

HANSARD

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COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, September 24, 2019

Committee Room

The Connector Program

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HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Brendan Maguire, Chair
Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, Vice-Chair
Bill Horne
Hugh MacKay
Rafah CiCostanzo
Brad Johns
Larry Harrison
Tammy Martin
Claudia Chender

[Hon. Lena Metlege Diab replaced Brendan Maguire for a portion of the meeting]

In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Halifax Partnership

Wendy Luther, President & CEO
Robyn Webb, Director, Labour Market Development
Nathan Laird, Program Manager, Connector Program

Department of Labour and Advanced Education

Ava Czapalay, Associate Deputy Minister
Nancy Hoddinott, Senior Executive Director, Skills and Learning



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2019

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Brendan Maguire

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT (The Chair): I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Human Resources to order. My name is Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, the MLA for Lunenburg, and I'm chairing this meeting today.

Today, in addition to reviewing appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions, we will hear from the Halifax Partnership and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education regarding the Connector Program.

I'd like to remind everyone in the room to turn your phones either off or on vibrate. Coffee and washrooms are in the anteroom to my left. In case of emergency, we will exit through the Granville Street exit and meet up at the Grand Parade next to St. Paul's Church.

I would like to start with introductions, starting with Ms. DiCostanzo, and we will go around and we will have the clerk and Legislative Counsel introduce themselves, as well.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We have a little bit of committee business. First, we're going to do the agency, board, and commission appointments. You have a list from the clerk in front of you.

Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: For the Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage, I nominate Nathan Little as a member to the Colchester/East Hants Regional Library Board.

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

The motion is carried.

Next, Mr. MacKay.

HUGH MACKAY: For the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, I move that Ashley Gallant, Nastasya Kennedy, Shamus MacDonald, Margaret "Joan" MacDonnell, Stephen Parsons, and Maura Ryan be appointed as members to the Provincial Advisory Council on Education.

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

The motion is carried.

Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move that Edward MacDonald, Sheila Sears, Janice Stairs, and Gerald Weseen be appointed as directors to the Board of the Nova Scotia Health Authority.

THE CHAIR: Are there any comments, remarks? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: For the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, I nominate Jamie Loughery as member to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Board of Governors.

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

The motion is carried.

Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: For Research Nova Scotia, I nominate Dr. Thomas Marrie as director.

THE CHAIR: I was just getting clarification from the clerk. We're replacing the former Deputy Minister with Dr. Marrie, so I just wanted to be sure that we're doing it the proper way.

So yes, there is the motion on the floor by Mr. Horne. Are there any questions or remarks? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ms. Martin.

TAMMY MARTIN: I have a question regarding committee business about WCB appointments.

THE CHAIR: Is it on the agenda?

TAMMY MARTIN: No.

THE CHAIR: Go ahead.

TAMMY MARTIN: Regarding the appointments to the WCB, it is a long-standing practice outlined in Section 3.2 of the corporate governance manual that the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour has a role in nominating employee representatives to the WCB. Was the HR Committee informed of the recommendation by the federation in this case and have both the recent appointments vetted through this committee met the criteria for the WCB governance manual?

THE CHAIR: This was for a previous meeting that we had?

TAMMY MARTIN: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We don't know, but we can find that out for you. We'll leave it to the clerk.

JUDY KAVANAGH (Legislative Committee Clerk): I'll look into it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Moving forward, we want to discuss a meeting date for the December meeting. I think it falls on New Year's Eve. We figured it would be very

hard to fill our committee and find witnesses so I will hand it to the clerk to tell you some available dates. I know it seems far off, but our calendars get full.

JUDY KAVANAGH: We've been looking at other committee meetings to make sure we don't conflict with them. It looks as though the morning of December 10th or 12th would be clear - that's a Tuesday or Thursday. Also, there are some Wednesday mornings, December 4th or 18th.

THE CHAIR: The week of the 10th, anyone who is here for the Health Committee or Public Accounts Committee, if you come the Thursday, you could fit it all in one week, which is a lot of meetings, but you won't have to travel probably the week before, if you're coming a long distance. I was just thinking of that for people who are travelling far distances. Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: For clarification, the 12th, which is the Thursday, that's when the Health Committee is. That afternoon?

JUDY KAVANAGH: On Tuesday the 10th, the Health Committee meets in the afternoon, so we could meet in the morning.

BRAD JOHNS: Are you looking for a motion, Madam Chair?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

BRAD JOHNS: I move the morning of December 10th.

THE CHAIR: That's a Tuesday. Are there any comments about that?

TAMMY MARTIN: I agree with you, I think if it could be Thursday morning - I don't have my calendar so the 10th or 12th.

THE CHAIR: I think for people travelling, it would let them travel in the morning to get here - some people travel five or six hours to get here. That way, they're in the city and they'll be off at noon and will be travelling by daylight. It will be dark in December so that's to consider. Are we in agreement for the 12th?

BRAD JOHNS: Can I amend my motion that's on the floor to the 12th?

THE CHAIR: Sure. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

We will meet on December 12th at our regular time, 10:00 a.m.

The annual report for 2019 was circulated to all the caucuses and members. We are asking for a motion to approve the annual report that will go to the Legislature, probably this month or next month.

Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I move that the report goes to the Legislature. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Any comments? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Finally, to our topic: The Connector Program. Thank you for being patient, but we have our committee business to do, as well. It gives you a chance to see how we function.

I'd like to welcome our guests and I will ask them to introduce themselves starting with Ms. Hoddinott.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Wonderful to have you here today; we're very interested in hearing about your program. I'll just let you know that I will say your name so that they turn your microphone on, so if you will give me some kind of signal that you're waiting to speak on a question or whatnot, just signal.

We're going to start with opening remarks from Ms. Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and committee members. I'm very pleased to be here today with my colleagues from Greater Halifax Partnership and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education.

This topic about connecting youth and newcomers to the labour market here in Nova Scotia is particularly exciting for me. My grandparents immigrated to Nova Scotia through Pier 21 100 years ago and I also have six children, three of my own and three step-children, who are between the ages of 20 and 32. So the idea of having reasons for them to connect to work here in Nova Scotia is personally important to keeping them here at home.

I'd like to begin by thanking you for the invitation to present to the Human Resources Standing Committee on the Connector Program. We're happy to be here to share the excellent work being done to provide new and young Nova Scotians with the opportunities they need to gain valuable work experience.

I would like to acknowledge the businesses and the not-for-profit communities in Nova Scotia for their critical role in mentoring and hiring young people and newcomers

and giving them that important opportunity to live and work in Nova Scotia. Families and youth choose Nova Scotia for many reasons, but they stay here for work.

Today I want to assure the honourable members that in addition to the Connector Program, we have many programs and policies that are helping youth and members from underrepresented groups attach to our workforce. The Connector Program is administered by the Halifax Partnership and supported by the province. Ms. Luther and her colleagues will speak to the Connector Program directly in their remarks.

In the time that I have, I would like to touch briefly on a few key initiatives that the Department of Labour and Advanced Education has in place to support programs that have the same objective as the Connector Program, that is retaining our youth by connecting them with potential employers and job opportunities. Graduate to Opportunity and Innovate to Opportunity are two programs that do just that. These programs help young people begin meaningful careers in their fields of study.

