

Official languages audit finds ‘relatively high’ level of bilingual service Katherine d’Entremont says expectation of excellent delivery of bilingual service in government not being met

Description

New Brunswick’s official language commissioner says provincial government departments are delivering a “relatively high” level of bilingual service, though there are still failures in some areas.

Katherine d’Entremont says in her [annual report](#) that an audit of departments found rates of service delivery in French above 80 per cent and in English above 90 per cent.

And, it adds, her audit didn’t find a single failure to provide service in English in the government’s seven regions. In four regions, there were failures to offer service in French, with the highest failure rate at 18.2 per cent.

- [Government rejects call for all senior bureaucrats to be bilingual](#)
- [Languages commissioner wants more French-speaking immigrants](#)
- [Province must better monitor bilingual jobs, watchdog says](#)

“After nearly half a century of official bilingualism in New Brunswick, one might expect the delivery of bilingual services to be excellent in every respect throughout the province,” d’Entremont writes in the introduction to her report.

“This is not the case.”

The audit, done in person and by phone, only covered government departments and agencies.

It didn’t audit health authorities, the courts, police, Crown corporations, municipalities and regional service commissions, all of which are required to provide bilingual service.

240 complaints

The report says d’Entremont’s office received 240 complaints in 2015-16. Of those, 63 were admissible, 41 based on lack of service in French and 22 on lack of service in English.

The highest number of complaints were against the two provincial health authorities and the City of Fredericton.

The report says the Vitalité health network has to “step up” its efforts in its hospitals in Grand Falls, Edmundston, and Moncton, where there were complaints about French-only signs, service and public address announcements.

And it says Horizon Health didn't provide service in French in its emergency department at The Moncton Hospital, where only 15 per cent of employees had undergone second-language training.

D'Entremont's report was tabled at the legislature on Tuesday during her appearance before the standing committee on procedure, privileges and legislative officers.

'Very low rate'

Other elements of the annual report:

- The audit found "a very low rate" of active offer in provincial offices. The law requires a front-line employee to actively offer bilingual service, but it happened fewer than one in five times during the audit.
- The commissioner says the government should re-examine its implementation plan for official languages, released last year. D'Entremont writes that many of the measures in the plan "are insufficient to achieve the objectives" of the Official Languages Act.
- The province's translation bureau should be expanded and strengthened, she recommends, so it can serve Crown corporations, municipalities, and other public bodies also subject to the law.
- The government has not acted on d'Entremont's recommendations from previous report, including on second-language training for civil servants.
- The New Brunswick Heart Centre, the province's only cardiac care centre based in Saint John, is singled out for praise for the bilingual service it offers patients, who come from all areas of the province.
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