

Observations of service in person and by telephone

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 in-person and telephone observations.

The Office of the Commissioner is supported by Statistics Canada in its methodological approach, particularly with respect to sampling, calculations and validation of results. It is important to note that the results provide an indication of an institution's performance at the specific time the observations take place. They do not represent the probability of obtaining service in the official language of your choice.

Definitions

In-person observations

Observations of service in person involve making anonymous visits to a federal institution's bilingual points of service to assess its capability to serve the public in the official language of the linguistic minority. This includes observations of service in English in Quebec and service in French outside of Quebec.

The evaluation is based on the following three criteria:

Visual active offer

The observer indicates ("yes" or "no") whether bilingual services are offered at the point of service. This offer is provided through the following visual elements:

- bilingual signage outside
- bilingual signage inside
- presence of "English/Français" pictogram
- display of pamphlets, forms or documents in both official languages

The observer may indicate “yes” even if not all of the elements are present. For example, if the “English/Français” pictogram is not visible, but most of the documents and signs at the point of service are in both official languages, the observer will indicate that there is a bilingual visual active offer.

Active offer by staff

The observer indicates (“yes” or “no”) whether initial contact with an employee at the point of service is in both official languages, through the use of the “Hello, bonjour” greeting, a phrase such as “Next, suivant” or a similar phrase.

Availability of service in the official language of the linguistic minority

The observer indicates (“yes” or “no”) whether service is received in the official language of the linguistic minority at the point of service.

Telephone observations

Observations of service by telephone involve making calls to contact numbers that the institution provides to the public. When the telephone number is for a specific physical office, the same approach is used as for in-person observations with respect to the official language of the linguistic minority. If there is only one telephone number for the entire country, the same number of observations is made in English and French.

The evaluation is based on the following two criteria:

Active offer by telephone

Several factors are taken into account when evaluating active offer by telephone. For example, if the institution has a separate telephone number for English and French, the active offer is implicit. If the voicemail system’s main menu lets callers choose the official language in which they wish to proceed, the active offer is explicit. If there is no choice offered, the active offer is evaluated based on the first verbal contact with an agent.

In the latter case, the observer indicates (“yes” or “no”) whether the institution’s first point of contact answers the telephone call in both official languages by using a bilingual greeting, such as “Hello, bonjour,” or by announcing the name of the institution in both languages, for example, “Canada Revenue Agency, Agence du revenu du Canada.” Greetings like this make it clear to callers that service is available in the official language of their choice.

Availability of service by telephone in the official language of the linguistic minority

The observer indicates (“yes” or “no”) whether service is received in the official language of the linguistic minority.

Methodology

The methodology is the same for observations in person and by telephone. It involves making a number of anonymous observations at a representative sample of all the bilingual points of service of the institution being assessed. At the beginning of observation cycle, the Commissioner asks the institutions that will be observed to provide a list of all of their bilingual points of service that are open to the public without an appointment. The list is sent to Statistics Canada to establish a sample. One or more observations of the points of service in the sample are made over a defined period of time. The results provide an indication of the availability of service in the official language of the linguistic minority.

Results

The main objective of in-person and telephone observations is to obtain statistically valid overall results for each of the observation criteria. Unless otherwise stated, the observations do not generate statistically valid results by point of service.

Results quality indicator

When Statistics Canada calculates the observation results, it assigns a quality indicator to each one. The indicator establishes the quality of the sample that was subject to observations.

- A. standard deviation below 4% (margin of error of less than 8%, 19 times out of 20)
- B. standard deviation between 4% and 8% (margin of error between 8% and 16%, 19 times out of 20)
- C. standard deviation between 8% and 12% (margin of error between 16% and 24%, 19 times out of 20)

Statistics Canada considers the quality indicators A, B and C to be appropriate, given the objective of the Office of the Commissioner's observations. This statistical survey is not an opinion survey, nor is it intended to predict future results.

Comparison of results

Observation results are snapshots of service availability at various points of service at a specific time. Unless otherwise stated, they cannot be compared from year to year or serve to determine progress over time. The ensuing results would not be reliable, as the margins of error increase when results from separate samples are compared. However, it is reasonable to conclude that an institution must make improvements at its bilingual points of service if it obtains poor results in every observation exercise.