Since Graduate to Opportunity launched in 2005, Nova Scotia businesses have created full-time opportunities for over 1,000 new graduates here in the province. Innovate to Opportunity, which launched in 2018, has a focus on hiring Master and Ph.D. graduates for jobs in the research field. To date, 19 graduates of these programs have been hired with another 11 positions approved and ready to be filled. Both programs' diversity bonuses have already supported more than 275 young and diverse graduates in landing good well-paying jobs in their chosen careers. I would also like to mention that approximately 120 international student graduates have taken advantage of both programs to date.

In addition to these programs, Nova Scotia's award-winning Study and Stay program supports international post-secondary students to study here and then stay in Nova Scotia post-graduation. Actually, Wendy Luther sitting next to me was the creator of the Study and Stay program, so I'm speaking about her own program in front of her - excuse me for that, Wendy. (Laughter) We're proud of the early success of Study and Stay though and this program focuses on international students, specifically from China, India, and the Philippines who are provided with the essential connections, resources and mentoring needed to transition from student to professional here in Nova Scotia.

[10:15 a.m.]

To date, three cohorts of Study and Stay have graduated and the first two cohorts from 2017 and 2018, 79 per cent of those graduates are still living in Nova Scotia. We just had another cohort graduate with 52 students and currently 46 students remain here in Nova Scotia, and we know that these programs are working. Our outreach efforts have shown that two years after taking a Graduate to Opportunity position, 80 per cent of those graduates are still working in Nova Scotia.

Government, with our community partners and our post-secondary institutions, is focused on advancing our efforts to keep people in Nova Scotia to help them set down roots

here and build our communities. Our 10 universities in communities throughout Nova Scotia, along with our 13 community college campuses, attract young people to study here in Nova Scotia. There are currently about 43,000 students in Nova Scotia universities: 48 per cent of those students are Nova Scotians, and 52 per cent come from outside of Nova Scotia. Of these, about 8,500 students are international students.

There are also about 10,500 students in the Nova Scotia Community College and approximately 400 of those are international students. We know from talking to these students that many of them want to stay here in Nova Scotia when they graduate. The sense of community and the friendships they make contribute to wanting to stay. Internships, experiential learning, mentoring and part time work help students develop the skills that employers need.

In addition to our students, Nova Scotia is increasingly attractive as a destination for immigrants. In fact, already this year, Nova Scotia has welcomed almost 3,400 new residents.

I am pleased to report that more young people are finding and creating new opportunities for themselves. Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking are fostered in our P-12 schools, in universities, in the Nova Scotia Community College and through many great programs like 4-H and Junior Achievement.

Businesses are starting and growing here because of what Nova Scotia has to offer. We know that new grads and new Nova Scotians in our communities have the skills and determination to succeed here. Sometimes they just need the right introduction or connection to find a career in their field or get a helping hand in starting a business. The Connector Program helps to attract and retain the valuable talent our province needs to succeed.

The Halifax Partnership has been leading the Connector Program since 2009. The program has seen great success. About 3,100 new and young Nova Scotians in Halifax have been connected with local businesses and organizations. Of these, more than 1,300 participants have already been matched with jobs.

I won't steal your thunder, Wendy, but I did want to point out that the Halifax-based Connector Program has now four other Connector Programs in rural Nova Scotia - in Cape Breton, in the western regions, the Valley and northern Nova Scotia. Once launched this Fall, Connector Plus, which is the program's new app, will build on the program's success and extend its reach.

This success wouldn't be possible without the knowledge and expertise at the Halifax Partnership. This is a program that government is proud to support. My colleagues from the Halifax Partnership will provide more details on the Connector Program. After today's presentation, we'd be happy to take any questions you may have.

THE CHAIR: Opening remarks from the Halifax Partnership - Ms. Luther.

WENDY LUTHER: Thank you committee members for the opportunity to be here with you today, and Ava for that introduction. I'm here with some of my colleagues from the Halifax Partnership. Sitting right next to me are Robyn and Nathan, and some of our colleagues have also joined us in the audience.

This topic - the Connector Program and talent retention in general is something that I am deeply passionate about. As Ava mentioned, I recently left my post as President and CEO of EduNova Co-operative, which is the association that promotes international education in the province and promotes our incredible education assets here and attracting more international students and helping them stay, to move over to Halifax Partnership three months ago where we continue these themes. At the end of my remarks, I'll share the synergies between these many programs all working towards the same goal.

To begin, very briefly on the Halifax Partnership, we're a public-private partnership between HRM, our largest and founding public sector investor, and 100 businesses here in Halifax that believe in the potential and future growth and prosperity of our city. We have the mandate to sell and market Halifax to the world as well as to help companies here in Halifax be the absolute best and most competitive that they can be. With that foundation of our core between HRM funding and private sector funding, we work very closely with the provincial and federal governments to enact programming that helps our businesses and citizens in Halifax and beyond. The Connector Program is an exceptional example of that.

We also have a team of economists on staff. We track Halifax's economic progress, and we share that with the business community and our government community to help them make good decisions about their future and the future economic direction of our city.

What I didn't realize when I was only three blocks away at EduNova is just how closely we do work with HRM. We co-lead Halifax's economic growth strategy, and we are currently in year four of the five-year plan and are beginning work now this Fall to shape what Halifax will look like over the next five years. I very much look forward to your input on a vision for our city and its impact on the broader province.

Everything that we do at the Halifax Partnership is led by this plan that we co-own with the city, including the five-year strategic goals. As you'll see there, "Attract & Retain Talent" is an incredible focus of our work at the Halifax Partnership and is right there as one of the key four strategic goals of our work. Also there you'll notice aligning economic development priorities is one of the four strategic goals. This Connector Program is a testament to how the goals to attract and retain newcomers and recent graduates align directly with those goals of the One Nova Scotia report and coalition, the Atlantic Growth Strategy, and the overall focus of our province on retaining talent right here in Halifax and beyond.

It's important to know that these strategic goals roll up to our aspirational goals to grow Halifax to a population of 550,000 and GDP of \$30 billion to 2031. The Connector Program is instrumental in helping us reach those targets.

A bit of background on the program itself, and Ava shared some of the history. We're now in the 11th year of the program, and we just celebrated our 10-year anniversary with connectors and connectees and leaders in our province. We were honoured to have Minister Diab join us and provide remarks in August when we celebrated on a windy ship out in the harbour. There is a lot to celebrate as it pertains to the Connector Program. The concept is elegant and simple.

When it was first created, it was clear to my former colleagues at the Halifax Partnership that there was a disconnect between companies looking for talent and newcomers being able to access those job opportunities. It is, at its core, a networking program. It is a systemic opportunity for newcomers and recent grads to meet people who can offer them advice and direction. It was not necessarily envisioned as a direct pathway to jobs, but in fact, the results show that that has been the outcome, and I'll share some numbers with you in a moment.

The model is simple. We have connectors who are leaders in our community - business or government leaders - who volunteer their time to meet with connectees, recent graduates or newcomers. The commitment from the connectors is that they have a brief meeting over a coffee, very informal, and the connectors are offering three contacts within their network to pass on to that connectee. I moved here from Vancouver 18 years ago, and when I first moved, I needed every connection I could get - every introduction I could get - to understand the job market here, so this is an opportunity to very systematically do that for recent graduates and newcomers. The proof is in the results in terms of how it's working.

The program has been recognized globally as best in class. We have won upwards of 10 awards, internationally, for the program as well as the success has been expanded provincially, regionally, and nationally and I'll speak to that as well. We're funded by outside agencies including RSCC who has just committed to another five years of funding to take us to 2025 in terms of their support of the national Connector Program.

