

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

COMMITTEE ROOM

**Department of Labour and Advanced Education
Re: Student Employment Programs
& Appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions**

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

Mr. Chuck Porter (Chairman)

Ms. Joyce Treen

Mr. Gordon Wilson

Mr. Stephen Gough

Mr. David Wilton

Mr. Eddie Orrell

Ms. Karla MacFarlane

Ms. Marian Mancini

Ms. Lisa Roberts

[Mr. David Wilton was replaced by Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft
& Mr. Ben Jessome]

In Attendance:

Ms. Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Labour and Advanced Education

Mr. Duff Montgomerie - Deputy Minister

Ms. Elizabeth Mills - Senior Executive Director, Skills and Learning

Ms. Marjorie Davison, CEO, Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2017

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Chuck Porter

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning. We'll call the committee to order. We'll start with introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just before we move to you and the folks with you, Mr. Montgomerie, we're just going to do the appointments. We've got a few minutes here, so we'll take care of those.

Department of Community Services - Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: For the Board of Management of the Kings Regional Rehabilitation Centre, I move that the appointments of Donald MacDonald and Murray Salsman as members be approved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The Preston Area Housing Fund Board of Directors - Ms. Treen.

MS. JOYCE TREEN: I move that the appointment of Kenneth Hudson as a member be approved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture - Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: For the Nova Scotia Fisheries and Aquaculture Loan Board, I move that the following appointments be approved: Dannie Hanson as chair and member; Peter Corey as vice-chair and member; and Nathan Boudreau, J. Donald Doucette, Denny Morrow, and Claude Poirier as members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Department of Health and Wellness - Ms. Treen.

MS. TREEN: For the Midwifery Regulatory Council of Nova Scotia, I move that the following appointments be approved: Maren Dietze and Theresa Pickart as midwives; Dr. Anne Houstoun as member/physician; and Kimberly McFarlane, Karin Wallace, and Laura White as lay members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The Department of Justice - Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Mr. Chairman, for the Human Rights Commission of Nova Scotia, I move that the appointment of Eunice R. Harker as commissioner and chair be approved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The Department of Municipal Affairs - Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Mr. Chairman, for the Nova Scotia Municipal Finance Corporation, I move that the appointment of George MacDonald as a member be approved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

There is correspondence from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development with regard to our January meeting. It's there for you as well.

Our topic today is the student employment program, and our witness is certainly no stranger. He has been here, somebody said, as long as the Citadel, I think I heard earlier this morning. (Laughter)

Mr. Montgomerie, why don't you introduce those with you and carry on with your presentation.

MR. DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I'm pleased to introduce my key staff members who are here in support today. To my left is Marjorie Davison. Marjorie is the Chief Executive Officer of the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency. Marjorie played a key role in the harmonization of our apprenticeship programs in Atlantic Canada, and has played a key role at the national level as we try to make that happen nationally.

Elizabeth Mills, to my right, is the Senior Executive Director of Skills and Learning. Elizabeth led the major change of Careers Nova Scotia to Nova Scotia Works, which was a major scenario.

I'm pleased to introduce Kim White, who is the Director of Workplace Initiatives, Skills and Learning. Rick Alexander is the Director of Youth Employment, Skills and Learning. Many of you will recognize Vicki Elliott-Lopez because she was the operational lead and did most of the heavy lifting in the restructuring of Careers Nova Scotia to Nova Scotia Works. She is the Executive Director of Programs, Skills and Learning. Jennifer L'Esperance is the Executive Lead of Youth Initiatives. Jennifer is new to us and is playing a key role as we try to coordinate our youth efforts and a lot of what we're going to talk about today that involves other departments and agencies as well.

With that, I think I'm good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you want to carry on with the presentation, go right ahead.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: Up on the screen, the three key areas that we absolutely focus on are attraction, retention, and participation: reverse the out-migration numbers - attract and retain more 18- to 34-year-olds than those leaving the province; achieve youth employment levels so the unemployment rate for 18- to 34-year-olds is at or less than the rate at the current year; and increase workforce participation.

Key to all of this is partnership with the private sector. For example, all of my team that are here interact with the private sector on a regular basis, as well as the post-secondary sector because it's a partnership, and the more that the private sector is aware of the value of getting young people attached - particularly even if it's co-op or intern or so on - we know that when that happens, those companies have a great experience and many times those young people get hired quicker than others and they get hired to better jobs.

We have a table of youth ministers. Minister Regan is the Chair of Youth. We meet on a regular basis at the senior staff level, the deputy level, and the ministerial level. That group is composed of the Department of Business; the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; the Department of Community Services; the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, which also has African Nova Scotian Affairs and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs; the Department of Justice; the Office of Immigration; Communications Nova Scotia; the Department of Municipal Affairs; and the Public Service Commission.

Recently Jennifer led a major workshop on Friday and Monday of senior staff from those departments to ensure that we're coordinated and working together to advance those objectives.

The youth engagement is a really interesting dynamic because we have youth in different places. If you take the post-secondary world of universities and the community college, we meet with youth on a regular basis. In a structured way, we meet with them four times a year - actually, Minister Regan meets with them, supported by us. That means all the universities and community college folks are represented at that table.

But more importantly, they will meet with our staff on a regular basis, particularly Students Nova Scotia and the Canadian Federation of Students. They're very passionate about what they do, and they are always trying to advance things for the betterment of the students that they represent, and we have a really respectful relationship with them. Then you have different kinds of settings like P-12 and the student councils. You'll have Marjorie on the apprenticeship side where you're working with young people in a different kind of setting.

Where Minister Regan and ourselves get a little concerned is whether we are missing people who may be falling through the cracks. She has made a real effort, supported by staff, to meet with Phoenix Youth and Hope Blooms. She was recently in Yarmouth with the SHYFT group. We also met with Fusion, which is another really interesting, dynamic table - those are the young folks who are in the workforce - and

they've met with the Premier and ourselves. I think they meet two or three times a year, and they're a great resource to keep us on our game and to make sure we're focused in the right places.

Private sector engagement, you're going to look at that slide and go, here we go, there's a lot of bureaucracy going on here, but I'm really quite proud. Take the Education Action Plan - for example, coding is now in the schools, and entrepreneurship is now being talked about in the school setting which has never happened before. IBM, by the way, is closely associated with the coding initiative. There's some really good stuff happening there.

The Transition Task Force, which had heavy representation from the private sector and the post-secondary, has come forward with many recommendations that we've actioned, and we'll go through some of those later on. They were really helping to stay on point, particularly on the promotion of trades and so on, and the value of those occupations in this province.

The Private Sector Growth Framework - basically, the deputy ministers who are responsible for economic development meet on a regular basis chaired by Deputy Coolican, who is the Deputy Minister of Business. We have NSBI, Innovacorp, and all the key players at the table.

The field guide innovation report - if you haven't had an opportunity to read it, it was done by Peter Nicholson. It came out of an innovation table we set up with the universities two years ago on research and development, co-chaired by Presidents Florizone and Ivany. We contracted with Peter to really shake us up on how we can do things differently and more innovatively.

That report is starting to work its way through government. As recently as the last Throne Speech, the Nova Scotia research council and the Nova Scotia research fund will be set up as an outgrowth of that report; we're close to getting that research council set up. There's some other really exciting recommendations that Peter has made that we're trying to action.

Now or Never/We Choose Now/A New Deal for Youth. The Atlantic growth framework - recently the federal government and the provincial governments in Atlantic Canada at the highest level, premiers and federal ministers, have directed us to work together to develop an Atlantic growth framework. Within that framework, there are some really exceptional opportunities for us, working with our colleagues in the other three provinces, to maximize opportunities for young people.

Make it Here is a website we have where we try to make it simple for young people to get information. If you get a chance, I hope you can get on the website. It's something we're going to expand, and we'll talk about that a little bit later on.

Of course, the Prime Minister of Canada leads the youth file for the federal government. There's an Expert Panel on Youth Employment report coming soon. There are more opportunities for us to interact with the Government of Canada than there were before.

Diversity in youth - this is a snapshot of some of the programs that we have that reach out to different types of young people. The one at the top is really, really exciting. Basically, Mitacs is an independent organization set up across Canada to maximize federal monies and private sector monies that enable attachment for Ph.D.s or grad students to get internships with companies. The federal government, in their last budget, increased the budget for Mitacs, and we are doing the same; we've put more money into Mitacs.

