

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, January 31, 2023

Committee Room

**Skilled Labour Shortages and Impact on
Critical Infrastructure in Nova Scotia;
and
Appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions**

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Chris Palmer (Chair)
Melissa Sheehy-Richard (Vice Chair)
Dave Ritcey
John A. MacDonald
Nolan Young
Hon. Tony Ince
Ali Duale
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
[Ali Duale was replaced by Braedon Clark.]
[Kendra Coombes was replaced by Gary Burrill.]

In Attendance:

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration

Ava Czapalay, Deputy Minister

Department of Public Works

Peter Hackett, Deputy Minister

Mark Peachey, Chief Engineer

Gerard Jessome, Chief Executive of Engineering

Nova Scotia Community College

Don Bureaux, President

Jill Provoe, Vice-President, Academic and Equity

Tom Gunn, Dean, Trades and Transportation

Apprenticeship Board

Trent Sohlt, Incoming Chair;
Executive Director, Nova Scotia Construction Sector Council



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2023

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Chris Palmer

VICE CHAIR

Melissa Sheehy-Richard

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Human Resources. My name is Chris Palmer, MLA for Kings West and Chair of this committee. See, a call to order, and look at that. That's how much power there is - no. (Laughter)

Today, in addition to reviewing appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions, we will hear from witnesses regarding skilled labour shortages and impact on critical infrastructure in Nova Scotia.

At this point I'd like to ask everybody to please put your phones on silent as we proceed into our meeting. I would now ask all committee members to introduce themselves for the record by stating their name and their constituency, starting with Ms. Sheehy-Richard.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you, everyone. For the purposes of Hansard, I'd also like to recognize the presence of Chief Legislative Counsel Gordon Hebb to my right and legislative committee clerk Judy Kavanagh to my left.

At this point, we'd like to ask our witnesses to just have a bit of patience with us as we proceed with a bit of business we have to do. We're going to move on to appointments for agencies, boards, and commissions at this time.

I'd like to ask for a motion for our boards. MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: For the Department of Advanced Education, I move to recommend that Nick Beynon and Shellene Sparks be appointed members of the Dr. P. Anthony Johnstone Memorial Scholarship Committee.

THE CHAIR: There's a motion on the table. Any discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: For the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, I move to recommend that Margaret Gillespie deGooyer be appointed a member of the Université Sainte-Anne Board of Governors.

THE CHAIR: There's a motion on the table. Any discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: For the Department of Community Services, I move to recommend Collette Robert, Afolake Awoyiga, Rohini Bannerjee, Veronica Merryfield, Alyssa Blais, Betty MacDonald, Brittany Carter, Diana Brothers, and Julia Cecchetto be appointed members of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

THE CHAIR: There's a motion on the table. Any discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Lastly, for the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services, I move to recommend that Denise Robichaud be appointed a member and funeral director of the Board of Registration of Embalmers and Funeral Directors.

THE CHAIR: There's a motion on the table. Any discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Thank you very much. As you notice, there is a bit of noise here externally around the construction, so we ask for your patience as we proceed through our meeting today.

We will ask our committee members to move the rest of our committee business to the end of the meeting to allow for a full discussion with our witnesses here today.

We'd like to welcome all of our witnesses. At this point, I'd like to ask you all to introduce yourselves at the table. We'll begin with Deputy Minister Czapalay.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you all. At this point I'd like to ask all those who have prepared remarks as an introduction if you'd like to begin, beginning with Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Good morning, I'm Ava Czapalay and as I mentioned, Deputy Minister for Labour, Skills and Immigration. Thank you for inviting me to be here today along with colleagues from the Department of Public Works, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, and the Nova Scotia Community College. We all play an important role in growing and fostering Nova Scotia's workforce. This is key to building on the growth we're seeing across the province and addressing skilled labour shortages that all jurisdictions across Canada are facing right now.

In preparing to come here today, I reflected upon something a friend said to me earlier this year: 2030 came early. For many years, it was recognized that because of many people retiring and people not pursuing certain skilled trades, there would be gaps in our skilled trade sector by 2030. COVID-19 accelerated this challenge. Global events have created job pressures, not only in Nova Scotia's labour market, but worldwide.

Nova Scotia is in a fierce competition to attract the world's most talented and skilled workers. But I believe Nova Scotia has a competitive advantage. People across the country and all over the world are seeing what Nova Scotia has to offer. They want to come to Nova Scotia, build their careers, lay down roots, and thrive here.

Since hitting our population milestone of one million people in December of 2021, Nova Scotia has welcomed approximately 35,000 more people, according to Statistics Canada's population clock, and we have committed to grow our population to two million people by 2060. The Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration is laser focused on making sure this growth is both targeted and strategic. We need to attract and retain people who can help us grow our infrastructure and services to support our growing population. We're working with government departments to plan for this growth.

Our population will continue to grow, with job-ready newcomers arriving daily, and our province's median age is getting younger. Young people will choose to stay here and work, and many who already live here will have opportunities to re-skill and upskill into a trade. The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency continues to find solutions to grow a strong, diverse, equitable, and highly skilled workforce.

We want everyone to know that there is a place for them in the skilled trades. That's why we're focused on making sure we reduce barriers for equity-deserving groups. We're attracting job-ready newcomers through our immigration streams and from other parts of Canada. We also need to retain our youth - the builders of tomorrow - and show them that a career in the skilled trades has a lot to offer.