Now, we could not do this work without our referral partners, and this speaks to the synergies between other groups that are doing excellent work in retaining talent. Most notably: ISANS, all of our post-secondary institutions, groups such as EduNova, and private sector companies such as Irving Shipbuilding all play a role in referring newcomers and recent graduates to the program.

Now onto some results, and Ava shared some of these numbers. The program has changed and improved for the better thousands of lives. Not only the newcomers and the recent graduates who feel better about their future here in the province and region as a result of receiving helping hands along the way, but also I've heard from dozens of

connectors - and I'm one myself - in terms of how this has changed their attitudes towards the challenges, the needs, and the opportunities of newcomers and recent graduates. Going back to the One Nova Scotia report, that certainly pointed to the need for us to change our attitudes towards young people and newcomers, and this program is also having that outcome.

Here are the numbers of the last 10 years: Over 3,000 connectees matched with nearly 1,500 connectors in 10 years. As a result - and again I'll stress that it's not just to find a job - of these connections, 1,300 connectees have found jobs in their field in Halifax. On the budget in this current year, 2018-19, the budget was \$295,000. The results from just last year: we've had 218 new connectors, 539 new connectees, and almost half of them have found jobs right here in Halifax.

This is only the Halifax Connector Program. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, the program runs province-wide with mentorship and guidance and leadership from our team at the Halifax Partnership, and from the coordinators actually in those regions who know the environment there and know the connectors and the connectees personally. To share a national Connector Program - again funded by our federal colleagues, 39 Canadian communities are involved. Here in Nova Scotia, five Connector Programs - and their operators are here on the screen - including our sister organization, the Cape Breton Partnership. Here are the results from outside of Halifax - Nova Scotia only. In this last year, 261 new connectees, 251 new connectors, 68 jobs found outside of Halifax.

I was very curious about the economic impact of this work, so I had our chief economist Ian Munro run some numbers for us. In very, very conservative estimates - even to guesstimate that some of these individuals are very new in their careers - let's just surmise that an average salary rate starting out of post-secondary would be \$35,000 to \$40,000 a year. When you multiply that by the number of individuals who say that the Connector Program specifically played a role in them finding their job, they will earn approximately \$7 million dollars next year, in terms of their individual contributions back into the economy in Halifax alone.

When we extrapolate that on to tax revenues, we're looking at approximately \$1 million in tax revenues in Halifax alone just from those individuals who are crediting the Connector Program to them directly finding their jobs.

[10:30 a.m.]

As it was mentioned in Ava's remarks, this program has been incredibly successful, as I've shared. It has been replicated here and throughout the world. We wanted to do more, so in working with our colleagues at the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, we created a project that would mean that we could scale the program through using technology. That is what the Connector Plus and the Connector Plus app is all about.

It's primarily targeted to recent graduates - both international and domestic graduates - using technology and an app to be able to connect them to connectors, which would mean that instead of the hundreds of individuals a year that we're able to target, which we're thrilled about, we would be able to reach thousands of individuals. That project is currently under development, slated for launch in Q4 of this year with a long-term vision of working with our federal partners to roll that out region wide throughout Atlantic Canada.

With that, I want to thank you for your kind attention. I look forward to your questions. This program is simple, but it has positively impacted thousands of lives. We look forward to working with you as we vision this to grow - what does the next 10 years look like. As we're all working towards facing one of our largest demographic challenges in our region, this has a direct impact on meeting those challenges.

I also want to note - and I do have the breakdown for you here in terms of the types of individuals last year in Halifax that have been impacted - of the 274 individuals who found jobs this last year in Halifax associated with Connector Program, 150 were immigrants/newcomers, 49 were international graduates and 75 were by young emerging talent - so local, domestic graduates from our post-secondary institutions.

I also want to note - and we brought some copies for you - in our Halifax Index, we do track the retention of youth in our city. In the printed copies - we'll share this with you - there was a typo in the printing, and for those of you who joined us at the Halifax Index launch in June, our chief economist spoke to this, but in terms of our baseline numbers, back in 2015, we were losing 1,300 youth, ages 20 to 29 in our city. Well in 2016, we were losing 222. In 2017, we were up - positive - 252, and that's the number we'll have to share in your document. It's online correct. Last year, we were up 152.

So we've changed the delta on that of north of 1,400 individuals in that 20 to 29 bracket. This program is playing a big role in making those numbers move in the right direction. Thank you so much for your support of this program. I look forward to your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your opening remarks. We will open up for questions. We'll start with the PC caucus. You'll have one question and a supplementary and then we'll move on to the NDP and then the Liberal caucus. Mr. Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: Fantastic program - my goodness - good results, great program. Right now, is the focus mainly on new grads coming out or immigrants coming in, or is there a main focus?

ROBYN WEBB: We work very closely with ISANS and this ratio changes from year to year. It just so happened that this past year was quite a large number of referrals from ISANS. We know these folks are job-ready.

We have four full time Connector coordinators that work with folks. Typically, you would see 400 people come through the system. Last year was an amazing year for us. We worked very hard, and four people actually worked with over 500 folks. We base it a lot on referrals, but we do a tremendous amount of on-site meetings and marketing with the post-secondaries. We would love to see a higher ratio of post-secondary graduates. We think, with the Connector app that we have a marketing campaign that will be very directed towards those, in the future, you will see that flip to a much higher percentage of local and international graduates.

LARRY HARRISON: The success rate for connecting, is it more with immigrants than it would be with grads?

ROBYN WEBB: Those who found jobs, out of the 274, 150 were immigrants, 49 were international graduates, and 75 were local grads.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP caucus. Ms. Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Thanks for your presentation. It's certainly great to see this focus. It's definitely different than when I was graduating from university. You mentioned as a kind of average, let's say they're right out of university, they're making \$35,000 a year. That's also what I made in my first job 15 years ago, so we would hope that those wages are going up. Notwithstanding, are the jobs that you're counting as employment full-time permanent jobs?

ROBYN WEBB: Yes, they are full-time jobs. They are not survival jobs, and they're not part-time. They are jobs within the field of study.

WENDY LUTHER: On the salary piece, what we're going to do is a bit more research on what those numbers are. This was a guesstimate of economic impact, and we wanted to make sure that we were estimating low not high. We'll work with our research team to dig down in terms of what the salaries are looking like for these recent grads and look forward to being able to report that back to the committee.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The other question I have connected to that is, it sort of feels like we're talking about two realities a lot when we talk about labour force. On the one hand, we have presentations that talk about how we are employing people, and there's these full-time jobs. Then we have other folks who come and talk to us about labour shortages. I know from conversations I have had with the Nova Scotia Community College, they talk about gearing their programs to those labour shortages. I'm wondering where that analysis is in your work and whether you feel like these employment stats are actually going to fill places where we're having labour shortages and helping those employers.

WENDY LUTHER: This is something that's keenly interesting to me because this program, as I mentioned earlier in my remarks, was created out of that mismatch. Having come from international education and now where I am in the broader economic lens, I

believe there's still more work to be done in terms of really articulating what those labour shortages are to the talent that could potentially fill them and rewinding that in terms of our recruitment practices in international education.

That piece, from a Nova Scotia lens, has not necessarily been done in terms of working with our post-secondary to create programming where there is a clear and obvious need by industry. If we cannot fill those seats here within our domestic student body, how are we going to market and say, we have a need in these five industries - here is your pathway as an international student to studying in these industries to be gainfully employed here in our province? We've seen some examples around the world in that, but there is much more work to be done. To me, that is the next frontier of how we could very systematically and strategically fill those labour shortages for the long term.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the Liberal caucus with Mr. MacKay.

