

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, June 29, 2021

Video Conference

**Youth Workforce Programs
Agency, Board and Commission Appointments**

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

Rafah DiCostanzo (Chair)
Bill Horne (Vice-Chair)
Hon. Leo Glavine
Hon. Gordon Wilson
Hon. Tony Ince
Larry Harrison
Brad Johns
Claudia Chender
Kendra Coombes

[Hon. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft replaced Hon. Gordon Wilson]
[Susan Leblanc replaced Claudia Chender]

In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Labour and Advanced Education

Duff Montgomerie, Deputy Minister

Nancy Hoddinott, Senior Executive Director, Skills and Learning Branch

Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency

Marjorie Davison, CEO



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JUNE 29, 2021

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Rafah DiCostanzo

VICE-CHAIR

Bill Horne

THE CHAIR: I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Human Resources. I'm Rafah DiCostanzo, MLA for Clayton Park West, and I'm the Chair of this committee.

Today, in addition to considering appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions, we will hear from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education regarding youth workforce programs.

Members, witnesses, the committee clerk, and Legislative Counsel should keep their video on throughout the meeting with their microphone on mute, unless I call on them to speak. They should turn on their own microphone before speaking and then put it back off again. This is a good time for all of us to check our cellphones and other iPads and things to make sure they're on silent.

We're asked not to leave our seats unless it's absolutely necessary, and if you need to leave for a few seconds, just leave your video on, please. Any member having technical problems, please call the clerk - don't ask Rafah.

I will now ask the committee members to introduce themselves for the record by starting with Mr. Horne.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: We're starting with the committee business, the agencies, boards, and commissions appointments. Mr. Horne, go ahead, please.

BILL HORNE: For the Department of Agriculture, I move that John Vissers be appointed as chairman and member, and Robert Michael Walsh and Robert Prange be appointed as members to the Nova Scotia Crop and Livestock Insurance Commission.

THE CHAIR: Any discussion? All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried. Next?

BILL HORNE: For the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, I move that, Rod McCulloch and Sadira Jan be appointed as honorary governors to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia Board of Governors.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I would just like to speak quickly to these appointments. In principle I have no opposition to these appointments, except I'd just like to say that Rob McCulloch and Sadira Jan are currently, or this past year, have been regular members of the Board of Governors, and now they are moving to honorary governors.

This suggests that there are no actual new appointees to the actual Board of Governors at the Art Gallery. We know that there have been some significant issues with the Board of Governors at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia right now, and I'm very concerned about it.

As we know, the Art Gallery will be going through a significant project with the new building, a significant investment, but I'm concerned that the Board of Governors does not have the appointments it needs and are necessary to oversee this. Currently we know that they don't even have enough members to have quorum on the board. This is a real issue, and these appointments are not going to do anything because they're just moving folks from the board to being honorary governors.

I'd like to make a motion that the committee write to the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage and ask for an update on appointments to the board of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, which would include a timeline for when we can expect the board to have a full complement of members, and identify strategies to address any issues in appointing a full slate of members.

We know that there's an issue. We don't have any information about the issue, so I think it makes sense for the committee to get to the bottom of what's going on - especially given the importance of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia to our province.

THE CHAIR: Any further discussion from the members? We would like to vote on this motion to send a letter from the committee.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ms. Kavanagh would write that letter, correct? Wonderful.

Further appointments? Who would like to make some more?

JUDY KAVANAGH: The motion is still on the table for the appointments to this committee. Is the committee going to vote on those today or defer them?

THE CHAIR: I'm sorry, just repeat that? The motion that Ms. Leblanc just brought in?

JUDY KAVANAGH: No, the committee has agreed to write the letter. I don't think they've agreed on whether or not they're going to approve those two appointments today.

THE CHAIR: Of course. The motion is there. Are we in agreement to move those two names for the honorary governors? We're saying yes, right? We're voting yes, or you have a question? Ms. Leblanc wants to speak to it.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I apologize. I also meant to ask if we could get clarification on the difference between a governor and an honorary governor. I'm happy to approve these appointments today, but in the letter I would like to have the clarification of the difference between an honorary governor and a regular governor.

THE CHAIR: Do I consider that as an amendment or just as part of the original motion?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Part of the original motion, although it's not in what Ms. Kavanagh has been given. I can clarify with Ms. Kavanagh later.

THE CHAIR: You don't mind repeating the whole motion?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Sure. I move that the committee write to the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage to ask for an update on appointments to the Board of Governors the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, including a timeline for when we can expect the

board to have a full complement of members and identify strategies to address any issues in appointing a full slate of members, and to clarify the definitions of “member of the board of governors” and “honorary member of the board of governors.”

THE CHAIR: We’re just going to vote again, just to make sure that we’re all in agreement.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Now we can move to the next department - correct, Ms. Kavanagh?

JUDY KAVANAGH: No, you still have to vote on whether to accept those two appointments today.

THE CHAIR: Oh, I see. I thought we - I’m sorry. Yes. The motion is to accept those - I thought that’s what we started with.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Thank you, Judy, for pointing that out.

All right. Next we have the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Go ahead, Mr. Glavine.

HON. LEO GLAVINE: I move the following appointments to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: Blaire Gould, member, First Nations; Chief Leroy Denny, member, First Nations; April Hiltz, member, First Nations; Nastasya Kennedy, Mi’kmaq member, Annapolis Valley SR; Tammy Williams, Mi’kmaq member, Halifax SR; Darren Googoo, Mi’kmaq member, Cape Breton-Victoria SR; and Janice Francis, Mi’kmaq member, South Shore SR.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister Glavine. I’m not sure what the SR stands for, Judy, at the end of the last four names. That wasn’t pronounced but I have it in the note as SR.

JUDY KAVANAGH: No, I’m sorry, that’s just the official title that was given to us by the department. Also, for the record, perhaps we should clarify that this is for the Council on Mi’kmaq Education.

LEO GLAVINE: Yes.

THE CHAIR. Correct. Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: I just want to have the record reflect I'm very happy to see these appointments coming forward today. I've made comments in the past criticizing that this council had so many vacancies and I'm very glad to see that these appointments are coming forward together. It's an important committee to make recommendations to the minister in regard to Mi'kmaq education and I just want that stated for the record.

THE CHAIR: I agree with you totally. I was excited to hear the names as well. I'm assuming SR stands for "Senior" but I'm not sure. We will clarify that. Our notes had SR for the last four members. Thank you.

We have a motion on the table to accept seven names for the Council on Mi'kmaq Education. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried. Thank you so much - this is wonderful.

The last department is the Department of Environment and Climate Change. Mr. Glavine, would you do that one as well?

LEO GLAVINE: For the Department of Environment and Climate Change, I move that Kenneth Meech be appointed as both Chair and member to the Resource Recovery Fund Board (Divert NS).

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Glavine. (Interruption) I have to turn my microphone off because my phone is off, but it comes through my computer because they're linked. I just declined it and hopefully that person doesn't call again. I apologize. All right. So we have a motion on the floor for the appointment of Mr. Kenneth Meech.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

All the ABCs are complete. Thank you so much.

BILL HORNE: No, there's another page there.

[10:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: I'm so sorry. Yes, I apologize. There are two other departments, the Department of Inclusive Economic Growth and the Department of Justice. Mr. Ince, would you like to do those?

HON. TONY INCE: I move that Nancy Eke-Agu and Mike Uberoi be appointed as members to the Halifax Convention Centre Board of Directors (Events East).

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.
The motion is carried.

Next is the Department of Justice.

TONY INCE: Next, for the Department of Justice, I move for the Police (RCMP) Advisory Board, Pictou County, there is a person by the name of Frances Watling, as a member, and they reside in Pictou County, I believe. Also to the Department of Justice and the Advisory Board, Thomas Shears as a member, and I believe from the Town of Oxford.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Johns has a question. Go ahead, please.

BRAD JOHNS: Just through you, Madam Chair, perhaps Judy can tell us: are they two separate advisory boards, one being for Pictou and one being for Oxford, or are they the same advisory board?

