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## **BILINGUALISM IN THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER OCCUPATION: SUSTAINING THE MOMENTUM**

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**Service Paper**

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## **BILINGUALISM IN THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER OCCUPATION: SUSTAINING THE MOMENTUM**

### **AIM**

1. The aim of this service paper is to address Second Official Language (SOL) proficiency and training issues currently affecting the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) occupation by presenting recommendations to the Public Affairs (PA) Branch Council.

### **INTRODUCTION**

2. Since 2013, PAO candidates must obtain a minimum SOL proficiency functional level of BBB to attend the Basic Public Affairs Officer Course (BPAOC) as they progress to Operationally Functional Point (OFP). However, there is currently no mechanism in place to manage cases where PAOs fail to maintain the minimum SOL entry requirement. In addition, while the need to have PAOs at the functional (BBB) level and above increases many PAOs do not maintain their SOL proficiency and let their SOL profile expire.

3. This service paper presents recommendations to ensure PAOs acquire, maintain and improve their ability to communicate in both Official Languages throughout their career through a look at the Official Languages legal framework, the expectations towards the PAO occupation and the work done thus far by the PA Branch regarding bilingualism.

### **DISCUSSION**

4. The Official Languages Act (OLA) sees that English and French, as official languages of Canada, enjoy the same status, right and privileges in federal institutions, “in particular in communicating with or providing services to the public and in carrying out the work

of federal institutions”<sup>1</sup> as well as setting out “powers, duties and functions of federal institutions with respect to the official languages of Canada.”<sup>2</sup> As a federal institution, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) must adhere to obligations and commitments stemming from the Act such as being able to communicate with the public in the official language of their choice in offices located in the National Capital Region or anywhere else where there is significant demand for communications.<sup>3</sup> Being communicators on behalf of the Department of National Defence (DND) and the CAF, PAOs are the link between the military and the media, the public, stakeholders as well as subject matter experts. Consequently, they must be able to interact with Canadians in English or in French.<sup>4</sup>

5. Further to these legal requirements, the Job Based Occupational Specification (JBOS) for the PAO occupation specifies that PAOs are expected to perform their duties in compliance with the OLA.<sup>5</sup> It also underlines the functional level (BBB) requirement before attending the BPAOC and the need to have attained the integral level (CBC) prior to promotion at the rank of LCol.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the JBOS outlines the requirement for PAOs to attend mandatory training to reach the integral (CBC) level during Developmental Period (DP) 3A for eventual promotion to LCol. While it is not managed as mandatory training for *all* PAOs, the PA Branch Succession Board selects candidates to fill the two Second Official Language Education and Training (SOLET) Advanced Training List (ATL) credits.

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<sup>1</sup> *Official Languages Act - Part IV Communications with and Services to the Public, (1985).*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Armed Forces, *Backgrounder - Director Official Languages*, BG 98.022 (Ottawa: 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Department of National Defence, A-PD-055-002/PP-001 Vol 2 Part 1, *Canadian Forces Manual of Military Occupational Structure – Job Based Specification for the Public Affairs Officers Occupation* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

6. The PA Branch has recognized the need to tackle the bilingualism needs of PAOs for years. In 2009, it was agreed that the Branch would work with the Director Official Languages (DOL) to discuss the number of PAOs requiring SOLET to develop a training program. The topic of ATL credits available to the Branch was also raised at that time.<sup>7</sup>

7. In 2011, DOL presented the findings of a study recommending a minimum integral profile (CBC) for PAOs working at DP2, indicative of the pertinence to have bilingual PAOs. The allocation of more ATL credits was once again discussed, although a CAF-wide review was planned at the time and until its completion occupations were to manage within their current allocations but could, in concert with Career Managers, have access to other occupations' unused credits as long as there was no impact on PA resources and capabilities.<sup>8</sup> DOL staff also indicated they were exploring solutions "to ensure that occupations responsible in the provision of External and Internal bilingual services have the necessary means to meet their obligations"<sup>9</sup>, noting that a sole reliance on ATL credits for SOLET was ineffective and untimely to train those delivering necessary services in both OL. Of interest, only 73% of PAOs had a valid profile of BBB or higher at that time.<sup>10</sup>

8. The following year, making the integral (CBC) profile as an employment requirement for PAOs was still a consideration. The need for more coordinated efforts was raised by participants at the Annual Military Occupation Review (AMOR) with 62% of Anglophones

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<sup>7</sup> Chief Military Personnel, *Annual Military Occupation Review (AMOR) Record of Discussion - Public Affairs Branch - 26 January 2009* (Ottawa: 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Assistant Chief Military Personnel, *Annual Military Occupation Review 2011/2012 - Record of Decisions for Public Affairs Officer MOSID 00203* (Ottawa: 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

and 98% of Francophones holding a profile of BBB, of which 17% of Anglophones and 80% of Francophones had a profile of CBC or higher. The Branch was actively working toward meeting the CBC employment requirement, exploring the amendment of Entry Standards, offering training/incentive to qualified PAOs and beginning the delivery of the BPAOC in both OL.<sup>11</sup>