Recently, J.P. Deveau and his company took on quite a few of those interns. Again, what happens is, they're a four-month setting and sometimes they'll repeat them - four months, four months, four months - and a lot of times those companies end up hiring these young people. So that's a real opportunity with highly skilled graduate students, Ph.D.s, to get a workforce attachment here in the province.

The OPtions - Overcoming Poverty - program works with at-risk youth through employability skills training and work-term placements. It partners with local businesses to offer young Nova Scotians opportunities to grow and develop their careers, and we'll go into a little bit of detail on those a little bit later.

The diversity and inclusion framework was launched in November 2016 and it's aimed at increasing participation in the apprenticeship program for under-represented groups. Marjorie will be able to speak to that in a few minutes.

This is a busy slide, but it's just to give you a few examples of success. We did a simple thing just a while ago - we eliminated the fee for testing for GED programs. That came out of the Transition Task Force of eliminating barriers and making it easier. I was totally astounded by the amazing feedback that we've received for that one simple gesture. Sometimes we get caught up in the bureaucracy - we take our eye off the ball. This was not a high-expense item for government and it has a great return, and gives more young people a chance to do the testing and so on.

Coding in schools, I mentioned. The Public Service Commission hiring initiative - they did a simple thing. They got rid of the experience as an absolute requirement because young people coming out of university looking for opportunities might not have had an opportunity to get that work experience, so that's resulted in amazing growth of young people being hired into the Public Service Commission.

Again, it's an example of a corporate approach. All the departments I mentioned earlier are engaged in these one way or another, and we work together to make sure we track them and keep them on point.

I think I'm going to turn it over to Elizabeth now and to the more knowledgeable people on the programs.

MS. ELIZABETH MILLS: There are a number of employment programs that are offered in Nova Scotia and those programs are accessed by all Nova Scotians, but our young people in particular are accessing those programs. Duff has already alluded to One Journey - we're very proud of that particular program. It's really driven by employers who are having difficulty hiring skilled individuals in their sector. We've worked closely with our sector councils and individual employers to expand that program even further.

Since 2013, we've had over 700 individuals, almost 800 Nova Scotians go through that program. Over 60 per cent of them, almost 70 per cent, are young people in the youth category. The great part of that program is that once they go through One Journey, they do the skills training and development, but they attach immediately to the employer. We have good retention, good employment numbers there, so we're very proud of that program and we're very proud that it's so well accessed by young people.

Many of you will know about the START program. We have about \$10 million that we put into that program. It's a very flexible program. It's available to employers to hire individuals that may lack work experience or may not have been in the workforce for a while and for recent graduates. We've had 665 individuals access that program. The average amount that an employer accesses is about \$10,000 for each worker. It could be up to \$25,000, and it's mostly focused at small- and medium-size employers, although we have worked with larger employers in areas where there's a high unemployment rate.

The START program is very flexible. It allows the employer to use that money in any way they need. It could be for wage subsidy or it could be for initial training and orientation for the worker, and for equipment for the workers to use when they start the employment.

Many of you will know about the Connector Program. This is a Halifax Partnership initiative that began in 2008-09. It has been very successful; in fact, so successful that the Halifax Partnership has franchised it across Canada. Since its inception, over 1,500 new, young Nova Scotians have accessed the program. By "new" I mean recent immigrants, international students, and recent grads. It's a networking opportunity for young people to start to build their network in their area of interest, in their sector. We're very proud to say that eventually through that networking process, 800 of the 1,500 were successful in finding employment.

As Duff said, our mantra in this department is to work very closely with the private sector. We provide funding support to a number of sector councils. They're very important to us because they help us identify the labour market industry issues and needs in each of their sectors, and they help small- and medium-size businesses in their sectors attract and retain workers, and access tools and resources that they might not otherwise have because of not having HR departments, et cetera. So that program is very instrumental in helping to shape our focuses.

Duff referred to the transformation that Vicki Elliott-Lopez and her team led to go from what we called our Careers Nova Scotia centre to Nova Scotia Works. That initiative had three basic pillars; one of them was to expand our reach. Prior to the transformation, Careers Nova Scotia focused on unemployed, EI-eligible clients. That was their main purpose. Through the transformation process we've expanded our reach so that now we want to reach out to employers, as well as young people.

We have also introduced an expansion or additional component of that, which is a Virtual Nova Scotia Works. So essentially everything that you could access in a physical location, you should be able to access through this Virtual Nova Scotia Works. It's very much in the design phase at the moment. It should go live in fiscal 2018-19. Right now, we're at the process of determining what the business needs are and talking to focus groups, users, and research to make sure that we know what resonates with the users and how best to deliver that through this platform. We're very excited about this, so stay tuned for that.

I want to just stress though that just because we have a Virtual Nova Scotia Works, that does not replace our need for physical, in-person services. This is meant to augment and it's meant to help us with our expanded reach.

The deputy referred to the work with Phoenix House, for example, and Phoenix youth were very helpful in identifying their needs. Not surprisingly, we learned that young people tend to want to use virtual services and access through technology. We want to talk to the users as much as possible and shape it to their needs.

We do offer a number of student employment programs; Rick Alexander has been managing those programs for us. We have three that you would be aware of. Graduate to Opportunity is a fairly new program. It started in 2015 formally. We've been developing it and growing it. We're very excited about the excellent results. We have 260 new graduates in permanent full-time positions. These are really good jobs and they're in their area of study. Recently you would have heard that the Premier made an announcement, and we've added an expansion to our GTO program wherein employers that hire diversity candidates will receive a 10 per cent bonus on top of the 25 per cent.

The way GTO works is, the employer is making a commitment to hire the new grad for two years. The new grad must have graduated from a university/college in the last year. They must be a resident or willing to relocate to Nova Scotia, and the employer must be willing to pay them at least \$30,000. The subsidy is 25 per cent in year one and 12.5 per

cent in year two, with the understanding that the employer picks up the full amount in year three. As I said, we're very excited about the bonus of 10 per cent.

The co-op program is an extremely successful program. We have an excellent working relationship with each of the universities that offer co-op education. We have regular meetings with the co-op coordinators of those facilities. We always have a significant number of applications each year.

I think in this fiscal year, which would have been those students who would have been employed last summer, there were over 900 students who were employed all around the province. The students would be recent graduates. They would be just graduating from Grade 12 and accepted in a post-secondary institution. This gives them that summer period between graduating from high school and entering post-secondary to have some good, practical experience. The employers that are eligible are community-based, non-profit organizations. It not only benefits those individual students but also benefits community groups throughout the province.

As I said, there were over 900 students who worked in job placements last summer. We're just in the process now of reviewing the applications for this year. We have a similar number of applications as we did last year. We'll soon be making decisions on those.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: On the innovation side, again just mentioning Mitacs - as you can see, \$705,000 for 176 interns. I cannot emphasize enough that those are highly educated young people who get an opportunity to focus on innovation and partnerships - social innovation, if you will, and industrial innovation - with the companies that they get attached to.

The sandboxes we talked to you before about. I just draw your attention to 2014-15, with 657 students and 38 mentors. In one short year, look how it's grown. It's an incredibly exciting environment.

We're often used as a model across the country because not only do we have seven, but none is a stand-alone. They're all partnerships maybe between two universities or a university and a community college, or whatever, which maximizes the opportunity. There are 19 new business start-ups that have come out of those sandboxes, so they're really a dynamic situation for us.

I mentioned the tables of innovation that we set up with the universities, the community college, ACOA, and key government departments a couple of years ago. They are working incredibly well. For example, the R&D table is where the Nicholson report came out of. It's also caused the government to really focus on research and development, and the creation of a research agency to help guide decisions for the government in the future - those scenarios.

The technology-enabled learning table has got a single portal now developed where young people can go online and basically almost change courses between universities and community college. It's a really interesting scenario that they developed for us.

International education and training - we're doing a Study and Stay program. We've targeted China, India, and the Philippines, because as many of you realize, with 10 universities and a population of under one million, the recruitment of international students is critical to the success of our universities. They are very active in those three countries.

What we've done is, we selected 50 young people in the fourth year of their studies, and they will be monitored and mentored over this year. Our key is to try to retain 80 per cent of them here in Nova Scotia with jobs; we're matching them up with private sector folks and so on. We already have 700 applications for next year. What that program does is cause excitement back in their home countries because they know that the universities and the government are really focused on their young people when they're here and really trying to get them job opportunities.

Marjorie, please.

