

<b>MATTERS</b>	<b>QUALITY MANAGEMENT</b>
<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>FINLAND</b>
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PROVISION OF SERVICES ON CUSTOMERS MOTHER TONGUE – BILINGUALISM AS A QUALITY FACTOR IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</b>

### **ABSTRACT**

The Ministry of Finance nominated in October 2003 a working group aiming at the realisation of the new Language Act in practice. The task of the working group was to determine how to promote the implementation of the new Language Act, for example, by developing organisation models, management systems, human resources policy and pay systems. The project was conducted by learning from examples, by launching experiments and disseminating proven good practices.

### **FULL TEXT DOCUMENT**

According to the Finnish Constitution a citizen has the right to use his or her language - Finnish or Swedish - when communicating with the authorities. In January 2004 a new Language Act came into force. The new Act requires that the authorities on their own initiative ensure the realisation of the language rights of the citizens, without them having to call attention to the rights by themselves.

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The working group analysed examples of service provision in some administrative fields, where the language aspect is especially relevant, for instance in the National Agency for Taxation and the National Board of Customs and in the regional and municipal administrations. Furthermore a pilot project was implemented, where CAF-criteria (Common Assessment Framework) was utilised in order to identify good practices concerning the service provision on customers mother tongue in nine organisations representing the national and the regional level. A special application of the CAF-criteria was produced for this purpose and the criteria can also be used as an extra annex to the general criteria, when analysing and developing the quality of service in individual organisations.

According to the main conclusions of the working group attention should be paid to the following factors when trying to promote good communication in minority languages between citizens and public authorities:

- The language aspect has to be communicated as part of the general strategy and it has to be taken into account in results agreements, management agreements and results and development discussions. Quality work, customer satisfaction surveys and continuous monitoring are ways of implementing results targets.
- Operations should be organised in such a way that the customer feels confident when conducting business in his or her own language. The work processes and shifts can be arranged so that there are enough officials with the requisite language skills in front line services. Operations in the minority language, for example, telephone services, can be separated and concentrated into units of their own in regions where a minority language has a strong presence. Services can also be made more effective by networking.
- The administration must pass on the importance of language skills to the education system. As basic language skills are built up within the framework of the education system, the administration must strengthen cooperation with educational establishments.

- Language skills should be taken into account in human resources strategy and recruitment, in defining the competence needed for of different duties in relation to new pay systems, and when assessing individual performance.

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