We've recently increased the number of apprentices being trained by journeypersons to a ratio of two-to-one to train more skilled tradespeople faster. We're growing, and with growth comes incredible opportunities to promote the skilled trades as a rewarding and viable career path.

To address skilled labour shortages, we must make it easier for people to build their skills. We're working with the Nova Scotia Community College to allow easier access to upskilling. We're also here to help employers. We have the tools to help their employees enhance their knowledge and abilities. For example, we have focused on workforce training and business development, increasing diversity in the workplace, and strengthening Nova Scotia's economic prospects in Cape Breton.

In support of recent infrastructure projects in Cape Breton, we've invested over one million dollars in training opportunities. This will help people in the construction sector get the skills they need to work on the new projects in Cape Breton.

This also supports industry partners in meeting their labour market needs. Under the Cape Breton infrastructure initiative, various targets were set: 25 per cent of trade hours must be worked by apprentices, and 10 per cent of those hours must be worked by apprentices from equity-deserving groups. Also included are provisions for equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion in the entire workforce.

At Labour, Skills and Immigration, we're focused on attaching people to jobs and jobs to people. For those looking to attach to the workforce, there are more than 50 Nova Scotia Works centres that deliver employment and career services throughout the province. No matter where people find themselves in life or in the job search process, there are passionate staff in every region who can help connect people to work.

In recent months, the committee has heard about our marketing campaign that's out right now in other parts of Canada to attract skilled trades workers. The campaign promotes Nova Scotia's tax refund named More Opportunity for Skilled Trades - it goes by the acronym MOST - for skilled trades workers who are under the age of 30. From the website,

LiveinNovaScotia.com, people can connect with our six navigators. They work with newcomers to help them understand what kinds of work opportunities exist in different regions throughout Nova Scotia.

These are just a few examples of investments, initiatives, and partnerships that are helping us attract, retain, and support the people we need, people who can help build the houses and the infrastructure we need. More people make us stronger in every way.

When it comes to addressing our labour and infrastructure needs in Nova Scotia, people are part of our plan. Thank you for your time. We are happy to take your questions.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett, do you have any opening comments?

PETER HACKETT: I do. As I said before, I'm Peter Hackett, Deputy Minister for Public Works for the Province. With me today I have Mark Peachey, our Chief Engineer of Highways, and Transportation and Gerard Jessome, our Chief Executive of Engineering, who looks after building and critical infrastructure.

Along with thousands of people at the Department of Public Works, much of the work we do centres on buildings and maintaining critical infrastructure for Nova Scotians that they count on each and every day. This includes health care infrastructure, highways, roads, bridges, schools, and many more to help our client departments.

The list of priorities for our province is long, and it's only going to get longer as our population grows towards our goal of having two million people by 2060. In many ways, having this much construction development under way is a good problem to have, but tens of thousands of people are needed to complete these projects as we go forward.

Skilled trades no longer need to look down the road for work. They can find it right here with the developments that we currently have going on. The billions of dollars invested in these projects help to keep our economy growing through the pandemic and will continue to mean opportunities for local businesses as we continue into the future.

The challenge with a local growing economy is finding enough right people at the right time to do this work that we're currently in. If every developer wants to pour concrete at the same time, that is a bit of a problem right now, but we also need to work closely with the industry to plan carefully and find creative solutions to get through this hiccup we're currently under.

Labour pressures and rising labour costs are only part of the complex puzzle for major infrastructure projects. Other issues include the cost and availability of materials, rising interest rates, inflation, availability of equipment, and other factors that go along with the construction industry. Sometimes it's not about finding enough equipment operators, but just finding enough equipment to actually bring to the province and do the

work. This is the reality of global market conditions today. It's not just here in Nova Scotia; it's right across the country and North America, and probably the rest of the developed world. Nova Scotia is not alone. Jurisdictions around the world are competing for labour and raw materials to meet increasing demand.

In previous discussions I've had up to this meeting with my counterparts across the country, everybody is continuing to spend. Capital programs are still going on, everybody still has growing population, decreasing and old infrastructure, so everyone is still spending money right across the country. There is simply no way for us to outbid our competition, so we have to find solutions to work with it.

In many ways, this is a new experience for Nova Scotia. We're not used to this type of demand and this type of progress and this type of work that we're currently under. It's obviously a good thing. Construction is a good thing and progress forward is a good thing. We just have to find ways to develop around it. We're seeing the convergence of significant population growth combined with major capital investments at a time when resources are in short supply; however, we have faced difficult economic times before, and that's one of the responsibilities of the department: to manage risk and to get around that.

Our experiences tell us that Nova Scotians are getting good value for their investment, and our working relationship with industry helps our province overcome these challenges. As our population demand for major projects continues to grow, we will continue to find solutions that deliver for Nova Scotians. I'm welcome to taking your questions.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bureaux, do you have any opening comments today?

DON BUREAUX: Again, I want to echo my colleagues' comments and thank you. It's an honour to be here this morning. I want to thank many of you for spending time on our new campus in Sydney last Friday. I'm joined today by my colleague Jill Provoe, who is Vice-President, Academic and Equity, and behind me is Tom Gunn, our Dean of Trades and Transportation.

As was mentioned already, we're seeing this situation not only across Nova Scotia but right across the country. Job vacancies and labour shortages in the construction industry are truly an area of concern. We know that the employment numbers have returned to pre-pandemic numbers, but we also know that those numbers, those levels, are simply not enough.