JUDY KAVANAGH: There are 29 police advisory boards in Nova Scotia, one for each municipality that's policed by the RCMP.

BRAD JOHNS: I just wanted to make sure that the record showed that right.

THE CHAIR: We can vote on each separately if you prefer, so let's vote on the first one, for Pictou County.

The first motion was for Frances Watling. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The next motion was for the Police (RCMP) Advisory Board for the Town of Oxford, Thomas Shears. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We are this time done, and I apologize - my pages were not stapled together, and I put it in the wrong place. Again, thank you all for finishing the ABCs.

We have youth workforce programs as our topic for this meeting. I'd like to welcome our witnesses, and maybe they can introduce themselves and give us their opening remarks. We have from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education: Duff

Montgomerie, Deputy Minister; Marjorie Davison, CEO of Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency; and Nancy Hoddinott, Senior Executive Director, Skills and Learning Branch.

I will leave it in your capable hands, Mr. Montgomerie.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I'm pleased to be here today to discuss the youth workforce programs we have at Labour and Advanced Education. You've already introduced Nancy and Marjorie, two amazing colleagues, and thank you for that. Together, we'll be happy to take your questions and provide information on youth workforce programs.

Madam Chair and committee members, more people want to come to Nova Scotia and stay here, and young people are finding and creating new opportunities for themselves because of what Nova Scotia has to offer. We want the best for our youth, and we are creating innovative programs and opportunities to encourage them to stay here and thrive. Before the pandemic, we saw the strongest population growth in Nova Scotia in 34 years, with our youth population growing at even a faster rate. Youth unemployment numbers were also dropping.

I'm pleased to report that despite the economic impacts of COVID-19, our youth population 15-34 years of age continued to grow by close to 1,000 young people last year alone. Nova Scotia is five years strong in retaining young people within the province. This has reversed a three-decade-long trend of losing our youth.

Over the past year, Labour and Advanced Education has invested in over 15 various youth-focused programs, providing career exploration, skills development, experiential learning opportunities, mentoring, and wraparound supports directly to over 11,800 young people and participants. Thousands more youth across the province are further supported through training and employment programs and services.

Our youth employment is recovering, and I know that we are well positioned to get back to where we were. We anticipate a strong recovery through our world-class universities and community college system, our apprenticeship system, our youth workforce programming, and with employers who see the value in hiring our talented young people.

We have adapted our programs and supports to be responsive to the needs of youth and employers of youth during the pandemic. A tip of the hat to the private sector, they have been amazing, and have stepped up in a big way during COVID to continue to help bring youth workplace experiences. They've been, quite frankly, amazing.

The attraction and retention of our young people remains a priority. We know that when our youth see themselves in meaningful careers and are connected to those jobs, they

are more likely to stay and build their lives here. Our youth workforce programs are built on this foundation. At LAE, we provide the following programs to attract and retain youth in our province: they include Summer Skills, Co-operative Education, Graduate to Opportunity, and Innovate to Opportunity.

Apprenticeship is a post-secondary education and training system that leads to certification and provides for quality careers in the skilled trades. Apprentices receive hands-on training from certified tradespeople along with in-class technical training. The agency partners with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, industry, community organizations, and equity-seeking groups to promote apprenticeship opportunities, and to ensure that trade-specific training is responsive to the needs of industry and the Nova Scotia job market.

We have increased interest in people pursuing trades, and more and more people are seeing the value of it as a career choice. The agency employs a Youth Outreach Coordinator to engage the partners and through the youth apprenticeship programs, helps get high school students excited about career opportunities in the skilled trades right here in Nova Scotia. Youth between the ages of 16 and 19 who find employment in a designated trade can register as a youth apprentice. This allows the youth to begin their apprenticeship and collect apprenticeship hours during employment, even if they're in high school, working evenings, weekends, and during the Summer.

The agency invests approximately \$1.5 million annually in youth programming to provide exposure, education and experiential opportunities for youth in the skilled trades. The agency also has the Apprenticeship START Program. This program provides financial incentives to employers to hire and train apprentices in the skilled trades during the full term of apprenticeship. When employers hire apprentices from underrepresented groups, the hiring and completion incentives are doubled from \$2,500 to \$5,000 each. Employers who train an equity apprentice to certification may be eligible for up to \$30,000 to support their costs. Our future is bright and we're working hard to ensure that our future includes everyone.

We also know that our young people are driven by their values, and demonstrating in some of the most pressing issues facing us today, including anti-racism, equity, and inclusion. We know the key to driving innovation in a thriving economy is ensuring our workforce is equitable, accessible, inclusive, and representative of our diverse communities. As a department, our top priority is advancing inclusion and employability for all by fostering responsive learning systems and empowering safe, fair, diverse, and productive workplaces.

We continue to work in partnership with industry leaders, educators, equity-seeking groups, communities and the private sector to create more opportunities to support and foster ideas and products to achieve inclusive economic growth for Nova Scotians. Some of our youth workforce issues include diversity bonuses in our co-op program, our Summer

Skills program, our Innovate to Opportunity program, and our Graduate our Opportunity program.

We recently partnered with NPower Canada through a \$1.3 million investment to support 350 youth to enroll in an employer-driven IT training program. This program was free to participants and includes access to wraparound supports, including access to a social worker and mentorship. This program will help participants attach to entry-level positions in the IT sector in Nova Scotia or to continue further education.

The first youth cohort to complete NPower's program in Nova Scotia was comprised of 41 participants, and over half identified as Black, Indigenous, or persons of colour. Graduation took place in May, and over six per cent of the alumni have already connected to the workforce or are enrolled in higher education.

Work-integrated opportunities for students with disabilities is also a key to us, so we expanded work-integrated opportunities for students with disabilities at Nova Scotia universities and the Nova Scotia Community College by introducing programming to support summer employment, co-ops, internships, work terms, and part-time employment.

In addition to these youth-focused programs, we have many other programs that can also support youth. Some of them include the Fast Forward Program, START, Skills Development, Nova Scotia Works Employment Services, the One Journey Initiative, Sandboxes, the Connector Program, Science and Industry Pathway, Mitacs, Study and Stay, and many more programs offered by our colleagues at other departments throughout government.

We continue to keep youth top of mind when we're looking to fill the needs of the labour market. A great example of this is the recent announcement of \$16 million in improving our computer science programming so that more youth can be trained in this high-demand industry sector and secure good jobs here at home, all the while supporting Nova Scotia business and industry. We remain focused on working with employers to hire youth through our many programs by partnering with organizations to connect hundreds of young people to careers.

We appreciate every opportunity to listen, to learn, and work collaboratively with our young Nova Scotians. Whether it's through our government's student round tables or through other youth engagement opportunities, we are continuously inspired by their talent, ideas, and contributions to our province. We encourage our youth to reach out to our Nova Scotia Works centres in their communities, or online for supports in their search for career advice. Supporting our youth to reach their full potential remains a priority. We know that when our youth are connected to meaningful jobs, they are more likely to stay and build their lives here.

We have worked closely with Dr. Strang in supporting his efforts and Public Health's efforts to keep Nova Scotians safe, and Dr. Strang often refers to the amazing responsibility of our student leaders in the universities and post-secondary world who have stepped up and really worked hard to ensure that they followed Public Health initiatives, and they are a great example of the power of youth in our province.

I also want to acknowledge that everything we do to support our youth is in partnership with others. From the private sector to non-profits to post-secondary, we all value our youth and work together to create opportunities for them to grow and thrive in our province. I thank you for your time and obviously we're very happy to take any of your questions.

THE CHAIR: Your timing was perfect, you had until 10:29 a.m. You did it perfectly.

Before we start the question period, I just want my colleagues to agree on doing the 20 minutes. We normally start with the PC caucus for 20 minutes, followed by 20 minutes for the NDP caucus, and then the Liberal caucus. Depending on how much time we have left, we divide it again for the second round of questioning. Are we all in agreement? Please show hands. It just makes it much easier than me having to figure out who put their hand up first for questioning.

