

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

COMMITTEE ROOM

**Public Service Commission
Succession Planning in the Public Service
&
Appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions**

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

Mr. Brendan Maguire (Chairman)
Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Bill Horne
Mr. Hugh MacKay
Ms. Rafah DiCostanzo
Ms. Alana Paon
Mr. Brad Johns
Ms. Lenore Zann
Ms. Tammy Martin

[Mr. Ben Jessome replaced Mr. Hugh MacKay]
[Ms. Claudia Chender replaced Ms. Tammy Martin]

WITNESSES

Public Service Commission

Ms. Laura Lee Langley, Commissioner
Mr. Rollie King, Associate Deputy Minister - Labour Relations

In Attendance:

Ms. Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Ms. Janice Brown, Senior Policy Analyst
Executive Council Office



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2018

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

1:30 P.M

CHAIRMAN

Mr. Brendan Maguire

MR. CHAIRMAN: Welcome everyone to the Human Resources Committee. My name is Brendan Maguire, Chair of the committee. We'll start by having everyone introduce themselves and we'll start to my left.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have two things on the agenda today. First is the Public Service Commission, and we'll get our witnesses to introduce themselves.

[The committee witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Today's topic is Succession Planning in the Public Service. We'll give our witnesses 20 minutes, and then we'll throw it out to the floor.

MS. LAURA LEE LANGLEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank you and the members of the committee for inviting us here today to discuss succession planning and talent management in the Public Service. I always feel like it's a privilege to be here in my role as the Public Service Commissioner.

Joining me, as you've already been introduced to, is Rollie King who is the Associate Deputy Minister for the PSC, with the responsibility for labour relations.

I do want to say that we're always happy to present a few minutes on some of the initiatives that government has in place to enhance the employment experience of a civil servant, particularly as they relate to talent and succession management and employee engagement and then, of course, answer any questions you may have on any of these topics.

The Public Service Commission of Nova Scotia is concerned with providing support systems that provide a rich employment experience for civil servants, regardless of where they are in the Public Service, where they live in Nova Scotia, and at what stage they are in their careers, which is to say we are striving to provide a continuum of initiatives, supports, and programs for employees that consider their whole employment experience, from hire to retire and all that comes in between those milestones. None of what we do should be looked at discretely, but instead, as a suite of tools that are intended to be considered holistically for the employee.

Just by way of some background, the province has approximately 10,300 full-time equivalents. That translates to a head count of just over 11,000 employees. Just so you can do your own factoring, the ratio of employees to FTEs is about 1.1. Approximately 76 per cent of our workforce is unionized; the remaining 24 per cent would be excluded employees. In terms of years of service, about one-half of our employees have between six and 20 years of service, about 15 per cent have more than 20 years of service, and 28 per cent have been with us five years or less. A very small percentage have no service tracking because they are casual workers or relief workers or folks who don't track their years of service.

Based on data provided by the Nova Scotia Pension Services Corporation, there are just under 2,000 civil servants who are eligible to retire now and another 1,000 can go within the next three years. This may sound alarming, but we know that eligibility for retirement and intention to retire do not correlate. When we ask workers about retirement intention, the vast majority tell us they intend to work past their retirement date, for a variety of reasons. Some include concerns about their financial security, the desire to increase their years of pensionable service, their overall job satisfaction, and changes to the Superannuation Plan.

This is not unusual in Canada. The Conference Board of Canada conducted research involving employers and employees on their perspectives and experiences with pensions and retirement readiness and, although not specific to public sector employees or Nova Scotia, the results showed that many Canadians are concerned that they have not saved enough for retirement. Many say they will continue to work because they enjoy what they do, and many just say that they're not ready.

In the Nova Scotia civil service, the average retirement age is 61 years with an average of 24 years of service. Compared with other Canadian jurisdictions, we fall within the middle of the pack regarding the average age and years of service at retirement.

Our data does not show an upward trend in retirements to date. Over the last five fiscal years, the average number of employees retiring annually is about 375. That ranges from a low of 340 in 2016-17 to a high of 443 in 2015-16. At the end of the second quarter of this fiscal year, there have been 177 retirements. That puts the number of retirements below the five-year average of 202 at the midpoint of the fiscal year.

I'll just say a word now about our turnover in the Public Service. The turnover rate is between 6 and 7 per cent. Research suggests that an average turnover rate in today's economy is about 10 per cent, so we think we're doing well in that respect.

Just in terms of setting the stage around retirements, succession planning, and recruitment, those are some of the numbers.

Now what I'd like to share is what we're doing to attract, retain, and develop employees so that they're ready to move up and be our leaders of the future. We have a number of initiatives under way, and in the few minutes that I have left, I'll mention just a few.

Our younger worker initiative is a concerted effort to recruit and retain workers aged 35 and under. The underlying objective is to provide young people with exposure to and experience in the Public Service. We want them to find a career with us. We want them to see a future with the Nova Scotia Public Service, and since its inception in 2015, we've hired hundreds and hundreds of younger workers. For example, this fiscal year to date, there have been 833 younger workers hired as of October 31st.

To build on this effort, we've established a recruitment and selection unit and they have undertaken more networking activities with post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia. I would add that many of our recruiters spend time in the evenings and on the weekends to participate in events to promote working in the Nova Scotia Public Service.

In October of this year, we held our very first annual Nova Scotia Government career fair. We had over 300 young university students engaged with representatives from almost every government department on opportunities for internships, term jobs, and permanent positions as well. This team also scrutinizes the hiring process to ensure there's equity in the process and that our hiring guidelines are followed. They make recommendations on assessment processes and tools to ensure that there is accessibility that's built into the process.

A key factor in being able to retain employees is the level of engagement. We were disappointed with our employee survey results from our How's Work Going survey in 2017. Overall the responses indicated that for the first time since we began these surveys in 2005, we slipped below the engagement line. Our score overall was 57 per cent.

As you may be aware, the internationally accepted standard for engagement is 60 per cent, and although the majority of our departments scored well above that line, 23 per cent, those who did not, I think eight, caused us to take a deeper dive into the reasons behind the lack of engagement so that we might respond more effectively.

We discovered that over the years, while the overall score of engagement undulates from year to year, we are hearing many of the same things from employees. They are concerned with things like lack of opportunity for innovation. They are concerned with communication. They have concerns about recognition. They are concerned about their opportunities for learning and development, which affects their chances to take advantage of opportunities. Quickly, I'd like to share with you how we're responding to some of those concerns, and I can elaborate further during the question period if you're curious for more information on any of these things.

You might know that in November 2017, Canada's clerks signed a declaration to create space for innovation in public service across Canada. In Nova Scotia, what we've done is assigned an executive director-level coordinator for innovation who is leading the charge to create space for employees to bring ideas forward. Our associate deputy ministers established a framework for innovation, and that includes the launch of a website to guide innovative practice inside the Public Service. It also contains a training program for leaders and managers on how to provoke innovation amongst employees.

We've also introduced a certificate in public sector innovation through the Public Commission. This is the first year that we have had that certificate available. We have created several innovation labs within the Public Service. I can tell you that the response to date has really been overwhelming.

On communication, we've established a Director of Internal Communication position between the Public Service Commission and Communications Nova Scotia. Angela Johnson is our director, and she has established a network of internal communication leaders and champions throughout the government. We have launched an Intranet site for employees called The Hub, which is proving to be a really popular tool for getting information to employees and also for hearing from them and getting their responses on what they like, what they don't like, and what they need.

Recognition is a tough one for us, I have to tell you, because we have many employee recognition programs throughout government. Most employees tell us that the recognition from their immediate supervisors is meaningful and it's timely. We dug a little deeper, and we understand that many employees are telling us now that they really want recognition by the public at large. They want to be valued by the citizens they serve for the

jobs that they do. This has been a broader undertaking, as we are striving to tell the public servants' stories to the people of Nova Scotia using the words of public servants. We're doing that through various means. One which you may have seen is our 100 Days of Celebrating Public Servants, which is a daily public recognition of people from all over the civil service in Nova Scotia, using Twitter as our primary vehicle.

Our Learning and Development Centre has shifted its learning model in response to employee complaints that they weren't feeling as though they were being served adequately in this area. Employees can now tailor their learning more specifically to match their career path, their plans, and their aspirations.

This slide is one of our public servant tweets.