What we've also known for many years now is that one of the main drivers of our shortage in this particular sector is an aging workforce. Close to 20 per cent of construction workers in Atlantic Canada are set to retire by the year 2027, in four short years. We simply, as was mentioned, do not have enough people for the jobs of the future, and we at the Nova

Scotia Community College, in addition to the programming that we do, have committed to four large areas of focus.

[10:15 a.m.]

The first, working very closely with Deputy Minister Czapalay on establishing strategies to boost immigration. The second is getting more youth to consider a future career in trades with pride. The third is creating unique pathways for underrepresented individuals who've traditionally faced barriers of entering this path of work. Last but not least, providing opportunities for quick, and sharp, and faster upskilling of those already in the industry.

Here's the great news: the people who are here today, I can say without a doubt we spend our time coming up with ways to work more collaboratively. I can guarantee you that we work in a way that's in a partnership focus, but there's more that we can do. If we continue to strengthen our current collaborative efforts which we're focused on, I am convinced we can reach the goals that are established for this province: the big, the bold, and the brave goal of doubling our population as was mentioned earlier. To do that, we must continue to work in a strategic, coordinated manner. A manner that is informed by the unique needs, the contributions, and the barriers faced by each of our communities and groups that we serve.

Let me tell you what we're seeing in particular at NSCC. Some construction programs that we teach have very high industry demand. We know there are lots of jobs out there, but they're not full. Conversely, we see less industry demand for some programs' graduates, but we have large wait-lists for those programs. If we were to grow the capacity and make upgrades to our technology, our spaces, and to increase our equipment in many of our trade programs, we would need to look at the massive investment that would require.

We're also seeing emerging demands that require us to reconsider how we best prepare people for the workforce of tomorrow, in light of the expectations of learners today. We know that short, quick courses that cultivate a particular skill that employers want are in high demand globally. The term for this is a term I'm sure you've heard: micro-credentials. They bridge between pre-existing skills that people have today and the knowledge that they require for tomorrow.

We offer some of these micro-credentials right now, but we know we need to offer many more. To do so, we're going to continue to work with our friends at the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency to make sure that that flow of skilled tradespeople for tomorrow is a clear pathway, and I'm very excited about the work that we're doing now.

We also recognize that students coming to us across all programs are in greater need of support when it comes to mental health and readiness for learning at the post-secondary level. We want to make sure we foster a culture at NSCC that prioritizes the

mental health and wellness of all students and all employees, allowing them to learn, to grow, to contribute, and to thrive.

We're also very intentional - and it's a unique position which Jill occupies, which is Vice President of Academic and Equity. Those two drivers are very important for us to be combined in Jill's portfolio. We build diversity as one of our core strengths, and we know that by embracing diversity of knowledge, a broader, wider world view, and experience, those are key drivers for success in advancing education, innovation, creativity, and excellence.

We feel that there's a number of programs that we've offered that we can replicate - for example, the Pathways to Shipbuilding program. Through this approach, we can strengthen Nova Scotia's construction workforce by ensuring equitable opportunities for those who are traditionally underrepresented, allowing them to enter this line of work to truly make their mark. Finally, we believe it's time to foster a widespread pride - and I see this all the time - in this particular line of work, and promote a better appreciation of the skills required and the significance of these professions, and the talent of those working throughout the industry.

Through our annual studies, we know that the satisfaction rate among our grads from all trades-focused programs is very strong, as is retention. In fact, 94 per cent of our School of Trades and Transportation grads who are employed are living and working in Nova Scotia.

So, Mr. Chair, and to your colleagues, I'm very proud that we're here today to speak about this very important topic of labour shortages and its impact on the critical infrastructure of Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Soholt.

TRENT SOHOLT: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present to you today. To my esteemed colleagues, I very much appreciate the chance to share with you some insight from industry and from the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency.

We, the Province, the industries, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, and the construction sector - we're in a unique time right now, one that is more complex than ever, and a complexity that does apply to all sectors in our province, especially around the discussion of labour and the future of work. We can't ignore, though, what has happened in the past three years and the impact that that's having on our employers and our labour organizations.

The term "labour shortage" carries a lot of weight. It is a term that is used too often, I think, and dates right back to the 1990s. In some occupations, absolutely, we have a

shortage of people pursuing training and pursuing the opportunities for work right ahead of us. In other areas, depending on what stage your project is at, though, we have people who are waiting to go to work or looking for training opportunities.

We are noticing that labour, in construction in particular, is more fluid and adaptable than ever. We have workers in the province who still travel to other parts of Canada for work or for better wages. We have workers who are drawn into other sectors for better wages. We also have workers who are looking for their own work-life balance, and as a result of the past three years, are asking themselves some pretty tough questions.

Our EI numbers tell part of the story as a lagging indicator, but they don't tell the whole picture. We have equity-deserving communities who have high unemployment rates, and they have shared with us that when they hear the term "labour shortage" and industry is not engaging them, they hear: Industry doesn't want us. We can't be doing that.

This is why we say it's complex. This is why it's important to understand these dynamics. We often use phrases like "labour alignment" or "skills gap" or "recruitment and retention challenges" or "intentional workforce planning," because management, employers, labour, apprentices, students, community leaders, and youth share with us their experiences. Keep in mind that the private sector is competitive in nature. When it comes to skilled labour and the work available, we compete for that labour with every other sector in the province.