MS. MARJORIE DAVISON: Apprenticeship is a lesser-known post-secondary education and training option that leads to certification and quality careers in the skilled trades. Apprentices receive hands-on training from certified trades people along with in-class technical training. The median age of apprentices is 27, so the majority of participants in the system are considered to be youth. Government established the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency in 2014 in response to low outcomes of the system - apprentices not completing to the extent that they could be and employers not engaging in providing the training opportunities for our youth. Some national studies point out that only 20 per cent of employers who could train apprentices actually do, so there's a huge opportunity in providing more opportunities for youth within the system.

The agency partners with industry, community organizations, and equity groups to promote apprenticeship opportunities, ensures that trade-specific training is responsive to the needs of industry and the Nova Scotia job market, and provides opportunities to youth where the jobs are.

The benefits of apprenticeship are something we have to create a lot of awareness about with potential parents of youth who would come into apprenticeship with our school system as well and personnel within the systems and with employers at large. Through apprenticeship, employers can mentor and train pre-employment graduates from college programs and/or apprentices who come directly out of high school through to certification. That is a big benefit to employers. It creates a homegrown journeyman who's 29 per cent more productive than someone that you would hire outside of that program.

Apprentices gain real job experience and that makes them more productive and they're more valuable to an employer, and we provide a skills log book that assists the mentor and the apprentice to gain the full scope of the trade. The jobs in the community allow the youth to lay down roots and continue to call Nova Scotia home. It makes training and the occupation a more affordable option for many of our youth in the province who can't even afford to go to the college.

I provided a few statistics on the slide. The number of apprentices has increased by 3.2 per cent despite the downturn in the Alberta economy. We've had a lot of people coming back from Alberta. We had 1,298 new apprentices come into the system and as well, 263 new employers - and I'll talk about a couple of programs that support bringing new employers into the system. Almost 900 Nova Scotians have received certification in skilled trades during that period.

The national apprentice mobility agreement has been implemented and this is more of a policy approach to providing opportunities for youth. This agreement was led by - it's actually called the Provincial-Territorial Apprentice Mobility Protocol, led by our Premier and implemented through an agreement across the Forum of Labour Market Ministers in Canada. Even Quebec has participated in that agreement so it is unprecedented. That enables an apprentice to keep Nova Scotia as their home base, but still avail themselves of employment opportunities across the country and be able to come back and work in Nova Scotia.

Elizabeth and I have been working together a lot to help employers see the value of training and supporting the HR development of their workforce, but most employers still prefer to hire a certified tradesperson over an apprentice. So having the agreement in place enables our apprentices to continue their training and then still be able to compete for jobs when they are certified.

As Duff mentioned, we launched the Diversity and Inclusion Framework, and our aim there is to really grow the system for diverse participants. We have had a very small percentage of women participate in the apprenticeship program over the years. It fluctuates between 4 and 6 per cent in any given year, and it's even smaller for our Aboriginal First Nations communities and our African Nova Scotian communities in the province. So we've been working to include diversity in how we do our business and to ensure that we work with our training provider - the Nova Scotia Community College and others - to make sure they're inclusive. We have been able to grow a small percentage of the number of diverse apprentices to date and we hope to continue to do that.

The last point there is the procurement pilot. This again is another strategy. If we have employers in the province who procure trade skills, actually offering jobs to apprentices as a result of that, then we can have more opportunities for youth in our province.

We have worked with our Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal on the school builds that have happened over the last year, and anyone bidding on those projects must be able to demonstrate that they are active in the apprenticeship program - not just the prime contractor, but the subcontractors as well. That pilot has gone very smoothly and we are looking now to see if we can roll it out to all construction projects, and we also have influenced the procurement policy in government so that now under the Sustainable Procurement Policy, there is a consideration for the use of apprentices.

We have been out working with what are called category managers across government to ensure that they're aware of the apprenticeship system and how to build the use of apprentices into the specifications that they design.

I mentioned I would talk about a few of our incentive programs that we think are helping employers come into our system. We have Apprenticeship START, and this is sort of an offspring of the START program under Employment Nova Scotia. That program has enabled us to hire 340 new apprentices with employers and bring over 200 new employers into the system. We are actually hoping to grow that program in the future.

The Apprenticeship Award Trust was a pre-existing program before the agency. This provides support to apprentices who are already in training. It encourages them to progress, and when they progress, they are eligible for a financial award to offset their costs. They get \$750 per level that they progress and \$2,000 upon completion. That trust mirrors what the Red Seal program offers nationally through the federal government. We don't duplicate the supports offered, but we try to dovetail with those supports.

The final slide really focuses on what we are doing currently with youth. We have a lot of outreach to youth; they are the future of the skilled trades in this province. We have a youth outreach coordinator who works with us. She is out in the schools every day of the year, practically. She does presentations, provides information to youth, and liaises with a number of our partners who are in the schools as well, including the sector councils.

We have the opportunity for youth to come in directly and register as youth apprentices at the age of 16. They don't have to pay any of the normal registration fees that they would have to pay. The employer is not subject to the ratio, but it is subject to direct supervision. It's in recognition that, most of the time, those apprentices are working part-time.

We provide annual grants to the school boards across the province. It's a small amount for each school board and it's based on a formula. That is used by the school board to provide exploratory opportunities for young people in the schools. For example, it might be used to transport students. In the Aboriginal schools, it's used to transport them to the construction trades hall so that those youth can come from all over the First Nations communities in the province and get experience with the construction trades.

The summer youth program is one of our hallmark programs, and under the current government it has actually expanded and grown. Building Futures for Youth is the anchor program there, and that's with the construction sector. We have doubled funding for that program, and we are reaching out to grow more employers and youth participating. Serve it Up! is a brand-new program available in the culinary sector, and TestDrive is available in the motive power sector.

Those programs demonstrate a great partnership with industry and our school systems. We work with the co-op programs. The students are selected during the school year. They go through the safety training and workplace orientation while they're in school, then they're offered paid work placements by employers. Those employers pay that out of their pockets, so that's their contribution. They gain hours towards an apprenticeship, but also they gain up to two to three co-op credits to help them complete high school.

The last one is, we leverage a lot of youth engagement through our partnerships. We work with Skills Canada-Nova Scotia to put on the skills competitions that happen across the province and then go nationally and internationally. We've helped to fund, along with the full Department of Labour and Advanced Education, annual activities at the construction Trades Exhibition Hall, which is run through the Construction Sector Council. If you've not visited it, it is really phenomenal. It's one of a kind in Canada. You can go in and actually be introduced to displays and experiential opportunities of each of the trades that are represented by the mainland building trades unions.

Techsploration is a program for Grade 9 girls in the junior high schools. It's an opportunity to introduce girls to non-traditional career opportunities in the sciences, the technology areas, and the skilled trades. We were a founding member of Techsploration. There have been many girls over the years who have grown to realize they can do anything that they want to do through that program.

I just wanted to mention, it's not up there, but those are current, steady programs. But we also take the opportunity, when employers demonstrate a need, to try to figure out how we can respond to that need on the spot. Currently, we have a pilot in Cape Breton with the motor vehicle body repair trade, which is auto body or collision repair. They really have had difficulty retaining or even attracting youth to come in to that trade.

We partnered with the Nova Scotia Works Centre in Cape Breton along with the Nova Scotia Community College, and we put on a job fair. We worked with those employers and we had over 60 youth come, and we whittled it down to 31, and now they're being further screened by the employers. We're going to treat them as a cohort group and help them go through the apprenticeship system together, and then we're bringing youth and we're matching the youth to the employers who have that need. So those are some of the examples of what we're doing with youth.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: Success is really what Marjorie just talked about: those partnerships where you bring all those key players together - community college, the companies, and so on - and achieve success. The success we get measured on is obviously the unemployment rates. You can see by the chart, in 2012, it was at 18.6 per cent for that youth group, and now it's at 14.9 per cent. In Canada, in 2012, it was 14.4 per cent and now Canada is at 13.1 per cent. So the gap went from 4.2 down to 1.8.

Some pretty good signs in there. In the recession, back in 2008-09, we had a lot of people come home from Alberta, et cetera, but no jobs, and the unemployment rate would go down. This last little tranche with Alberta sort of in the tank a little bit, people came home and the unemployment rate actually stayed steady. So that's a sign that the young people that came home were getting attached to the workforce.

There's a lot of work to do and there are always external factors at play that can hit you over the head and change the dynamic, but we just want to make sure that we're working together and have programs and things in place that can really try to advance the yardsticks, if you will. Thank you very much for your patience.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for the presentation and to your staff. We'll begin with questions, the same as we always do. We'll start with an initial question and one follow-up - for anyone who might struggle with their math at recent meetings, just to review. We'll start today with Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I think that was pointed at me. (Laughter) Certainly on behalf of probably everybody here, that was a lot of information and a lot of hard work, and I think we can actually reach back across a lot of governments. This isn't just happening with our government; this has happened with previous governments, and I commend everybody - especially the people in the departments.