Now back to learning and development. We've moved to a model where people can tailor their learning, and we now include electives in our leadership development series and also certificate programs so that individual contributors have options to advance beyond the leadership series. In addition to this, our programs have advanced standing in several masters and certificate programs at Dalhousie University, Saint Mary's University, and the Nova Scotia Community College. This means those who want to go on to higher learning as they advance have an advantage by being involved in our learning series.

Through a platform we have called MyHR and our learning centre, we've also introduced and can link employees to many free development and self-improvement programs. Even if they aren't involved in one of the formal leadership series programs or a certificate program, there are other resources that are free for them, and they can do some self-directed learning if they like.

We've also established a career coaching position at the Public Service Commission. This is an expert who can assist employees with career path planning and can also help them as they apply for positions by providing coaching on resumé and cover letter writing, as well as coaching on interview skills to assist them in the hiring process. I might add that we also offer this service to members of the public who have questions around how to formalize their cover letters and their resúmes in a way that will help them get past the screening process. We also offer a complete suite of competency definitions for anybody in Nova Scotia who would like to understand the competencies that are attached with each level so that they might understand what kind of examples to give. This is to help not only our own public servants, but also others who wish to advance in the Public Service, a leg up as they engage in the interview process.

In January of this year, we launched an engagement program called Be the Change. Be the Change is an invitation to a year-long conversation about revitalizing pride in the Public Service. It encourages public sector employees to change the way they think and talk about themselves as public servants. We want them to be proud of what they do as

public servants, and we're really trying to change the lexicon around Public Service. We have also learned that engagement does not start and stop at the door when we enter and leave the workplace every day. We have to understand and embrace employees for all they are and all they struggle with and celebrate both inside and outside of the workplace.

Being flexible and helping people deal with the demands of daily life is part of the engagement continuum, so we are working continuously to understand how we can make that work in various Public Service settings. That includes introducing FlexNS, which is a flexible workplace program which contributes to better balance for our employees.

[1:45 p.m.]

Finally, on the matter of succession planning and talent management, with all that has been said, I'm really excited that our associate deputy ministers are now working to refine and formalize a broader approach to talent management. We want to know in a broader sense where our leader-ready and skill-specific talent is so that we can better prepare them for what's next.

The associate deputy minister team has been meeting to define the gaps we have, look at how to identify our broad talent pool, assess their leadership readiness, and make recommendations on the platforms that can provide us with the ability to better mine and develop the talent we have and need. This will add a corporate lens on talent management that is now managed really at the department level, for the most part.

These programs are designed to create a fulsome experience and one that compels our great public servants to stay with us for the long and diverse career options that are there for them.

In the interest of time, I'll end it there. I know you have a packed agenda today and we really are interested in answering the questions you may have.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll open the floor up to questions. Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Just some general clarification: Public Service, civil service, are they the same?

MS. LANGLEY: The Public Service is the broader Public Service so that would include health care workers and education workers and anybody really who works for the public. When I talk about civil service, and that's really what we represent at the Public Service Commission, we often use those terms interchangeably. If you work for the Government of Nova Scotia, the Province of Nova Scotia proper, it is the civil service.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Okay, so people such as our caucus staff and whatnot, they are government employees, but they are not part of the . . .

MS. LANGLEY: They're not part of the civil service. They would be public servants.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Okay, that's good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Chender.

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: Thank you for your presentation. I was particularly happy to see the piece around pride in the Public Service. I know that for us, as politicians, we get a bad rap, but I certainly am proud to be a public servant and I am immensely grateful for the other people who work in the Public Service, so I'm very happy to see that.

Notwithstanding the fact that retirement age doesn't necessarily correlate to people taking retirement, it still is a big chunk. Related to that, I guess, I have a couple of questions. The first one is, what are the processes around knowledge capture for these folks? As you say, the average length of service is 24 years, so we have people with a ton of institutional knowledge. Whether they go in a flash or in a trickle, we see that turnover coming with demographics.

I'm wondering if there are specific, department-wide procedures or government-wide procedures that you have to be sort of capturing the more tacit knowledge these folks have who have been around for a long time.

MS. LANGLEY: A couple of ways to answer that question, or a couple of important things to acknowledge with the question. Departments are tasked with actually inventorying or identifying the specific jobs that would be in danger, where we really need to capture knowledge. For example, critical incidents jobs where we would have to understand and know what they're doing, departments do that at the department level.

Now more broadly, what we have been introducing over the last couple of years are informal and formalized mentorship programs. That's a double-edged thing so it doesn't only help a young person along in terms of mentoring, but it helps to transfer that knowledge from the more seasoned and more experienced employee to the more junior person who is coming along. That's something that is newly introduced.

Your point is not lost on any of us, that sometimes when we lose somebody we think holy Hannah, what will we do now? We sometimes actually task the person who is leaving with helping us capture the institutional knowledge that will be leaving, but by department those positions are identified.

MS. CHENDER: Thank you. You've partly answered my follow-up, which is sort of around succession planning more specifically, which is covered somewhat by the mentorship. I think Newfoundland and Labrador have a sort of succession planning and management guideline particularly around developing employee knowledge, staffing needs, sort of identifying those key positions in advance, the critical ones that you mentioned, and thinking about how to fill them. Is there a guideline or a policy like that that's government-wide?

MS. LANGLEY: There's one that's quite out of date and that's what our associate deputy ministers are working on now, so that we can have a really good inventory corporately of where our danger zones are. We hope to have something by the beginning of the new fiscal year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Johns.

MR. BRAD JOHNS: I'm curious to know how this compares with other municipalities. I have a municipal background, so I know that when I was at council, we did similar internal reviews of staff to see how people were feeling and stuff like that, and I know other municipalities do. How does this compare with municipal reviews and reports that have come out, as well as other provinces, particularly in the Atlantic Region right now?

I guess I'd start that by saying, with a 57, if the pass is 60 and an overall engagement of 67, when I look at all this, if this was my kid's report card, we'd be having a big talk. I highlighted anything in red that didn't pass, and anything in yellow that was just in the areas for improvement stage. When you go through the report and you look at engagement, mission goals, professional growth, staffing, recognition, senior leadership, how many of those departments actually passed or failed or fell under areas needing improvements - when you look at them, the majority of it is needing improvement or are areas of concern.

MS. LANGLEY: I'm not sure what you're looking at. I can tell you that eight of our 23 departments surveyed fell below the engagement mark. The vast majority of our departments are engaged and some of them are highly engaged. The number of things corporately where we know we need improvement are pretty consistent, and they're consistent across jurisdictions. We don't really compare our scores to municipalities, but we do have an interjurisdictional committee of commissioners from across the provinces and territories, and we meet annually. Our surveys are aligned so that we can compare our data, and Nova Scotia is not unlike other jurisdictions in this struggle, and it's not unlike the scores we're seeing in the private sector.

Obviously, there are some anomalies where you'll see people that are highly engaged. Something that we're discovering is that it's really becoming more about the whole person. Because work life and home life are so very busy - and I think in my remarks I referenced the fact that you can't turn on your efforts to engagement when you walk into the workplace and when you leave it goes away. Because of the noise of daily life, we have

to be considerate around some of the things that will make the balance easier for people. FlexNS, for example, is an effort to do that.

Just to get back to your question, we don't compare unfavourably to other jurisdictions. Most of them struggle with the same things that we struggle with. The fact that we slipped below 60 per cent was really disappointing to us because we do have many departments that are highly engaged, but that's not to say that we haven't learned a lot from those departments that aren't and some of the things that they're concerned about. Largely, it's around recognition, work/life balance, and the opportunities to be innovative and the opportunities to have timely communications, so we think that we're addressing those things.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Johns, that piece of paper you have there, is that something that you've researched, or is that something that was in our . . .

MR. JOHNS: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm going to ask that you table that. If you're going to reference that, you have to table it.

MS. ALANA PAON: Do we have to table all of our questions, then, as well?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No.

MR. JOHNS: Can I table this with a . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just wait a second. Yes, you can. You're actually referencing something to the witness, which is completely different than the questions that you're asking, Ms. Paon. You're referencing an article or some facts here, and for committee rules and legislative rules, you have to table it. I ask that you table that document.

MR. JOHNS: Can I continue, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You can.

MR. JOHNS: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But if you're going to introduce . . .

MR. JOHNS: Yes, I understand, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let me finish, please. It has to be tabled.