To echo Deputy Minister Hackett's comments around supply chain, that's another complication that adds to this nuance, this complexity within our sector. What I would like to share, though, is that the sector will continue to grow and we will adapt.

So what do we do to make sure that our critical infrastructure gets built? I can share with you confidently that nobody in the construction industry has said we can't do it. Industry, management, labour, government, and community-training providers must communicate and partner and co-operate with a common vision in mind. This is where sector councils help, as our focus is on workforce development.

We need to start by understanding the work. In partnership with Build Nova Scotia, the Department of Public Works, industry, the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration and the agency, we have built a forecasting tool that can look at our infrastructure projects and calculate the occupations we're going to need for these major infrastructure investments.

How those projects are procured is critical. The requirement for apprenticeship and the inclusion of diversity as part of these projects, like the ones in Cape Breton, has the rest of the country looking to Nova Scotia as a leader in this space. We're doing things differently.

We need to promote the opportunities and share with our communities, increase career awareness, and promote occupations that people don't know about, as President Bureaux mentioned, while recognizing that apprenticeship is important and celebrating our professional builders - even referring to them as "trades professionals." That will help attract individuals to our space.

In partnership, we need to actively recruit throughout Nova Scotia, throughout Canada, and internationally, and encourage more people to move here. I'm pleased to share that last year, our council engaged over 700 individuals within the province and had 200 attracted to the labour force within the last year. It's doable, and there is appetite for that.

Retention through consistent, meaningful work, training, and advancement will be key. We need to provide innovative training. That can come through the Nova Scotia Community College. We have industry partners who provide some of that training as well to meet the needs of these projects. I'm pleased to share that this is happening and those graduates are attaching to the labour force. We simply need more of it.

I heard a fantastic statement last week: Workforce development is economic development. I thought that really hit home for a council that spends time in workforce development.

In partnership with industry, government, training providers, and our communities, it's critical. A lot of this work is being led by the Apprenticeship Agency and our industry councils association and training partners.

As we look forward, I've never been more optimistic about the future of this province than I am today - our opportunities, and yes, our challenges.

Thank you very much. I welcome any questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you all for your opening comments. I'm sure we're going to have a great discussion this afternoon.

We'll now move into the question-and-answer period. As per the protocol of this committee, it's done by show of hands. I'll do my best to keep a running record of who will be asking the questions. I'd like to remind everybody to please wait until you're recognized by the Chair before you begin to speak, just for Hansard to do the recording. We will move into the question-and-answer period, and we will probably go until 11:40 a.m. to allow for closing remarks and any committee business we have to do.

I see committee members have their hands up, ready to go quickly. I did see MLA Hansen, then MLA Young, and then MLA Clark after that. MLA Hansen, you're first.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm always excited to ask questions. This is to the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, the Nova Scotia Community College, and the Apprenticeship Board - whoever would like to speak first can go ahead.

We all know that there's a housing crisis in Nova Scotia. It's not a secret. Some of the worst vacancy rates are in the areas outside of Halifax in places like the South Shore, and Kings and Hants Counties. Across the province, we have seen the impacts of the pandemic on people's ability to find affordable housing. We have heard from employers that access to affordable housing is a key barrier to recruiting and retaining workers.

The CMHC Rental Market Report released last week said that unaffordable rents are contributing to outmigration. It pointed out that the number of people leaving Nova Scotia for other provinces increased by 33 per cent compared to the previous year. A majority of outmigrants, 53 per cent, left for more affordable provinces.

Can you explain the impacts of the housing shortage on our ability to recruit and retain skilled workers?

AVA CZAPALAY: Perhaps it's best to start with our immigration program. We recognize that it's important to grow our population and we have a mandate to grow it to two million by 2060, but also to grow it in a very targeted, thoughtful way.

We have a campaign right now that is specifically targeting skilled trades workers and health care workers. That campaign is now in its second phase. It's been very successful, and I've referenced to this committee in the past that we also have navigators in place so that when people come forward as a result of the campaign and say, we're interested in moving to Nova Scotia so what kind of work is there for me with this particular trade, we can attach them to navigators in communities throughout Nova Scotia to learn more about the work opportunities that are there.

Also, part of that conversation is, where will I live, and are there sports for my children, and is there an opportunity for my partner - all of those conversations. Our navigators are working hard to get community-based information back to people so that they can make a decision on whether or not they choose to come here.

Our population growth strategy has several pillars - immigration is one, in-migration is another. The third is retention - retaining people who live here already - and I'd like to speak about that for a minute.

We want to retain more of Nova Scotia's population. We want for people to see opportunity here and to see it here from a very young age. We're working closely with our partners, including the Nova Scotia Community College and others, to really get the message out that there is work in communities throughout Nova Scotia in the skilled trades.

It's having more people see skilled trades as an option, having more people decide that they want to stay here - that they don't need to leave to work in the skilled trades.

Our department's contribution to helping resolve our housing challenges is to bring in the people with the skills needed to construct those houses, and also to help people who are already here acquire the skills that are needed to contribute to growing the infrastructure that our growing population needs.

THE CHAIR: MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I'll direct my questions towards NSCC. As a former NSCC faculty, I can think of some of the challenges you're having in rural Nova Scotia to generate some interest in the trades, and when you said that you're working with LSI to boost immigration here.

[10:30 a.m.]