When you get a lot of information, it's sometimes hard to find questions too - really, you answered a lot of questions. There was one thing that I don't think you touched on and that's linkages across government. You did talk about the table of ministers and the youth priorities in the ministry - the minister being the Minister responsible for Youth - and that's one linkage I would assume where you cross departments.

With the overall work that's being done in employment, can you give me an example of how you are engaging or what forms you have to engage, say, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to ensure that what you're doing is dovetailed into each other's priorities?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: There are a couple of dynamics. One is obviously we have the full table where we share scenarios with each other, and if we go back to that first slide - the three priorities - those are corporate/government directions to us. So all the people around that table and all those departments focus on those three priorities, knowing that

they will do other things to support youth in different ways, but we also need to know from them how they can work with us to make sure we change those dynamics.

Then you get into situations like the Transition Task Force co-chaired by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education by Minister Casey and Minister Regan, where we focused on more specific ways of how we can take the two systems to maximize growth.

I told the story that I was visiting with IBM and they had seven young people that they had just hired in a meeting with me. I said, by the way, I'm going to meet with the Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development - is there anything you'd like me to say to her or advice that I might be able to give her? One young lady said, I went through high school and never heard the word "entrepreneur" once. Another said, I had to make a decision in Grade 9 about math and science, without really realizing it may impact whether I can get in a trade or not.

So there are many examples where we take specific issues. The other one I can think of - and I mentioned it to you earlier - is the post-secondary folks with ACOA; key departments like the Office of Immigration, looking to retain those international students and get them attached to the workforce; and the work we do with the Greater Halifax Partnership. There are a ton of things that we really work hard on.

Some of the key companies like Michelin, IBM, Irving, and others are very receptive to being collaborative and co-operative in helping us make sure that we're maximizing opportunities, and particularly when we get to special populations. Those companies are open to working with us to try to design ways to make their workforce more diverse.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Orrell.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Thank you for your presentation. At the very start of the presentation on Page 2, you talked about the youth engagement part. Two groups that you've talked to were the Canadian Federation of Students and Students Nova Scotia. They've been out talking with all the caucuses and whoever will listen with the upcoming budget and so on and so forth, and rightfully so. They have a lot of asks and a lot of concerns. One of their biggest things is debt. They're coming out with a ton of debt and they're not finding jobs that are paying enough money to pay this debt down, and I understand that when that happens, they leave our province.

Has there been any consideration given to what some of the asks and requests are from students as far as transferring some of the Graduate to Opportunity money that was cancelled, say, or money towards students loans into up-front grants or maybe even grants that will take the tuition or the cost of living down so that these people can come out of

school with less debt and then maybe take on a job that will allow them to pay for their loans and to live in this province and not have to move away?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I wish Ava Czapalay was here - my Senior Executive Director of Higher Education, who is totally knowledgeable on this - but I'm reasonably knowledgeable too. We are very sensitive with the students and their concerns and their needs. For example, the Canadian Federation of Students is a little different - they have \$90 million worth of asks. With Students Nova Scotia, it's around \$8 million - and frankly, quite reasonable in what they're asking us to try to do. Students Nova Scotia was even great to say, even if you reposition money without even finding new money to help us.

So those are the kinds of things we try to help them with, in areas that are of the highest priority to them. Our student assistance program is an exceptional program. When you graduate in your fourth year, your Nova Scotia debt gets written off - it's free. The reason we wait until graduation is because it's an incentive program.

Also, if I remember correctly, we give a 40/60 split with the student loan up front - 40 to a grant, 60 to a loan. Plus we do the student bursary - Ava would be proud of me - I think \$1,200 or more.

At the same time, we're conscious of our own responsibility within government - because the Premier is committed to balancing the budget - to make sure the money we have is used appropriately. We really value the relationship. There are always differences and they'll take us on as they have every right to do, but behind closed doors we really work hard with them.

MR. ORRELL: We had this discussion in the last sitting, that most people are taking longer because of the living costs and they have to take on a part-time job so they're not getting that degree in the four-year period. So we're asking if that could be expanded into the fifth and sixth. Anyway, that's another story . . .

MR. MONTGOMERIE: That is a key ask of Students Nova Scotia - the fifth year.

MR. ORRELL: You talked in here a lot about apprenticeships and co-ops and so on and so forth. One of the asks that people have, and I was one of them - when I went through school, I had to do on-the-job training in summers where I couldn't work and I couldn't raise any money, and I didn't get paid.

Is there something being looked at so that people who have part of their requirement to have educational training in their summers or during the school year, who can't work or have to be away from their placements - I went to school at Dal, my placements were in Toronto and Cape Breton and Halifax where I had to live and I had to keep, but never got any money. So that part of my education was driven up. Are there any considerations being given to take some of that money that's being used for other programs to allow people who need that education and on-the-job-type training as part of their education to receive some

kind of financial or monetary gain, so they can afford to stay and do that and continue their degree in that length of time?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: A really good point. The co-op program that we have is a pay program; the Graduate to Opportunity and so on. Some educational programs have a requirement for young people to do an internship thing without pay - where there's no pay involved. So it's a balance. Obviously, our preference is that young people get paid, quite frankly.

The second piece to that though is workforce attachment - when you get into a situation where you're actually with a company or a small business, your chances of getting attached to the workforce grow substantial. I know the Royal Bank went through some criticism a while ago because they had a lot of unpaid interns in their setting, and they stopped the program. So it's a balance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen.

MS. TREEN: Thank you for your presentation. It is certainly a lot of information - a lot of good stuff going on. My concern is getting that information out there to the people who need to have the information. I'm going to go on it myself when I leave here today, but the Make it Here information website - if you can talk further about how it works, what's on there, what information you can gather from it.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I absolutely share your concern. I've got three pages of youth programs here and we've worked really hard, particularly with our stakeholders in the private sector to educate them. Like the great work Marjorie has been doing in the apprenticeship - you can see how many businesses have grown attached. It's hard work to make them aware, and at the same time, make it simple for young people and their parents to be able to access.

I might ask Elizabeth to speak a little bit on where we're headed in that regard, but I totally agree with your point.

MS. MILLS: Thank you for the question. Yes, we do have a lot of programs that not everyone is aware of. We have excellent uptake in our programs. Our outreach could be much better than it currently is. We rely heavily on our sector councils to communicate all the programs that exist. They do that to their member organizations, the small- and medium-size employers.

We work closely with the chambers of commerce - we actually have agreements with them wherein they promote our programs to their members. We partner with other organizations like the Apprenticeship Agency, NSBI, ACOA, and others to go around the province and meet with small- and medium-size businesses and talk about what's available.

Our virtual career site that we're working on, we think will be very helpful in reaching young people and parents. That is part of our mandate, part of our goal, with Nova Scotia Works - the expanded reach.

We do as well through the Nova Scotia Works organizations obviously - they work closely with the clients that come in the door and they're aware of all the programs and services that exist and they refer clients accordingly. Again, through our role as the expanded reach, we'll be definitely working more closely with employers on that.

Deputy Minister Montgomerie mentioned the Transition Task Force - that was made up of private sector individuals and post-secondary institutions. They published a series of recommendations, and the whole point of it is to help young people transition from school to work. So that is an area where we are working closely together. All those recommendations now are being looked at.

There are joint working groups consisting of Labour and Advanced Education and ourselves. We're looking at how to implement those recommendations throughout the system. We've also engaged our sister department, DCS, in that work as well. We know that a lot more can be done on communicating.

Our little model of what we call our dog-and-pony show, where we've partnered with local chambers of commerce and MLAs in communities, is a good vehicle, I think. We've learned a lot from doing that and I think we can model that with parents and young people and schools.

We don't have a problem of uptake. We have excellent uptake in most of our programs, but I think we can do a lot more and we have an opportunity to do more in marketing programs. You will notice that we've undertaken a marketing initiative on the GTO - Graduate to Opportunity - so that we can maximize the uptake in that program as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen, a follow-up?

MS. TREEN: Yes.

MS. MILLS: One more - sorry. You asked about the . . .

MS. TREEN: The specific - yes.

MS. MILLS: The specific question - sorry. The Public Service Commission developed a new website. What they attempt to do is put together all the programs that exist - the summer student employment programs, the apprenticeship programs, and also how to get employed within the Public Service Commission. I think that particular site is a wealth of information. There are excellent tools and resources, and it's good one-stop shopping for a young person looking for employment opportunities in Nova Scotia.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. MacFarlane.

