

LEGACY OF THE *OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT*: WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet to support **Activity 7: The Official Languages Act Perspectives**, and **Activity 8: Was the B&B Commission Successful?** on pages 10 and 11 of *Historica Canada's Official Languages Act Education Guide*.

When the *Official Languages Act* (OLA) came into force on 7 September 1969, it gave French and English equal status as the two official languages of Canada. The Act grew out of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B&B Commission), which exposed massive inequalities between francophone and anglophone Canadians. The Act was instrumental in integrating French into federal institutions, requiring all federal institutions to offer services in French and English, creating job opportunities for French Canadians, and offering greater economic opportunity to francophone communities across the country (primarily through increased job opportunities within the Federal government). The Act also set up the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL), which measures linguistic realities, ensures the Act is respected across the country, and takes care of complaints.

But what kind of impact did the B&B Commission and the resulting OLA have for Canadians? The effects of the OLA can be measured through different indicators that measure whether the Act made Canadians more bilingual or helped cultural relations between French and English Canadians.¹ The B&B Commission's success can be measured by assessing whether the OLA did indeed bring about change in three key areas:

- The extent of bilingualism in the federal government
- The role of public and private organizations in promoting better cultural relations
- The opportunities for Canadians to become bilingual in English and French

THE EXTENT OF BILINGUALISM IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:

- Since 1969, the percentage of public administration jobs that are bilingual has increased.
- Public servants are offered the possibility of taking French lessons to improve their skills.
- In 2007, positions in the core public administration required the following language skills:
 - Bilingual - 40.2%
 - English Essential - 51.2%
 - French Essential - 4.0%
 - English or French Essential - 4.4%
- While this figure may seem positive, the reality of French usage in the workplace is very different. The report of the OCOL in 2018-2019 found the following:
 - Since 2008, 4 surveys show that between 91% and 93% of English-speaking employees are comfortable writing in the official language of their choice at work.
 - Only 67-68% of French-speaking employees are comfortable writing in their chosen language, a 25% difference.
 - The results of the Public Service Employee Survey show no real progress on any significant issue between 2008 and 2017, showing stagnation.

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS IN PROMOTING BETTER CULTURAL RELATIONS:

- 67% of anglophones believe that the Government of Canada is effective in protecting both official languages, as opposed to 47% of francophones.
- 96% of francophones believe it is important for all Canadians to have access to services offered by the Federal Government in their official language of choice, while only 83% of anglophones think the same.
- In Canada outside Québec, 98.6% of workers reported using English at least on a regular basis, and 9 out of 10 workers reported using only English. These proportions are similar to those observed in 2006.
- In Québec, the predominant use of French in the workplace fell from 82.0% in 2006 to 79.7% in 2016. This decline was mainly in favour of the equal use of French and English, which rose from 4.6% in 2006 to 7.2% in 2016.
- The proportion of workers who use more than one language at work rose from 14.9% in 2006 to 15.4% in 2016.
- Summer programs (e.g., Explore) have increased over the years, with the goal of helping Canadians speak both French and English.

¹Statistics, facts, and figures taken from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/fr) and from Statistics Canada (www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016031/98-200-x2016031-eng.cfm).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CANADIANS TO BECOME BILINGUAL IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH:

- Between 2006 and 2011, the number of persons who reported being able to conduct a conversation in both of Canada's official languages grew by 350,000 people to 5.8 million.
- The bilingualism rate of the Canadian population edged up from 17.4% in 2006 to 17.5% in 2011.
- Just under half of the students in public schools across Canada (2,382,693) were learning a second official language in 2015/2016.
- Among these students, the majority (1,954,068) were enrolled in regular second language programs (core programs with English or French as a subject), down slightly (-0.2%) from the previous school year.
- The Federal Government now offers the possibility for public servants to take French lessons to improve their skills.
- Demand increased for French immersion for students in all provinces. In 2015-2016, around 430,000 students were enrolled in French immersion programs, compared to 360,000 in 2011-2012 — an increase of nearly 20% in four years (total student body has remained the same).

OTHER OFFICIAL LANGUAGE STATISTICS

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL) is the main government organ that makes sure that the Act is respected across the country and that takes care of any complaints. The OCOL also issues recommendations and advice to elected officials regarding the best way to achieve institutional bilingualism. The OLA itself specified three pillars, which the OCOL measures: ensuring respect for English and French and equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in federal institutions; supporting the development of English and French linguistic minority communities; and advancing the equal status and use of English and French. You can visit the OCOL website at www.clo-ocol.gc.ca for more facts and figures. Here are some statistics that may help you assess the impact of the *Official Languages Act* and the success of the B&B Commission:

- In 2018-2019, the OCOL recorded 550 complaints related to Communication and Services to the Public, making up about half of all complaints received by the OCOL. These complaints include services received at the border, at voting polls, and in over 30 different federal agencies.
- While 20.6% of Canadians (6.8 million people) reported a mother tongue other than English or French, only 6.2% of Canadians spoke a language other than English or French as their sole home language.
- In 2011, 63.5% of the population whose mother tongue was neither English nor French reported speaking English at home.
- Nearly 7 million Canadians reported speaking French most often at home in 2011, compared with 6.7 million in 2006.
- In Quebec, the proportion of the population that reported speaking only French at home decreased from 75.1% to 72.8% between 2006 and 2011. In the rest of Canada, the proportion of the population that reported speaking only English at home declined from 77.1% to 74.1% between 2006 and 2011.

CONCLUSION

After 50 years, the *Official Languages Act* has proven to be a defining force in Canadian society. The future of language in Canada and the modern relevance of the Act still raise many questions. Statistics Canada projects that by 2036, half of all Canadians will either be immigrants or children of immigrants, meaning that 25% of the Canadian population is expected to have a mother tongue other than English or French, and our official-language populations will become increasingly culturally diverse. The creation of an *Indigenous Languages Act* aimed at reclaiming, revitalizing, strengthening, and maintaining Indigenous languages in Canada will also influence the way our government implements linguistic policy across the country. While it's important to acknowledge the enormous progress that has been possible because of the Act, it is important to think about its place in our current society and the future of language and linguistic policy in Canada.

WHAT IS THE LEGACY OF THE B&B COMMISSION?

Use this chart to support **Activity 8: Was the B&B Commission Successful?**, on pages 10 and 11 of *Historica Canada's Official Languages Act Education Guide*. See pages 6 and 7 for the accompanying *Legacy of the Official Languages Act Worksheet* for this activity.

TARGET AREA	CRITERIA	MEASUREMENT
Extent of bilingualism in the federal government		
Role of public and private organizations in promoting better cultural relations		
Opportunities for Canadians to become bilingual in English and French		