We will start with the PC caucus for 20 minutes. It's 10:29 a.m. right now. Mr. Johns, go ahead, please.

BRAD JOHNS: I guess I just have a couple of questions regarding, some of them are directly related of course to COVID and some of the challenges that have been going on.

I noted that in the 2019-20 accountability report, it claimed that there was \$1.9 million that actually went unspent in youth initiatives. I'm curious to know whether or not that was unspent strictly because of COVID, or if there was something else that was involved in there. Also, in addition to that, what the actual dollar amounts are expected to be this year versus projections for this year.

[10:30 a.m.]

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: If it's okay, I'd ask Ms. Hoddinott to respond to that.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Hoddinott.

NANCY HODDINOTT: Last year, in terms of our provincial youth budget, we certainly made changes to maximize youth uptake in all of our programs, and we maintained either the same number of student supports or graduate supports or just under

what we had achieved the year before. But some of the cost savings were actually due to the fact that the federal government was kicking in some additional supports for students and wage subsidies, and where we were matching those things federally and allowed stacking of programs, we actually didn't need to contribute as much per student, for example, in our Student Summer Skills placements as we would have the year before.

Because of that federal infusion of dollars, it's not that we didn't support as many students - it was that the federal government money came in and we actually didn't need to expend as much provincial dollars. Overall, we were able to support almost as many students last year as the year before, and we had a record year this year with the number of co-op placements that we were able to support.

BRAD JOHNS: The \$1.9 million that was unspent, what you're saying is that that was unspent because it was matched by federal money, and thereby it wasn't needed. Where did the \$1.9 million go? Did that just go back into provincial coffers, or was it reallocated to different programs within the department?

NANCY HODDINOTT: We were able to reallocate some additional dollars into our diversity bonuses. We reinvested some additional funding from GTO to ensure that we could offer some additional diversity bonuses throughout the programs, through our co-op and Summer Skills. So there was some additional investment in that area.

BRAD JOHNS: Can you elaborate what those were specifically?

NANCY HODDINOTT: What we launched last year was some additional investment from our Graduate to Opportunity program. We were given a budget for Graduate to Opportunity that we continue every year to get to sort of a cap budget that we have there. Realizing that we wouldn't potentially spend all of the Graduate to Opportunity investment, we requested permission to add a diversity bonus to our Student Summer Skills and to our co-op as well as the GTO program.

What we were able to do - so for employers who employed individuals who identified from an equity-seeking group, we were able to add some additional funding per individual to the wage subsidy that we pay. I'll give you an example.

In our Student Summer Skills program, the normal wage subsidies - we reimbursed employers at \$9.10 cents an hour. If a student identifies from an equity-seeking group, we reimburse the employer at \$10.10 an hour. So it's a dollar an hour additional investment, and that's to encourage employers to really seek out and hire from these groups. So we were able to add some of those pieces throughout our programming last year.

BRAD JOHNS: I'll ask just one more question, Madam Chair, and then my colleague can ask a few. I'm curious to know if the department knows exactly why youth

seem to be so much disproportionately impacted by job loss during the pandemic. Is that because of the type of employment, part-time versus full-time, or is it retail sector issues or what? Have you had an opportunity to analyze that and see what it is, Mr. Montgomerie?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: The honourable member has pretty well nailed it. A lot of the job losses for young people are in the hospitality and retail sector, and a lot of them, of course, are part-time as well. They did get particularly hard-hit.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: Picking up on what my colleague just mentioned, does the department have any real input as to stabilizing the employment opportunities going forward, with respect to ensuring that youth will have equal access?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: As I mentioned in our opening comments, it's all about partnerships with us, particularly with the private sector and others, and we have a myriad of programs. Let me give you an example: our Connector Program, like through the Greater Halifax Partnership. We provide support for them to connect with young people. Their members actually connect with young people in employment opportunities as well as training and so on.

Our Graduate to Opportunity program is one of the more amazing success stories working again with the private sector. We had more than 1,700 new graduates who have been hired to more than 1,500 positions since the program was introduced: 80 per cent of those graduates are still working in Nova Scotia at the end of two years, and 31 per cent of those graduates self-identify as African Nova Scotian, racially visible, Mi'kmaw or Indigenous, or a person with a disability.

There are several programs like that. Again, we work with 13 sector councils, for example. That's everything from trucking to IT to manufacturing and so on. They also work as a group, and it's through those groups that we keep in touch with labour needs, labour supply needs. We have a partnership right now in Cape Breton through the Construction Sector Council and through other government departments, labour unions and employers in Cape Breton, as we look to make sure as the major infrastructure programs go on stream for Cape Breton that the workforce is there to support it.

So there are lots of partnerships and lots of scenarios. Of course, the community college does an amazing job of partnering with the private sector and ensuring job shortages and so on are dealt with. Marjorie, as head of our apprenticeship agency, could speak volumes to that as well.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Davison, would you like to add something?

MARJORIE DAVISON: I would just add from the skilled trades perspective that we're aware that there is a huge demand over the next 10 years needed for young people to come into the skilled trades. It's not necessarily top of mind for young people, so a lot of our effort is spent on promoting the apprenticeship system and opportunities in skilled trades, working with industry to do so, trying to leverage policy as well.

For instance, when Deputy Montgomerie talked about the Cape Breton infrastructure initiative, we've been working to ensure that there's procurement policy in place that provides more opportunity for our young people to work on those jobs, to provide opportunities for local talent and also apprentices and as well, a certain percentage of those apprentices coming from equity-seeking groups.

We're looking for opportunities at a policy level as well as the program level, to ensure that young people know the opportunities are here, they can learn about them, and they can come into them successfully.

LARRY HARRISON: We're realizing that skilled trades are somewhat where it's at, right now, so the department is working towards getting tradespeople certified, certainly among our youth, which is a great idea, and I'm glad to see that's happening.

The employment is almost 80 per cent youth employment, 18 per cent lower than its pre-COVID level. Does the department have any idea when youth employment will bounce back and surpass its pre-COVID level?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: We continue to see strong signs, once we're through the second shots and we begin to try to get back to some form of normal, that there will be a strong rebound in strength in employment. We're also seeing, through our universities and the community college, the domestic enrolment anticipated for the Fall is quite high. It's higher than normal. It's a sign that young people want to be here in Nova Scotia, because not only do they feel safe, but they feel there are opportunities here. We are reasonably confident that as we begin to come out of this, the employment will grow, and if I try to remember, I think from the first wave of COVID, we recovered just below five per cent of the original hit of unemployment to reduce it to five per cent. Of course, then the third wave hit, and young people got hammered again.

Again, we are hopeful and we think we will see a strong recovery as people become safer.

LARRY HARRISON: We do not have crystal balls. I wish we did. But certainly the department is working on trying to stabilize the situation when things will open up again, which is good to hear. I don't know whether my colleague has more questions or not before our 20 minutes are up.

THE CHAIR: You have actually another eight minutes, and Mr. Johns just put his hand up. Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: I noted that regarding specific to Cape Breton, it seems to be the most significantly hit due to COVID in youth employment numbers. What I was looking at - it looked like there were almost 7,000 fewer jobs in Cape Breton for youth than before. I'm curious what's actually being done not only to return the numbers to pre-COVID numbers, but also to attract new youth to Cape Breton. Is there anything that's being done to do that and address employment there?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I would ask Marjorie if she could speak to that, please.

MARJORIE DAVISON: I can elaborate in terms of the investment and construction in Cape Breton, with over \$3 billion planned in Cape Breton and moving into mainland. That's what was mentioned in my previous comment, that there are growing opportunities for Cape Breton. Our work cut out for us is to provide some on-ramp training so that those young people have the basic skills, the essential skills that they need to enter into these opportunities. We find particularly when we're working with groups that are traditionally underrepresented in these occupations that we need to provide more intensive supports up front.

Again, the partnership with industry has been phenomenal there, and they've been very open to helping us to get the message out to youth. Nancy can talk about the investments that she's making particularly to reach out to the equity youth there.

