

Finally, and perhaps the most important factor, the Canadian foreign service as a reflection of Canadian society is a bilingual service. Canada has two official languages, English and French, and Canadian Government departments are required to serve the public in the language of its choice. It has always been recognized that knowledge of languages in addition to one's native language is a useful attribute for persons in the foreign service. The Department of External Affairs has for many years, even before the recent legislation was passed, been in the forefront of the effort to enhance the position of French as a language of work in the public service. Much of the correspondence between Canadian missions abroad and the Department has for many years been conducted in either English or French, depending on the wishes of the originating officer. The management of the service also led the way in trying to ensure that, in general, the proportion of French- and English-speaking Canadians in the service would be roughly equivalent to their proportion of the total population. This was done in accordance with the basic tenet of the foreign service that admission and promotion should be solely on merit. In the early days, it required a considerable effort on the part of the Department to encourage able young French-speaking Canadians to join the Department in Ottawa, since Ottawa was far less amenable to bilingualism than it is today. Nowadays, following the adoption of the Official Languages Act, the Government is spending a great deal of time and money in providing language-training programs in English and French, and the Department of External Affairs has expanded its own already substantial activities in accordance with Government policy. A recent development was the designation of certain divisions in the Department as French-language units -- that is, all work within such units would be carried out in French. There are several units within each department in the Government and the objective is to encourage the development of French as an equal language of work. I think you will appreciate that a prerequisite for working in the often complex area of foreign affairs is dedication to accuracy. For officers to be able to work accurately in two languages is a good deal more demanding than simply being able to converse in them.

The factors I have outlined to you combine to make work in the Canadian foreign service stimulating and rewarding. The Canadian Government is working in a pragmatic way to determine the right scale and focus for Canada's involvement in an increasingly interdependent world. The foreign service as the primary instrument for executing Government policy in the external environment is contributing to the progressive definition of that scale and focus as a reflection of Canadian society as a whole.