Is there any work around trying to attract tradespeople into some of these rural areas that they can continue working in the trades and get through the process? I was talking to a carpenter the other day - two and a half years is the wait time in Shelburne to build a house. It's a long time. Are there any updates that you may have on the international recruitment process or strategies? That can go to NSCC or Deputy Minister Czapalay.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bureaux, would you like to begin?

DON BUREAUX: Thank you for the question, Mr. Young. One thing that I know that you would know is that in rural communities, a beacon for a new family coming to Canada is often an educational institution. They come to us often as an entire family, and they'll arrive at the front desk and see the institution as a place where they can find a bit of a home and safety to prepare them for a life in Nova Scotia.

As I travel around the province and meet with our campuses - I was in Shelburne last week - I saw very on-the-ground examples of that campus being that beacon where people can come. When we talk about welcoming and having skilled labour go to one of our rural communities, we have to think of it as a family attraction - not just an individual attraction. When I speak to those campuses, my challenge to them is to create that warm, welcoming environment, and a soft landing for the entire family to come.

In terms of our work, we work very closely with Deputy Minister Czapalay's office, as well as other organizations like EduNova Co-operative, for example, where we create opportunities for people to come to Nova Scotia to study and then to stay after they're here. Connecting our students with the workforce as soon as possible creates that kind of stickiness that they can stay.

The last thing I will say is that you're right. We're hearing these stories of carpenters who are taking two-and-a-half years. But we're also finding that our rural small businesses are tremendously open to giving new Canadians opportunities, and what they need from us is a way to bridge that skill gap very quickly. If someone needs help with English, someone needs help with a particular local skill set, we need to get that individual in and out quickly.

The last thing I'll say is one of the more popular ways of teaching and learning is a work and learn model: you'd work for a couple of days a week and you'd learn for a couple days a week. That kind of cooperative effort is what it's going to take for us to crack this shortage.

THE CHAIR: MLA Clark.

BRAEDON CLARK: I wanted to ask this of Deputy Minister Hackett, if I could. In your opening remarks, you talked about health care infrastructure. Obviously, nothing is more critical than that on the infrastructure side, I would say. On the QEII Health Sciences Centre redevelopment project, I'm going to ask a bit of a two-parter here with the Chair's indulgence.

First, is there an expectation within the department that skilled labour shortages will have an impact on that particular project? Also, does the department have an up-to-date estimate on cost and a timeline for that project? With all due respect to Mr. LeBlanc and others who've spoken about this, all we've heard on cost is that it will be more than the original estimate. I think it would be good to know if that's \$100 million or a billion.

PETER HACKETT: To answer the second question, I don't have an update on cost at the moment. As you know, this project is still in procurement. We're still working with the vendor on this one. Our team is working on cost and schedule, but they're working at a very good rate to get this thing landed. I don't have an update at this time, so I'll just let you know that, but it is going at a good pace and we're very optimistic we get this thing landed.

On the first question about the skills and labour, the hospitals are interesting. They're big projects. Obviously, we have big projects in Cape Breton - we have a big NSCC project going on in Cape Breton - and the skills for building these types of projects are a little unique, sometimes. There is skilled labour with Red Seal electricians, plumbers, and carpenters, who are all needed for all these projects. Sometimes in the health care sector, there are specialized people as well.

I would expect that the way that we've kind of pulled back the Halifax Infirmary project to stagger that and other projects, it will help the labour issue that we're in. I think that we'll be able to stagger that and other projects that their client wants to do. That will take some pressure off the labour shortage, we hope.

I mentioned NSCC in Cape Breton, and the Cape Breton Regional Hospital project as well. We've worked from the beginning of those projects, and Gerard Jessome and his team have tried to stagger those so that we're not interfering with each project. NSCC is continuing; we did a tour there last week and it's coming along quite well. We've moved into some of the work in Cape Breton which is a little bit behind that project. The foundations are in, the framework is up. We're a little bit behind on NSCC. We're hoping that the labour at NSCC moves over to the Cape Breton Regional Hospital project. That way we're trying to stagger those projects so that we don't interfere with the labour issues that we have.

We would expect the same on the Halifax Infirmary project. We know it's a big project, we know there will be a lot of people on that site, but we'll try to stagger our jobs around that so we don't take away the workforce from other projects that would delay that project. It's a process we're working on.

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I just wanted to touch on that a little bit further, in particular what you're doing as a department to both attract and develop the skilled labour that you need for these projects. Competing with the labour that's going around all the time, it is a challenge, but I'm just wondering what the Department of Public Works was doing in particular to attract more people to our workforce.

PETER HACKETT: The first part is our two chief engineers. They work very closely with the industries, with the road building industry and the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, in understanding what the needs are and what the shortages are out there, and trying to focus on how to deliver the projects that we have to deliver. If they see there's a shortage or there are going to be delays in certain projects, we try to look at what needs to go first. If it's a school that has to be built and done, another school may be delayed to get that school done first. Same with bridges. If we look at bridges, we say this is a bridge, this needs to be replaced. We'll do that one first. We'll stagger the next one out.

They're working with the industry to make sure that we can stagger the projects so that we can deliver the projects. We're working with them, understanding what shortages they actually have. That's part of it. We're also working with our partners at the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration on their programs, trying to figure out what they're bringing in, what we need, and apprenticeship programs as well. We're working very closely with them and making sure that they understand what we need, and they can deliver on that going forward.

I don't know, Ava, if you have any . . .