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Thank you so much for your presentation and being here this morning. I have a lot of questions, but as of yesterday we learned in Pictou that PiCCoLA - you would probably be familiar with the continuous education system that we have there in Pictou. We've had it for a couple of decades and it has really become quite popular since free GEDs, which is really great because there were people that weren't going because of the expense. We had a partnership with NSCC to house them, and we've learned as of yesterday that they have to be out for their new school semester in September.

So as of last night, the mayor and I were struggling to find a place for them to teach their students. They've never had to pay rent so I'm wondering - I know their budget comes through your department - is there money for rent and is there a limit on that? I know it's a little bit away from the presentation, but I thought I could ask that question because it's very important.

We're very concerned because we've had that service for, I think, three decades now in Pictou. We have no public transportation in Pictou County and we can't have these individuals travelling to New Glasgow. They're coming from River John, which would be 45 minutes from their home to get to New Glasgow. Many of them don't have any transportation - they walk. So I'm just wondering about a rent portion of it.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I think what I would really like to do is have some of my key staff have a side discussion with you. Let's really find out what's going on in the background and see if we can come to a solution of some sort. So they're in the community college now, but have to leave?

MS. MACFARLANE: They're in the Department of Fisheries building, but NSCC took that over so the Department of Fisheries is actually a tenant that pays NSCC now. Because of NSCC's budget constraints, they have to more or less get rid of someone, and unfortunately, it's them. They've never had to pay rent so it's a big concern.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: With Elizabeth, we'll make sure we have the right people sit down with you. Thank you for bringing that to our attention.

MS. MACFARLANE: Am I allowed another question?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Since I'm the chairman, yes. (Laughter)

MS. MACFARLANE: Thank you very much. Really a lot of great things are happening; I like what's all under the Momentum slide here. With Mitacs, I just want to confirm - there was an increase to that budget in this past year, and I'm just wondering what the increase is, and because it is so popular, I'm wondering if there are discussions of increasing it again.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: We were able to reposition some funds within the department. I think it was around \$200,000-some to increase. A key lever for us was obviously J.P. Deveau's company's interest down in Cornwallis Park. I don't know if you're familiar with J.P.'s company down there, but they are fast becoming a research growth; you would obviously be very familiar with it. Obviously, we're in a budget process and back to the three priorities we've been asked to address by government, we'll always continue to advocate our case.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: There are many things that I want to delve into more and make sure I share with people in my community who could benefit. I also had a presentation from the Canadian Federation of Students and I'm just wondering - I wish I had the booklet that they brought with me, but I was struck by this graph in their presentation on average youth employment, which actually showed declining average youth employment; adjusted or normalized for population changes, it's a little bit greater. I'm assuming that the left axis is percentage. It went from 71 per cent down to, normalized for population, 63 per cent. I'm wondering how that jibes with the youth employment rate.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I would point to that chart. Youth employment is an interesting dynamic when you try to track it. Twelve months has to be your litmus test. Some people will take monthly figures and so on. Youth are usually the last to get hired and the first to get laid off, so there's always that dynamic. Youth tend to be job hunters when they first start out, so they're in and out. We sort of keep an eye overall, not that that's our total bible.

We're like Students Nova Scotia. We want to make sure - the community college, for example, has something like an 88 per cent placement rate. When they graduate, 88 per cent have jobs. In post-secondary, it's lower, for all kinds of different reasons. You have arts programs and professional programs and so on.

I'm keenly aware of the barriers that they would reference, but I'm a little hazy on the stats to be quite frank.

MS. ROBERTS: Would you know in terms of total numbers for employed youth population in Nova Scotia, where the trend is going?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: We actually have very capable labour stats folks who could sit down with you - and more than happy to do that by the way - and take data and charts and take you through it. I'm going to have to be very frank - I'm not really good at that part of it.

MS. ROBERTS: That's okay. I'm going to get some more substantial stuff on my next go-round.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I'm more than happy to have staff sit down with you.

MS. ROBERTS: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gough.

MR. STEPHEN GOUGH: Thank you very much for the presentation. It's a lot of information, as my colleague had said. I'm just wondering, how are you supporting the youth at risk?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: There are a couple of exciting things, from my perspective. When we blew up Careers Nova Scotia, one of the things that we wanted to really be on our game about is how we best work with special populations. We actually contracted with St. F.X. University to create a centre of excellence where they will help guide us in making sure best practices and so on are utilized. We have also reached out, and thanks to African Nova Scotia, for example, quietly working in the Prestons, behind the scenes to have the community identify to us specifically where we can really help them. That process is under way.

If I remember correctly, Marjorie, we're doing some stuff in the community on apprenticeship to promote within the Prestons. Maybe you could speak to that if you don't mind.

MS. DAVISON: I can speak to that. The East Preston Empowerment Academy provides learning support to the community members, and a number of those community members have identified either working in a skilled trade, or a desire to. We partnered with the Adult Education Division of Employment Nova Scotia, Skills and Learning, and we're supporting them to do a trade qualifier, which is a route around apprenticeship, but it brings the training right to the community so that they can challenge for their Red Seal certification.

That's being done in addition to the interest in helping people prepare for Grade 12 - GED, that type of thing. That's been working very well, and we're hopeful that we can bring that out to other communities, particularly communities that are somewhat

marginalized - my particular interest is skilled trades - helping them come into the training and making more affordable pathways for them to do that. Does that help?

MR. GOUGH: Did you have something you wanted to add?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: It just struck me, too - I think of the Irving example, Marjorie, where the community college and Irving partnered with 10 women on welding. I attended the graduation, it was amazing.

MS. DAVISON: I can speak to that. Irving has attempted to plan for new entrants coming into its workforce over a period of time where it makes sense for them to grow. They have partnered with Women Unlimited, which is primarily funded under Employment Nova Scotia, and what they have done is they have cohort groups of 20 women and they do a 14-week readiness program and then they are supported to go into a two-year community college program in welding or metal fabrication, which is more the iron worker, shipbuilder trade at Irving.

The first cohort group is graduating in June and they will be going into the workforce. They have jobs at Irving. This will be done in two other cohort groups and there is also a cohort group that just started for Aboriginal First Nations from the region - not just Nova Scotia, but also includes New Brunswick and P.E.I.

MR. GOUGH: You're saying that Women Unlimited has been successful and I'm just wondering with everything else that you're doing, are you having positive results?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I'm really excited about it. I guess what I'm really liking is when we broach with a company the ability to try to make changes, they're usually receptive because what they say to us is, we need your help on the opening part of this and we'll commit as long as you're there to support us - whether it's the community college or the women's group that Marjorie just mentioned. It's a partnership. Back to that partnership thing - that at the end result we see those young women have success. So pretty excited actually.

MS. MILLS: We have an adult education program and many of our clients that are referred to us are clients of DCS. They would be young people who would be on income assistance or their parents would be on income assistance, and they have not been able to complete their high school. So a significant number of our participants are in that area.

We know from the research that the higher the education levels the individual has, the greater opportunity they have to complete high school and go on to post-secondary or to attach to the labour market. So we partner with our sister department, DCS, on those types of initiatives.

We flow money through to DCS for some of their wage subsidy programs through our labour market transfer agreements through federal money, so we flow money to them to manage those programs. We also partner with Phoenix House and other organizations that we consider to be intervention organizations to help young people who are at risk with adult education, labour market attachment, work experience, and so on.

There is a whole myriad of opportunities that do exist and our partnership with sister departments is really important, along with community organizations. They play a big role in this.

MR. GOUGH: You're doing wonderful work. I know it's tiring, but you have a lot going on for sure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. MacFarlane.

MS. MACFARLANE: I'm curious - as stated earlier, we all have had the opportunity to meet the Canadian Federation of Students and Students Nova Scotia, and it's very interesting, they're very organized and they have their priorities. One of the things that concerned me - and I'm just wondering if you have any input or knowledge on it - they're concerned, as I am too, about the inexperienced worker. When you start your job you go through a three-month process as an inexperienced worker making 50 cents less. Personally, I'm totally against that. I think it's ridiculous and I think that when people start a job they should start at least at minimum wage.