MR. JOHNS: Great, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Continuing on, in the 2017 How's Work Going survey, the Department of Environment received the lowest remarks of all departments for senior leadership, with a 23. I am the Critic of the Department of Environment, so I picked up and kind of questioned that one.

What has been done to address results that were so low when 50 shows an improvement or above 60 is success?

MS. LANGLEY: Thank you for the question. What we asked deputy ministers to do at the end of each survey, and their senior teams, is to go through the data and make sure they understand specifically what is . . .

MR. JOHNS: I'm sorry, Ms. Langley - Mr. Chairman, if I could, I can't hear while you're talking. I'm sorry, I have one ear that's good and it is facing you, so thank you. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry, Ms. Langley, I don't hear very well out of this ear, I hear better from this one.

MS. LANGLEY: No problem. What happens after each survey is that departments' senior leadership must look at the results. They have to mine the data so that they understand what they might be able to do to effect change, or to address the concerns they've heard from employees. For example, at the Department of Environment they had just gone through a major restructuring and we typically expect that engagement scores will dip after a reorganization. That's something that is predictable.

Having said that, that doesn't give anybody a hall pass. What executive leadership has to do is look at the verbatim comments that come with the scores, try to understand and have employee meetings around how we can respond more effectively to what you're telling us, help us understand the areas we're missing so we can implement a plan.

Every department must have an engagement plan so they're working all the time on something related to their own specific survey results. I might work with the Public Service Commission on providing a corporate plan. Be the Change was a response to our corporate results and responding to things that we heard corporately. But then I would also have to have a plan for the Public Service Commission as the Public Service Commissioner, for example. Every deputy minister has to do that and work with their senior teams and their employees to see how they can affect those scores in a positive way.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: I'm more curious about the first time that a person gets involved with the civil service or through your program. How does that happen? Is it replying, reacting to a job that's performed or put out there to the public? Or does it go to the high schools or NSCC? How do you make first contact?

MS. LANGLEY: There are a number of ways that young people or anybody, for that matter, who is interested in working with the Public Service can engage. There are, particularly for young people, there's a younger workers' site where any new jobs that are entry-level jobs are posted. That's a separate site than the novascotiajobs.ca. I think that site includes everything. Then we have a separate site for entry-level jobs as well.

Now for internships or co-ops, for example, some co-ops we work directly with the universities. For example, Mount Saint Vincent has a Bachelor of Public Relations Program and they have co-op - I think their students have to have co-ops in order to complete their degrees, so we would work directly with Mount Saint Vincent and go and do interviews there and hire co-op students.

Similarly, with the Nova Scotia Community College, many of their programs require that their students have six-week work terms, so we would work directly with the community college to place young people where we can so that they get that six-week experience.

The majority of it is through the hiring process where we would have postings for summer jobs, postings for internships, and sometimes our co-ops are actually posted publicly as well. Sometimes we do work directly with educational institutions as well.

MR. HORNE: Just a quick follow-up, I guess. The high schools, do you contact any of the high schools, through the guidance counsellor or something like that? I'm sure the schools get involved.

MS. LANGLEY: Sometimes we go to career fairs in high schools but quite honestly, really, it's more university students we focus on. However, we do have a summer hiring program. The summer hiring program for university students, generally our postings go out in March or April. We always have a second tranche of postings in late May or June that is really intended so that some of the high school students can get a shot at having some experience in the Public Service as well.

[2:00 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Chender.

MS. CHENDER: I saw that you noted a number of areas where there needs to be improvement and so we talked a little bit about engagement recognition - all those things. Then there was a whole slew of activities sort of nested under the category of innovation. I'm not being cheeky, but I am really interested in what the definition of innovation is because it's such a buzzword. It's a word we're hearing used by government a lot right now. I know some of the folks involved in those innovation labs. It seems like it's great, but it also seems like it's sort of a catch-all, and so I'm curious if you could speak a little bit more to exactly what those innovation initiatives are pointed at and particularly that executive director of innovation. What is that person's job?

MS. LANGLEY: One of the first things we did was recognize that if we didn't define innovation, everybody would have a different definition. So, for the sake of our innovation activities, we actually define it as finding new and better ways to do valued things.

We are very specific about the fact that it doesn't have to be big, and it doesn't have to be life-shifting. Sometimes the smallest of ideas can mean a paradigm shift in how we initiate a program or how we approach something, so it can be big or small. That's the definition and that's how we're using it.

We are also interchanging the word "innovation" with just being smart. That's another word that can mean a whole lot of things. Really, it's about giving people a platform to bring their ideas forward. As I said, sometimes a small change - for example, we used to have a sign-off process for hiring that required eight or 10 signatures, when really it required three or four, and it cut down the time to get a hiring approval from probably three months to six or eight weeks. A small thing like that made a big difference.

Let me just talk about the executive director in charge of innovation. The job is not to bottleneck all of our innovation work through one person. Really the job is that she stands back and looks at all of the innovation that's going on across government. She connects the dots. We look to emulate good practices that are being developed in one area perhaps in another area, or we look to leverage good things that might be happening across departments so that we might better integrate systems or align our approaches in any different way.

By having this person in place who is looking at best practices - not only here but across the country and in other jurisdictions, and in particular the leading jurisdictions in this respect - she can help us to create environments where we can be better at allowing it to happen. We can perhaps be less risk averse if we look across other systems and see where things have happened more successfully. Her job is to do that, mine that, and work

with departments and people who are leaders in their departments on how to grow the innovation footprint.

MS. CHENDER: I'm still not totally clear, but I like your definition and I appreciate it. From where I sit, I guess I would just say that communication across departments, that's the biggest challenge I see somewhat from the outside is a lack of coordination, a lack of communication, a lack of all kinds of coming together in that way. I hope to understand and see the fruits of that innovation project as time goes forward.

MS. LANGLEY: I would say that your observation, because we're in early days, is not incorrect. We do have a challenge in making sure that people understand what we're talking about. Even some of our executive leadership is looking to get more involved so that they can have a bigger understanding.

We haven't rolled it out yet - we're doing it in January - we have developed an Intranet site for public sector employees with definitions and tools around how to even approach the conversation around innovative practice and public service. We have introduced the innovation in the public sector certificate program at the PSC, which will also help us build capacity.

Admittedly, because we don't have a lot of resources in that respect, we are taking baby steps to roll it out. We're learning from other provinces that actually have innovation units or secretariats established, but it's early days. I would offer to the committee to invite us back in a year or 18 months or so and see how well we're doing. By then, I hope that we will have more of an articulate vocabulary around what it is we mean and how we're actually seeing the fruits of our labour.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Paon.

MS. PAON: Thank you so much for joining us. I'm learning so much, actually, from the presentation and learning, as well, from just reading the report earlier this week. The paper that was provided earlier, which we tabled, does go through a listing - and this was an internal document done within our caucus - with regard to engagement; mission goals; professional growth; staffing, which really piqued my attention; recognition; and senior leadership. Again, my colleague Mr. Johns had referred to the passing grade, and if it was a report card, we would kind of be having words.

Can you explain a few things here to me? I'm looking specifically for staffing. You had mentioned that you had the younger worker initiative, which is wonderful to hear, and it's wonderful to hear that you have so many young people taking advantage of the programs available to come into the Public Service Commission. I would like to hear a breakdown; of that number of 800 young people, how many were term positions, intern positions, and how many have been retained as full-time positions or actually worked into

a full-time position? When I'm seeing staffing issues here, I'm assuming that some of those staffing issues are either retention or people retiring and positions being hard to fill. I'm just wondering how many of those internships and those term positions are actually moving into full-time.

MS. LANGLEY: I can answer your question. To date this year - I can't do the math to figure out the number, Rollie, maybe you're smarter than me - but to date this year, 30 per cent of those jobs are permanent full-time jobs. That takes into account - the term positions, the seasonal positions wouldn't be in that. The term positions wouldn't be in that. Our summer hirings wouldn't be part of that 30 per cent. It would be part of the 800 number. I'll say that since the program was introduced in 2015-16, from November to March 2015-16, 12 per cent were permanent full-time. In 2016-17, 21 per cent were permanent full-time. In 2017-18, 27 per cent were permanent full-time. It is going up, and that I think is a real effort by hiring managers to not only compete to attract these young people but hopefully we're giving them the platform so that when they try to compete for permanent positions, they have a better footing.