NANCY HODDINOTT: Just a couple of other things I'd highlight in terms of specifically in Cape Breton. When we receive applications for our programming, all the continuum of youth programs, Summer Skills, co-op, as well as our Graduate to Opportunity initiative, we ensure that we're funding and supporting students and youth across the province. That's one of the criteria. We ensure that we're investing in all regions of the province.

I would note as well, there are specific initiatives where we want to make sure there are opportunities to take advantage of these remote learning opportunities that we have right now, so NPower, which is a program that we're supporting to get diverse youth into the IT sector - for now all of the program and the learning is based out of Halifax. We're now accepting and promoting the program to Cape Breton, recognizing we have those remote opportunities. We're working with groups in Cape Breton specifically to enroll students in Cape Breton into that IT training program.

[10:45 a.m.]

BRAD JOHNS: Just to follow up on that, programs like the GTO and the other ones - are they actually impacting youth migration to Nova Scotia? Are we seeing that migration here? What are the numbers like showing feedback from that?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I think a real success story, to highlight the question the honourable member made, is the Study and Stay Program. That's a program that basically taps into international students from the Philippines, China, and India and connects them with employers or potential employers and they're basically mentored throughout that term.

If I remember correctly, in the first couple of cohorts, almost 80 per cent of them have stayed and have employment here in Nova Scotia. It's an amazing program. It won an international award - and I apologize, I can't remember the name of the award - but it's again an example of a partnership between the private sector, universities and an amazing organization called EduNova. EduNova is an arm's-length organization on behalf of universities that helps support international recruitment and so on, as well as retention of international students.

That's part of the reason why our workforce is growing, but part of the reason is the economy has been strong and people are beginning to see Nova Scotia pre-COVID as a safe, wonderful place to be.

BRAD JOHNS: I'll turn things back over to my colleague, but just a very quick comment: 80 per cent retention seems pretty significant and I'm pretty surprised by that number, actually. So with that, I'll turn things back over to Mr. Harrison for a quick question.

LARRY HARRISON: Where would be the greatest area of need where our youth could be hired right now?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I would refer to Ms. Hoddinott and to Ms. Davison on those two.

NANCY HODDINOTT: The labour market needs for youth are the same - they're just the labour market needs in general. There are certainly opportunities in the IT sector - the deputy spoke in his opening remarks to the investment in the computer science program in post-secondary. We continue to work around labour market needs and training in the construction sector, and there are lots of aspects to that.

There are continuing labour market needs in health care and continuing care, and we have a number of very targeted investments in skills and learning in those areas that really are working with employers around what's needed, doing some training, and ensuring through our One Journey Initiative, for example, that we work with a cohort of individuals looking to train up in areas like continuing care assistants. Then it's working

with employers so that when they graduate from those programs, they go right into employment. So there are ongoing needs in those areas as well.

That's just a few. Marjorie may want to get a little bit more specific in terms of the trades . . .

THE CHAIR: Ms. Davison, I'm so sorry. The time has elapsed for the PC caucus. Now it's the NDP, and if they let you continue, that's their choice. Ms. Coombes, go ahead, please.

KENDRA COOMBES: You can continue.

MARJORIE DAVISON: Well, driven by the shipbuilding sector and the Province, there are a number of industrial and manufacturing trades which are providing great opportunities for youth. There is an initiative called Pathways to Shipbuilding which is bringing cohorts of women and equity-seeking individuals into the shipyard, and that is filling the demand there for welders, metal fabricators, industrial mechanics, ironworkers - a number of different trades from the manufacturing perspective. Other trades in demand include the industrial electrician.

In other areas, as you might know, we're seeing a huge need for cooks within our service sector. Challenges sometimes in those sectors is that the pay is not as high. We see a need for hairstylists. We're dealing right now with bringing in a new trade called the Black Beauty Culture Hair Innovator, which will provide opportunities within the African Canadian community in Nova Scotia. A lot of the service trades have big demand but there are needs there to improve some of the working conditions so that youth will come into those trades.

There are additional equipment operator trades, and this has been identified by the Office of Immigration as well, and has been made available as an opportunity to bring people into Nova Scotia to work within heavy equipment operator trades. Cranes aren't included in that, but you will notice there are a number of cranes now up in the City of Halifax. We are seeing more construction, and that is the demand for those types of operators. We've also been working with the forestry sector in response to the closure of Northern Pulp and trying to create a more sustainable sector, and some demands are emerging there around equipment operation as well.

That will give you a few - carpenter always has a huge demand. It's probably always one of the largest trades in demand, but we also have some other homegrown trades like boat builder, which are also in demand. Over the next few years, there are a number of opportunities within the skilled trades for our young people.

KENDRA COOMBES: I want to go in a little deeper from my colleagues with the PCs on some of these issues. Our caucus has repeatedly pointed out over the last year that the employment impact of COVID-19 has been very difficult for various different groups.

It has been unevenly distributed, as we know, among demographic groups and industries. Youth 15 to 24 experience the largest job losses among all age groups. Nova Scotia women also lost more jobs than men, both in number and in percentage of terms. I recognize the department has a number of existing programs to support youth employment, but what specific changes or new investments are being made to address the dramatic loss of employment experienced by youth and young women in particular?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Nancy and others can probably speak more to how we pivoted with existing programs to adapt them to support the private sector and others to encourage them particularly to hire youth or provide experience or learning opportunities. If I may, I'd defer to Nancy.

NANCY HODDINOTT: I'll highlight a couple of things. I'll highlight that during last Summer and into this additional Summer, we pretty much adapted every program and policy we had in place to ensure that we could maximize the number of people that we could support and support employers who were still out there really trying to bring youth in to support them. We adapted our policies around our co-op programs and our Summer Skills program. We ensured that they meshed really well with the federal investment as well. We worked with employers to elongate application periods and allow for longer placements into the Fall as opposed to just the Summer months, and in doing that, we maintained and supported pretty much the same number of students and young people that we did the year before. That's one piece.

We also recognized in areas like - and again, it comes back to some of the earlier comments - retail, tourism, accommodation, those sectors where youth and women were highly employed and impacted, we made changes to our programs. For example, our Skills Development program, where individuals working in those sectors would actually have to demonstrate they had a lesser time working in those sectors in order to come into our Nova Scotia Works centres, if they were interested in retraining or upskilling and wanted to get funded to do that, we reduced the criteria that they needed to meet in order for us to be able to fast-track some of those individuals who were unemployed and wanted to get upskilling to get into different areas of work.

We've done that. That was only launched less than a year ago. We continue to monitor those things.

We also redo some of the criteria particularly around equity-seeking groups - this would include again women in underrepresented occupations, but other equity-seeking groups as well. Again, lesser timelines in the workforce in order to qualify for some of our training and upskilling in order to really reach out and support those people.

Our training and upskilling programs - for example, like a Skills Development program - funds individuals to go back to school but it also provides a wraparound living

allowance, child care supports, all of those pieces that need to be in place to ensure that individuals, and women in particular, have the funding they need to go to school, to really up their skills to get even better employment. We've made some of those adjustments and changes as well.

THE CHAIR: I'm sorry. My computer froze. It takes me out and brings me back without touching it and it takes literally seconds. I texted Suzanne just to make sure somebody knows that. Ms. Hoddinott finished speaking - correct? Ms. Coombes, go ahead, please.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you Madam Chair - I'm aware of that issue and I was expecting you back momentarily.

You did mention child care supports. I know there are many of us - specifically myself and a few others who are very much advocates of a public system of accessible, affordable, high-quality child care. We know that it's critical to addressing one of those key barriers that you just discussed to women's labour market attachment. The median monthly cost of child care for an infant in Halifax is \$957, and we also know that there are child care deserts in our province, as well as not enough flexibility in that child care system.