HUGH MACKAY: Thank you for the excellent presentations. It's very informative and a very successful program. I'm looking forward to the continuation of that.

I think somewhat connected to Ms. Chender's point just now about labour shortages and so forth, one of the things that I noticed on your slide for value propositions was the ocean advantage. That aligns very nicely with our government, with our higher education focus and so forth here in the province. I'm wondering, what's the Connector Program doing specific to the ocean sector?

NATHAN LAIRD: Thank you for the question. We don't specifically target companies in that sector at this point. We look to really work with industry as a whole and connecting people into all the different industries. I think ocean technology is certainly one that will grow into the future.

When we look at the breakdown of the skill sets coming into the Connector Program, some would be highly relevant for the oceans technology moving forward, but a lot of them are more geared towards financial services, human resources, operations field as well. The really short answer is that it will be a focus for us moving forward, but we haven't targeted that industry yet at this point.

AVA CZAPALAY: Could I add on to that in terms of what the province is doing to connect youth to the ocean sector - in particular, to ocean sector related jobs of the future? We have a number of programs that connect students who have Master degrees and Ph.D.s in research areas, including oceans, to actual work that relates to research. Innovate to Opportunity is one program that I mentioned, but we also invest over \$1 million a year into My Tax, which is a not-for-profit organization funded by the federal government in Canada. It matches students with research focuses to jobs in their communities. That program is very active in the ocean sector.

We also launched an ocean sandbox last year. That fosters entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurship within the ocean sector. The sandbox is based in Dalhousie's Faculty of Oceanography.

I want to point out as well that we have graduate scholarships that we offer to supplement the universities and their graduate scholarships. One of the areas of focus there is the ocean sector and the Nova Scotia Community College has targeted programming in ocean technology as well.

WENDY LUTHER: Mr. MacKay, your question goes back to our broader work at the Halifax Partnership in the innovation district, as well as our innovation ecosystem work in attracting companies here that are in the ocean sector, and most importantly because that is our value prop, as reflected in the strategy and as reflected in reality.

As this connects to our investment attraction work, a value profit we share with companies that are looking to move here and expand here - many of which are in the ocean sector - is we share with them the Connector Program and how that is a tool for their long-term talent acquisition here in our region.

This is back to Ms. Chender's comment as well, we also have companies across all sectors, companies actively reach out to us when they cannot find talent in certain areas through their regular mechanisms - posting jobs and the traditional methods of finding talent - will contact the team looking for specific individuals. That too, again, not the original stated purpose of the program, but a very positive side benefit in terms of when companies have specific need, being able to tap into this pool of talent.

HUGH MACKAY: Thank you all for those responses. I appreciate that. Certainly along the South Shore of Nova Scotia, and of course beautiful Chester-St. Margaret's being part of that, the ocean sector is critically important, but also the tourism sector is critically important for us.

[10:45 a.m.]

As Mr. Laird said, perhaps that's not a targeted sector like oceans at this point, but can you speak to the development of tourism labour market - a Connector Program for tourism - at all? Or work being done at LAE?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Webb.

ROBYN WEBB: We have various programs that all feed into the labour market, so the Connector Program is one in which we would work with businesses that are experiencing labour shortages for certain. We also have the Atlantic Immigration Pilot that we work with, as well. We have two full-time folks that do that, and we've noticed quite a heavy volume of uptake in the tourism sector.

Sometimes the programs overlap and, as an organization, we meet every Monday to talk about the businesses that each of the different programs have worked with and how we could leverage the support of other programs within that. The Connector Program is not in your area, I don't believe, at this point. We've spoken with Lunenburg now and someone from your office, as well, about a Connector Program but there isn't one right now in your area. Hopefully soon.

In each area, so for the Western Region, what they focus on is their key industry drivers. When you launch a Connector Program, one of the things that we look at is each community is unique in the type of industry that drives that economy and that is where the program manager would focus, on those companies that are looking for the talent and those young folks and newcomers that are looking to be employed in that area. It's very much tied to the economic drivers within each community.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Hoddinott.

NANCY HODDINOTT: Just some additional information around what the department is doing specifically focused on the tourism sector.

All of our youth employment programs - where we offer wage subsidies and things to employers like the Student Summer Skills Incentive, the Co-operative Education Incentive - would be providing students with work experience and funding supports to employers in tourism, which would be one sector that would be impacted by that.

The other big piece, I think, that we're remaking some really intentional work is with our Sector Council Program, so we have a Tourism Human Resource Council that we fund and the purpose of that is to work with the tourism sector around attraction, retention, and training of employees in that sector throughout the province. We work quite intentionally with that sector through that program, as well.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Laird.

NATHAN LAIRD: Just to follow up, Mr. MacKay, on one more point. Wendy had mentioned that we often have companies reaching out to us looking to us to refer people out of the Connector Program. I actually wanted to highlight one from your region: Hawboldt Industries.

They've reached out a number of times and we've actually successfully referred a number of engineers and project managers to Hawboldt. They're quite grateful because it helps give them some visibility in Halifax and it's a great match because they're looking to hire skilled engineers, and they don't necessarily have to have a licence. We've set up a very tight relationship, actually. When I meet people of interest to Hawboldt, I've been able to refer them on and some of them have been hired in less than 36 hours. It has been that successful.

THE CHAIR: Thank you all. We'll turn it over to the PC caucus. Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I guess I have a bias for the partnership because I was actually a past board member for a number of years. I've been able to witness firsthand what you do in promoting Halifax, particularly, to the world and the good work. It's good to see that this initiative wasn't there at that time when I was on, so it's been added since then.

I'm curious to know, in regard to following up with the industries, whether or not there seems to be one industry more than another that is bringing connectors, or that connectees seem to be going into?

NATHAN LAIRD: I would say the primary industries that we see are financial services and information technology.

BRAD JOHNS: Is there a time limit or what seems to be the average time that a connector is involved in the program? Is there a limit to that?

NATHAN LAIRD: There is no limit. We have some connectors who began with the program in 2009 when it began and they're still actively engaged. Obviously, certain people's life situations and employment situations change so at any given time, we probably have about 600 to 700 active connectors in the database and we're constantly on a monthly basis engaging new ones as well.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP with Ms. Martin.

TAMMY MARTIN: It seems from this presentation I have so many questions I don't know where to start. The first one I'll address to the associate deputy minister. With the recent MOU that's been signed regarding tuition, and the lack of support for increasing tuition fees in Nova Scotia and sadly with the highest debt, we used to be second and now we're winning that game at first in the country.

You talked about - as Ms. Chender said - leading students into specific paths. From what I can tell and from many students that we've chatted with, the rising cost of tuition is a huge barrier. What is the department doing or is prepared to do to alleviate some of these concerns because it wasn't addressed in the recent MOU.

AVA CZAPALAY: In my previous role, I was the senior executive director for higher education and had overall responsibility for shepherding the MOU to its final state, so happy to address that.

The current MOU that was just signed limits tuition increases to 3 per cent. That's what you were referring to, I think, in your question. The actual tuition doesn't take into account the bursary that remains in place for all Nova Scotia students attending Nova Scotia universities. Immediately the universities deduct \$1,283. There's no magic to the

number - \$1,283 is the upfront bursary, so it's deducted from all full-time students studying in Nova Scotia universities.

