

***IMPROVING ACCESS FOR HANDICAPPED PERSONS TO SERVICES
PROVIDED BY THE MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT***

ACTION PLAN FOR 2007-2008

Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
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SUMMARY

The *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights* stipulates that every year each ministry must adopt an action plan to identify and reduce the barriers encountered by handicapped persons.

The government policy on providing handicapped persons with access to public documents and services (*L'accès aux documents et aux services offerts au public pour les personnes handicapées*) stipulates that Québec ministries must be proactive and take the necessary measures to ensure that anyone with a handicap has the same access as any other citizen to documents and services that are available to the public.

This plan is a continuation of the action plan for 2005 and 2005-2006. It proposes measures for adapting the offices of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS), its on-site and telephone reception services, publications, Web site and information on services to meet the needs of people with handicaps.

INTRODUCTION

The *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights* stipulates that any ministry or public agency with at least 50 employees (with the exception of educational institutions) and any municipality with at least 15 000 inhabitants must prepare and publish an annual action plan aimed at improving access for handicapped persons to the documents and services they provide.

The 2006 government policy *L'accès aux documents et aux services offerts au public pour les personnes handicapées* served as the basis for this second action plan. The policy encourages the MELS to be proactive and to take the necessary measures to ensure that anyone with a handicap has the same access as any other citizen to documents and services that are available to the public.

The MELS also referred to two documents produced by the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (OPHQ): the November 2006 version of the *Guide à l'intention des ministères, des organismes publics et des municipalités en vue de la production de leur plan d'action annuel à l'égard des personnes handicapées* and the *Guide d'accessibilité et d'adaptation des services gouvernementaux*, published in March 2005.

In the action plan for 2005, the MELS complied with a request to study the following public services:

- providing information about education, recreation and sports
- providing statements of marks at the secondary level
- providing official copies of secondary school and college diplomas
- providing student financial assistance¹

It paid particular attention to the physical environment in which these services are provided, considering the accessibility of facilities and the technologies and means of communication used.

For the current fiscal year, the MELS plans to continue working on initiatives that have not been fully achieved yet, namely the phasing in of building renovations and improvements to means of communication. It will also look at training options for reception and referral staff who are in contact with handicapped persons.

This Action Plan for 2007-2008 presents a brief description of the MELS organization and its sectors of activity, with emphasis on the services it offers handicapped persons. It is followed by a progress report on action taken in 2006-2007 and the results achieved. Finally, an outline is given of the follow-up planned for 2007-2008.

1. Student financial assistance has special provisions for handicapped persons under the loans and bursaries program and the allowance for special needs program that provide access to the assistance and equipment they need to complete their studies.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS SECTORS OF ACTIVITY

The MELS is responsible for developing and suggesting policies to the government in the areas of preschool education, elementary and secondary education, college education, and university education and research, all with a view to:

- promoting education
- raising the scientific, cultural and professional level of the Québec population, by promoting, developing and supporting these areas
- promoting access to the highest levels of knowledge and culture for anyone with the desire and aptitude to pursue them
- contributing to the harmonization of educational orientations and activities with government policies and with the economic, social and cultural needs of Québec society

In doing so, the MELS respects the responsibilities conferred by legislation on educational institutions and school boards. In addition, it encourages access to education in a concrete way by providing student financial assistance.

The MELS is also responsible for advising the government on recreation and sports and for ensuring that the different ministries take a coordinated approach in these areas. Its fundamental responsibility consists of encouraging, in partnership with its target clientele, the safe, healthy pursuit of recreation and sports activities and of promoting a physically active lifestyle among the Québec population at large.

In carrying out this mission, the MELS comes into contact with the public through its role of offering information services, issuing secondary school statements of marks, issuing official copies of secondary school and college diplomas, and granting student financial assistance, which will be touched on in this action plan.

The main thrust of ministry action is undertaken with various partners, however, particularly in the areas of education, recreation and sports. This action involves handicapped persons in a number of ways.

Under the *Education Act*, educational services offered by the school boards must be adapted to the needs and capacities of students with handicaps. The MELS complies with this provision through its funding and actions. The MELS also offers a program of grants for colleges and universities that provide specific support to students with handicaps: special equipment, attendants, interpreters, and translation into Braille. The MELS also offers support programs to recreational and sports associations that benefit people with handicaps.

The MELS takes accessibility to handicapped persons into account in its purchases and rentals. It also collaborates with the Régie du bâtiment du Québec in making an inventory of the architectural barriers in public buildings, including educational institutions.

The MELS collaborates on projects of the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale aimed at integrating and supporting handicapped persons in the workplace.

The OPHQ and the MELS have formed ties over the years to ensure that the quality of the services provided to handicapped students continues to improve. A number of committees, including some coordinated by the MELS and others by the OPHQ, serve as a forum for dialogue between the MELS, the OPHQ and agencies that promote and defend the rights of handicapped persons. It should be noted that 10 MELS staff members participated in 2006-2007 in the committees working on updating the policy *À part...égale – L'intégration sociale des personnes handicapées : un défi pour tous*.