I know they went into detail with us and at length, and I'm wondering if you have any opinion or input how you see that. Just to clarify, one student gave us an example of where they worked at Tim Hortons, let's say, in Cape Breton in the summer and they came to university in Halifax and went to McDonalds and was considered inexperienced. I'm sorry, I think that's just shameful. I just think it's a system that has to change and I want to know if your department has any opinion on that.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I'm reminded that I have Labour Standards too.
(Laughter)

This is off the top of my head. One time is it, so it shouldn't have to go a second time. We would encourage them to go to Labour Standards. We really would.

MS. MACFARLANE: Okay. That's fabulous . . .

MR. MONTGOMERIE: Sorry - Labour Standards, I should explain, is an arm's-length neutral organization. Minister Regan will often get concerns, and she will refer them to the Labour Board. That puts it back in a neutral setting. That's why I would encourage that student to go there.

MS. MACFARLANE: Have there been discussions about possibly reversing that trend, though? Really, 50 cents over three months, whether they're a student - or whether I'm 50 years old and I start a job and I'm considered inexperienced. Going around my small community, I was asking small business owners, and I've had a business - I've never, ever taken advantage of anyone like that. I think that we're looking at larger corporations that are taking advantage of that. I'm just wondering if there's any discussion that maybe we would see a reversal of that.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I'm trying to recall our many meetings with Students Nova Scotia and with the Canadian Federation of Students. I've got to apologize; I don't recall that specifically. When I go back, I'll check with my senior team on post-secondary because we are focused on their asks trying to figure out where we can be strategic with the resources that we have so that we can support some of the things that they're asking to do. That one I'm not familiar with, and I do apologize for that.

MS. MACFARLANE: I just want to say, and I understand your resources, that this would have no cost to you. It would just need your support and everyone's support in saying, do away with the inexperienced worker at 50 cents less. Thank you.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: Marjorie is reminding me we have a minimum wage committee, which I didn't know about. They have considered it and said no, but we can bring it back to them to look at in the next go-round. Again, they're a bit of an arm's-length. They make recommendations to the minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: The Graduate to Opportunity program and more particularly the diversity bonus - that's new and probably still not measured, seeing what the real impacts are. I don't want to mix the intentions here - the intentions are tremendous but I would like to know - the path that you've taken to incent employers to hire women and people of diversities, again, is tremendous, and I feel that they should be given those jobs regardless. What's wrong in our society today that that doesn't happen? Again, the question isn't one to really negate the initiative. I'm wondering, what else can we do or is being done to change this? It's a problem.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: It's changing the conversation, changing the narrative. The more we're out in front and the more that we can do to heighten awareness around the issue that you raise, the more success we'll have. We amended the Graduate to Opportunity for that very reason.

One of the things we did early on was, we met with the Nova Scotia and Halifax Chambers of Commerce a couple of years ago to make them aware of some of the stuff that we're doing. They became so engaged that, at the chamber dinners now, they'll have a co-op student sit at a table, and they put our Graduate to Opportunity up in the slide show.

We meet with them on a regular basis to get their ideas and they'll actually bring in key employers - 10 or 12 at a time. It's quite phenomenal, actually.

Now that we have Graduate to Opportunity, we're specific to diversity - money talks, everything else walks. It's an incentive to try to get the extra attention of those employers that didn't think or haven't thought in that way.

MS. MILLS: I just want to add to that. In addition to the additional wage subsidy to incent hiring of under-represented groups, we also offer other resources to employers. We have developed a welcoming workplace tool kit to assist employers both in terms of their recruitment methods, and in terms of orientation and management of employees. We also have developed a very sophisticated and broad series of tools through SkillsOnlineNS that are available to employers and to community organizations and so on to help with diversity issues, but it's a big issue and there are a variety of interventions that we need to use. Part of it, too, is to make sure that our diversity candidates are aware of the opportunities and aware of the programs as well and are able to access those programs in a way that other young people are doing. I know that apprenticeship as well has developed an actual strategy in this regard.

MS. DAVISON: I think that we've learned over time our experience with hiring is that you tend to hire someone that you're most familiar with or someone like you. So it really is changing the narrative, as Deputy Montgomerie has said, in helping employers understand more successful recruiting tactics.

I know in the apprenticeship system we will often have employers say they can't find apprentices, but when we ask them, what methods have you used to look for apprentices, we find that they're not very sophisticated in many regards. We know even with the job bank that's available through the federal government and evolved to the province to operate, a lot of employers do not post their positions there even though it's free.

There are a lot of reasons for that. I won't get into all of those because there are dynamics in terms of the workplace, but I do think it is around really working with employers to better understand how they can hire and to help them see all young people as potential opportunities for the workplace and see diversity in the workplace.

The value of the incentive, if it does bring an employer to hire, I think it reduces the risk for that employer to take that chance, and then when they have that opportunity we hear often from employers, that person has been wonderful. I've heard employers who would never hire women say, I'm going to hire a ton of women now because they're very productive, they make my workplace safer.

As well, we've done an initiative recently with ISANS to help bring Syrian refugees to get their practical skills assessed against a trade and we worked with employers and provided a wage subsidy so that they would bring them in to do that assessment at the workplace. It was just a pilot, but most of them were granted full-time jobs and they actually don't have the English skills that they need so they're still working on their English skills.

It really is about how we help employers open their minds to experience the difference and then see the benefit of having that diversity actually in their workplace.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I did have a follow-up but it was just answered.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: I have a couple of questions about the student loan forgiveness program. When there are co-op terms in the course of a post-secondary program, often that alone can extend a student's program to beyond four years. So how does that work? Have you accommodated that?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: We are looking very closely at the fifth year.

MS. ROBERTS: So for that circumstance and other circumstances where students might also take five years.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: The students have made an exceptional case and they're correct in the point that they make. So we are wrestling with it right now.

MS. ROBERTS: I'll look forward to seeing that shortly. The Nova Scotia Community College tuition has been increasing faster than the rate of inflation for almost 15 years and those students cannot currently have their loans forgiven by the province. Is that also something that you're looking at?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: There are many two-year programs outside of the community college including private career colleges and within universities so it's not a high priority for us at this time. The ability for the community college - and you may be aware that President Bureaux and his team have launched a campaign to raise private sector funds to help their kids that are having problems.

For example, the first contributor was Ron Joyce - \$5 million. We work really hard and a lot of folks don't appreciate that in a post-secondary world there are several millions of dollars that they use of their own revenues that they try to provide assistance to young people in need. We try to balance that kind of dynamic.

Michelin just announced, for example, they will every year pay for the tuition of 16 young people from their community areas. So that's the kind of dynamic Don and his team are working with. They basically increase 3 per cent a year, and keep in mind the major costs for any post-secondary - it's like the health care system, is salaries. So there is always that challenge within that dynamic.

What I have to applaud the community college on is they've - as much as they're an arm's-length government organization, they really gained credibility with the private sector, so much so that you have the Ron Joyces contributing - as well as many other businesses.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I'm very interested in the apprenticeship program. I often get asked by people who work in the trades how they go about getting an apprentice.

MS. DAVISON: How does the employer?

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: There are employers who, say, own construction companies and they often come to me and ask, how do I go about getting an apprentice?

MS. DAVISON: There are different ways. For instance, if you're in the construction sector, if you participate in the Building Futures for Youth program, which is providing summer opportunities for young people, that gives them first look at some of the young people coming out of schools and they can provide, and often do offer, work to them during the school year.

We work through the sector councils and through the associations, as Elizabeth has mentioned as well, to identify opportunities, and we connect them to groups like First Nations, the Mi'kmaq Employment Training Secretariat, or APTEC, which is the off-reserve group, or other equity groups that are trying to connect their members into employment. So, if we hear of demand coming from different sectors, we will connect them with groups that have clients that they've invested training dollars in, and they're trying to get them connected. So really it is about trying to broker that relationship. Does that help?

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Is there a website that I can send people to? Is there a person in your department that you connect employers?

MS. DAVISON: Yes, often I will just say, contact us and we will help them make the connection with the groups.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: What kind of costs are associated with apprenticeship programs? Is there an initial fee? I know there is an EI program for the participants.

MS. DAVISON: There is actually a lot of support between the federal supports and the provincial supports for apprentices. If you come in as a direct-entry apprentice or right out of high school there is a registration fee and there are tuition costs, but we do, as I mentioned, provide an award, which is essentially a tuition rebate if they progress. It's just that it's after the fact. They're also eligible for 60 per cent of employment insurance when they leave their work to go into training, and they also get living allowances and if there's child care - other types of supports that they may need.

The employer can get a tax credit of up to \$2,000 for each apprentice that they hire and they can get that for up to two years as well. There is also a tool tax deduction available to apprentices to help cover costs of tools annually, and to journey people as well. There is probably more.