We also have one of the best student assistance programs in the country. We're very proud of the program. It has been thoughtfully built upon year after year. We in Nova Scotia give our Nova Scotia applicants 40 per cent up front in terms of a grant. It's money they don't have to pay back. They borrow 60 per cent and if they complete their degree in five years - 10 years if they have a permanent disability - then they can get their Nova Scotia loan completely forgiven.

It's an amazing program. We're doing more to promote that program so that students have full awareness of the benefits of the program. If they don't graduate in five years, we take their most expensive five years and forgive those five years.

To the topic in question today - the experiential learning opportunities - they're much more robust than they were back when we were in university. We're doing a lot of work with the universities to promote entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking. For example, one of our programs provides students in the sandbox program with a summer job, so the students take their idea and they're given time in the sandbox in the summer as though it's their job and they're paid for it. It's like work, but they're working on an idea that's commercializable in the long run.

For the experiential learning, much more is being done to increase awareness with employers of the benefits of hiring students and also with students across many disciplines - so it's not just your typical co-op programs.

We do appreciate that there are a number of factors that play into the affordability of universities, but we feel that there are a lot of mechanisms also that are in place to assist students with affording their post-secondary education.

TAMMY MARTIN: I appreciate the program. My daughter participated in it, actually. However, I respectfully disagree. I think a cap of 3 per cent is still too much to Nova Scotia students when we're leading the country as well in poverty among youth, children going to school hungry. I think 3 per cent is a huge amount when you have no money to begin with, but I do appreciate the strides that have been made.

I would like to segue into - when you talked about universities, I would like to specifically talk about Cape Breton and what is being done there. As you may or may not be aware, as the second city in the province, we are in desperate need of help and assistance. I believe the enrolment now at CBU is 5,000, which is wonderful, mostly because of international students. What programs are currently there or ongoing to encourage not only people to come and attend university there but to remain once they have landed a position or a career? If somebody could speak to that.

ROBYN WEBB: The Connector Program is alive and well in Cape Breton. They're experiencing good success with that program. Also, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot is in Cape Breton. Halifax Partnership and the Cape Breton Partnership and the Western Region have a conference call every week, and every second week it includes the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. What we share are best practices and approaches for businesses to be aware of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, the value of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. One of the streams of that program is the retention of international graduates. We work with the Office of Immigration on presentations to the post-secondaries throughout the province, and Cape Breton is doing a great job of that.

We also in Halifax Partnership have another program called the Experiential Learning Program. We have one full-time person who is a liaison with the post-secondaries across the province, and we work with each post-secondary to see how it best fits so that they would be able to work collaboratively with Halifax Partnership.

For example, in Cape Breton, they would definitely like to retain their talent there, so they're not interested in coming to do job shadowing in Halifax. We're aware of that, so we partner with the Cape Breton Partnership to make sure that those opportunities are there. If you look at some of the other post-secondaries, like maybe St. F.X., their students really want to look for opportunities in Halifax, so we try to make that happen. It's very customizable to what the post-secondary and community needs are.

AVA CZAPALAY: I would like to add on to your question, which was CBU specific, I think, in some regards. CBU has really set an example across Canada for how it can grow its numbers through international student recruitment. I've met with students from CBU many times. Newcomers to Sydney love the Sydney area, they love CBU, and they want to stay if they can find work. They also are very keen to get to work as soon as they arrive. They want to study and work at the same time. The other feature is that they don't care to live in residence. They prefer communal living situations in homes.

One of the first unanticipated consequence that CBU discovered is that they needed to beef up transportation in order to get students to jobs. Specific to your question about what the province is doing, I never thought I would be engaged in jobs about buses and purchasing buses, but we did - with funds from Communities, Culture and Heritage - find some money to help the Metro Transit Authority in Sydney purchase two additional buses to help move students around. Now the students are being bused seven days a week, and they run the buses many, many more times than usual. Even local people are enjoying the improved service.

I asked the student union president what they saw as change in buses, and they said that previous to the growth in enrolment, they were selling about 200 bus tickets a month, and now they sell 40,000 a month. The students are on the bus. The buses are crowded 24/7.

A couple of practical examples, continuing with the busing example, is that students then wanted to stay in Cape Breton and work in Cape Breton this summer. The province assisted Cape Breton University with renting a bus to bus students around to rural communities outside of Sydney to their jobs, particularly in the tourism sector, actually. Also, Louisbourg Seafoods arranged transportation to bus students to their facility from Cape Breton University. You wouldn't initially think transportation was the key, but it really is a key I think my colleague Nancy Hoddinott has some program specific information, as well.

[11:00 a.m.]

NANCY HODDINOTT: Just some other things that have sort of come into play over the last couple of years as the needs of these students becomes more apparent. We have local Nova Scotia Works Employment Services Centres in Sydney and throughout Cape Breton and there are also supports that are provided on campus through student services.

What we've been able to facilitate over the last couple of years is a closer working relationship with those community-based supports and what's offered on campus so that students know where the supports are - if they're thinking of career development, if they're looking for employment supports, where's the appropriate place to get those supports and is there a bus that can get into downtown Sydney to get to those local centres? Also, having staff who understand absolutely the menu of options that are available to individuals, whether they show up on campus student services or in the community, people can refer back and forth and provide the services that are needed, so that's happening.

The other piece that we're doing is, we've added some additional resource into Nova Scotia Works - new positions called Employer Engagement Specialists. Those folks work in Nova Scotia Works Centres and they understand the needs of employers in the area. If there are people coming into the centres looking for work, you have these individuals who are working with employers and can actually match up where we have employers looking for people where people are looking for work and those connections can be made a little more quickly.

THE CHAIR: Good things in Cape Breton. Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: As I'm hearing this, I just get so excited and I don't want to say it just because my colleague, the Minister of Immigration happens to be here. I have been so impressed with our immigration and my riding is the densest, the most diverse, and one of the richest in so many ways just because it has so many new immigrants that are highly educated; you were talking about IT and financial.

For example, Park West School - I go to their Fall and Spring barbecue - and the number of people that have moved here, and 90 per cent of the people I speak to are IT and

financial. They are all here, beautiful families and it's booming. The number of apartments - I don't know how they're filling them, but they are all full.

This is an incredible thing from what I saw 15 to 20 years ago. We met so many immigrant families that came and left and now it's exactly the opposite. It's just a real delight, what's happening. We're running into the opposite problem with overcrowding and I keep telling them, no this is a very positive problem. Give me that problem over the other problem. It is really wonderful.

At the beginning I used to get a couple of newcomers looking for jobs in my office and I would connect them. I actually met with somebody from the partnership and brought them to my office. Another lady who also works with Community Services, and they're working together and helping to make sure that people find jobs. Within the departments, there is great help for new immigrants as well. I really wanted to compliment something, again and she's here . . .

THE CHAIR: Do you have a question, Ms. DiCostanzo? (Laughter)

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Yes, I do. It really is an exciting time for us here right now with what's happening with immigration. It's the international students who we're retaining. I remember five years ago, and I wasn't even involved in politics, I thought wow - what a smart thing we're doing here because they come on their expense, they get educated, get our education, and they start to like our weather and get adjusted to it before we offer them the jobs.

This was a brilliant idea and it's working wonderfully. I came as a student, as well as an immigrant 20 years ago and I think this was an amazing thing for us to retain talent.

THE CHAIR: Question?

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Yes, sorry. One other thing - for me, it's about connecting them to jobs. I know construction is booming and they're short on people, so I saw something on the Trades Exhibition Hall that's happening this Saturday and I put it on my Facebook, because that's who sees my Facebook. Is there anything else, as an MLA, I can do, if you can help me? Thank you.