2. BUILDING ACCESSIBILITY

Progress report

The Ministère has offices in 17 different locations in Québec. An exhaustive list of all work required to improve accessibility with respect to buildings occupied by the MELS was prepared in April 2006 and submitted to the Société immobilière du Québec (SIQ). A work schedule was submitted in fall 2006 and, since then, some work has been carried out. Other work has yet to be accomplished.

The SIQ has received many similar requests from a number of ministries and agencies and, as the body responsible for managing Québec government buildings, it has accepted a leadership role in this regard. In its action plan for 2007-2008 it states that in order to meet government expectations in exemplary fashion regarding the needs of handicapped persons and to act effectively and coherently so as to achieve the maximum benefit in relation to the funding allocated, the SIQ has agreed to produce a thorough inventory of current conditions in rented and owned spaces. By fall 2007, it will prepare a precise assessment of owned and rented buildings in terms of how accessible they are to handicapped persons. Appropriate corrective measures will be determined and budget costs evaluated. The SIQ will then implement a coherent set of measures, addressing the most serious deficiencies first.

It should be noted that the possibility of moving the offices located in both Rouyn-Noranda and Rimouski has temporarily put these projects on hold.

As well, over the coming year major work already planned by the SIQ at the Marie-Guyart building, in Québec City, and at 600 Fullum, in Montréal, will provide an opportunity to correct deficiencies indicated by the MELS.

The current state of affairs as of April 2007 is as follows:

- ❑ Every building occupied by the MELS now has either a direct entrance or an access ramp. Last year, a handrail was added at the Laval, Laurentides et Lanaudière regional offices.
- ❑ There are automatic doors in all the regional offices except for the Côte Nord (Sept-Îles) and De la Capitale-Nationale offices. In the assessment planned for the fall, the SIQ will take these deficiencies into account and renovations will be proposed for these buildings.
- ❑ The use of pictograms to indicate the location of adapted bathrooms and elevators is not widespread, but corrective measures will be incorporated into the renovation plans to be prepared in fall 2007.
- ❑ In all buildings housing the MELS, the control panels in the elevators are accessible to people in wheelchairs. In five cases, the control panels do not have

Braille buttons, i.e. the Sept-Îles offices; the Bureau du greffe, rue Saint-Amable, in Québec City; 150 René-Lévesque Est, in Québec City; 1175 Lavigerie, in Québec City; and 1410 Stanley, in Montréal. This situation will be addressed in the upcoming renovation plans.

- ❑ Since 2006, two more elevators in buildings occupied by the MELS have been equipped with audible signals, for a total of seven to date. These buildings are located in Saguenay, Trois-Rivières, Longueuil, Montréal (600 Fullum), Québec City (1035, rue De La Chevrotière), Laval and Outaouais. There are plans to equip elevators with audible signals in all buildings housing the MELS.
- ❑ All buildings occupied by the MELS have handicapped toilets, except the offices in Sept-Îles. However, the SIQ is preparing a plan to remedy this situation. In addition, work is scheduled in a number of buildings over the coming months to make washrooms fully adapted for handicapped persons: automatic doors; toilets and sinks adapted for people with reduced mobility, including those in wheelchairs; and faucets that are activated automatically rather than mechanically.
- ❑ Building directory signs have been adapted as much as possible to clearly indicate the public services provided. However, the graphics standards of the Québec government's Programme d'identification visuelle do not allow for the use of larger characters, and therefore these signs cannot be made easier to see for people who are visually impaired. Another possible obstacle, for people in wheelchairs, is that building directory signs must be hung at a certain height in order to comply with the regulations.

Action planned for 2007-2008

- ❖ Follow up on the work planned to ensure total accessibility in the 17 buildings occupied by the MELS. This entails installing automatic doors, pictograms, directional signs to indicate the location of service points on each floor, Braille buttons and audible signal systems in elevators, and making toilets completely accessible to handicapped persons.
- ❖ Make the Office des personnes handicapées aware of the difficulties experienced by the MELS in adapting building directory signs to the needs of handicapped persons, given the norms of the Programme d'identification visuelle regulating signage in all government buildings.
- ❖ Consider installing interactive terminals in the lobbies of large buildings to guide visitors, particularly those with a handicap.

3. COMMUNICATION

➤ ON-SITE RECEPTION SERVICES

- Progress report

An inventory of training needs prepared in 2004 after consulting receptionists working in MELS offices did not reveal any particular needs with respect to accommodating handicapped persons. However, in 2006-2007 the MELS developed an information sheet to raise awareness and equip its staff to offer adapted services. The information sheet was distributed to a few groups of reception staff. To maximize the impact of the information sheet, a communication plan will be developed. To make the sheet easier to use, it will be professionally designed and printed.

