



Part VII of the Official Languages Act...

Positive measures for English and French communities across the country

Adopted in 1988 and amended in 2005, Part VII of the *Official Languages Act* stipulates that all federal institutions have the legal obligation to take positive measures to fulfill their commitment to ensuring that English and French have equal status in Canadian society.

Respecting English and French minorities and promoting linguistic duality

Under the new Act:

- The federal government is committed to enhancing the vitality of English and French minorities in Canada and supporting their development. The aim is to enable Anglophone and Francophone minority communities across Canada to achieve their full potential and ensure they have access to the same benefits as the rest of the population. **Two million Canadians belong to an official language minority community.**
- The federal government is also committed to fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society. This may include initiatives that focus on official language learning or that foster dialogue between the two official language groups.
- Every federal institution has the duty to ensure that positive measures are taken to implement these commitments.
- After lodging a complaint with the Office of the Commissioner, Canadians can seek a court remedy if their rights under Part VII are not respected.

Defining “positive measures”

Each institution must determine, based on its mandate, what kind of “positive measures” to take. The Commissioner defines a positive measure as an action taken by a federal institution that has a **real** and **positive** effect on:

- the vitality of official language minority communities,
- progress towards the equal status of English and French in Canadian society, and
- the future of linguistic duality in Canada.

Guiding the actions of federal institutions

Institutions can refer to **three guiding principles when implementing the new Part VII**:

- a proactive, systematic approach and targeted action (in other words, ensuring that a Part VII “reflex” is incorporated into the federal institution’s culture when it develops policies or programs);
- active participation by members of the public in order to identify courses of action or solutions that best meet their needs; and
- an ongoing process for assessing and enhancing its policies and programs in terms of Part VII.

The role of the Office of the Commissioner

- **Raising awareness** among federal institutions, communities and the general public
- **Reviewing and evaluating** how federal institutions that have a coordination role are implementing the new Part VII
- **Evaluating federal institutions** for our 2006–2007 performance report cards, using new criteria for Part VII
- **Investigating** Part VII-related complaints

Investigations

- In 2006–2007, there was a significant increase in admissible complaints related to Part VII compared with the previous year; they went from 6 to 137.
- This increase is largely due to complaints received following the budget cuts announced on September 25, 2006.
- Canadians should not hesitate to exercise their language rights and contribute to making our official languages a source of pride for our country.

*“One of my priorities will be to ensure the Act is effective.
Good intentions are no longer enough:
we must now see concrete results.”*

Graham Fraser
Commissioner of Official Languages