MS. PAON: Going through the statistics as well, it piqued my interest that many of the departments that seem to have - I beg your pardon for saying so - kind of a higher failing grade would be those essential services: Community Services, Environment, Internal Services, Justice, Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. Agriculture, which is my portfolio, is not too far behind. I would like to know, of that breakdown of those full-time positions, do you have a breakdown of where those younger employees are actually being placed on a full-time basis? Is it basically Community Services? Is it Agriculture? I guess I would like to know if there are different recruiting processes for the different departments that would make it more interesting, basically, for a young person to be more favourable towards one department or another. Are these grades actually influencing where some of those young people are landing?

MS. LANGLEY: I would say that I don't think that these scores would have any influence on where a young person would maybe go. I think the biggest thing that we are seeing is that as we make young people aware of that diversity of opportunities available to them, they get really excited about the possibilities. I don't think this would have an influence on them. I don't have a breakdown right here of where those young people are going, but I can report that back to the committee for you. We can get those numbers for you, for sure.

I would just say that all of the recruitment goes through the Public Service Commission and through our recruitment and selection group. No one department would have a leg up on another department in terms of their approach, but we really are trying to encourage job postings that actually describe the day in the life of a person in this job, rather than the bureaucratic, sterile, formalized job descriptions that often government would become known for, so that people can get just a little bit of a view into what they might be looking for or what they might be getting if they were actually successful in a

competition - so to be a little more innovative and a little more appealing to the younger applicant.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. RAFAH DICOSTANZO: My question is more about visible minorities in the government. I know that when I was looking for a job a long time ago, government was the place that really looked after or tried their best to hire a visible minority, and you tick it on the form. My riding has one of the highest visible minorities, and I've run into many newcomers in six or seven years and they're working for the civil service, which makes me very happy.

I also wanted to know, for me, because I'm an entrepreneur and I never give them information about working for the government, can you help me tell them what opportunities there are? I know 10 years ago, there was a shortage in IT. What areas do you have the most demand for right now that I can forward? I get a lot of calls and a lot of meetings with young people. I have a lot of young people, and lot of multiculturals are looking for jobs. Help me help you direct them to you. Do they get any assistance, because they don't know the system and how to apply? What can you offer me?

MS. LANGLEY: Thank you for the question. I appreciate it because one of the things that I am really passionate about is diversity and inclusion in the workforce, and in particular in the Public Service. We work really hard to provide education around cultural sensitivity and various other factors that would go into creating a welcoming work environment for people from all different backgrounds.

I have to say that there aren't really any areas where we are seeing a shortage or a difficulty in recruiting. Almost every job that we post, we literally have hundreds of job applicants, but I would say that IT is a burgeoning field, and as we move into an era of where we are anticipating a move to more digital applications in almost every line of business, that that is really a safe bet that we are looking for and wanting people that have those kinds of skills so that they can obviously move almost anywhere in the system, but they can bring their bright ideas with them.

Engineering is an area where I think we usually don't have difficulty recruiting, but it's always an area where we require help. If you look at the numbers of people who are eligible to retire, you'll see that there are a good number in Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, and also a good number in Community Services - so social work, caseworkers, child development workers. That's what I would do: look at the areas where we expect people will start to retire over the next while.

MS. DICOSTANZO: For those two areas, I'm sure I could help out. Does the government give an incentive for hiring? I know that in the private sector, we're giving incentive: 25 per cent if you hire a new graduate and 35 per cent if it's a visible minority or from the Black community. Do we have that for the government as well?

MS. LANGLEY: No, we don't provide incentives in that respect. However, we do have policies that are really intended for us to be sure that we're looking at equity candidates with an extra sharp lens. Most certainly around the hiring of equity candidates we must be sure that within certain percentages equity candidates are often given favour because we are really trying hard.

We also designate positions, so from time to time we're able to do that. We're actually working with the NSGEU, starting some conversations around how we can create spots for designated candidates within the union environment, so that's a little bit tougher, given the collective agreement. We all agree that the collective agreement is important, and we have to respect it. But Jason MacLean, the new president, seems to be very interested in diversity and inclusion as well, so we're really excited about what we might be able to do together.

[2:15 p.m.]

MS. CHENDER: You mentioned Community Services, and I can't help but notice this chart that my colleague handed around - that does seem to be sort of bottom of the barrel, which accords perfectly with what we've heard. My guess would also be that your attrition rate is considerably higher there. There are all kinds of things we could talk about with Community Services, and I respect that that's not your role to answer. However, we in the Opposition often say, "Community Services, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera," and then we hear "Transformation." Then we say, "But Community Services," and they say, "Transformation." We've been hearing that now for almost two years and before that, before I was here.

You can only do so much about this, in terms of hiring and the work that's in your purview, but does a result like this in this kind of survey have, for instance, budget implications or other implications back to that department that says, hey, something really needs to change here? It's not just about hiring. It's not just about mentorship. It might be about budget. It might be about who knows what.

To me, this would be kind of like a three-alarm fire, especially considering, as we've heard, this is one of our most essential services. I wonder if you could comment on that specifically.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before you answer, I just want to let everyone know this is probably going to be the last round of questioning. We'll leave you a few minutes for closing, Ms. Langley.

MS. LANGLEY: Thank you for the question. There are a couple of observations - one I was going to make when Mr. Johns asked a question a few minutes ago, and then it slipped my mind. I'll circle back around, but I'll start with what you're asking.

I would expect the deputy in that department to take a really good look at these scores and try to determine what is going on there. They have been going through a transformation - not just a workforce transformation but a transformation in how they deliver services to the most vulnerable of course, as I'm sure you're aware. We would expect for the deputy to make observations around whether anything has to change that requires additional budget measures, staff, or whatever would maybe make a change here. That would really be her responsibility.

Back to note some of the larger departments that were pointed out by Mr. Johns just a couple of questions ago, something that I would notice as commissioner and wonder about is that many of these departments are regional departments where staff are spread out across the province and where the staff complement of those departments is really quite large. We would look at what the unique challenges to change are when you have a really large department of employees who are spread across the province. What are the unique challenges to be able to understand more completely what those employees are trying to say to you around what is working for them and what isn't?

If you'll notice, some of the departments that have higher engagement scores are smaller departments. It might be easier to have relationships or a focus on engagement in some of those smaller departments. I'm speaking just from my own observations and my own study of what the drivers of engagement are.

When it's hard to get to what some of the unique challenges might be of regional offices, for example, it might be something that we could take a deeper dive into and look across the system at how we might improve those scores for some of those employees. I meant to include that in my response to Mr. Johns' earlier question about some of the departments.

In any case, in terms of budget and change, the deputy ministers would be responsible for taking a close look.

MS. CHENDER: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Johns.

MR. JOHNS: I'm curious, Ms. Langley. In addition to Public Service, you're also the Deputy Minister to the Premier and the executive director of the Public Service, right?

MS. LANGLEY: Yes, I am the Deputy Minister to the Premier and the head of the Public Service.

MR. JOHNS: I'm curious to know - and I guess I'm looking for an opinion here - is there ever a conflict between those two roles? Should those roles be separate? I don't really know what either of those roles do in depth, but I'm just curious. It would seem to me that the Deputy Minister to the Premier is probably a pretty hefty role, as well as the Public Service. Has there ever been a recommendation - or why is that not two positions?

MS. LANGLEY: It could be perceived that the role of Public Service Commissioner and the head of the Public Service reporting to the Premier - that there might be a conflict there. Shortly after I was appointed, within weeks of my appointment, I actually had a governance review done of those roles. What I did was establish a committee. It's an independent committee that would have oversight and scrutinize any hiring that I might be part of.

For example, if I was recruiting somebody to the Premier's Office or to the Executive Council Office - the Premier actually recruits his own staff - but to the Executive Council Office in terms of what their pay recommendation would be, the recommendation for hiring goes to this independent committee and they scrutinize the competitive process. I don't participate in any competitive process - I stand back - other than for deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers.

Because of the potential of the perceived conflict that you raise, this independent committee has oversight over the things that I might touch that could be perceived to have any kind of conflict involved.

MR. JOHNS: I'm new and I don't understand that process, so I wanted to ask that question. I appreciate that. That's okay for now. I think my colleague has a quick follow-up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Paon.