You did mention child care supports, and I want to know what those types of child care supports are and how those work. I'm assuming it covers the cost of child care or a portion of it. Could you please explain how this child care support works?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I can indicate that our colleagues at Education and Early Childhood Development are working hard with the federal government looking at child care opportunities, and our Department of Community Services as well. They would be more able to answer your question than we would, so I apologize for that. EECD would probably be your best contact.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm assuming, then, when you're talking about part of the wraparound supports that are provided are actually coming from the subsidized program within Education and Early Childhood Development? Or Community Services?

NANCY HODDINOTT: Typically, LAE plays in this - we do a couple of things. We provide some funding and supports for the early childhood education training programs. So there are enhancements and training programs across the province. We have particularly worked in Indigenous communities to ensure that if we had some funding that we could leverage to help train and upskill individuals in the workplace to provide a better quality of early childhood education in some of those communities, we would do that.

But specifically, what I was referring to in my last comment was one of the programs that we fund is called Skills Development. It's a program for unemployed people who identify that they want to go in and do retraining because they can't attach to the labour market. We fund them to go back to school to retrain - short-term sort of training initiatives.

As part of that funding, we allocate dollars - and there's sort of a formula that's used to calculate this on an individual basis based on need, income - those kinds of things. We will fund specific amounts if there are child care needs. We will include that in the bi-weekly payments and supports that individuals get to go back to school. Does that answer your question?

[11:00 a.m.]

KENDRA COOMBES: Yes. I want to thank you for that clarification on that issue, because it was a little off-putting.

I'm just wondering, how is your department working with the employers to understand their responsibility to provide accommodations to workers who have caregiving responsibilities?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Again, at my level, high-level partnerships with a lot of the organizations and the wraparound supports that are needed are always part of the discussion. Again, I'd look for Nancy or Marjorie for perhaps more detail.

MARJORIE DAVISON: I can talk in reference to the employers that we work with, and we work with around 2,500 employers in the province who are active employers at skilled trades, and of course accommodating women and the needs of women in these workplaces is very primary and important to us. What we do know is that we have been able to attract more women into the skilled trades, but it's a difficult journey to complete and to get trade certification because of the experience in the workplace. It's not necessarily just related to child care issues.

What we try to do is work with the employer when they take women into the workplace to help them understand what the needs are of the particular women whom they're employing as apprentices. That might be accommodating child care. Often, it's more about the leadership provided in the workplace, the culture of the workplace, ensuring that the women aren't subjected to microaggressions on a daily basis. For example, that they have access to protective equipment and gear that fits them that they can use safely, that they are adequately deployed in work, and that there's confidence in them to do the work that they've been hired to do.

These are all issues that women do face. We have worked in partnership with the Status of Women, the YWCA, and with Women Unlimited. There are a number of groups that are interested in supporting the success of women in non-traditional occupations including trades, and we have all been working together to develop resources. With a special project with federal funding, we have a Women in Trades office that has been going for the last - this is the third year coming around for that, and that office has been able to do a lot of work. We've developed an assessment process with our employers to help them be able to know what the environment is they're providing and to identify the gaps and then to provide resources to them to help, to prepare, and to provide a successful experience for women who are coming into those occupations.

KENDRA COOMBES: You touched on another part of the issue that I was going to bring up in this question. The Co-operative Education Incentive and Student Summer Skills Incentive both include a diversity bonus, as was mentioned earlier, which provides

an incentive to encourage employers to hire youth who are underrepresented in the workforce and face additional barriers to employment, including those who identify as African Nova Scotian, racially visible, Mi'kmaw, or Indigenous, as a person with disability, a woman in an underrepresented occupation, or international student.

With regard to that, there's more than just the caregiving accommodation. What programs and supports specifically are in place to ensure that employers accessing these bonuses are equipped to address issues of racism, sexism, or other forms of discrimination if they occur in the workplace, and is there training available to the employer?

NANCY HODDINOTT: We try and do a couple of things to support those pieces in our programming. First and foremost, I'll speak in general of what we're doing with sectors and industry, and then in particular to some of those programs. Our deputy minister mentioned earlier in his opening remarks around our sector councils. That's a program that's unique in Nova Scotia. We fund 14 industry or sector councils to work in areas in small- to medium-sized enterprises like recruitment, training, and retention. A huge focus of that work is how those sectors work to support their businesses in being inclusive: having inclusive workplace policies, providing an environment that's welcoming and supportive of everybody who's coming in to work there. We do a lot of work in that area just in general with a number of sectors across the province.

For our particular youth employment programs like co-op and Summer Skills, we ensure that we do a little bit of a check-in at post-work experience with youth. We do a little bit of a survey at the end of the year to ensure that we have some sense of how that went, what the workplace experience was. If there are issues identified in that, we take that into consideration in terms of, is that somewhere we would send another student for another term in future years? What's the opportunity to go back and talk to the employer about some issues that may come out of there.

We do surveys, we do evaluations, we monitor those things, and we also have focus groups with youth throughout the course of the year as well, just to get a sense of how things are going in general, what they're looking for when they're coming into a workplace, what would be supportive, and we share that with employers as well - just in general commenting on what they can do to help a student.

We also have an incredible online curriculum called Welcoming Workplaces that we continue to enhance and update that we encourage - it's free. SkillsonlineNS has all kinds of ongoing learning opportunities that employers as well as individuals can go into to really brush up on or think about the kind of workplace environment they're offering now, the workplace environment they want to be able to offer, and what policies and programs they may have to bring in to ensure that they have a better place that's inclusive of everyone to work.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm just going to ask this further question. How does your department plan to address - how is it addressing the systemic barriers that exist for groups currently underrepresented in the Nova Scotia workforce?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Sorry, I missed the first part of the question. I apologize.

KENDRA COOMBES: How is the department planning to address the systemic barriers that exist for groups currently underrepresented in the Nova Scotia workforce?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: We've seen a real effort and emphasis in many areas to make sure - let me give you an example. The universities have a working group already where we're really looking to reduce those barriers. We learned early on that you need to have absolute attachment to the African Nova Scotia community or the Indigenous community directly, to ensure that you're providing an experience that in fact will make sure that student or individual sees success. We're seeing it in the construction sector and other areas, where even some of our union folks have hired specifically to recruit Indigenous folks into the trades.

It's part of the everyday conversation, which I can tell you for years I've been in government, I've never seen the emphasis that I'm seeing now - and it's long overdue - to make sure we are having those discussions not only internally to government, but with our partners. Our partners are being responsive overall. They do want to engage. They do want to provide opportunities, and they ask us for help to learn how they learn more about the Indigenous community and the African Nova Scotian community and people with disabilities and so on, so they can make for a welcoming opportunity in the workforce.

We've got a ways to go, there's no question, but I really believe we're seeing success in many fronts because of the commitment of our partners.

THE CHAIR: Time has lapsed for the NDP caucus. We move on now to the Liberal caucus - Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

HON. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Thank you so much. I have been impressed with a lot of the work that Nova Scotia Works has done and I find they're very good - at least the Bridgewater office, it's the one that I tend to have the most conversation with - about updating me on some new programs and whatnot that they have in, which is great, because I do get parents who are concerned about the future of their children.

I'd like to talk a bit about the school liaisons and their roles. I wasn't aware of this until I got the package, so if you could give me more information and detail about the role of the liaisons.

NANCY HODDINOTT: Nova Scotia Works is our employment service across the province, and the Bridgewater service is very good, so thank you. Yes, they do some incredible work.

A number of years ago, with the transformation of the Nova Scotia Works centres and from working in partnership with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, we recognized that at every transition time there's a bit of a gap in service for individuals, and we wanted to ensure that we were closing that gap for youth who were in high school and then leaving high school to either go to post-secondary or try to enter the labour market.

What we've done is work with Education and Early Childhood Development to really co-invest in new positions across the province. Currently, we've actually placed nine school liaison positions, which are really career development practitioners, in nine locations of Nova Scotia Works across the province to work with nine families of schools, particularly at the high school level. It's beginning at the high school level with youth having that career practitioner attached to the schools and some days actually in the school working to help youth begin that career planning piece, to help them understand that once they graduate from high school, the services in the community, where they are and how they are located, what kinds of services they can expect.