There are now plans to promote the information sheet and distribute it on a much larger scale. Afterwards, reception staff will be asked their opinion of the sheet and whether they have any additional needs.

Action planned for 2007-2008

- ❖ Distribute the information sheet to all administrative units that have direct contact with the public.
- ❖ Prepare and implement a communication plan to create awareness among the entire staff (especially staff members in direct contact with the public) of the MELS' responsibilities with respect to accommodating handicapped persons in its offices.
- ❖ Have staff members complete a questionnaire to determine their satisfaction with the information sheet and find out about any additional information or training needs they may have. Adapt the information sheet based on respondents' comments and oversee production of the final version.

➤ TELEPHONE RECEPTION SERVICES

- Progress report

Toll-free lines are now available for all services offered by the MELS, as well as for services that come under student financial assistance, i.e. information services, the allowance program for particular needs, the Bureau des plaintes (complaints office) of the Unité des droits de recours (appeals unit). Clients may either call these numbers or contact the regional offices.

The information sheet prepared for reception staff, which includes a section on telephone communications, will be tested in the coming months. Consideration may be given to developing other tools and organizing training for telephone client services staff.

Action planned for 2007-2008

- ❖ Evaluate reception staff members' needs after working with the information sheet.

➤ **MINISTRY PUBLICATIONS**

- Progress report

The MELS produces over 500 education-related publications annually, 60 per cent of which are intended for people working in the education system. About 30 per cent (orientation, statistical and research documents) are intended for readers with specialized knowledge. The remaining 10 per cent are addressed to a wider audience. These publications include literature on student financial assistance programs. The MELS also produces literature on recreation and sports.

Most documents are posted on the Web in Portable Document Format (PDF) and comply with Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) standards, which makes them widely accessible.

Summaries are presented on the MELS Web site, and complete documents can either be viewed on-line or downloaded. The summaries written in 2006-2007 were authorized by MELS officials and underwent an editing process to ensure that the quality of the writing met ministry standards. Some publications may be written in simple language to make it easier for people with an intellectual impairment to understand them. A number of the publications produced by the MELS are available in English as well as French.

➤ **WEB SITE**

- Progress report

Depending on their disability, handicapped persons may have a variety of problems accessing Web sites. The World Wide Web Consortium, as part of its Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), has proposed standards to facilitate access.

The new sections being added to the MELS Web site comply with WAI standards, but the site as a whole does not. Moreover, because there is more than one level of WAI standards, some users may still experience difficulty.

The Aide financière aux études site has also been designed according to WAI standards, with the exception of student files. These files will be adapted to comply with WAI

standards the next time this section of the site is reorganized, probably within the next five years.

Action planned for 2007-2008

- ❖ Update the entire MELS Web site during the next major overhaul in order to comply with WAI standards.

➤ **INFORMATION**

The main MELS program aimed at handicapped persons falls under student financial assistance. The student financial assistance sector has adopted a communication plan to promote awareness of its two programs for handicapped persons: the special allowance for handicapped persons and the loans and bursaries program.

Action planned for 2007-2008

- ❖ Follow up on the communication plan to promote student financial assistance programs for handicapped persons.

CONCLUSION

The aims of the action plan for 2007-2008 are to take corrective measures to improve access for handicapped persons to public services provided by the MELS.

In the coming years, each program and service for handicapped persons may undergo a more systematic examination to identify possible obstacles, be they physical, administrative (legislation, policies, regulations, standards, programs, services, forms) or promotional in nature.

APPENDIX

ACTION PLANNED FOR 2007-2008

- ❖ Follow up on the work planned to ensure total accessibility in the 17 buildings occupied by the MELS. This entails installing automatic doors, pictograms, directional signs to indicate the location of service points on each floor, Braille buttons and audible signal systems in elevators, and making toilets completely accessible to handicapped persons.
- ❖ Make the Office des personnes handicapées aware of the difficulties experienced by the MELS in adapting building directory signs to the needs of handicapped persons, given the norms of the Programme d'identification visuelle regulating signage in all government buildings.
- ❖ Consider installing interactive terminals in the lobbies of large buildings to guide visitors, particularly those with a handicap.
- ❖ Distribute the information sheet to all administrative units that have direct contact with the public.
- ❖ Prepare and implement a communication plan to create awareness among the entire staff (especially staff members in direct contact with the public) of the MELS' responsibilities with respect to accommodating handicapped persons in its offices.
- ❖ Have staff members complete a questionnaire to determine their satisfaction with the information sheet and find out about any additional information or training needs they may have. Adapt the information sheet based on respondents' comments and oversee production of the final version.
- ❖ Evaluate reception staff members' needs after working with the information sheet.
- ❖ Update the entire MELS Web site during the next major overhaul in order to comply with WAI standards.
- ❖ Follow up on the communication plan to promote student financial assistance programs for handicapped persons.