MS. PAON: It's good to hear that there is a second lens, basically, that you work with so that it keeps things a little bit at arm's length. I would like to know - because I don't know about this committee - you say that they're independent members on the committee. How are they chosen and who are the members on this committee?

MS. LANGLEY: They're chosen by position, and they don't report to me directly. The Associate Deputy Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is on the committee. The Executive Director of Legal Services is on the committee and the Associate Deputy Minister of Labour and Advanced Education - those three positions. They would scrutinize any hiring that would be done, so because those people don't report directly to me, there is a barrier between me and them. They report to other deputy ministers, so they review anything that goes forward.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: I'm good, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I was very interested in the senior leadership and their scoring. What have you learned from this - because leadership is at the top and it's really important we take our directions from the leadership. They set the mood and the tone for the departments. What have you learned about why that score was so low, and what is the action plan - what are you doing to rectify that?

MS. LANGLEY: From mining the data, two of the biggest complaints that employees have about senior leadership is their communication skills and the length of time it takes for decisions to be made. Staff get very concerned or really upset when it takes a long time for a decision to be made. Those are the two things that are the most commented on by staff around senior leadership. You can appreciate that in a bureaucracy often things have to go through numerous layers before decisions are made, or sometimes for various reasons things just can't move forward. What we've been really working hard to do is to be more transparent in our communication around those things - what holds them up, why we've got these issues.

We've appointed a Director of Internal Communication between the Public Service Commission and Communications Nova Scotia. That person has established a network of internal communication champions across government, and they are working with the senior leadership in their own departments around best practice in internal communication and trying to improve our record in that area.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Just one more - there was a question about people with knowledge retiring. What about the people with knowledge who transfer into another department? There's a lot of interchange within departments. Someone may be in a senior role in a department and then move on to another department. What are you doing to replace the knowledge in those cases?

MS. LANGLEY: In those cases, we're a little bit luckier because we still have the body in the Public Service. Sometimes we lean on them quite heavily to have a long transition period where we can have a good knowledge transfer and we can set the new person up for success. That's a little bit easier because we are really trying, I think harder than ever, to be more horizontal in how we manage in any respect because we know that in order to put the citizen at the centre of the conversation in terms of policy development and program design, that it's more important than ever that we work horizontally. That one is a bit easier, where we at least still have the person and don't feel bad about giving them

a call or convening a meeting to make sure that we have the information that we might need.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have a few more minutes left, so I'll let the Conservatives have one last crack at it, one round of questioning. Ms. Paon.

MS. PAON: If I may correct you just for a moment, it's Progressive Conservative not just Conservative, thanks. It's important - it's important to me.

I just wanted to go back to staffing and resource planning. Again, just looking at these numbers, because my new portfolio is youth based, it's important to do due diligence, obviously in any hiring practices. It's astounding to me the amount of time it takes to hire just a plow driver. I'm going to use that as an example because I'm in rural Nova Scotia, and I get a lot of calls regarding roads. In speaking with local people who have been basically in these positions for sometimes 10 or 20 years, what they need to go through every single year to get rehired for these positions is astounding, and that really causes a backlog, which causes - to be very frank - safety issues sometimes as well because we literally don't have people on the ground doing these essential services, and we have snow falling.

Is the hiring practice for a civil servant, a public servant, an employee, the same across the board for every single department? Or are there some departments that have to go through a different process? I'm not clear on that and why there's such a backlog, why, for example, you have a middle management position sometimes not filled for months and months and months, which obviously causes delays within a department as well in moving forward.

MS. LANGLEY: Thank you for the question. I'm a little bit surprised to hear that. I know it's just an example, but people who have been working in winter snow removal for many, many years should simply be recalled every year, and so the process shouldn't be that complicated or difficult. In fact, even with some of our summer students, if you have gone through the competitive process and been a summer student at Laurie Park this year, next year you should just get a call back. It's part of the union collective agreement as well. For those positions, it should be fairly simple.

Having said that, we, too, are trying to refine and improve our hiring process so that it is more expeditious. We have, believe it or not, gone from many months to just a few months, which for us is a lap around the gym. But it's still not satisfying in terms of the length of time it takes to get us the new person in the chair.

I would say that there is a pretty regimented process, and it really comes down to our accountability around the hiring process. We are going through a Lean Six Sigma look at our recruitment and selection in our hiring processes to see if there aren't some ways that we can expedite the screening process, make sure that the interviews are held in a more timely way, conduct reference checks quicker, for example. In some competitions, we can

even provide questions to applicants in advance, because nobody is trying to trick anybody. We want people to come in and present their best self because that's how we get the very best hires - so there are ways that we can implement a more expeditious hiring process.

[2:30 p.m.]

Like you, we share the concern and we understand the frustration. It's inside government as much as it is outside government, because we all want to get our people hired and working.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Johns.

MR. JOHNS: I have two very quick questions. Are all the deputy ministers ultimately answerable to you or to the Premier? I'm confused.

MS. LANGLEY: Deputy ministers formally report to the Premier. The Deputy Minister to the Premier is really - they report to me on a daily basis, so I'm the person that they would report to on things like vacation and overtime - well, not overtime, but vacation and whatnot. But technically, we all report to the Premier.

MR. JOHNS: I'm familiar with other structures, not here. I'm just learning this a little bit.

My second question: Is there an issue in the province with employees leaving provincial government to go to the private sector? Are we seeing that at all or is it mostly because of retirements?

MS. LANGLEY: Our attrition rate is pretty low, and it hasn't changed in a very long time. Sometimes people leave to go to other positions, but most of the time, we're seeing retirements. Our turnover rate is very average.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would like to thank the Reform - I mean, the Progressive Conservative Party for closing it out. We'll give Ms. Langley a few minutes to close it out today.

MS. LANGLEY: Thank you so much to the members of the committee. I don't have formal remarks to close out, but I would love to take the opportunity to just say that for me it's a privilege and an honour to have the position of head of the Public Service. I'm so very proud of our public servants and the work that they do every day. I hope that people realize just how hard they work. I know that there is sometimes a stigma around public servants, and I think you all have seen in your time as members just how hard civil servants and public servants work. They are really incredible, incredible people. I do have the privilege of seeing their work first-hand and up close.

I do want to say that engaging them and making sure that they have the best possible employment experience, for me, is a passion. Let's just say that as we move into another year where we'll be doing another engagement survey, I will be working really hard to make sure that some of the things that we have all seen here are mitigated so that the experience that our employees are having as they show up every day is one that they can be proud of and one that allows them to bring their whole selves into the workplace where they can be the best that they can possibly be on behalf of all Nova Scotians.

On that note, I'd like to say that it's a privilege to answer your questions. I think it makes us better when you make us take a really good look at what we're doing. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your time. Mr. King, do you have anything?

MR. ROLLIE KING: No, nothing, Mr. Chairman. If I don't have to say anything, that's usually a success. (Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's how we like it. Thank you for all you do.

We'll go on to other committee business. We'll recess for two minutes.

[2:34 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:36 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're on to committee business. This will be agency, board and commission appointments. Do we want to do the appointment first and then we'll do the Q & A after? There's just the one. Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Mr. Chairman, under the Department of Justice, I move that the appointment of David Saxton as a member of the Police (RCMP) Advisory Board for the Town of Yarmouth be approved.

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

Mr. Johns.

MR. JOHNS: Now that we've voted on that, it's a question on that board.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The motion is carried. Mr. Johns.

MR. JOHNS: I missed my list here, but when I was going through, there are an awful lot of municipalities that haven't brought forward representatives or appointments to this board. Is there a reason why there are so many vacancies? Do we know?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would say that may be a question for Ms. Janice Brown, Executive Council Office.

MS. JANICE BROWN: The appointments are actually the responsibility of the Minister of Justice. I know they are working diligently to get all those positions filled as quickly as possible. I honestly can't tell you why they remained unfilled for a period of time, but I can certainly speak with the department and get you more information on that.

MR. JOHNS: Thank you, Ms. Brown. In my term on council, I was Chair of the Halifax Regional Board of Police Commissioners. People were falling over themselves, both council as well as the public, to get on that particular board. I would think it would be similar with this one.

To go through and see so many vacancies, I know as a member of the Halifax Regional Council, almost everybody wanted to be on it. Every elected official wanted to be on the Board of Police Commissioners. I'm just really confused as to why there are so many vacancies with municipalities.