AVA CZAPALAY: I think that's a great question, to draw out how the departments work together. In my opening remarks, I mentioned the \$1 million in funding to support the Cape Breton infrastructure projects, and that goes to the earlier comment that some of the skilled workers needed to build some of those health care facilities often require upgrading or new skills to do so. The \$1 million was determined to be the amount needed to help those workers upskill so that they are ready to work on those projects.

We work in coordination with TPW, but also with unions and employers in Cape Breton to understand what the skill sets needed would be.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: This is to Deputy Minister Czapalay. We've heard tons of news on immigrants coming here but then having to go through regulatory processes to get them able to work here. What has your department done to actually help minimize the regulatory burdens and increase worker movement, either moving to Nova Scotia from others or away?

AVA CZAPALAY: Our immigration programs are economic immigration programs. People come here with a job offer. What we do is everything possible to help them get into that job opportunity and feel supported. Happily for Nova Scotia, they often come with partners and family and others who do need extra support and job opportunities. We also have people come through the regular federal immigration streams who come to Nova Scotia and look for work.

One of our programs I wanted to highlight is especially relevant to the topic today, and it's a program that ISANS delivers for us, where skilled trades workers can register with ISANS, and they work on a job site for three months. Nova Scotia pays the salary, and that gives the employer an opportunity to see in real time what their skills are and how their skills equate to the skills of someone trained here in Nova Scotia.

That program has been very successful, as you might appreciate, and it's one way to get skilled workers into job sites faster, and then hopefully connect to a permanent job after that.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.

HON. TONY INCE: This question will be for the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency. If an individual who is working out west, who's looking to get their apprenticeship - if they move home, how challenging is it for them to be able to get their additional skills or whatever they need as an apprentice?

TRENT SOHOLT: Thank you so much for that question. The apprenticeship staff certainly know the nuances to it. The beauty of trades is that there's a lot of harmonization effort happening across the country to recognize skills and experience that have been

recognized in another jurisdiction, to be able to recognize that experience and that education when they come to Nova Scotia.

If there are gaps, there are programs in place, and staff there work very closely with the individual to make sure that they can then meet the requirement that we would see in Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: I wanted to ask about the NSCC. As you know, our party has long been associated with the call for free tuition. As with all such things, there are arguments in favour and arguments against. It seems to me that in the context of the depth of the shortage of skilled trades professionals, the case for eliminating financial barriers is stronger today than it's ever been.

From this point of view, is the college looking at reducing tuition or looking in a new way at financial barriers in order to expedite the entry of people into the places where we need people the most?

DON BUREAUX: I'm going to just think about the foundational pillar that NSCC was created upon back in 1996, when we became an independent board-governed institution. That goal was to democratize post-secondary education. Your question is spot on in terms of what we think about every day. How do we democratize? How do we remove barriers to people wishing to pursue a post-secondary education and get into a career?

The topic of free tuition is one that has been talked about for a long time around the world, as you said, with massive studies being done. It's shown that, actually, it's not the primary driver to increase access. If it's a financial burden, what we've done is develop a very successful fundraising arm of the college. Through bursaries and scholarships, we have been able to reduce a lot of the barriers for our students.

What we find to be more impactful is this notion of being truly an accessible college from the point of view of truly meeting learners where they are from a learning-style point of view - using something called Universal Design for Learning. It's a very flexible way to allow people to meet their outcomes.

One thing that we've also recognized is the importance of going to the learners where they are. Setting up a learning centre on a First Nation community has been an incredible boost in terms of increasing access.

To answer your question, I still am not sure if free tuition is the primary driver, but we are committed to the multiplicity of access-oriented programs that will allow more and more people to come to the college.

We're seeing it. We're seeing more people with disabilities. We're seeing more people from First Nation communities. We're seeing more people from other communities who have traditionally faced those barriers.

SUZY HANSEN: My question will be for Deputy Minister Czapalay. You may be aware that there are international students studying to be doctors here in Nova Scotia who can't complete their residencies here because they don't have permanent residency. Is there any intent to change the requirements to make it easier for Canadian medical graduates without Canadian citizenship to do their medical residency in Nova Scotia?

AVA CZAPALAY: Yes, I've been following that story. Certainly our Immigration and Population Growth branch is leaning in as hard as it can to recruit health care professionals to come here. That's in partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness, the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment, Nova Scotia Health Authority, and others.

[10:45 a.m.]

The marketing campaign targeting skilled workers that I referenced - also, actually, the other branch of that recruits health care workers from the rest of Canada. We're also looking globally to bring in health care workers.

I've been watching with interest for anybody who comes forward and says, look, we found a barrier here. We'd like to know about it - what is the barrier, and is there something that can be done about that barrier? We appreciate hearing the stories. Our focus is on making sure that health care workers who come here have a job opportunity - that they actually come here with job offers and they can get to work ASAP.

For international students who are studying here, we have a number of programs. One is a unique program that I think you might know, Study and Stay Nova Scotia, that works with students who indicate fairly early on in their studies that they'd like to stay in Nova Scotia. We work with them to talk about the various pathways to staying here as a permanent resident, and, also, helping them start with volunteer work, integrating into the community, eventually helping them connect with employers and then hopefully to a job at the other end of that.

We have some programs that are looking at how to keep international students here in this province.

THE CHAIR: MLA Hansen, I will allow for quick follow-ups, as long as it's pertaining to your original question.

