

14th MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Washington, D. C.
20-22 September 1951

Topic 10: SPECIAL COMPENSATION FOR BILINGUAL STAFF MEMBERS

Background

The 13th Meeting of the Executive Committee in Resolution XIV, adopted pursuant to Resolution XXI of the IV Meeting of the Directing Council, recognized the importance of developing a bilingual and multilingual staff for the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and recommended that the Director study means for providing additional remuneration for bilingual staff. The Director has made a careful study of the positions at the Headquarters and Field Offices in accordance with the expressed desire of the Executive Committee.

The work of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau is carried on in four official languages - English, Spanish, Portuguese and French -, with principal working emphasis on English and Spanish. As a result, the Director has continuously followed a policy of giving preferential consideration to personnel with a working knowledge of English or Spanish and one of the other official languages.

At Bureau Headquarters, the Director has been developing a bilingual or multilingual staff for all posts where a working knowledge of English or Spanish and one or more official languages is necessary for the efficient and proper conduct of Bureau business. The results of this policy are as follows:

1. The highest degree of language skill is required of translators, who must prove their ability through written examinations to translate into one of the official languages from the other official languages.
2. Posts vacated by unilingual personnel are being filled by candidates with a working knowledge of English or Spanish and one of the other official languages whenever possible.
3. In the local wage rate categories (secretarial, stenographic, clerical and junior administrative) covering both Pan American Sanitary Bureau and World Health Organization personnel, 79 of the 119 posts are filled by staff members having a working knowledge of English and Spanish, Portuguese or French. Of the unilinguals, 35 are English speaking and 5 are Spanish speaking; they are primarily engaged in accounting, clerical, reproduction, typing and custodial duties not requiring a working knowledge of more than one language.

4. In the medical, technical and high administrative categories, primary consideration is given to work skill and training, with the working knowledge of Spanish or English and another official language being an important factor in the overall evaluation of the potential value of the candidate.

In the Field Offices of the Bureau, local wage scales have been set up which provide special classifications and salaries for bilingual personnel. This has been effected in accordance with Staff Rule 1613 and the expressed wish of the Directing Council and the Executive Committee.

In further cognizance of the expressed wish of the Directing Council and the Executive Committee, the Director has approved a language allowance for personnel at Bureau Headquarters for immediate implementation. It is patterned after that established by the World Health Organization for its Geneva staff.

The language allowance will be paid to those staff members in the local wage rate categories upon demonstration of proficiency in English, if the mother tongue is Spanish, Portuguese or French, or in Spanish, Portuguese or French if the mother tongue is English. Those whose mother tongue is not one of the official languages must demonstrate proficiency in one of the official languages other than the one they normally use in the course of their work.

The allowance will consist of an increase in base salary, equivalent to a within-grade salary increase. Eligibility will depend on satisfactorily passing a special language examination, which the Director has requested to be prepared. Two examinations will be given: one for lower grade personnel, based on the importance and variety of duties required of these staff members, and a second, a more difficult one, for the higher grade personnel in the local wage rate categories.

All staff members at Bureau Headquarters in the local grade levels will be eligible for taking the language examination, without regard to whether a knowledge of two or more languages is required for satisfactory performance of duties. This system will tend (1) to encourage unilinguals to develop their knowledge of more than one working language and (2) to introduce a means for recognizing language skills, without causing injury to the Post Classification Plan for providing "equal pay for equal work".

The World Health Organization when installing their language allowance system discovered that 1/3 of those staff members having a working knowledge of two or more official languages qualified and therefore became eligible for the language allowance. Using this figure as a basis and taking into consideration that the average within-grade increase in the local salary scale is \$120 per annum, the immediate cost to the Bureau for implementing this language allowance system would be approximately \$3,600.

Proposed Resolution

The Director suggests that the Executive Committee adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS:

The IV Meeting of the Directing Council and the 13th Meeting of the Executive Committee have indicated the need for developing a bilingual staff for the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and expressed the desire for providing special compensation for bilingual personnel;

The World Health Organization has adopted a workable plan for providing additional monetary recognition for ability to read, write, speak and understand two or more working languages;

The policy of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau is to afford equal treatment for personnel of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and World Health Organization staff; and

The Executive Committee is cognizant of the estimated cost to the Bureau for granting such a language allowance,

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

RESOLVES:

1. To approve the action of the Director in setting up language examinations and providing for special compensation for local wage rate personnel.
2. To recommend that the Directing Council take similar action in approving the action of the Director.
3. To request the Director to continue his administrative efforts to develop a bilingual staff for the Pan American Sanitary Bureau.