We currently have nine in place. We're adding another five in the Fall of 2021, which will bring the total up to 14 for the province. We've seen some good successes out of this in terms of numbers of students who are accessing the supports. I think these people have really taken some time to be embedded in the school system and be recognized by the administration that this is a resource that's available, and then the liaison back and forth between the community supports and the school supports has been going very well.

So it's a partnership with Education and Early Childhood Development that we're actually quite proud of and we do ongoing evaluations of how those things are going. It's just that we're top of mind in terms of what youth are needing, what they're looking for and if we're meeting those needs.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: So do they work directly with the guidance department in the high school?

NANCY HODDINOTT: It's interesting when you're building a relationship in a school - it took a little while to figure out that place for guidance and the place for these career practitioners. Ultimately, it is a partnership, and guidance and these practitioners work directly, so where do we hand off? Where is it a guidance issue versus where is it really something that we can hand off to a practitioner, because it really is about the next area of study, what career they're thinking about.

The other support that's been really interesting is the support that these practitioners provide to parents who are trying to help their children make decisions about their next steps. There has been a lot of work there. They're available to parents as well in terms of helping parents coach children in making some of those decisions and some of those next steps.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I did career coaching for parenting back when my eldest son was in high school - I remember doing that. Can you give me the names of the Regional Centres that offer a liaison now and then who's getting the new five positions?

NANCY HODDINOTT: If it's okay, I will actually get those to you post-meeting.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Oh, that's fine. I'm just wondering if South Shore Regional Centre for Education is one of them that will have the person. (Laughter)

[11:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Ms. Lohnes-Croft, one second, please. Ms. Hoddinott, you can send that to the clerk after, and then she will send it to all the members. Back to Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I find one of the gaps that happened, and I'm particularly speaking to students with disabilities, is that there's a guardianship issue where once a child turns 18 or 19, they are adults and they don't have to communicate with their parents about their educational plans or what they're looking for. I find you're nurtured in junior high and then you come to high school, and it isn't as hands-on for parents to know exactly what career paths are available. If the communication is with the student, it doesn't always get communicated to the parent.

I've heard parents who say, I go to parent-teacher meetings, and I can't get answers because my child hasn't signed a paper giving permission. Kids can stay in school until they're 21, and often children with disabilities will, to pick up extra courses or because they haven't found where they're going next because of that gap, as we spoke about. That's sort of a grey area for parents who are trying to be supportive and trying to find a career or work or an apprenticeship program or secondary education for their student.

Have you come across that grey area with guardianship and the student actually being an adult and having the right to make decisions on their own?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Yes. For example, in our post-secondary branch, we have a specific unit that supports students with disabilities. They work with those students on a regular basis, and also Saint Mary's University in a partnership with ourselves has an amazing program where they bring in private sector individuals to partner with students with disabilities for job opportunities and so on. Actually, we were able to target \$8 million

specifically with students with disabilities, over 3,000 of them, to support them in case they needed additional technical aids and so on during the pandemic.

The guardian question - sorry, \$2.5 million. My staff are correcting me. I've got to be careful here. But the 3,000 students, I was correct about. I'm not sure whether Nancy or Marjorie might be able to speak to the guardian issue specifically to the honourable member. I'm not able to, other than we do have a specific unit to work with students with disabilities.

MARJORIE DAVISON: I don't have a precise answer there. We would certainly follow the protocols, again, working with guidance as well as practitioners in schools. A lot of the work to actually get to a place where we actually could work in the schools in this way was ensuring that we would follow all of those protocols and privacy - all of those things that need to be in place. There was certainly some training for career practitioners, in terms of working with the youth population, which would be slightly different than working in the [Inaudible] population. We're certainly following the rules, recognizing that it's always best for a parent and a student to be working together, but where that's not happening, all I can tell you is, if a parent just wants to work with the career practitioner on their own, so they absolutely can understand what's available out there and can communicate that with their child, we welcome that, and that's certainly an option.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: It does seem to be a grey area, and respecting the privacy of the adult child too. I understand it, but I understand the frustration of a parent. There are some children who just won't communicate with their parents. I do hear that frequently.

With the STEP program that's offered in high school, which is usually the student picks a trade that they're interested in, and on Fridays they attend the local NSCC and learn some trades basics. Does this go along with what your liaison is doing - preparing someone for an apprenticeship program - or are these totally separate?

MARJORIE DAVISON: The STEP program is a unique program - is it Park View high school?

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Yes.

MARJORIE DAVISON: Okay. It preceded what we now have, the O2 program in the high school. To get more information we should reach up to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, but I am aware, because we work closely with Education and Early Childhood Development on trades programming. That is a program that that board is supporting on its own, where they're enabling the students to come in and to access - I think they learn around a number of trades going into the NSCC

on Friday during the week. It's not related to any of the career practitioner work that may be happening. It's an offering of that board that's unique to that board.

The idea of skilled trades in the schools has been growing, and there are skilled trade centres in a number of high schools across the province. I think it's 29 schools across the province, but in all boards, and then there's a greater number of schools that can offer skilled trades courses independent of the centres. The centres are actually sort of a shop, a physical location that has been built into the school.

The Options and Opportunities program is available in 69 schools across. It's an older program, it precedes the skilled trade centres, but it's providing that exposure to students in a more comprehensive manner across all the school boards in the province.

The participation co-op right now is between 3,500 and 4,000 high school students every year, that participate in co-operative learning. It just gives you a bit of the gamut from an experiential learning perspective in the schools.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I should add, it's kept a lot of students in school and has really enhanced and brought them to realize that they want to choose a certain career in trades. I know a lot of successful people from that program.

Being summer, I was reading also about a summer student apprenticeship program, and I'm interested in what that's all about. I think of summer as a time to earn pocket money or money to go to college. I didn't realize there was a summer apprenticeship program. Can you talk a little bit about that, since it's very seasonal?

MARJORIE DAVISON: Yes, I'm happy to talk about that program. That's a program we fund in partnership with industry associations in the province. We currently have three iterations of that program: Building Futures for Youth, which is operated by the Construction Association of Nova Scotia; we have a Test Drive Program, which is operated by the Automotive Sector Council; and Serve It Up, which is operated by the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia.

It's a process during the school year where the students apply and are selected, and there are actual discussions with the families of the students as well, and they go through a selection process. They participate in a two-week workplace safety program, and then they are able to work five to seven weeks with an employer during the summer.

It is a paid experience. It is unique for high schoolers, because they get co-op credit, but most co-op credit is supposed to be unpaid. In this situation it's a partnership with Education and Early Childhood Development, recognizing to experience a true apprenticeship, you need to be in a paid work experience, and these young people work under someone who is certified in that trade. It's available to them in Grades 10 and 11.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I think that's all I really had on my plate for today, so I can pass it on to one of my colleagues.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Mr. Ince, I believe, had a question.

TONY INCE: This is very informative. You guys are doing a great job. Keep it up. My question is probably going to be more directed to Ms. Davison around if she could talk more about the Women in Trades Office and the shipbuilding programs.

MARJORIE DAVISON: After I speak, Nancy may have something to add, because she is a huge partner in the shipbuilding initiative. What was the first part of your question, Minister Ince?

TONY INCE: I was just asking about the Women in Trades Office.

MARJORIE DAVISON: The Women in Trades Office operated in two units. One of them is dedicated to just construction, and it's an Atlantic initiative, so we have been a lead in working with our Atlantic partners on providing women with opportunities to work in the construction sector. The second one is women in skilled trades, which provides opportunities to work in the other three sectors. This program was based on a wage subsidy. There was a significant wage subsidy provided to the employer.

We wanted to reduce any perceived barriers. Many employers will think about a woman coming into trades as not having the physical stature required to do a trade, and so it's really helping them understand that it doesn't matter what size you are, that there are things that you can do within a trade like any other person. Many tradespeople are small when they're men, as well, so it's not a size factor.