There is the Canada Apprentice Loan, which is new. With that they can get the money up front and then they can actually use it to help get them through school and then still get their EI. So they're not exclusive of each other. We try to work with the apprentices to help them do that planning and understand how they can avail themselves of the different financial programs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: In sticking with the community college aspect that we're talking about, I probably two years ago had a young gentleman and his mother in my office who had taken a course at the community college and in order to continue forward with his studies and his journey to be a Red Seal person, had to pass two Department of Labour and Advanced Education exams in order to continue - one halfway through the course and one at the end.

According to them, and I had followed up with the community college and it was the case, 20 of the 25 young adults in that class had failed the second part of the Department of Labour exam. Three months later when they wrote it again only 15 of them wrote it and one passed. So then we had six months later he wrote it again - because you had to wait the six months - and nobody passed, but only five of them wrote. We had 25 kids start, and seven people passed the Department of Labour exam.

I had the discussion with the community college, which told me that the curriculum hadn't changed, and their teachers hadn't changed. So it was either the Department of Labour exam that was different or changed, or they weren't teaching to what was necessary to get into the system. Is there anybody in the system who monitors that to make sure that

what is being learned and what is being needed in industry is being taught and being tested on?

MS. DAVISON: I will just ask one question and then try to answer. Do you know what area the exams were provided in from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education? What trade was it, what program?

MR. ORRELL: This trade was process operations, power engineering.

MS. DAVISON: Oh, power engineering. That's actually administered through our Technical Safety division in the department.

Just to answer your question in terms of work, those exams are managed nationally through a power engineer group. Any change to that exam would happen through consultation with industry across the country. I'm not aware of how often those exams may have been changed.

But I do hear your concern about NSCC and preparing to the satisfaction of industry. I actually hear that a lot. I try to go out regularly and meet with industry and get a sense of whether the apprenticeship system is meeting their needs. Through the transition task force, we have developed what's called a joint stewardship initiative with the NSCC. Our leadership teams are meeting monthly, and we've identified a number of these challenges. We're trying to come up with strategies on how to improve the quality of the training at NSCC so it's delivering on what industry is looking for. That's something that we started in August. We've been meeting through the year. It's going to take some time.

With the creation of the agency, what we did is, we developed trade advisory committees. Those trade advisory committees are for the whole trades training system. It gives industry one place to go and advise across that system. In the past, they would have had to work directly with the college on their issues or directly with apprenticeship or elsewhere. I think that raises the accountability for the NSCC to listen to what industry is experiencing and also to take their recommendations under advisement when they want to make a change to a program. Now the recommendations coming through that mechanism go to the board of governors at the NSCC as well as to the apprenticeship board, so there has to be consensus on those changes before they go to the minister for final approval.

There are systems that have been newly put into place, and I think it's going to take some time to work through. But there are very trade-specific issues sometimes, and power engineer is one of those unique programs.

MR. ORRELL: I'm not downplaying the role of NSCC by any means because they do provide a valuable service.

I guess my question related to that is, although we're consulting with business and industry and education institutions, is there anyone in the department who is tasked with trying to determine what the future is going to hold and what specific training we're going to need in the next two years, five years, or 10 years? I know when the shipbuilding contract was awarded, we all of a sudden started to scramble and make sure there were enough welders in the province. It seemed like welding courses popped up everywhere. They were going to need 30 welders, and we had 60 or 70 who were going to be coming out at the same time.

I know there's no way that the ship procurement - but if that's a program that's going to be coming up with the federal government and provincially - we'll say it's coal mining or we'll say it's roadbuilding, we know that that's going to happen in the next little while. Do we have someone who's out there determining what we're going to need in the future and trying to apply that in some of our institutions?

I'll use Memorial High School in Sydney Mines as an example. It has a trades program. It's a composite high school. It trains people for welding, electrical, carpentry, plumbing, and so on and so forth. Is there a way that if we knew we were going to need more plumbers in the future, we could expand that program and add a couple more seats there and throughout the province so that we're not going to face that shortage? We're facing a shortage of tradespeople now, and it's because we pushed everybody to university degrees. Now we're trying to reverse that and get back so there's a balance.

Is there someone in the department who's employed to make sure that we have the skills and the education needed for what's going to happen in the future?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: We all do. I don't take that lightly at all. Part of the relationship with that private sector is to understand their needs. Sector councils are a great place, for example. What I've seen in this province is the absolute ability for the community college and others to turn on a dime. The welding program actually was quite well organized. We dealt with Irving up front. We sat down with them - what are your needs and can you help us with diversity in groups, et cetera?

Michelin right now is talking to us about their future in the next several years in three plants and the kind of workforce that they're going to need. I can remember when the Department of Health and Wellness suddenly realized that the technicians that graduate from the community college, the retirement rate suddenly went higher than they thought it was going to be and Don was able to add 14 seats almost within two months. That means that at the end of that, 14 additional people will get jobs.

We're not always perfect, obviously, but as long as the relationship is strong - the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, Mainland Trades, those are folks we deal with. Dalhousie, Acadia - 10 universities, Nova Scotia Community College. We try to stay on our game when it comes to the needs of the province.

IBM - my favorite story - what they love is they can sit down with six universities and the Nova Scotia Community College on a regular basis in a group called CARET. Not only do they use those organizations to hire people, but they use them to train people. IBM's major issue is what they call onboarding, which is really what you're referring to. It's how do I find a way to train people who are going to work for the Royal Bank or for IBM? So the community college and the universities designed an onboarding support program.

Companies are getting more comfortable, and we have three business consultants - we could probably use a whole bunch of them - that on a regular basis will meet with companies to try to help them out with issues they may have, anything from HR to things that they might see at risk. We're all in that interest area, for sure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Mills, do you want to add to that?

MS. MILLS: And Marjorie probably will as well. Just to add to what Deputy Montgomerie said, we do have a unit within our department, which does labour market information. The economist that the deputy offered to meet with you is in that unit. They do regular survey work and we have to test that academic economics research on the ground with employers, and we do that through our sector council work, but also through staff that are on the ground meeting with employers all the time and the deputy referred to the business consultants.

You would have heard in the recent federal budget that there was a reference to a new organization, which is a national Labour Market Information Council, and Deputy Montgomerie is a board member on that new council. The mandate of that council is to be providing more granular, more useable labour market information across the country. So I think you've just had your first board meeting on that and so I think there will be some good results from there as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just before we move on we'll welcome, for Hansard, Mr. Jessome as he replaces Ms. Lohnes-Croft this morning. Ms. Treen.

MS. TREEN: I just want to make a comment. I think that extra 10 per cent for those hiring women and persons with disabilities - I think it's a great idea. You do have to start changing the conversation and sometimes the pocketbook is where you can help start changing the conversation. I do notice going out now - and I always stop and make a

comment - women on construction sites and women mechanics and whatever, and I always stop and make a comment because it just feels good to see that.

I think it's starting to change. Do we have a lot of work to do? Yes, but I think it's starting to change. I think there is hope there, but that's not my question. It's about the virtual Nova Scotia Works. That's exciting that you're doing that. I think that the way people think and the way we live and stuff that that's a tool that they need.

Is the site just going to be for people looking for work or is there going to be a side for employers to go on? How is that going to work?

MS. MILLS: In the same way that we provide a suite of services to Nova Scotians who enter a physical location, job seekers, employers, young people, parents should be able to access those services only through a virtual means, and we will also link them to in-person just-in-time services as well so they can talk to somebody if they need to. For sure, we see it as reaching employers as well, yes. One of the points I wanted to make is that we do provide a lot of information to employers and to industry associations and groups. That information we disseminate out. But one of the things we find is that the in-person is always very effective.

MS. ROBERTS: A lot of your focus is on interacting with employers and the private sector. In my district, the young people who I interact with, many of them have only a tenuous relationship with employers. There's a lot of precarious employment, and there's a lot of self-employment. I'm wondering if your department is looking at any initiatives to support young entrepreneurs to make that a less scary, stressful way of making a living and staying in Nova Scotia.

I'll share just one specific observation based on my Facebook feed, where I'm lucky to have a number of self-employed 20-somethings - artists and creators of various sorts. A number of times recently I've heard, can anyone recommend someone who can help me with my taxes - I've got three different businesses? There's a whole mess of different situations, and their taxes are as complicated as if they were running a corporation - and can anybody do this for me for less than \$20,000? I have to say, I've been exactly there, where I felt totally scared by my own paperwork, and I was making \$20,000.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I think one of the more exciting things, as I view the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, is the formation of the Business Education Council. You have the head of IBM in Nova Scotia co-chairing with the Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, with people like Jordi Morgan and others, private sector people at the table and my team at the table to get at exactly what you're talking about. Again, it's changing the narrative.