MS. BROWN: It's different from municipality to municipality with these boards because there's a legislative framework for them, they all have to have certain numbers of members that are appointed by the municipality and then by the provincial government. I believe that the remuneration varies from one to the next.

I'd really have to go into it a bit deeper but I don't think it's the case in every municipality, unfortunately, that they have people falling all over themselves to take these positions. I know, in fact, that typically when we've advertised those positions that all the applications come to our office and we only ever receive a handful of applications for them.

I think part of it may be that people aren't necessarily aware that the provincial government is making appointments to those positions, so we're trying to do a better job of reaching out and advertising in all those communities to get enough applications to fill all those positions in a timely way.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Chender.

MS. CHENDER: Ms. Brown, thank you for coming. I have a related question, but more generally, we all saw the Auditor General's Report this morning about the IWK, and I'm sure we'll speak more about that in other committees and other fora.

One of the issues that in fact one of my Progressive Conservative colleagues raised months ago was the delay in filling the full complement of that board. As members of this committee, I'm well aware that all those appointments go through the Executive Council Office and need to be vetted there. I wonder whether there are guidelines or time periods for filling those kinds of key appointments because we now know that's one of many issues that the board had, but certainly it's an important one. As we sit here and try to contribute to the process, I'd love a better understanding of why - I understand that sometimes there aren't applicants, but in general why those appointments can take such a long time.

MS. BROWN: I wonder if we might - I was asked to give a very brief overview of the process to start with and then probably I can address some of those concerns in the course of that discussion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sorry, we jumped the gun. Ms. Brown, if you want to give your presentation now, that would be great.

MS. BROWN: It's going to be very brief. I guess I'm curious, how many of you saw my presentation the first time around? Were some of you around the table here in 2017? I'm only going to give a much more truncated version of that today because I know we want to get to the Q & A portion of this, but I would encourage you to ask Judy. I'm sure she would be happy to provide you with a copy of the older presentation as well, which has a little more detail in it.

This presentation has only two slides - gotta love that, right? If we could move to the first slide, at the present time we have 153 agencies, boards and commissions to which government makes appointments. About 130 of those are non-adjudicative ABCs and the others are adjudicative ABCs. You don't typically see the adjudicative ABCs. The appointees for those boards are selected by a competitive process so it falls into one of those exceptions in Rule 60. But in 123 ABCs, you do see the vast majority of appointments. The only ones you wouldn't see are the ones that fall into one of those limited exceptions in Rule 60.

We've actually just instituted in the last couple of years - we've created a web portal that allows our vacancy list to be a live list. It changes every day as appointments are made. As new vacancies arise, those new vacancies will appear on our website. Our current opportunities are posted. They're posted year-round and we accept applications year-round as well.

Having said that, we do have two recruitment campaigns where we're actually hard at doing advertising, and we do that in the Spring and Fall. We're looking now at extending the period of time in which we're doing advertising, particularly using social media and whatnot to try to encourage more applications throughout the year. But we're already finding that having the constant online presence and the refreshing of those lists is generating more applications throughout the year.

ECO - the office that I work in - is tiny. It's me and one other person. I have other duties and she has other duties. We don't manage the whole appointments process; we manage the corporate piece of it. There are actually about 25 people in departments who are doing the work that needs to be done at the departmental level. I'll show you a slide in a minute that will show you the process and tell you where we touch on it.

What we're really there for is to manage that online application system. We manage the database, we manage the media campaign and the recruitment campaign, and we provide best practices and support to our departmental colleagues. That's at the front end. Once the ministers make their choices and the documentation is prepared and it comes into ECO, I then review it to make sure that everything has been done in the proper way - they follow the process, the documentation all looks good - and then it goes to Cabinet before it comes to you. Of course, we manage all of that process too.

I've already mentioned the online ABC application system. We just launched that in September 2017. We have had an awful lot of positive response. We've so far received more than 1,600 applications via that portal. We've had a few complaints, of course, but really very few. We've been really pleased. We've had many more positive comments with people saying how easy it is to use, once they figured out how to get into it the first time, which has been really great. It has generated a lot more applications.

It has also given us an opportunity to provide a portal where applicants can track the status of their application so they can see if they've been screened - and if they've been screened as qualified or not qualified. Then they can also go in to check the date. If they're appointed ultimately, they can go in to see when their appointment expires and the terms of their appointment, et cetera.

We haven't quite built this yet, but it's going to give us the opportunity to delve into what we refer to as our applicant pool. I should know this off the top of my head, we probably have a couple thousand people who have personal profiles now in the system. They haven't applied yet, but they've kind of set themselves up so they can apply.

[2:45 p.m.]

We've asked them to indicate if they have particular skills that we know we're often looking for, and we've asked them to complete diversity statements. What we're going to be able to do is, if we have an opportunity and we're having a difficult time attracting applications, we can go into that pool and do a search and email people who maybe fit a particular profile and invite them to consider applying.

In fact, in trying to fill some positions recently, we actually piloted that, and it was very successful. We reached out to a couple hundred applicants and said, you have skills we're looking for for these positions, would you consider applying? A lot of people said yes. It turned out that all you had to do was ask them, which was great.

At the moment, the front end of the application system is done. We're still working on the back end. We hope to have that done - well, we will have that done because the developer who is doing it has to have it finished by the end of the year and we're planning to roll it out to our departmental colleagues in January.

Currently, it typically takes three to four months to process an application from beginning to end, but we are working very hard on shortening that time. I'll just go to the next slide, which I think will help explain why it takes as long as it does.

The vacancies get posted - and this is just the process kind of from front to back. The positions get posted, and we do our annual advertising campaign. Typically, applications get screened twice a year as well. We try to bundle them because the screening is done by panels of volunteers. We don't want to be pulling them in every two weeks to screen applications, so we do tend to bundle applications.

Where we have boards that get a lot of applications throughout the year, departments can and do have screening panel meetings more frequently to deal with applications, but there is a bit of a delay. We gather all the applications that are then screened. The applications come in via our system, they're very quickly reviewed by my colleague, Mora, who within 24 hours turns them around and sends them out to the departments. Then the departments have them in their inbox.

We've already cut out a couple of weeks there. We used to send things through internal mail, and now we just hit a button and they get it electronically. They can go in and access it through the system, which is great.

The applications then are screened by the screening panel, and ministers are provided with decision packages made up of all the names of the qualified applicants. The ministers make their selections. The departmental staff prepare the paperwork. It goes back to the minister for signature, it goes to Executive Council. Of course, it takes a week and we've actually shortened that - it used to take three weeks to get it on the agenda. We're now getting it on the agenda in a week or 10 days, typically. Then as soon as the decision is made the documentation is sent over here. Of course, then it must wait for your process.

Depending on when it comes over here, it might be waiting three weeks, it might be waiting - well, I guess 10 days is the minimum because we have to have things here 10 days beforehand. Of course, once you approve it - usually the following day the ministerial appointments are issued, or sometimes it's the following week for OICs, it just depends on when we have signings with the LG. That's the process.

In terms of a particular opportunity and why it has remained vacant for a while - the one at the IWK was interesting. I think that probably no one - and I am sort of speaking as a matter of what I think happened as opposed to knowing because I wasn't involved. Notwithstanding the report today, that is a board that's made up of very skilled and knowledgeable people and they may have just not felt that having a government appointee on that board - because I think there's only one or two on that board, I'd have to go back and look at the details. The vast majority of the board is actually selected in a different way, so maybe that is why it was left.

I can tell you that the present Minister of Health and Wellness, because we're working very closely with him, has his eye on filling every single vacancy. There have been a number of vacancies in some of the professional regulator boards and other health boards. We expect to have most of those, if not all of them, filled by February, so we're making really good progress.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Chender.

MS. CHENDER: That's helpful, thank you. As I look at that flow chart, it seems like the review by the screening panels is the one where things sort of collect at that point and then they move through.

MS. BROWN: Yes.

MS. CHENDER: If that's the case, I think you mentioned that a couple of times a year you have review.

MS. BROWN: It really depends on how many applications have been received. What I can tell you we did this time around - and again, this was our effort at ECO to provide best practice to our departmental colleagues - as we were closing out the campaign, I sent an email to everybody and said, have you scheduled your screening panels yet and if you haven't, please do so right away and, by the way, report back to us.