The wage subsidies are to reduce the barrier, and then each employer agreed to have an assessment completed at their work site and to participate in a series of what we would call interventions - essentially workshops, resources - working with their own workforce, as I mentioned earlier, preparing them for women to be there. The Women in Trades Office provides mentoring and coaching as well, as the women are going through their apprenticeship.

There have been issues. We have had to move women to other opportunities because it didn't work out. So it's not been all rosy, but we've learned a lot and our objective is to really understand what it takes to provide a successful experience for women in trades so that we can ensure that we're doing that after these projects are completed.

Regarding the shipbuilding program, this started with Women Unlimited, which is another program I mentioned earlier. Women Unlimited is very focused on supporting barriered women into careers in the trades and technologies. It involves a 14-week career exploration program up front, and then they get preferential seating in an NSCC program

of their choice if the seats are available. Upon completion of that, they enter into full-time employment.

That model was used to develop the Pathways to Shipbuilding model. Irving Shipbuilding Inc. loved that model - they wanted the individuals to go to NSCC and to get that full two-year diploma before coming to Irving. They were able to space out the cohort so that it was meeting the needs that they were experiencing in their workforce, and also enabling them to grow their learning about bringing women.

If you can imagine, after the first cohort of women in shipbuilding, they joined Irving all on the same day. I think it was 17 women coming into Irving and making such a splash in that workforce. And the union was very on board as well. There were some learnings from Irving, in that it was a nice splash but it was kind of difficult to manage. Now we're learning to do a bit more spacing of individuals coming in.

We've had the two women cohorts, the Indigenous . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. Sorry Ms. Davison . . .

MARJORIE DAVISON: I'm done?

THE CHAIR: Yes, the time for the Liberal caucus is complete. We do have about seven minutes for our second round, starting with the PC caucus. If they wish for you to continue, and I know Ms. Hoddinott also had some information on the shipbuilding and the women. So we're going to Mr. Johns and he can decide.

[11:30 a.m.]

BRAD JOHNS: We're fine with continuing to hear the response.

MARJORIE DAVISON: I was just going to finish with that there has been an Indigenous cohort and after that an African Nova Scotian cohort. We learned a lot from the Indigenous cohort, which I think set up the next cohort with African Nova Scotians for a huge success. In fact, all of them - 19 of the 20 who completed the program are working at Irving.

What happens when they get to Irving is that they become registered as apprentices and then they're supported to complete their apprenticeship in those trades. Now there is a new cohort under development for another group of Indigenous youth, and it will be within the steamfitter/pipefitter/plumbing trade. It's a bit of a departure from the previous emphasis on metal fabrication.

Nancy has been a huge funder of this, so I will turn it over to Nancy. It has been a huge partnership of a number of different groups.

NANCY HODDINOTT: I'll just add - and again, a huge partnership. When you come to the table in a huge event like this, it becomes: What's your place in this work? We know that the success of these programs is the wraparound supports that are provided to go back to school and train.

Our place in this, similar to the Skills Development program, is that we provide the living allowance and all those other supports. Whether it's child care, rent, housing - all those kinds of things that need to be in place to support somebody to go back to training. We have, through our federal Labour Market Transfer Agreement funding, been able to fund these three programs and these individuals from a living allowance perspective to ensure that they don't have to worry about those things while they're going back into training and upskilling for jobs in the shipbuilding industry.

BRAD JOHNS: Just very quickly, I'm curious to know if anybody has numbers on how many youth were employed in the sector in the Summer of 2019, versus 2020 and 2021.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Due to the provincial lockdown implemented to curb the third wave of the pandemic at the end of April, the number of unemployed youth 15 to 24 increased from 9,400 on April 1st to 11,200 in May.

All I've got is this year's - I don't have 2019 for comparison. I think the honourable member is looking for comparative data. Maybe Marjorie or Nancy might.

THE CHAIR: They're both shaking their heads. I'm assuming it's negative. But we can get you that information. (Interruption) Ms. Hoddinott has something.

NANCY HODDINOTT: We do have a sort of total number between 2019 and 2020, if that's helpful. We know that youth employment dropped by 8,500 jobs, so a negative 12.7 per cent between 2019 and 2020, if that's helpful.

BRAD JOHNS: I may have missed this, so I apologize if I did, but what's the plan to find employment opportunities for youth in the tourist sector for this Summer?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I know the Department of Inclusive Economic Growth has been working very closely with TIANS and the tourism sector. I'm actually part of a team with Deputy Farmer and Deputy Miller, that's helping to look at programs to support the tourism sector. But we also have our programs in relationship with them as a sector council and Nancy might be better prepared to speak specifically to what we're doing.

NANCY HODDINOTT: Tourism is one of the sector councils that we work with and fund. We have been working with them in light of what they're anticipating around a

recovery of that industry over the next few months. What areas were requiring some of our additional investment, upskilling, and training, and we would be working - so that would be some additional dollars that we could flow through the sector council if they needed to do some additional training in local or different regions across the province.

In particular with our youth program, and we know that Summer Skills and our co-op programs - we know that they are continuing to employ students in those areas. I talked earlier about wanting to ensure we have geographic representation in those arenas, but we also want to make sure that we have sector-specific representation in the jobs. If youth are studying an area in that accommodation-specific area of study, and there are co-op programs, we want to ensure that we support some of those as well. We will continue to do that this year and into next.

It really is just engaging with the sector around where are your training needs, where are your labour shortages, and what are the areas we can support you in, either short-term or longer term, in meeting some of those gaps?

THE CHAIR: Your timing was perfect. Your time has elapsed for the PC caucus. We move on now to the NDP caucus. Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: According to the recent Canadian income survey data from Statistics Canada, 13.7 per cent of the population aged 18 to 64 in Nova Scotia has income below the poverty line. This was the second-highest portion in the country after Saskatchewan. Is the department doing any tracking or evaluation on the quality of jobs in the province?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Again, I know our partners in Community Services and so on are working hard in that area as well. I don't know specifically if Marjorie or Nancy may have some direct comments on that, but all the sectors that we work in with partnerships to get youth workforce attachment to young people, we work really hard on those who are vulnerable as well and trying to ensure that they have success. It comes back to our colleagues at Community Services have some exceptional support programs to help with workforce attachment with those who are on income assistance and even to attend university.

I wonder if Nancy or Marjorie might have some more information.

NANCY HODDINOTT: As part of the labour market information that we regularly monitor, we would be looking at those kinds of things: employment rates, income levels, those kinds of things. The other piece is where we choose to invest because we have labour market needs. For example, even NPower has been a recognition that these are young people in the province who are living in poverty or are underemployed. How do we get them not into just jobs, but into careers, and into careers that will provide them with a very

livable income? The programs that we support - we want to ensure it's not just a job, but it is actually a career.

We're investing in those areas, for example in things like NPower. Our Graduate to Opportunity Program is the same thing. We're providing supports to employers to hire graduates at a certain minimum level of salary to ensure that these people are coming out, and that their salary will allow them to pay off their student loan probably, but also earn a good living. We ensure that our income levels in the programs that we support are doing that.

Then there are examples - for example, this Summer, with some additional funding that we got through the federal government, through our Labour Market Transfer Agreements, we supported 25 projects across the province, recognizing again in those very hard-hit sectors, that there may be some opportunity locally for some very innovative, local labour market solutions that could get more vulnerable individuals or individuals in equity-seeking groups into training programs or actually in the workforce. We invested a significant \$10 million over the last few months for 25 12- to 18-month projects to get local individuals impacted through the pandemic back into training or into the labour market.

It's something we keep an eye on all the time to ensure that we're investing our dollars where they're needed, and we're investing in people and in communities where they actually need it even more.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm sending this back to my colleague, Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Quickly, I just want to ask about a media report last week where hundreds of students going back to university this Fall will be scrambling to find a place to live. At Dalhousie, the university usually houses about 2,300 students at residence, but due to COVID-19 restrictions, they have reduced their capacity to only 1,800.

