



**Presentation on the discussion paper by James  
R. Mitchell, “Toward a New Vision for  
Language Training in the Public Service,”  
to the Standing Committee on Official  
Languages**

By the

**Association of Professional Executives of the  
Public Service of Canada**

Ottawa, 3 February 2005

1. We would first like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX).
2. Our mission is to promote excellence and professionalism in the Public Service, which comprises around 4,000 executives, approximately half of whom are Association members.
3. APEX takes a keen interest in the matter of official languages, particularly since this aspect closely affects executives' work throughout their careers in the Public Service. The Association also recognizes that the bilingualism of Public Service executives is a crucial factor in the delivery of services to Canadians in both official languages as well as in the creation of a productive and harmonious workplace in which public servants are respected and valued, and also encouraged to improve their language skills throughout their careers.
4. Our presentation today will consist of two parts. We would first like to express **our general reaction to Mr. Mitchell's discussion paper**. We will then share with you a number of **recommendations from APEX** that build on Mr. Mitchell's vision.
5. **APEX's general reaction**
  - .1 The discussion paper is an excellent report on all aspects of the current situation. While the paper satisfactorily reflects APEX's official language concerns, it goes even further by offering a vision of what the situation should look like in 2010 with its description of the respective roles that the centre, as well as federal departments, agencies and employees, will have to play, without however prescribing the way to get there.
  - .2 APEX endorses all the recommendations made in the report concerning employee accountability.
  - .3 We also endorse the four principles stated, as well as the specific measures identified to apply a credible, new approach to language training, including ongoing funding and institutional support.
  - .4 We share Mr. Mitchell's view that "the temptation to regard language training as a problem rather than as a critically important opportunity to build the Public Service of the future" constitutes a major risk and challenge for both the Public Service and the country itself.
  - .5 In our view, given the departure of many public servants over the next few years, a window of opportunity is open to bring about genuine change, providing that **the Mitchell recommendations are implemented in their entirety. We should not make the mistake of focusing on just some of the recommendations in isolation without considering the possible negative repercussions on the coherence of the overall system.** For example, if we were only to implement the recommendation to overhaul the bilingualism standards (without taking into account the recommendations concerning culture, continuous learning and so on), we could end up with a Public Service that is even less bilingual and even less conducive to the use of French in the workplace.

## 6. APEX's recommendations

- .1 APEX feels that the top management of the Public Service, namely, **the deputy ministers and the associate deputy ministers, need to set the example by being functionally bilingual.** They should also be held responsible for setting the tone in the workplace. We believe that, without a truly bilingual workplace, even a major investment in training will prove to be ineffective in the long run.
- .2 We also believe that it is necessary to **review the language profile of ADMs in unilingual regions.** In our view, it is not realistic to require a high level of bilingualism for EX-04 and EX-05 positions in regions of the country that are designated unilingual since people cannot maintain their skills in a language that they seldom use. **We therefore recommend that passive bilingualism be explored for these positions with a language profile based on four skills instead of the current three.**
- .3 We believe that it is not cost-effective to invest major sums of money in training executives who are very close to retirement, when there is not enough funding to train the next generation. **We therefore recommend that executives who are within three years of retirement be allowed to opt out of language training.** It would then be the responsibility of departments and agencies to set up appropriate transitory measures.
- .4 APEX also **recommends that federal public servants outside the major urban centres be given access to quality language training.** We acknowledge that this recommendation will require a considerable infusion of funds; however, we believe that this should be viewed as an investment in the future of our public service and our country.
- .5 APEX also **recommends that the Public Service acquire greater expertise in terms of accommodations for people with learning disabilities;** this would apply to course and test designers, teachers and testers.
- .6 Lastly, **language training and testing should be included in the training and development plans of employees and departments and dissociated from the staffing process and its inherent rigidity.**

## 7. We would like to leave you with three documents:

- a case study of an executive suffering from dyslexia, which clearly illustrates the excessive rigidity and lack of expertise in the current system;
- the reports on two APEX-organized roundtables with all the main official languages stakeholders on learning difficulties and official languages. These reports clearly describe the issues, the efforts made and the successes to date.

## 8. Thank you for your attention. It is an honour and pleasure for us to have this opportunity to share with you our views on such an important matter.