

**University of Ottawa
Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute
(OLBI)**

**Appearance before the
House of Commons Standing Committee on
Official Languages**

May 1, 2012

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages during the consultations on the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality 2008–2013. I am Richard Clément, Director of the University of Ottawa Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI), and Associate Dean of the University of Ottawa Faculty of Arts. With me is Hilaire Lemoine, Executive in Residence at the University of Ottawa and former Director General of Official Languages Support Programs at Canadian Heritage.

The University of Ottawa: Bilingualism and the Francophonie:

To begin, I would like to say a few words about the University of Ottawa and its contribution to bilingualism in Canada. Since its beginning in 1848, the University of Ottawa has been a bilingual university; a committed leader in promoting bilingualism and fostering the development of French culture in Ontario, across Canada and throughout the world; and an institution open to cultural diversity. Two of the goals specifically set out in the University's act of incorporation are "to further bilingualism and biculturalism and to preserve and develop French culture in Ontario." The University's continually expanding array of French-language undergraduate, graduate and professional programs has been attracting a growing number of Francophones. That number rose above 12,000 in September 2011, putting the University of Ottawa in first place nationwide for French-language studies outside Quebec.

In addition, more than 3,000 French immersion students from high schools across Canada come to the University of Ottawa. To ease their integration into a bilingual institution, the University has set up the French Immersion Studies program. The program has been available since

September 2006 and is the only program of its kind in Canada, giving students from French immersion and core French programs as well as Francophile students the opportunity to study in their second language, today in over 74 undergraduate programs in 5 faculties. Students receive a French immersion designation on their diploma. Over 1,200 students were enrolled in French Immersion Studies in September 2012.

Lastly, in 2009 the Government of Canada chose the University of Ottawa to be the managing institution of the Language Rights Support Program (LRSP) through a joint partnership between OLBI and the Faculty of Law. The LRSP was recently extended for five years with the University continuing to be the managing institution—a vote of confidence for the University.

Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI) and the Roadmap:

I would like to say a few words about the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI) which I chair and its contributions to the objectives of the Roadmap. The University of Ottawa established the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute in July 2007. OLBI pursues the key role played for more than 40 years by the Second Language Institute in the Faculty of Arts and has as its mission to become a national and international centre of excellence in official-language education, language skills assessment, research and language planning.

As well, to provide leadership to other postsecondary institutions in Canada with regard to research, OLBI has set up the Canadian Centre for Studies and Research on Bilingualism and Language Planning (CCERBAL). The CCERBAL is a national forum for research on language education, public policy and language planning. One of its many activities is to host an annual conference that brings together 125 to 150 language education researchers, instructors,

practitioners and experts from Canada and abroad to discuss current issues. This year's conference was held last week on the use of new technologies in language education.

In addition, close to 50 practising language teachers come to OLBI each year for professional development in second language teaching at OLBI's Summer University, which is offered in partnership with the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers.

Furthermore, OLBI's Development and Promotion Office coordinates the marketing of Canadian expertise across the country and around the world in the area of bilingualism and official languages. OLBI signed a memorandum of understanding with the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in January 2008, which was renewed in March 2012. Under that agreement, OLBI acts as the ECML's "Canadian Point of Contact," coordinates the participation of Canadian experts in ECML research and development projects, and promotes the sharing of best practices and new methodologies by language educators in Canada and Europe.

OLBI is also very active in the Inter-American Organization for Higher Education (IOHE), which represents over 400 institutes of higher education in the Americas (including 28 in Canada). OLBI offered to develop and coordinate the Inter-American Network in Language Training, which was launched at the Conference of the Americas on International Education last week in Rio de Janeiro. The goals of the network are to (1) encourage language learning in the Americas; (2) promote mobility and internationalization; (3) foster the sharing of pedagogical models; and (4) promote research in language education and language planning.

OLBI is also the main partner in the Canadian International Development Agency's National Languages Project in Sri Lanka. The purpose of this four-year project between the governments of Canada and Sri Lanka is to provide support for the implementation of Sri Lanka's official languages legislation, in an effort to achieve peace and reconciliation after more than 30 years of conflict between the country's two main ethnic groups.

OLBI has also been invited to participate as a Canadian institution in the European Commission project Languages in Urban Communities—Integration and Diversity for Europe (LUCIDE). This three-year project is led by a consortium of 12 European postsecondary institutions, of which OLBI is a member. The purpose of the project is to describe the role of multilingualism in the development and evolution of major European cities. OLBI will be called upon to share the experiences of major Canadian cities such as Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Ottawa.