ROBYN WEBB: That's a great question. We have been working with post-secondaries all along and looking at the labour market challenges and opportunities. With construction, they're quite often not full-time positions. The seasonality of it can be a challenge in some ways for certain.

We are looking at the potential of an African Nova Scotian Connector stream and the feedback we're getting from that community is that there needs to be a skilled trades component. If we do work with somebody, we definitely try to find a connector, but it would be more intentional with this stream. That's in the future, hopefully.

WENDY LUTHER: Thank you for your passionate enthusiasm about this topic. We certainly share that passion. There are two ways that we can all encourage more people to get involved in welcoming newcomers. One is to encourage the businesses that we work with to become a designated employer through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. The Halifax Partnership is a designated employer, which provides a fast-tracking opportunity for newcomers and recent graduates to the RPR. I compliment Minister Diab and her colleagues for creating that program, which does not exist anywhere else in Canada other than here in Atlantic Canada.

From working with international students so closely in my previous role at EduNova, as they are looking at what employment options they should take when some were presented with multiple offers, a key part in their decision making was being employed by a designated employer and what that meant for their long-term future.

An international student who graduates from, as an example, a four-year undergrad degree can apply for a three-year post graduate work permit. The clock is ticking in terms of their opportunity to move from international student graduate on a post-graduate work permit to a permanent resident. The fastest path for them to do that is through working with a designated Atlantic immigration employer.

The second is to become a connector and to encourage others to be connectors. We have several companies that we work with that are champions for the program and see becoming a connector organization. RBC is one great example. They use that as an opportunity for their own diversity goals within their organization, as well as their professional development goals for their staff at all levels. Wherever you are on your employment journey - whether this is your first job or you have been working for 30 years and move here and are looking to start again - there is always someone a month, a year or five years ahead of you who can lend a hand, offer advice and offer connections. Those are two very practical ways that we can all get involved.

THE CHAIR: We'll move over to the PC caucus - Mr. Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: Most of my constituency is rural. In meetings with mining and some of the forestry industry, they're saying they cannot get people to work in the sense that they're going to stay. Some may take the job for maybe a few weeks and then they're gone. They are looking for people in those industries.

Halifax is Halifax, of course. It's a gorgeous city - everyone wants to be here, everyone wants to work. In the rural areas, it's a little bit tougher. What is being done in the rural areas to attract connectors? Are there a lot of connectors within the rural industry or do we need to do more work on that?

ROBYN WEBB: We understand that concern totally. When we work with the more rural connector communities, they're very focused on addressing the needs I said earlier, about where the gaps are and the retention and all of those things.

Very often in the small communities, they know better than anybody else what the struggles for the employers are. We support them in every way we can with marketing, collateral, launch events, networking events and things like that to really engage the community, but also to show young people that there are opportunities here and they're good paying jobs.

There is a lot of work that's being done to support on a monthly basis. We have a Connector conference call all across Canada, so there are very rural communities across Canada as well that have a Connector Program, so we learn best practices and different ideas from all across Canada during that meeting. There is also an annual learning exchange where it brings everybody together.

It's a struggle for rural communities across Canada, it's not just in Nova Scotia. We're thinking what the goal is with the Connector Plus app is that there will be two opportunities for a connection. Typically right now, there is only one - we make one match per connectee and then all of the referrals come from that.

With a Connector Plus app, there will be an opportunity for two matches - one through the app and one face-to-face. We're making a specific focus in that area to try to lend more support for the rural communities.

WENDY LUTHER: Thank you, Mr. Harrison, for your question. My comment is going to go beyond the Connector Program and touch on some of Ava's comments on Cape Breton. I was very inspired by a presentation from Louisbourg Seafoods - another great Cape Breton example - as it pertains to the infrastructure required around retaining talent in rural communities, wherever your rural community might be.

At the immigration summit, which occurred earlier this year, Minister Diab spoke at the summit on a panel presentation. Louisbourg Seafood spoke on how they're using the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, but they're also investing in their own transportation, housing and child care to make it accessible for employees to work there in a sustainable way.

Creative solutions such as building the housing and then having a mechanism for employees to buy those over time for employees who live away from the work site, providing transportation for them and their families so their young children as well might have child care close to work. Again, that goes beyond just making the connections, but being very deliberate and mindful about the infrastructure that lets individuals actually accept those jobs in rural Nova Scotia and beyond.

LARRY HARRISON: How does word get out to the various businesses? Is there a blanket thing that goes out to all businesses - all mining, forestry, agriculture? If not, how can I help get it out? It's a great program.

ROBYN WEBB: It is a great question and the challenge is there's not a huge marketing dollar budget for that type of thing. We are very effective with social media

marketing and through the post-secondaries, through business associations, through the chambers and that type of thing. We work very collaboratively with that.

I know for certain at our events, every time that we do a presentation, we encourage people, if they're not a connector, to learn more about it. It is very much a 1 per cent of time sort of thing, other than the launch, which is significant.

WENDY LUTHER: Thank you, Mr. Harrison. We look forward to arming you with the details so that when you're speaking to your constituents you have that in your tool kit to share with them and we look forward to the continued dialogue on what you're hearing from businesses in your region.

[11:15 a.m.]

As your colleague, Brad Johns, would know from his time in city council, I have this conversation with our rural HRM councillors on a regular basis. Their unique needs are top of mind for all of us that we all need to succeed in every corner of this province, so we will provide you with everything you need to connect the businesses you're speaking with to the program opportunities.

THE CHAIR: We'll move over to the NDP caucus. Ms. Martin.

TAMMY MARTIN: Just continuing to follow up on Cape Breton and I'm so happy to hear that we need more buses. What a wonderful thing. As I said, the university is peaked, but what I didn't hear and maybe I missed it, what percentage of people are actually staying?

Right now, we're looking for an increased immigration plan for Cape Breton to retain people because it's wonderful that they're there learning and getting their education, but do we have statistics on how many are staying afterwards and actually building a life there?

WENDY LUTHER: Unfortunately, not broken down by region in the province, but the best data that our sector has for international student retention is researched by Dr. Michael Haan, who was at the University of New Brunswick, now he's at Western University. The number that we use now in the international education sector is 15 per cent retention of international students to permanent residency.

That number has been verified with the numbers that we're seeing through Minister Diab's office in terms of the number of international student grads that are attaining their permanent residency. This is compared to retention numbers to PR in B.C. of 24 per cent and Ontario of 25 per cent. My observation as a professional in this sector up until three months ago is that that is largely because of the diaspora in those communities, not because of their intentional programming messaging to retain those students.

My last act at EduNova was to have the strategic plan approved by our board and they have clear goals to increase that retention rate from 15 upwards to 20 per cent. With all of our deliberate, intentional strategic efforts, we'll be able to move the needle in that direction.

TAMMY MARTIN: I appreciate the answer; 15 per cent is wonderful, but specifically to Cape Breton because you may or may not know, people are coming there, getting their education, but they're not staying. Could there be an incentive or a program - a pilot - to enhance or to engage their participation and actually staying post-secondary? Currently, like I said, we see them coming to be educated and then, as my colleague Mr. Harrison said, Halifax is pretty, Halifax is busy, and Halifax is fun. Cape Breton, not so much for immigrants, so I wonder, is there something that we could do collectively to encourage that? I, too, would love to know who the connectors are in Cape Breton so that I could be aware and encourage that involvement.