When we asked about this at a previous meeting, the deputy indicated that they were talking to universities about a framework plan for a return to campus. My A part is: How come students were just now, with only two months left before returning to school, notified about this change, and given that we have such low vacancy rates in Halifax - we know that we have some of the lowest vacancy rates in the country and that the average price of a two-bedroom apartment has increased 43 per cent in the last five years - I'm wondering if the department is doing anything to address the impact of high housing costs on the ability for young people to come back to university and complete their post-secondary education.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Our partnership with the universities and the Nova Scotia Community College and with our students is very strong. We're in a pandemic, and the epidemiology evolves. We got hit with a third wave. The universities came together with our Occupational Health and Safety team here at Labour and Advanced Education

and developed a framework that could work to bring students back to campus safely - also to make sure people in the community are safe. Epidemiology drives those decisions, along with vaccinations.

As we move faster to get second doses into arms, it will become clearer to the universities, and this is part of their challenge with students who are saying, can I get a residence? Can there be two to a room? All those kinds of questions that you don't have definitive answers on at the time, depending on the epidemiology. Dr. Strang has graciously met with the presidents several times to help them understand the framework.

Right now, some universities are choosing to take the chance that the second vaccination will be done in time, so that if you have two vaccinations, you can be two to a room in a residence. Dalhousie has chosen, from a safety perspective and their calculations, that 80 per cent capacity will be utilized within the residence rooms, and one to a room at this time. That might change or it might evolve, and I totally obviously understand the honourable member's concern about housing in Halifax, and Dalhousie for example has its own office of outreach to help students try to secure housing when they come. We know it's a challenge. I'm hopeful, all things being equal, that we'll see some normalcy in the post-secondary world come the Fall.

THE CHAIR: Your timing was great. The time for the NDP caucus has elapsed. We move on now to the Liberal caucus. The Honourable Tony Ince.

TONY INCE: I was wondering if you could speak to - we have a lot of capacity in the major centres with construction, everything that's going on. Can you speak to some of the initiatives that you may have in the more rural areas? Here we've got so much going on and people coming in, but there are still many rural areas, businesses that need people. Can you speak to what's happening there, please?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Montgomerie or Ms. Hoddinott?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I look to Nancy and Marjorie potentially to give a more detailed response to the honourable member's question.

NANCY HODDINOTT: I think a lot of the work we do, particularly with the sector councils, has sort of that provincial spread. It's really understanding from an industry perspective or a sector's perspective where the labour market needs are across the province. There are times when we're investing in training or specific programs in specific areas of the province over others.

If I allude to my earlier comment around the 25 projects that we funded this Summer, that was through a call for proposals to communities and organizations already working in the labour market space to say, is there something unique happening in your community where you might have a unique, local solution to that? Then people applied for

the funding we had available, and we were able to fund 25 projects. They are throughout the province and throughout a number of sectors, so it was really putting it back into community hands to say, this is the problem we have and here's the solution we think is going to work. We've done that.

[11:45 a.m.]

Those opportunities come up. We're open to those things. I think the Nova Scotia Works centres as well add a regional flavour and support to those local labour market needs where not just individuals looking for work, but employers on the ground in those communities can work with Nova Scotia Works centres. This is the need I have - how can you help me fill that need? We have that spread of programming across the province, a number of service delivery models, and a sector council program that allows us to get into some of those regional or community-based issues.

MARJORIE DAVISON: I can add a little bit from a trades perspective. Of course, the skilled trades are needed in rural communities just like they are in urban communities - maybe on a different scale, maybe more in terms of residential housing or dealing with motor power, on-road farm equipment, for example. Again, as I mentioned earlier, it's about encouraging a culture of training with the workplaces. Often in rural workplaces, the employers aren't aware of the apprenticeship system. They don't understand the value it can bring to succession planning, so we really try to get out there and talk to employers to help them understand the benefits of apprenticeship.

Our Apprenticeship START program preferences rural employers, so we made it available to those employers in rural areas to really encourage that participation in apprenticeship, and that has been helpful. We've expanded that program during COVID to make it more available within the municipal areas as well.

Another thing we do is we work with the equity groups on the ground. In terms of the Indigenous community, we have an Aboriginal apprenticeship advisory team. It's made up of all of the communities across the province so that we can be aware and help them connect to employers within their own communities. With the African Nova Scotian community, we have been working in partnership with the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs, particularly connecting our practitioners on the ground together, and then working to connect with the community leaders and helping grow again this connection to employers.

It does take time. It's a continuous effort. It's something that I think we have to recognize, that it needs to be an important effort for us in the years to come as well.

THE CHAIR: We have two minutes left. Mr. Ince or Mr. Horne? Who would like to ask a question? Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: Quick question: more curiosity about how our programs that you're producing that you're talking about today, how they would compare with the other provinces, especially the Atlantic provinces. I'm sure you have been watching that type of comparison. Maybe to the deputy minister.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Great question. What makes programs work is partnerships. What makes programs work even more is to make sure those programs are needed and are fulfilling a need that the private sector and others can build upon. That's our strength in Nova Scotia. We have strong, strong partnerships with everything from post-secondary to sector councils. We listen really hard to them. Obviously, we have disagreements and so on, but at the end of the day, we're able to deliver and see the retention of young people in Nova Scotia because of those partnerships.

I have to tell you, the co-op program, in the middle of the pandemic - I just could not believe how much the private sector stepped up. They were hurting, but they found ways to hire students, and they continually say in their surveys the co-op program is one of the best programs that they experience, so it's the partnerships that make it work.

THE CHAIR: This is the perfect timing to ask you if you have any closing remarks. I have a few things to say, but I will wait for you to have your closing remarks.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Those might have been them. Obviously, I'm blessed and am surrounded by a strong team, as you can see. A personal story: I went to the second graduation of the women cohort from the dockyard, and of course I showed up and here are all these young ladies and their parents and everybody is dressed to the nines and they're all excited, they're graduating, they're going to start work at Irving, and before the ceremony started, the back door of the gym opened and in walked the graduates from the last cohort of women dressed in their welding gear, all as a team, to support the new graduates.

I'm blessed to work with young people all over the place. I don't worry about the future of this province. Thanks for having us.

THE CHAIR: This was really amazing. If I just could say how grateful we are for the changes that have happened in the last five to six years of keeping our youth. I remember my niece and nephew 10 years ago when they graduated, they're all over. One is in England, one is out West.

My kids, who graduated in the last three to five years, and all their friends are here. To me, this is a beautiful example of how well we have done recently to keep our kids, to find employment for them, and to encourage them to keep their brain, this education that we're giving them. We lost so much of it 10 years ago to other parts of the world and to

other provinces, but now it's actually the reverse. People are coming here to find opportunity.

I am so grateful. I'm thankful to hear all these wonderful programs. Please keep them. If I have one little favour to ask, it is, maybe for a lot of the immigrants who are coming here, we need some kind of - not a welcoming package, but I know most groups have their own, and they try and help each other, but I know Newfoundland and Labrador has something. It's the community that helps the immigrants who are coming here for jobs as well. Maybe we can do something like Newfoundland and Labrador, just so they feel welcome. The stress of moving to a different country is so hard in the first year. Just to lessen it somehow and to allow them to go outside of the city as well, where there aren't as many people from their own community.

That is a dream of mine, and I love what I see, especially in my riding. I have one of the most diverse ridings, and everybody I meet, they're here because of a job. They're working, they're producing, they're opening businesses. This is the dream that I really was looking forward to 20 years ago, and I'm living it. Thank you for all your programs. You may leave so we can do some committee business.

Next, I see the next meeting. We did the business at the beginning, so our next meeting is Tuesday, July 27, 2021, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., and it will be, because it's the Summer, just ABCs. The committee will meet in July and August, but only to consider appointments to ABCs.

I have no other business here on my notes from July, so we are adjourned. Thank you. This was a very wonderful and interesting committee meeting. Our presenters were amazing with the information they presented us. Thank you all, have a wonderful afternoon, and survive this humid day again.

[The committee adjourned at 11:54 a.m.]