I can tell you that all the departments have now scheduled their screening panels. Of course, it depends on people's availability. We're heading into Christmas, but I think the vast majority of them are happening either in the early part of December or early January. We're making sure that people aren't kind of putting applications aside and sitting on them for six months. We're saying no, no, the applications are here, get them screened so that as soon as there's a vacancy, the minister is ready to make an appointment.

MS. CHENDER: Great. Just to clarify, when there's a specific vacancy or a pile of applications, there is the opportunity to strike one of those screening panels.

MS. BROWN: Absolutely.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. JESSOME: I have just two quick questions. First, Ms. Brown, would you be able to describe - I guess if and/or what - the difference would be between an agency, a board, and a commission? Is there a difference?

MS. BROWN: That's a very good question and the short answer is, not really because it doesn't depend on the name. Agency, board, or commission is really a catch-all expression that captures any entity that is created by government to fulfill a public purpose. Some of them are called councils, some of them are called committees. Some of them are called boards, typically with your board-governed Crown corporations and agencies.

Interestingly, there aren't a lot of things that are actually called agency in the provincial context but there is a definition of what an agency is, for purposes of particular legislation. Anyway, I'm going on a bit. It's a fascinating subject and I would love to have a very specific definition, but the truth is that that's a catch-all expression.

MR. JESSOME: So you're saying it gives you more flexibility to create a more memorable acronym, right?

MS. BROWN: Exactly.

MR. JESSOME: A follow-up to that, what's the process for initiating or what constitutes the creation of a new ABC?

MS. BROWN: Typically, government will do that when they have a particular need. Actually, one of the hats I wear is the governance adviser for government, so I will sometimes get a call from a department that will say we need an advisory board or we need a new entity to do X or Y, or we have a profession that has come forward and they want to be self-regulating.

The first question is always, what do you need the agency to do? Then we'll talk about how it should be structured. There are some best practices around what that looks like and we've tried to be a little more rigorous in our analysis of those sorts of requests over time.

MR. JESSOME: Okay, thank you so much. Just to note, thank you for making your presentation to the board of Students Nova Scotia.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Paon.

MS. PAON: Ms. Brown, I'm just noting on your overhead, it says, "Applications reviewed by screening panels," which is kind of the fourth piece in the process. I'd really like to know more about how, in fact, these applicants are screened. Sometimes when they come to us, we see the amount of male/female breakdown, we sometimes see how many overall applicants there were overall, and sometimes we don't. It would be nice to see a more standardized approach to when they come to us in that way. I'm always interested in those kind of statistics.

Also, I would really like to know at the end of the day - when the applicants are screened, they go through the process, they're presented to the minister - who is it who does the screening? Is it a panel of people? Is it literally a matrix system that gives like a score card to the applicants going through?

Where I'm trying to go with this is, how objective/subjective is the process in basically choosing who gets on these ABCs and who does not? So many times, we see that there seem to be several qualified candidates who have come forward and there are many positions that are open but then there's only one position that has been filled or chosen to be filled. What happens to all these other qualified candidates and why didn't they make it?

MS. BROWN: It's actually a pretty rigorous process and becoming more so. Step one is setting appropriate qualifications, and that's an area where we've been working with departments and the ministers on that - to do two things. In some cases, we actually needed to make the screening criteria more robust because there weren't enough screening criteria. In other cases, the screening criteria had kind of built up over time to the point that there were only about four people in the province who could actually apply, which seemed a little silly. In some cases, we've tried to work at stripping out some of those screening criteria to make the opportunity of more broad interest.

Once that actually happens at the front end, the minister must approve those. Those are the screening criteria that are used when the screening panels meet and go through the applications. The screening panels are made up of volunteers who are selected and appointed by the minister. There is some guidance. There is a document called the *Non-Adjudicative Agencies, Boards and Commissions Appointments Procedure Manual*. It talks about how those screening panels are to be selected. The guidance is pretty broad. The minister has a pretty broad discretion. They must be volunteers - that means not public servants. They're meant to be people who have got a knowledge of the workings of the department and the particular ABCs, preferably. Many times the minister will choose folks who have an HR background because they've got some skills at reviewing applications and that sort of thing.

The screening panels do differ from department to department because different ministers have a different take on how they should be constituted. I can tell you that it's not political staff doing the screening and it's not civil servants. It's members of the community, and their role is really to assist the member to make sure that there is an objective lens: do the people in this package meet the screening criteria?

In terms of the screening grids that they use, again, there's some variety from department to department. At a minimum, they would use a screening grid that basically indicated which of the screening qualifications the individual met and typically there's also a column for them to comment on particular skills that the individuals could bring to the board or to the ABC to which they're applying.

I should have backed up and said that part of our new online system is enabling applicants to self-identify and fill out what we call an employment equity and diversity statement. That is actually giving us much better information about the diversity of our candidates, where people self-identify and where they choose to have that information included in their application, because it's a voluntary thing always. That can also be taken into account, so a note would be made that: this group of people were qualified, these four people self-identified as belonging to one of the targeted groups, and then if they've got any special skills.

The other thing the ministers are often interested in is regional representation. Sometimes when you see there are four applicants and there are three positions and they've only selected one, it may be because all the applicants are from Halifax and they actually want to get more applicants from outside Halifax. So the regional thing can be one of the deciding factors.

All of which to say, the ministers ultimately have discretion, and it isn't the case that they must fill every vacancy. Some vacancies are required to be filled because the board can't function unless the vacancies are filled. But very often, if you look at legislation, it will say the minister may appoint up to 13 members or sometimes it doesn't have any number. It just says the minister shall appoint a board, so it really is the discretion and the good judgment of the minister to decide how big that board should be. Sometimes they just choose not to appoint the full number that had been appointed in the past.

On the question of vacancies, I think one of the things we're also doing now in developing the back end is to try to distinguish between what I refer to as a true vacancy - that is a vacancy that must be filled in order for the board to meet its legal quorum - and vacancies that exist in our database, because in the past there have been people in those positions, but they don't have to be filled necessarily. I think that's a fairer way to kind of gauge whether government is fulfilling its obligations.

MS. PAON: Thank you for that explanation, it has actually clarified quite a few things for me. With regard to department to department, there seems to be no standardized system in place with regard to how the appointments are made by the minister to the

screening panel that ultimately goes through the list of applicants that have gone through the process with Executive Council and then goes to the screening panel and then the appointments are, in fact, made by the minister - so those two levels of appointments that the minister has quite a bit of influence on.

[3:00 p.m.]

I would like to know, if I may ask this question, do you see value in having a more standardized - and I'd now call it, for lack of a different way to describe it - a standardized matrix system to make the process of getting the best qualified candidates into these positions for ABCs and obviously to get most of these positions filled as well, so that we have the best person in the best place, making great choices for Nova Scotia and making it a little bit more objective than subjective?

MS. BROWN: I'm not sure I entirely agree that there isn't some consistency across departments. Granted, there are differences but the basic approach is actually pretty similar.

There has been discussion of centralizing some of the screening and whatnot, and certainly that may be considered in the future. I can tell you that ECO has recently assumed responsibility for supporting the appointments for the Department of Health and Wellness because there were some holes there, so we're kind of piloting this as having the ECO kind of manage the process from start to finish. So far it's going very well, but whether we would want to do that across government I think is a decision that has yet to be made.

I do see a lot of value in sharing best practices and making sure that the screening criteria are more or less consistent. We get a lot of support from our PSC colleagues in that as well. Again, there are differences but there are a lot of similarities. The similarities even come from the fact that the ABC coordinators in the departments - we call them ABC coordinators - all talk to each other and help each other. We have a gentleman who works at LAE who has become a bit of a go-to guy for all questions related to how to structure your screening panel and operate it, screening grids and that sort of thing. He has been doing it for 17 or 18 years and he's probably the most knowledgeable guy we've got.

The process certainly leaves room for quite a lot of variation, but the reality is they all tend to kind of be quite similar because they're learning from each other.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. HORNE: Thank you for being here today. I commend you for wanting to come before the committee and talk to us. I just want to make a point in saying that I'm pleased you're here. I know I've been on this for five years or thereabouts and we're always having difficulty in understanding how they actually operate. Now I see there seems to be a light to try to review and revise the program and gives everyone here today the same

information. I think it's good and I guess my comment would be that it's going to improve our committee's comments.