AVA CZAPALAY: Maybe I could answer the first part and then Wendy and her team could take the second part.

In terms of the increase in enrolment at Cape Breton University, the students primarily are registering in engineering technology programs, health profession programs, and business programs. I think one of my colleagues made the earlier point - I think maybe Wendy - about the targeted recruitment and recruiting students to fill particular labour market opportunities.

Students also have an entrepreneurial mindset, and as I mentioned earlier, they actually love Sydney and the Cape Breton area and want to stay there. They've been warmly welcomed by the community and feel at home. When I asked the students what they liked about the area, they said the people, the fresh air, and the surroundings. You can imagine, coming from India into that kind of setting.

We have a sandbox fostering entrepreneurship on campus at Cape Breton University. It's called the Island Sandbox. It's filled with students wanting to learn how to be entrepreneurs. We also have programs that connect students to the business communities in the areas, in engineering, health professions, and business, to help get that practical work experience.

Through Nancy's shop, the students have on-site resumé preparation and that kind of thing and coaching so that they know how to approach employers. Once they get some work experience, then they feel more comfortable going after the more permanent jobs. This is the second year that they have had the exponential growth, so those graduates will start looking at the workforce this May.

WENDY LUTHER: We look forward to introducing you to Carla Arsenault at Cape Breton Partnership, who I imagine you may already have interactions with. It's her team that leads the Connector Program on Cape Breton Island and would be able to provide

any details and, also I'm sure, ask for your involvement in promoting the program throughout Cape Breton.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the Liberal caucus. Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: It has been an exciting discussion. Continuing on in a similar vein, at one time I was of the understanding that connectees had to go and talk to the connectors or search them out. Now you're saying there's maybe an app coming, and there's a lot of it like the sandboxes in place to do that for the connectees.

I'm just wondering if you can elaborate a little bit more actually how a student wishing to stay in a community can find a job with a connector. Do they have to do that first initiation, rather than you giving them the names of who those connectors are?

NATHAN LAIRD: I can certainly answer this question. In terms of the post-secondary, we do a lot of proactive outreach with universities. This time of year especially, I'm on campus at one of the schools two or three times a week speaking with groups of both domestic and international students in particular.

It's raising the profile of the program and letting them know when they can actually enroll. They have to be within six months of graduating to come into the Connector Program, so we're raising that awareness. Then when they do approach graduation, most of them are finding us. It's a combination of university outreach, word of mouth, the Halifax Partnership's marketing activities that we do. It is a real combination.

Then my team and I will sit down - we meet with everyone coming into the program, face-to-face, for about an hour, just to review their background, make sure their resumé is up to par, and then really look to get an idea on what they're interested in to make more impactful connections for them.

BILL HORNE: I think this has changed quite a bit from the beginning. Now it's getting involved in many different metrics of opportunities for the student and the connector too. I'm just wondering how the word gets out in the program. You talked about yourself going to the schools and universities. What other way - I guess advertising, that sort of interest?

ROBYN WEBB: We have some really great marketing collateral that has been developed - pop-up banners. Today we're at the job fair, the university career fair, where we'll have our marketing material there, and we'll be meeting with students and businesses that are there as well and promoting the program. Our website is very user friendly and refers people. They can register online for an appointment to meet with us.

We are very proactive. We try to be wherever we know the students will be, the graduates. It's not uncommon for us to specifically target, for example the MBA classes or the Master of Finance classes, and actually meet with the professor to see if we have an

opportunity to present the Connector Program. Where we see a real solid need, we will do very targeted recruitment, but in general, we are broadly promoting the program to arts and science, to all faculties really.

WENDY LUTHER: Of course, the other side of the coin is the connectors and how we recruit them - as I mentioned early on in my remarks, 100 investors, some of the largest private sector companies in our city, as well as our board members are - I was going to say, constantly inundated - they are strongly encouraged to get involved as connectors.

The team here works with companies throughout our community - Halifax and beyond - throughout the province in many of the other programs that we mentioned, experiential learning, Atlantic Immigration Pilot. When the team is speaking to these individuals, also encouraging them to get involved as connectors in the program.

I have a board member who is the owner of Narrative Research. She is a connector herself. She was looking for a talent in her firm that she could not find through regular channels and reached out and hired someone. She is now not only a connector, a governor of the program through her board role, but she has also been a user and a beneficiary of the program and the talent that it brings.

Also, as an example, we're meeting one of these companies that has some very acute labour market needs. I think I can share because they put this all out through social media - Steele Auto Group has a wage-day, come-back-home program, and we were speaking with them about what that looks like to meet their labour needs in all manners of different positions.

Those individuals working for Steele also reached out and said that now that they hear about Connector Program, they also want to be a connector. That is how we grow on both sides - both the recent graduates and the newcomers: the newcomers who come through ISANS and other referral agencies, as well as the students. Then on the other side - very important - the connectors. I think also, if I may, it would be helpful for Nathan to elaborate on a little bit once they've met with the connectee, what the next step is in terms of introducing them to the connector.

NATHAN LAIRD: In terms of how the process works, after my team and I do a meeting with them and we see that they are what we consider job-ready, then we will go through our database. I mentioned that we probably have 600 to 700 active connectors. We'll go through and really look for not just someone who happens to be in the same industry, but we'll try to get someone at an appropriate experience level, especially if we're working with highly skilled immigrants to try to match them with someone who is at their level.

We'll reach out via email typically with a connectee's resumé to a potential connector and we'll give them the right of refusal if it doesn't happen to be a good time of year. We wait for their confirmation that they are, indeed, interested in meeting with the

person, and then we'll do the email introduction from there and let the two people follow up and arrange a time to meet.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the PC caucus - Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: Obviously, I think the Connector Plus app is a logical next step. I guess if any criticism - I'm surprised you haven't been there already with the technology and the way that grads are coming out - I have a 12-year-old and her phone is pretty much her life. I'm curious to know - and I may have missed this when I stepped out - when did you say that app was going to be up and active?

WENDY LUTHER: We're aiming for Q4 this year - 2019-20 - for the launch of the app. This is new technology. It didn't exist before and no one has done it. We're putting a great amount of attention and effort to coming up with a tool that will meet everybody's needs - both the international and domestic graduates, as well as the connectors and ultimately the employers.

BRAD JOHNS: I'll look forward to seeing it, if it's something different, to see how it operates. I see that as a modification going forward to the program. I'm just curious to know what modifications, based on feedback from either connectors or connectees in the past, have happened based on recommendations.

[11:30 a.m.]

ROBYN WEBB: We have constant improvement in the program, so as feedback comes in, we fine-tune whatever the challenge is; whether it be the tool kit, the intake process, the matching process - we're constantly reviewing the processes to make sure that they're at the best they can be.

One of the things that I did want to comment on when you were saying why did it take us so long to develop the Connector app, everybody was in a hurry for that, but I do want to tell you that the results of the Connector Program - the face to face, with both the connectee and the connector - the tracking system allowing so many different potential matches and then the program coordinator actually selecting the best match, has incredibly high success rates. That's just unheard of to have a success rate that high.

I do want to caution when you move to an app, the success rate will not be that high because you're taking out that human element, that soft skill matching that you have in this process. We were very cautious not to dilute the nature of the program itself, and that's why we did a soft launch earlier on the Connector app. Then with that feedback, making constant changes to make sure it is the best product that we have.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP caucus. Ms. Martin.

