

IV. THE CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE TRAINING

The Centre for Language Training manages DFAIT language training activities in Canada, and offers pre-assignment courses as well as courses for knowledge maintenance and development; it also administers the allocation of funds to the geographical branches to facilitate language training in missions. The Centre offers its services to other federal government departments and agencies.

During the year, the Centre for Language Training provided courses to employees in 10 departments and agencies, representing 36% of its clientele: Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Elections Canada, Statistics Canada, CBC, departments of Citizenship and Immigration, Revenue, Environment, Natural Resources, Agriculture and National Defence. CIDA is the largest client by far among the above organizations, accounting for 31.5% of total students.

The Centre for Language Training works closely with Personnel sectors and missions abroad to ensure that DFAIT employees have the language skills they need to carry out their duties effectively. It is also in touch with many universities and associations, in order to keep up to date and at the cutting edge of language training. Course quality is evaluated annually, and program content is regularly validated to ensure that it continues to meet clients' needs.

In 1997-98, the Centre for Language Training was able to provide courses based on a communicative approach in both official languages and 42 foreign languages to Canadian government employees. The courses are intended to promote early use of linguistic and cultural knowledge in a working environment or, more simply, to facilitate social integration abroad. As international policy and the priorities of DFAIT and other departments evolve, the Centre can add new languages quickly on request to its list of offerings. In this way, elementary and intermediate course plans have been developed for 35 languages.

Several specialists in language training are employed by the Centre to manage all training programs and ensure that courses remain of high quality and evolve to incorporate new language-teaching technologies and methods. All teachers are native speakers, with various specialized university degrees; they are recruited by private schools which ensure that their skills and expertise meet the standard expected by DFAIT.

Statistics

There were 768 students registered for official and foreign language courses taught in Canada. These courses were either part-time (minimum of 3 hours per week) or full-time (maximum of 24 months).

In foreign languages, 548 students studied 34 languages and took 9,256 days of training in all, representing a 12% increase in the total number of clients, and a 31% increase in instruction time since 1996-97. Pre-assignment courses in particular increased considerably after DFAIT implemented measures allowing employees to take the training they need to carry out their duties abroad efficiently.

Official Languages, 220 employees (including 28 EX) took full-time or part-time courses.

A budget was allocated to the geographical branches for mission training. We have no data on the number of participants in the program. This will be changed in 1998-99, as new training budgets will be allocated and new policies applied to language training abroad.

Achievements, 1997-98

Intensive advanced courses in Japanese and Arabic were offered for the first time this year at the Centre for Language Training. Advanced Japanese was previously taught in Japan; repatriating the course has saved about \$250,000 per participant.

All missions have been requested to update the language skill levels required to enable employees to function effectively abroad. The new data allowed a more accurate assessment of the Personnel Branch's expectations for foreign language training.

A pilot project was launched to promote the inclusion of cross-cultural material in foreign language classes.

A qualitative evaluation of Al-Mumteez courseware was carried out, with positive results.

Pasajes Latinoamericanos courseware was developed, and will soon be available.

Ortho+ courseware was reviewed, and is now available on the Institute's web site.

A project for teaching written Spanish and German via e-mail was implemented. The course has been offered three times, to 93 employees from Headquarters and missions abroad. The experience was positive, and will be continued.

Virtual Campus

The Centre took advantage of its expertise in computer-assisted learning and gradually joined the Virtual Campus. Two pilot projects were carried out in Spanish, with the participation of 12 employees.