SUZY HANSEN: What I'm hearing is that there is an option. You guys are going to be working with these folks to be able to make sure that they can stay and work here and

actually get their status, their residency. We desperately need more doctors in this province. I just want to make sure that that's what I'm hearing, that we will be working with those folks?

AVA CZAPALAY: I can't comment on the individual circumstances of the students that you're referencing. I think some of them have actually gone on and left Nova Scotia. One thing that we are doing is working with all international students to make sure that they understand what the pathways are to immigration. For those who want to stay, we're helping them understand those pathways: how to connect with community, how to connect with work so that they can, as soon as they graduate, put down roots here and remain. Ideally, an international student who comes here to study is the ideal immigrant.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ritcey.

DAVE RITCEY: This question is for Deputy Minister Czapalay. Can you share any strategies the department has in regard to encouraging women and gender-diverse individuals into the trades?

AVA CZAPALAY: Actually, I'll say, Mr. Bureaux, when we were touring the Nova Scotia Community College campus in Sydney, I saw a woman worker painting in the campus, and I saw some diverse workers on the campus. I thought to myself, it's good to see our policies in action here.

I referenced earlier that we do have a program in Cape Breton specifically for the infrastructure projects that requires 25 per cent of those hired be apprentices, and of those, 10 per cent to be equity-deserving apprentices. We do work with employers, and the NSCC, and with unions to put some benchmarks around that, but we also have some wonderful programs that have shown great success in terms of supporting people who wish to forge a career in the trades.

One of my colleagues here referenced the Pathways to Shipbuilding projects. I think that showcases the success that we can have when we have small cohorts of individuals working toward a trade - in this case, it was welding - with wraparound supports, and feeling a sense of community amongst themselves. We've had how many cohorts? Does anyone remember? It's probably at least five or six.

THE CHAIR: I think maybe what I'll do, Deputy Minister Czapalay, is I'll allow you to finish the question, and then if someone would like to respond to it - I know, Mr. Bureaux, you wanted to - and then anyone after that, but we'll just keep it fairly structured, if we could.

AVA CZAPALAY: My apologies. We have some very successful pilots that do more to encourage women and equity-deserving groups to consider the skilled trades. We also work with Mi'kmaw and Indigenous communities, and African Nova Scotian

communities to find out what kinds of opportunities are available in the trades with those communities and helping students seek the skills and the training they need near their communities so that they can stay and contribute to work closer to home. I'll leave it at that.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bureaux, you'd like to comment as well?

DON BUREAUX: With your permission, I will ask my colleague to speak on a program called Women Unlimited, which is a very successful program, and also about a program that we refer to as 20-2020, a program that my colleague is very familiar with with Irving Shipbuilding.

I will say that we are also working very closely with industry. We need to ensure that the industry partners that we work with create a safe environment for our female apprentices and workers who go into non-traditional occupations. I saw that first-hand as I toured the facility last week and spoke with some of the female apprentices on site, who did speak very highly of the mentorship and the coaching that they're receiving from older, more experienced, male tradespeople. I think that's beginning to shift, but I think collectively we need to create those safe spaces in industry for our female apprentices.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Provoe.

JILL PROVOE: I will respond to Don's prompt. The Women Unlimited program, many folks here are probably quite familiar with that program. It's been running for, I believe, maybe close to 20 years as a partner with NSCC. I see smiles. It's quite a wonderful program. It officially transitioned to Nova Scotia Community College as one of our programs about two years ago. I was significantly involved in that program, so it does run through the college, bringing cohorts of 15 to 20 women at several locations throughout Nova Scotia. They do about 14 weeks of preparation, they experience different trades, and then of course we hope they move into trades and technology programming across the province.

The woman who is the program director of that initiative is also an African Nova Scotian woman who cares deeply about also bringing racial diversity and other forms of diversity. We're getting women into the trades and we're getting women from diverse backgrounds into the trades. We're really proud that we are now delivering officially the Women Unlimited program.

In terms of the Irving Shipbuilding Centre of Excellence programming, there have been two cohorts of all-women groups who have gone through Pathways to Shipbuilding initiatives. We're now running our second Mi'kmaw and Indigenous cohort of learners through those initiatives, and the 2020 for 2020 group is our African Nova Scotian cohort. They were going through the program of welding. I will just speak very briefly to it. It is such a source of pride, and I give full credit to community for that initiative. We had 20

African Nova Scotian students start that program and 20 African Nova Scotian students complete that program. That is a 100 per cent retention rate, 13 of those students with honours. That is throughout a pandemic. Quite an exceptional experience.

Full credit to students. Of course we were involved, but just an incredible group. The success of bringing cohorts of learners from specific communities, be they gender or be they racialized communities, is something we take great pride in. In many cases - the last thing I will say on those initiatives is that they're usually separate initiatives from our core funding, so to a question that was asked some time ago, those particular initiatives also generally do not have tuition that is charged for students in those particular programs as well. Their tuition is covered.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Soholt, you'd like to comment as well.

TRENT SOHOLT: If I may add, because Mr. Bureaux indicated industry, industry has done a lot of work in this space in partnership with the college around a program called Shift Change with YWCA Halifax as well. That's been a program that educates male supervisors in how to create more welcoming workplaces on job sites. That's been hugely successful in the construction industry.

I'd also like to share with the committee that there's an organization called Build Together Nova Scotia, which is a construction-focused organization that takes a look at how to provide supports for women who are entering into the construction trades, as well as the Office to Advance Women Apprentices, which is a federally funded program that partners with unions and contractors to help provide supports for those women pursuing opportunities in apprenticeship.