TAMMY MARTIN: Earlier when Ms. Chender was here, we talked briefly about compensation, and I'm wondering, do you have statistics that show what type of positions connectees are getting or moving into? Are they benefit positions with pensions and all fair compensation, or maybe if you could speak to the breakdown of that?

NATHAN LAIRD: I can't get down into a very detailed breakdown, especially with something as far as pensions go. When we do track it, I track everything quarterly to see participants who have come through the program and have found work. We do only count jobs that would be permanent, full-time roles in their career field, but beyond that, we actually wouldn't have access to the data to get down into the salaries or potential perks or benefits.

ROBYN WEBB: We're finding great success with the newcomers. What we're doing is bypassing that often a problem could be for a newcomer that they have to start at an entry-level job. With this program we are able to connect them at the level that they are qualified for with a connectee at that level. That really helps mitigate the entry level position for the newcomers.

TAMMY MARTIN: That's a good follow-up to my next question. With rising tuition fees - since 1990 in Nova Scotia, tuition fees have risen over 270 per cent with an average of 3.5 per cent higher rate for international students. If they're not coming into entry-level positions, are the rising tuition fees in Nova Scotia and no cap on international students a barrier for them getting an education in Nova Scotia and/or staying afterwards because of the payback cost?

AVA CZAPALAY: I'll start and then my colleague, Wendy Luther, might want to add to that.

We have quite a few international students studying in Nova Scotia. You mentioned CBU, but all universities host international students. The majority of them have reported early numbers that look like all universities have increases in international student tuition.

The international student tuition is approximately double what a domestic student pays. The students quite often need to demonstrate that they have funds to support themselves. For example, the students at CBU have a bond - I think it's \$10,000 that they have to deposit in a bank to show that they have that money there to support their stay.

I do sense that for international students who want to stay, they do feel the urgency to obtain work fairly quickly or to create their own work through the entrepreneurship angle. International students have the same access to the experiential learning opportunities that domestic students have throughout university including the sandbox program. In fact, in the sandbox programs, one unanticipated consequence is the volume of international students who are in the sandboxes with Nova Scotia students and quite often collaborating on a business idea. Often when they come to pitch their ideas during competitions, it will

be the international student out in front, whose first language is not English, pitching their business idea.

International students who want to stay, the Study and Stay program that EduNova initiated is testing that opportunity. How do we deliberately connect international students with mentors and supports during their studies here so that that process is easier to directly connect them to a job? We know if we don't connect them to a work opportunity quickly, they'll probably not stay.

WENDY LUTHER: Speaking directly to the international student piece, in the broader context, international education is approximately a \$200 billion a year industry just for flow of students, students and their families choosing to seek international education versus studying at home. Canada is probably, of all countries in the world, the one with the most clear pathways from study for an international student on to immigration. We compete with New Zealand and perhaps Malta in that field; whereas some of our largest competitors in international education in the world, most notably the U.S. and the U.K., have almost completely closed their doors to a pathway to stay and work. That has made Canada an incredibly competitive jurisdiction for students and their families who are looking long term.

The average international student has five acceptance letters, so five different institutions, from three countries. The conversation as it pertains to international student fees, of course once the students are here and the reality of paying for their tuition is real, it is an important topic for these individuals. As they're choosing where they study, our tuition is benchmarked against tuition in countries all over the world. In that context, we're really still very, very competitive. When you add that to the cost of living here in Nova Scotia versus elsewhere in Canada and the world, it becomes even more so.

The fact that we have pathways on to permanent residency and immigration when other countries don't, the fact that our province has programming to help those students find jobs that either don't exist elsewhere in Canada or the young graduates are not eligible - I was having this conversation yesterday as we're arming our post-secondary institutions with some proof points about the job market here in Halifax and Nova Scotia and what opportunities there are for their sons and daughters when they do graduate. Most areas in the world, if they have a program like Graduate to Opportunity, those would not be available to non-nationals. Here, they are not only available, they are encouraged, and they're a part of our diversity imperative.

That's just a few comments in the larger context about how our approach is incredibly and increasingly competitive even with the tuition fee increase for international students.

THE CHAIR: Over to the Liberals. Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: A question just came to mind. I know for a lot of international students, it's the travel, for airlines, direct airlines going back home. I think that's a big thing for choosing Nova Scotia. Is there anything that we're doing to help them? I know we're trying to do some direct flights out of Halifax, hopefully, that will encourage others coming. If you know something that can enlighten us, that would be great.

AVA CZAPALAY: Definitely access is important, and if you travel out of Halifax International early September, those flights are packed with international students. I flew to Sydney and the flight was completely crowded with students flying from India via Halifax to Sydney.

I don't know if there's a concerted effort from those involved in higher education to work on flights, but the traffic is commercially driven, so with all the students coming from India, perhaps that will attract notice that there are a lot of flights being booked through Toronto or Montreal from India.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: As the volume increases and the numbers that stay here then that will be the push to get that. As long as it makes economic sense, the airlines will do it themselves or at least offer it in certain seasons. Hopefully it makes it easier.

WENDY LUTHER: I had this very conversation with an Air Canada rep last week and they said there needs to be the business case. I do know that our provincial government colleagues as it pertains to increased trade, most notably with China and elsewhere, had been actively involved in these conversations.

As I responded to that Air Canada rep, we just have to continue to show success and help you make that business case. In terms of attracting talent and international students, that is in our purview so we'll keep doing our work to get those numbers up so the airlines see how they can also benefit from those direct lines.

In the meantime, our marketing collateral does share just how close and easy it is to get to Halifax, to the world. How close we are to Europe, how close we are to eastern United States, and how our connectivity through our major hubs - most notably Toronto and Montreal - we are really only an extra two-hour flight to come to our beautiful province.

THE CHAIR: We'll do a quick round with just one short question because we want to leave time for closing remarks.

Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: I'm wondering how many of your students you're talking to get jobs within the public sector versus the private sector. It sounds like from what you've been saying it might be 90/10 per cent - 90 per cent are getting outside the public sector and 10 per cent maybe within government. I'd like to get an idea of where that stands.

NATHAN LAIRD: I don't have the exact breakdown of percentages with me. I can get that for you. What I would say is from just general observations, it's heavily skewed towards the private sector and not the public sector. I have talked to a lot of recent grads and newcomers as well who are interested in working for the government. In all honesty, quite often the challenge is getting in, especially with union positions - that's often preventing applicants. I think there is a desire for more people to get into the Public Service - I just don't know that they see how to quickly and efficiently do that.

THE CHAIR: Do we have closing remarks from our stakeholders? Ms. Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: I would just like to thank the committee members for their interest in the program. I feel as though MLAs on site in their communities who know about the program and can promote it to both connectors and potential connectees - I think that the program will continue to thrive and grow. Thank you very much for the opportunity to share this with you.

WENDY LUTHER: Thank you to all committee members for your interest and questions today. To echo Ava's comments, we all have a role to play in welcoming newcomers and helping them be successful. We had so many great examples from the questions and others of what's happening in your constituencies. We look forward to this being an ongoing dialogue of, we live in a great province, how can it be even better? We look forward to working with each and every one of you on those themes. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I thank each and every one of you for coming - the Department of Labour and Advanced Education and the Halifax Partnership. You've answered a lot of questions. I think we will all go away with a better understanding of your program, so thank you very much.

Our next meeting is Tuesday, October 29th from 10:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. Appointments to agencies, boards and commissions only because we are sitting in the Legislature at that time.

Being no further business, I adjourn this meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 11:45 a.m.]