MS. BROWN: May I respond? I want to say that since I'm here and there's an opportunity, as part of rebuilding our new web application, we're also rebuilding our reporting functions. We would love an opportunity at some point to engage with the committee on the forms that we complete for you because we think we could provide you the same information but in a slightly different format that would be much more easily produced by our ABC coordinators and hopefully easier for you to read because everything would look a little more consistent from department to department. It would all be coming out of our system in the same form. We could have a discussion down the road, but if you're open to that, I'll certainly raise it with Judy.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This will be the last round. Ms. Paon.

MS. PAON: I have a specific question about when you go online under the ABC memberships. Under Executive Council Office, there is a Youth Advisory Council that is still listed, for which no one seems to have much information as to whether it is still in existence. There seems to be some confusion about the Youth Advisory Council. When you go online, it actually shows that every single seat is vacant. There are no members on this Youth Advisory Council. Can you shed some light on whether this council actually still exists and if it still reports to the Premier under the auspices of the Executive Council Office? If so, why are all the seats vacant?

MS. BROWN: I believe - and I confess I would have to go back to double-check. I know there was a youth advisory council that was created by legislation that was subsequently replaced by a different sort of youth advisory council that was created by way of Order in Council. I'm not sure that even that youth council is still operating at the moment. It may be that it's under review, but honestly, I would need to go away and look into that for you.

What's on our database is really reflective of what is legally on the books. We do have a few boards, and we're diligently working to kind of deal with these because we don't want people to be misled. At the same time, we don't want it to just kind of disappear. If it's in legislation then there should be some record of it somewhere.

If the positions are showing as all vacant, then I would assume that means that council isn't operating at this time. The reasons for that, I can't explain.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Johns.

MS. PAON: Do I not have a supplementary on that one? (Interruption)

MR. JOHNS: My colleague may continue.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Paon.

MS. PAON: Thank you. Again, with regard to - going back to youth. It's a new portfolio that I've just been handed. It's very exciting. I would like to know, of all the ABCs - and it may not be a number that you have at the top of your head - how many do you know that do, in fact, have youth involvement or a youth seat on it? We often talk about the importance of youth engagement and retention of youth in this province, and they are our future, as we always like to acknowledge. It's important to have their voice around the table.

When I see that there's a vacancy - if this is still legally on the books as far as the Youth Advisory Council - I'd like to know, is there youth engagement and placement in other ABCs?

MS. BROWN: Indeed, there is. I can also tell you that there's a real emphasis in attracting more youth candidates - by that we mean under 35. I don't know if that's really youth, but when we are talking about populating our ABCs, we're asking people to let us know if they're under 35. I'm very excited because in the last year and a half, we've received 150 applications from young people. Ministers are giving serious consideration to those candidates.

I already mentioned that we're looking at our screening criteria, and part of that was about not having unnecessary barriers. Recognizing that people bring - they may not have experience, but they may have skills. Experience and knowledge can be gotten. If you've got basic skills, people can be trained. There is a real focus on youth and certainly in our outreach, in our recruitment, we've really been focusing - every campaign for the last four or five years, at least, has had young people featured in the ad. We've been doing videos which go online, and we had a couple of really wonderful videos from current members under 35 who were extolling the opportunities that were available and encouraging other youth to apply. So that's certainly a focus.

I know some boards have talked about having positions that are specifically for younger members, and there's some discussion about whether that's really the best way to do it. There has also been discussion about the possibility of observers - bringing people in and giving them an opportunity to observe different boards so they kind of figure out where they might want to plug in. Certainly, it's a topic that's very much under discussion and we're taking real steps on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Lastly, Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. DICOSTANZO: I don't know if it's a personal question or if I was going to talk to you after, but you mentioned that for new boards that are trying to form - I'm trying to help the interpreter coalition. We called ourselves "coalition," because I don't even know

if that comes under agency, board or commission, but it's a group of actual government department members, as well as interpreters and senior interpreters. We're trying to find a way of self-governance as well as offering a service that's standard for six departments. We have Health and Wellness, Justice, Community Services, Education and Early Childhood Development, police, and Immigration that are the most used - they require the service.

I'm trying to help them because you can imagine the interpreters are from different cultures and different countries. It's a wonderful thing to teach them the standard of this. Will you be able to help us with something like this? Should we have you in the meeting when they're trying to decide what to do? Is that something . . .

MS. BROWN: You know it's funny - again, it's sort of a different part of my work. I'm involved in a group in government called the Advisory Committee on Self-Regulation. About a year and a half or two years ago, government adopted a new policy on self-regulated professions. The idea was to establish a process by which requests could be considered and a test for determining when it would be appropriate to establish a self-regulated profession and give them those self-regulation powers by legislation.

I know of the interpreters because I've heard of this request kind of out there, and I know that approaches have been made to some of my departmental colleagues. Typically, those requests are taken up by a department that becomes kind of a champion for it, if the department working with the profession determines that it would be in the best interest of the public for that group to be self-regulating.

It's kind of a lengthy process of analysis and information-gathering that has to happen, because when a self-regulated profession is created, it's given the powers of government to really affect the livelihoods and well-being of its members, obviously as well as to protect the public.

I'd be happy to chat with you some more after the meeting just to give you a bit more information but there is a process in place. I seem to be answering every question in a long way, I apologize.

MS. DICOSTANZO: Thank you, I will speak to you after. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, Ms. Brown, we can give you - oh, Mr. Johns, quickly.

MR. JOHNS: Do we still have opportunities to ask questions?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Quickly, please.

MS. PAON: Did we not have until 3:30 p.m.? (Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Johns, could you ask your question, please.

MR. JOHNS: You mentioned something around Rule 60 in that - can you elaborate a little bit on that? Thank you for coming, I find this very educational for me, I'm learning a lot. I'm curious which ones are exempt because of Rule 60 - or which ones fall under that and what exactly that is.

MS. BROWN: Mr. Hebb might want to answer this question. Rule 60 is the House Rule and it's the rule that actually creates the committee and establishes your terms of reference, so certainly one that you might want to become more familiar with over time. It basically says that all the appointments made by government need to come to this committee for review and approval before they're finalized, but there are some exceptions. Some of those exceptions are, and I don't have the rule in front of me so forgive me if I don't get them all, but one of them is if the selection is being made pursuant to a competitive process - so sometimes it's actually full-time, more like a job because we're actually advertising a specific position.

Our office doesn't do this, the department does it. I'm thinking here of things like the Chair of the Labour Board, which is a full-time job. There's a competitive process - they set up a selection panel and go through that whole job process. That would fall into one of those exceptions.

There are also other exceptions, I believe, where for example universities actually select the people who are going to be appointed, so government is not really making that choice, the university is. We're just making the appointment so there really isn't any purpose for it to come here because the decision is really made somewhere else, so certainly worth having a look at the rules.

The adjudicative boards, of which there are 30 - now, an adjudicative board is a board that makes decisions about the legal rights of individuals. Think of things like the Assistance Appeal Board or the Motor Vehicle Appeal Board or the Labour Board, they kind of act like courts.

The government adopted - I believe it was in 2002, it could have been 2008 - quite a robust process for screening and selection of those people. That is very much like a competitive process. At some point in history - and I wasn't here when it happened, but this committee okayed those particular appointments not coming here because they are handled in a different way, with a more robust, competitive process.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Quickly, one last question.

MR. JOHNS: Does the URB fall in that category then?

MS. BROWN: The URB, those are full-time positions as well. They don't come through our process.

[3:15 p.m.]

MR. JOHNS: They would fall under Rule 60?

MS. BROWN: They fall under Rule 60, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: With that, we'll give you a few minutes for closing statements.

MS. BROWN: I appreciate that. I really don't have much to say except thank you for having me. I appreciate this opportunity and I very much hope that the committee will continue to work with our office to continue streamlining the process and making it work better. We're all very excited about the changes we've made the last couple of years. We've been getting a lot of positive impact. We're starting to see the shifts in numbers in terms of diversity and inclusion. We want to continue that work with you.

I particularly appreciate if we finish off a little early because I have to get to Bridgewater for my niece's Christmas concert tonight. I was looking at the clock thinking, can I get there?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. It was great to see you today. Drive safe.

MS. BROWN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The next meeting will be Tuesday, January 29th at 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon. It'll be Ms. Tracey Taweel, CEO of Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, with regard to the Atlantic Immigration Pilot.

With that, Happy Holidays, and we'll see you on January 29th.

[The committee adjourned at 3:16 p.m.]