9. In 2013, while the percentage of PAOs at BBB and CBC was roughly the same as the previous year, the PA Branch decided to keep the BBB employment requirement as the minimum SOL profile since its efforts to raise it to CBC had not been supported by other CAF agencies.<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding, efforts went on to improve the linguistic abilities of PAOs at low cost, still considering a CBC language profile as ideal for all intake programs except Component Transfers (CT) due to different OL requirements and rules for Reservists. In addition, two out of the three PA Branch ATL credits for SOLET were and still are given to those nearing promotion to senior officer ranks. An incentive was also put in place whereas the Branch raised the level of SOL profile required to get full points on selection boards.<sup>13</sup>

10. These initiatives seem to have worked: in 2014, 75% of PAOs held a valid BBB profile compared to 48.6% of other officer occupations across the CAF, 37% of PAOs had CBC or higher compared to 23.6% for the rest of the CAF officer corps.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Assistant Chief Military Personnel, *Annual Military Occupation Review 2012/2013 - Record of Decisions for Public Affairs Officer MOSID 00203* (Ottawa: 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Assistant Chief Military Personnel, *Annual Military Occupation Review 2013/2014 - Record of Decisions for Public Affairs Officer MOSID 00203* (Ottawa: 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Assistant Chief Military Personnel, *Annual Military Occupation Review 2013/2014 - Record of Decisions for Public Affairs Officer MOSID 00203* (Ottawa: 2014).

11. Lastly, in 2015, discussions were still ongoing between the PA Branch and Director Personnel Generation Requirements (DPGR) regarding the possibility of having SOL requirements identified by entry plan. In addition, the number of PA bilingual positions at the BBB level across the CAF went from 89 in 2013 to 122 in 2015, while the number of PAOs having the required profile for the position they were in went from 55.06% in 2013 to 52.46% in 2015.<sup>15</sup> As bilingual positions increased, the ability of PAOs to work in both OL decreased.

12. The career managers do take positions' SOL profile requirements into consideration when developing posting plots, especially for the positions located in the province of Quebec where an ability to speak French is essential. However, as operational and individuals' needs arise, posting a PAO in a position with the proper SOL profile becomes challenging and as such, a position's bilingual requirement can go unaddressed. In addition, DOL is still reviewing all positions across the CAF to reassess the level of bilingualism required across regions of Canada, an initiative scheduled to be completed in 2016. There are no indications as to the kind of effect that it could have on the PAO positions across the CAF, although one thing remains certain: as PAOs may be posted across Canada, the requirement to communicate in both OL remains.

13. While not all PAOs can access year-long SOLET, there are a number of training opportunities available to them. First, the PA Branch has purchased 12 Rosetta Stone licences that are available to PAOs wishing to maintain their proficiency at a generic level, although this is not geared towards taking the Public Service Commission (PSC), the language testing standard for CAF personnel. Second, PAOs can also access Autonomous Language Learning in Interaction with Elements in Synergy (ALLIES Web), an online language learning application

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<sup>15</sup>Richard Paquin, *Re: Service paper on JCSP – BBB Language Requirement*, 7 January 2016 11:01 AM.

available all the time that is geared toward PSC language tests.<sup>16</sup> Third, PAOs can request to attend a Progress Level Course, which consists of five-week full time language training course. Fourth, there is the possibility of applying to do a similar fulltime Progress Level training within Distance Learning in a virtual classroom. Finally, PAOs can access part time SOLET training with a tutor also in a Distance Learning environment.

14. No matter the variety of training options available, an individual needs to have the time to attend the training during the day. Contrary to most other officer occupations in the CAF, PAOs are often by themselves in a unit or headquarters and do not have the flexibility of absenting themselves for long periods of time to attend courses. Combined with operational tempo pressures, SOLET is often an afterthought until selection boards season approaches.

15. PAOs will too often let their profile expire and will not see to maintain it, although “the responsibility for SOLET and the retention of SOL proficiency is shared by CAF members and the CAF to ensure that investments in SOLET are optimized.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, as much as the PA Branch Advisor would like to ensure PAOs maintain valid SOL profiles, he does not have command authority on any of them: it leaves him in a position to rely on the chains of command to ensure their PAOs have valid profiles and to support their efforts in staying current, which often does not yield the expected result. In contrast, oddly enough, there is a lot of dissatisfaction within PAOs as captains and majors expect to receive the training and perceive that their

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<sup>16</sup> "Second Language Training - ALLIES Web," last modified June 12, 2015, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/training-elearning/second-language-allies.page>. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/training-elearning/second-language-allies.page>

<sup>17</sup> Canadian Armed Forces, *DAOD 5039-7 Second Official Language Education and Training for CAF Members*, Vol. DAOD 5039-7 (Ottawa:2009).



Francophone colleagues are at an advantage over them since they have more opportunities to work and live in their SOL.

16. This presents three issues. First, with a limited number of ATL credits for full time SOLET, there are not enough full time training resources to bring all PAOs currently lacking a valid BBB SOL profile to the level they should be. Second, before making an official appeal to get more ATL credits, the PA Branch needs to get a clear understanding of what the training needs actually are. And third, as the PAO occupation requires new candidates to reach a BBB SOL profile prior to attend BPAOC, there is currently no process in place to deal with those who will have an expired OL profile five years after acquiring it and are unable to attain BBB on retesting.