The above initiatives are but a few examples of national and international coordination, outreach and promotion of Canadian official-language expertise that showcases the skills Canada has acquired over the last 40 years in the area of official languages and multiculturalism.

The Roadmap and its impacts:

From our understanding, one of the major impacts of the Roadmap 2008-2013 is the maintenance, over five years, of the federal government's funding level for official languages, based on the final year's budget, 2007-2008, of the Action Plan for Official Languages. This level of funding has enabled the provinces and territories to maintain or expand their minority-language and second-language education programs. The level of funding has also most probably enabled the Government of Ontario to maintain its financial support to the University of Ottawa,

which has allowed the institution to maintain existing programs and offer new programs of study in French, and expand its French Immersion Studies program. The Roadmap has also made it possible for federal government departments and agencies to launch new initiatives that have benefited the University of Ottawa and OLBI, including the Public Works and Government Services Canada University Scholarships Program in Translation, and the Canada School of Public Service initiative to extend access of language-learning tools to Canadian universities. The Roadmap's greatest benefit in my opinion, however, is the Government of Canada's formal five-year commitment to official languages. That demonstrated leadership is a public declaration by the federal government on the importance of linguistic duality in Canadian society.

The next generation of the Roadmap:

A "Roadmap" or "Action Plan" approach over five years with a specified financial commitment would be a way for the Government of Canada to renew its commitment to promoting official languages in Canada. It would also send a strong message and provide significant financial support to provincial governments and educational institutions, which have a duty to provide high-quality education, including the teaching of both official languages. On behalf of the University of Ottawa and OLBI, I would like to propose to the Committee a number of initiatives which should be considered in a next 5-year Plan, and which would contribute to the advancement of the official languages in Canada.

1) Rate of bilingualism among young Canadians

The federal, provincial and territorial governments should agree on a target for the rate of bilingualism among young graduates of the educational system. This target should be realistic and, to be met, would require a review of second-language programs on the basis of a Canadian

adaptation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; it should also result in a national campaign to promote the advantages of bilingualism to young people; as well as the creation of incentives for universities to offer second-language programs similar to the French Immersion Studies program at the University of Ottawa.

2) Official-language e-learning for all Canadians

Official-languages learning opportunities should be available free of charge, anytime and anywhere in Canada to all Canadians wishing to learn the other official language. Self-learning programs could be developed and/or adapted to the Canadian context, and published on the Internet. The learner could also have access to language monitors, by means of a helpline provided by designated public or private educational institutions in each province or region. Language skills testing would also be available online.

3) Mobility scholarships and bursaries

The University of Ottawa offers more than 350 programs in French in 10 faculties. Mobility scholarships and bursaries would make it possible for Francophone students in English-language universities in Canada to complete part of their program at the University of Ottawa and join the 12,000 Francophone students currently registered there. The scholarships and bursaries would also provide French immersion students in English-language universities who wish to complete some or all of their remaining studies in French with access, for a given period during their program, to the University of Ottawa's French Immersion Studies program and linguistic support that cannot be found anywhere else in Canada.

4) Summer University for young researchers on the official-languages

Canada needs to attract young researchers to the field of official languages. The University of Ottawa is considering a summer research training program led by a team of distinguished Canadian researchers. The program could be made a training and research priority of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

5) Public Service language training

The Government of Canada has decided to stop offering in-house language training to government employees and turn to third-party providers instead. The preferred providers should be universities with language institutes, especially those that have been involved in the Canada School of Public Service initiative to extend access of language-learning tools to Canadian universities under the current Roadmap. Moreover, to ensure the quality of the language training provided, the Public Service Commission should designate OLBI, in its capacity as a centre of excellence and national forum for official languages, as the coordinating body of a consortium of language Institutes to train and certify language educators, as well as to develop second-language programs. In addition, the Public Service Commission should consider transferring its Language Assessment Unit to OLBI, given the Institute's language assessment expertise.

Conclusion:

The University of Ottawa has by far the largest Francophone student population of any educational institution outside Quebec and offers Francophile students a French Immersion Studies program that is the only one of its kind in Canada—and in the world. The University of Ottawa also has the advantage of being home to OLBI, a nationally and internationally recognized institute for language teaching and learning, language skills assessment, research,

policy development and language planning. The University of Ottawa and OLBI can be of significant assistance to the Government of Canada in its leadership role with respect to official languages in Canada. Moreover, as “Canada’s University,” the University of Ottawa is well positioned to support the bilingualism initiatives of the federal Public Service and provide skilled bilingual prospective employees.

We thank you for your attention and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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May 2012