Having been in the school system myself, people tend to look at the school system like it's going to solve everything. Everybody has a problem, and the school system should solve it. Education departments have been insular for a lot of the time, but now they're

becoming more proactive. They're recognizing the need for coding and entrepreneurship, that kind of dialogue, to happen at the school level. I really take your point.

In my world of responsibility for post-secondary institutions and apprenticeships, we have young people in the setting in a lot of cases. Whether it's university, and they're interested in co-op and so on, you have staff at the university who can help them engage in co-op. But in the Grade 10 to 12 area, it's a little more fluid, I guess.

One of the things the Business Education Council is looking at is increasing the amount of co-ops. It's interesting, in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, if I remember what Sandra told me, it's small businesses across the province that really do co-ops for the high school kids, not necessarily the bigger companies. They're going to try to change that dynamic. I think she mentioned there's around 5,000 co-op opportunities that are provided. I don't know if I have answered your question.

MS. ROBERTS: I would just say that I think there's also a need to have dialogue directly with graduates of post-secondary because that's more so the group that I'm talking with.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have enough time. I'm going to allow a few minutes just for one question without a follow-up from each caucus. Why don't we start with you, Ms. Roberts, and carry on?

MS. ROBERTS: I would appreciate Ms. Davison talking a bit more about who came together to look at the procurement process and including an obligation to have apprenticeship. I think that there's a real opportunity in Nova Scotia to look at procurement and also maybe somehow adjust so that local companies that have the skills compete successfully against firms from away. Many small businesses in my district - designers, architects, and so forth - see their tax dollars going to Calgary and going to Toronto too often.

MS. DAVISON: The approach that we took was to work directly with industry. We worked with the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, and the Construction Association brought in all the construction partners from the union side as well as from the non-union side, so Merit Contractors Association, the Mainland Nova Scotia Building Trades, Cape Breton Island Building and Construction Trades Council, and some actual employers as well.

What we wanted to do is develop an approach that wasn't imposing on employers and inhibiting employers from being able to manage their workforce and in construction, many employers are doing different projects at a time so they have to have that fluidity to move apprentices or journey people around. So that's how we came up with the idea of demonstrating that you are actually actively engaged in apprenticeship.

It starts out on a reward basis. We haven't actually gotten to the point of saying that there has to be a certain percentage of apprentices on a work site, and that may be something we work towards in the future. Other jurisdictions have tried that but unsuccessfully because there's no way to really monitor it.

Then we worked internally with our procurement office and we worked with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, which does construction procurement, but all procurement through Internal Services, and really looked at raising awareness around - we're not just talking about construction. There's landscaping, renovations, culinary skills, and many of our centres are nursing centres or residential homes. So really developing some awareness around what are the apprentice-able trades and where are the opportunities to procure those skills, and then how can we translate that into opportunities for our young people?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: Just to follow up on the last question. I've had some good discussion over the last little while about predicting the future - how we are conveying that into our high schools so that the kids entering high school at Grade 9 now understand what is available. The discussions went around something like - if we could get every kid that came into Grade 9, through collaboration with the education system and the advanced education system, and had kind of an intake on the children to see what their interests are - what their educational background is, what they think they like - and maybe come up with some kind of idea of what would be available to them when they go into Grade 12 and the university level - so they don't waste a year.

If we could have almost like an assessment somewhere - and Grade 9 would be the way because then you'd get them early and they'd have an idea of what they might want to point themselves to. Are there talks between two departments that we convey what might be coming up in the future to these kids and through the high school back to them, and maybe looking into some kind of way to screen potentials of what would be best for them?

Some kids aren't going to be doctors. We don't need 1,000 doctors - well, we do now, but that's another story. We don't need 1,000 plumbers right now if we're going to make sure that we're able to meet the demands of the province. I hope that's looked into.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: The real issue to your point and you're absolutely correct is trying to get the best information we can to parents and young people that helps influence the decisions they may make.

We have a great relationship with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. We know that guidance counsellors are up against it with social problems and haven't been able to be guidance counsellors for a long time. That's why Elizabeth and her team are really focused on the virtual part.

I was in South Carolina. We met with senior management at Michelin and they brought in a State Secretary of Commerce and he made us aware of a website in South Carolina that is so detailed that I could go in and say, I want to be a nurse, and it would pop up and would go - not only here is what it takes to be a nurse and here's the pay level, you go over here and you press a button and you go to Richmond and it will say what vacancies there are for nurses. The same with plumbing. It's pretty comprehensive.

That's the kind of - I don't want to set expectations here, but you're absolutely right. The thing that drives parents crazy, and I totally relate to it is there are so many decisions young people have to make from Grade 9 to 12 - and I have to tell you this story. I was at a major conference in Ontario. We were asked - because of the work we've done in post-secondary, we presented to these post-secondary folks. They asked me the question about the arts program. Like are you downplaying the arts program in Nova Scotia? This was a professor who was in the humanities. I said, look, I have four kids. One of them wanted to be a teacher - he's a teacher. One who wanted to be a physio is a physio. One went through computer science, graduated with honours, and became an actor overnight. How do you figure? One took six years to get a degree from two universities and ended up in a private career college and now works for Oracle.

Young people are going to change. They're going to be influenced by their teachers, their parents, their friends, and their peers. They're going to find their way eventually. If we're all there to support them. (Interruption)

Exactly, let us pray. That's the key. When they're going to go down a road, you've got to be there for them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome with the final question, a quick one.

MR. BEN JESSOME: I'm just wondering if you can speak to the collaboration that you have with other departments or outside organizations to sell the concept of fighting out-migration with the stuff that you're doing to focus on reducing the youth unemployment rate. I see a number of initiatives here in conjunction with DCS. I'm wondering if there are some programs out there. For example, the Throne Speech indicated that there would be work to be done on an assistance program to help first-time homebuyers. Are there programs that are not necessarily focused on reducing the youth unemployment rate but could be used in an effort to combat this out-migration?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: Back to the three priorities that we've been directed to work hard to achieve, there are so many partnerships that we have to achieve those, and I talked about one earlier. I like to take the international student scenario where we've got three countries that we're working with. We're going to take 50 young people for a year who are international students. In the end, the goal is to place 80 per cent of them in jobs. There's a really good example of the Department of Immigration, post-secondary - all 10

universities and the Nova Scotia Community College - and our department from Elizabeth's team working together to achieve that objective.

It's like working with Michelin and identifying their labour needs on the outgoing. We sit down with them, and they tell us their challenges. We bring the appropriate people to the table to help them.

The Construction Association of Nova Scotia - I'm trying to think of the program they do, Marjorie, where they take young high school students. (Interruption) Building Futures for Youth. They take them through a construction experience for a period of time over the summer. It's a partnership with us and with them, and it usually leads to jobs for those kids.

There are lots of those. At the end of the day, it is about relationships. It's not about a government program saying, here. You've got to get out there, and you've got to sit down with those folks and figure out their needs. We work hard to tailor their needs to ours. I hope I answered the question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. We've had 35 questions actually this morning - a lot of information exchanged. We appreciate that very much. Deputy, before we close, we'll give you a chance to make some closing comments, you and the folks with you. Go ahead.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I always enjoy the opportunity for my team to be here with you and exchange. You are our elected representatives, and we absolutely value what you have to say and your advice, but we also welcome the opportunity to share what we're doing with you. I just have to tell you, I try to visit companies. I sit down with companies and try to get a read.

I was visiting a company in Windsor, a sheet metal company. I asked the gentleman, how do you get apprentices, and so on? He said, I have no problem. We know so-and-so at the community college, et cetera. We know our community, et cetera. Every year, we do apprenticeship. He said, I'll tell you one thing. If I get an apprenticeship from the left-hand side of my business - he's on the highway, and the left-hand side is the Annapolis Valley - I know that person is going to stay here for a long time. If I get somebody from the right-hand side, Halifax, they're going to be more mobile.

That's the kind of intelligence. You sit and you look at the logic of that business person, what he's arrived at to get the workforce that he needs. We just have to work hard to continue those kinds of relationships. I thank you for the time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. One last piece of business for us is our next meeting. That is April 25th, the day the House goes in. We will do ABCs only that day.

We're adjourned until then.

[The committee adjourned at 11:50 a.m.]