### **Action items**

17. The first item of action is to ensure that PAOs who had already reached OFP before 2013 get a valid profile within the next three to six months, enabling the Branch Advisor to get a clear assessment of the training needs to support the request for more ATL credits. To that end, an instruction from the Chief of Military Personnel (CMP) seeking chains of command support to have PAOs maintain a valid SOL profile and provide them with SOLET opportunities as well as prioritizing PAOs for SOL testing is considered as a significant message to PAOs of the importance of being able to communicate in both OL. While this would likely be seen by other occupations as an undue advantage to PAOs and an intrusion into various chains of command, it could be an opportunity to stress the fact that DND/CAF are serious about supporting the ability

of communicating with Canadians in both OL, a topic that regularly comes back in the media with much political sensitivity.

18. With a clear understanding of the training needs, the PA Branch will be in a position to ask for more ATL credits. Whichever number comes out of the training needs analysis, the Branch will have to rightfully justify its request since a CAF-wide reviews and rationalization of ATL credits is underway. Any increases in favour of the PAO occupation will have to be done at the detriment of another occupation and will likely meet a strong resistance. However, since the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) has already stated his intention to operationalize the PA Branch, it might have an attentive ear to its needs. Failing an increase of ATL credits, the PA Branch could explore asking for more Military Manning Overhead (MMO) positions as an interim measure until the ATL credits apportionment is addressed.

19. Second, with the BBB requirement implemented in 2013, PAOs who joined the Branch since then had to reach this SOL proficiency level and will see their profiles expire around 2017 or 2018. Should these PAOs not be able to maintain at least a BBB profile, a policy and process akin to those not meeting physical fitness standards must be put forward. The acceptable training period to achieve a BBB level should be determined with stakeholders and a Career Review Process should be developed and ready for implementation no later than 2018. In essence, a PAO's inability to maintain a BBB profile in his/her second language should have consequences on one's career.

20. Third, PAOs who reached OFP before 2013 who are not able to maintain or increase their bilingualism potential should see the number of points allocated to bilingualism on the Scoring Criteria of selection boards amended, whereas any profile lower than BBB would get no points and possibly limit career progression. A proposal of such a scoring scheme is outlined at Annex A, based on the one currently being used on selection boards<sup>18</sup>. As a supplemental incentive, any file to be presented to the selection board lacking a valid SOL profile should be immediately rejected in a fashion similar to those lacking a current fitness evaluation result.

## **CONCLUSION**

21. During the last few years, more attention was given to the requirement for PAOs to communicate in both OL. The JBOS was updated to reflect a minimum SOL entry requirement as part of achieving OFP, new forms of SOL training were explored then implemented and incentive measures were taken to motivate PAOs to increase their SOL abilities to increase their chances of career progression. And yet, as the number of bilingual positions at the functional level increased, the bilingualism level of PAOs decreased. This translated into pressures onto the limited SOLET training resources the PA Branch has access to.

22. As the CDS seeks to operationalize the PA Branch, a unique opportunity presents itself to request more resources to address SOL proficiency and training issues currently affecting the PAO occupation. As these are addressed, changing the PA Branch's culture on bilingualism will continue.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

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<sup>18</sup> Director General Military Careers, 5640-1 (DMCSS 2) - Review of Selection Board Selection Criteria, May 2015.

23. It is recommended to the PA Branch Council and the PA Branch Advisor consider and seek input from appropriate stakeholders and proper CAF agencies to implement all recommended actions items outlined above to build on efforts made by our predecessors and sustain the vision of a bilingual occupation.

Annex: A. Proposed Second Official Language Competencies Scoring Matrix

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**ANNEX A: PROPOSED SECOND OFFICIAL LANGUAGE COMPETENCIES  
SCORING MATRIX – PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICERS 00203-01:**

<b>Lt(N) / Capt Selection Boards for Promotion to LCdr / Maj</b>			
READING COMPREHENSION	WRITTEN EXPRESSION	ORAL PROFICIENCY	SCORE
C	B	C	4
B	B	C	3
B	B	B	2
X / Expired / Nil / A	X / Expired / Nil / A	X / Expired / Nil / A	0
<b>LCdr / Maj Selection Boards for Promotion to Cdr / LCol</b>			
READING COMPREHENSION	WRITTEN EXPRESSION	ORAL PROFICIENCY	SCORE
C	C	C	5
C	B	C	4
B	B	C	3
B	B	B	2
X / Expired / Nil / A	X / Expired / Nil / A	X / Expired / Nil / A	0
<b>Cdr / LCol Selection Boards for Promotion to Capt(N) / Col</b>			
READING COMPREHENSION	WRITTEN EXPRESSION	ORAL PROFICIENCY	SCORE
C	C	C	5
C	B	C	4
X / Expired / Nil / A	X / Expired / Nil / A	X / Expired / Nil / A	0

Note: Second Official Language (E) profiles in any category are valid regardless of date tested and all other profiles are valid for a period of five years.