of on-line media. The Office of the Commissioner therefore grouped them into two categories of services that have similar functions.

The first category includes interactions with federal employees through e-mail or on-line forms. Using the observations conducted in this category, the Office of the Commissioner sought to compare response rates and times in English and French. The second category of services includes content posted on-line by federal institutions for public viewing. Using samples of content published on federal institutions' websites, social media accounts, applications and on-line accounts, the Office of the Commissioner sought to determine whether on-line content was equivalent in both official languages.

Methodology

The methodology was established in cooperation with Statistics Canada, which also participated in the interpretation and validation of the results.

Unlike the results of the observations conducted in person and by telephone, which indicate the availability of service in the official language of the linguistic minority, the results of the observations of interactive services over the Internet compare response rates, response times and the availability of information in both official languages.

For the observations of interactive services over the Internet, equivalent messages in English and French were sent to each institution to compare response rates and times. The observations sought to simulate the experience of a member of the public who contacts the institution to obtain information.

Through the interactive on-line observations, it was possible to compare the number of responses and the time it took to receive a response in each official language.

The observations of interactive services over the Internet were conducted between February 21 and March 27, 2019; therefore, the results are representative of that time period.

Observations of on-line content were conducted on a variety of on-line sites and media provided in advance by federal institutions. These on-line observations sought to simulate the experience of a member of the public who browses on-line to obtain information or learn about a topic. Observers evaluated whether the content was equivalent in both official languages by examining the availability in English and French of the same sample content and by looking at the targets of the links provided. A summary review of social media posts was also conducted to compare the quality of the posts in each official language.

The observations of on-line content were conducted from January 31 to February 26, 2019; therefore, the results are representative of that time period.

Appendix A: Comparable response rates and times

1) Comparable response rates

The response rates in both official languages make it possible to determine whether federal institutions provide comparable service in English and French, without taking established service standards into account.

i. Calculating response rates in English and French

- o Response rate in English: (Number of English responses received ÷ Number of English e-mails and e-forms sent) × 100 = x%
- o Response rate in French: (Number of French responses received ÷ Number of French e-mails and e-forms sent) × 100 = x%

ii. Determining the score

- o **Comparable response rate score:** 100% minus the difference between the response rates in both official languages.

  For example, if Institution A provided a response in English or French for each e-mail and e-form during the observation period, based on the calculation formula, there is no difference (0%) between the two response rates, resulting in a score of 100% for the comparable response rate (see Appendix B).

  As another example, Institution B's response rate was 90% in English and 40% in French. Since the difference between the two response rates is 50%, the score is calculated as 100 − 50 = 50% for the comparable response rate (see Appendix B).

2) Comparable response times

The average response times for e-mails and e-forms in English and French make it possible to compare response times in each official language. To do this, a score is assigned that represents the proportionality or equivalency of the average response times in both official languages. The closer the score is to 100%, the closer the response times were in English and French.

i. Calculating average response times

- In order to reduce the effect of excessive response times on the average, the Winsorization estimation method is used. This method involves determining a limit[1] e.g., 200 hours for a given institution) based on the assumption that a response time exceeding that limit is the result of something other than a question of language. Therefore, any response time exceeding the limit is rounded off to that number for the purposes of calculating the average response times.
  - **Calculating average response times for English e-mails and e-forms and French e-mails and e-forms**
    - Average response times (hours) = Response times total (hours) ÷ Number of responses received

ii. Determining the score

- **Comparable response time score:** 100 × Shortest average response time ÷ Longest average response time.

  For example, if Institution A has an average response time of 75.2 hours for English e-mails and e-forms and 163.9 hours for French e-mails and e-forms, its score is 46% (100 x 75.2 ÷ 163.9 = 46).

  As another example, Institution B's average response time is 83.3 hours for English e-mails and e-forms and 62.7 hours for French e-mails and e-forms. This results in a score of 75% (100 x 62.7 ÷ 83.3 = 75).

Appendix B: Examples of observations of service over the Internet

Institution	Response rate in English	Response rate in French	Service availability score	Average response time in English	Average response time in French	Difference between the average response times (hours)	Difference between the average response times (%)	Response time score
				Response time				
A	100%	100%	**100%**	75.2 hours	163.9 hours	88.7 hours	54%	**46%**
B	90%	40%	**50%**	83.3 hours	62.7 hours	20.6 hours	25%	**75%**

Footnote

1- Because response times vary for each institution, the limits also vary: Institution A = 400 hours; Institution B = 200 hours.