NOLAN YOUNG: Just in case there's a bunch of high school people on the fence right now thinking what trades they should get into or maybe a career change, just curious, are there any trades that are more in demand than others right now? Is there any work that's being done to popularize some of the skilled training? That would be to the Apprenticeship Board.

TRENT SOHOLT: I can spend all day on this one.

THE CHAIR: You have just five minutes at the most. (Laughter)

TRENT SOHOLT: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Depending on what time of year we're in, and depending on what stages of projects, we'll really identify what occupations are in immediate demand. We encourage youth to find something they're passionate about and to pursue that. There are a number of avenues to do that through apprenticeship, through training, or what have you.

A way to learn of what's available, though - I'm proud to say that at the Nova Scotia Construction Sector Council we have a facility called the Trades Exhibition Hall. We've brought through thousands of youth to introduce them to 14 different interactive booths around the different occupations in the construction industry. We have a mobile training centre called the Mobile Construction Experience that goes to junior high schools around the province. It opens up on the sides and youth can try out different occupations to learn what they like and what they don't like. Both are valuable.

We're also working with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development right now and getting building kits to the classrooms so that they can actually put their hands on real construction materials to say: yes, I like this or no, I don't like this. Again, both are good results from that.

We're seeing youth ask some really intentional questions of opportunity. What we share with our youth when we see them every second day in the facility is that there are opportunities for you with where you find interest - that could be in the trades, or that could be in the management space - and then we're happy to help direct you to our appropriate partners to pursue that apprenticeship training, if that's the direction they care to pursue, or towards employment, in some cases, as a direct entry.

THE CHAIR: That was a very good answer. Sorry I limited your time (Laughter), but I'm sure there will be opportunities for members, if they would like to offer more, to make contact with any of our witnesses after to get more information.

BRAEDON CLARK: I just wanted to comment quickly on something MLA Hansen said earlier. She stole my thunder, but it was a very good point from the CMHC rental report the other day. I thought it was really interesting that the number of people leaving Nova Scotia increased 33 per cent year over year. I hope that's not the beginning of a trend, but it is something, I think collectively, we need to keep our eyes on.

Reasons unclear, but I think it's reasonable to assume this could be related to not finding a place to live that's affordable, perhaps not having access to health care, labour shortages, whatever the case may be. I think all of those things are interconnected. As some have said, it's a good problem to have, to have people moving to the province after decades of the alternative, but we don't want to tip too far in the other direction where people say, "I've got to go somewhere where I can afford to live." I just wanted to editorialize, perhaps, on that first.

Then I wanted to ask: Mr. Bureaux, you mentioned in your opening comments, perhaps, a bit of a misalignment maybe at the college between, in some cases, industry demand and student interest. You had some programs that are very high in demand from industry but low uptake and vice versa, which obviously is not the most efficient way to have things go.

I'm wondering: How do you address that issue? How do you balance things out so that the graduates you are producing match up well - as well as they possibly can - with demand in industry at the time?

DON BUREAUX: I know we say this every time, but that's a great question. I've been involved with post-secondary education for over 25 years, and there's an art and a science to predicting supply and demand in our world. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, one of the best sayings I ever heard was: The future arrived 10 years early.

What I mean by that is the planning horizons for predictability for labour and education matches - at one time you could predict out five years, and it became three years, and it became 18 months. Now the horizons are six and eight months out in terms of how things are changing.

In our world, not only do you want to provide an individual - a graduate, if you will - with the skills that are needed today but you need to prepare them to be able to be lifelong learners for the skills of tomorrow and beyond. It's a duality of "what's the hard skill that's required to be the best welder or the best plumber you can possibly be?" but also to develop the desire for continuous intake of new and updated approaches to your work.

That being said, we work daily with industry through our advisory committees to make sure that we are providing the skills that are required on those job sites. Because of the very nature of the college, we have a fluidity - we have a flexibility or a responsiveness that's quite quick and responsive. We try to encourage that as much as possible.

It even boils down to our infrastructure. There was a time when you'd build a lab or a shop that was a dedicated shop for welding for the next 25 years. That piece of infrastructure, that 800 square feet, may be a plumbing lab this year and a welding lab next year, and you need that flexibility to turn on a dime.

The last thing I will say is that as my colleagues have said, there has been a change in narrative required. You know, 25 years ago, we all collectively made decisions that perhaps have resulted in a lost generation of people looking for the trades sector as a viable career, and we're having to re-educate our youth that this is a place where you can have a proud, productive, impactful career. Once they get their heads wrapped around that, the last thing I'll say, which is true, is being an auto mechanic is not your father's auto mechanic type of work; it's an auto technician. I toured one of our mechanic shops last week, and there was more IT in that shop than there were wrenches. We need to say to a young person, you can take your gaming skills and apply those to a very lucrative career in electronic vehicles and have a very, very different career going forward.

THE CHAIR: There's still time. Thank you very much. We'll move to MLA Sheehy-Richard, then MLA MacDonald, and then MLA Burrill.

[11:00 a.m.]

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Well, if we're applying our gaming skills to the mechanical industry, then we are not going to have any shortage of labour coming up the pipes (Laughs). Rest assured. Everyone kind of chuckled at that one.

I just wanted to go back to Deputy Minister Hackett. When you talked about that you have to make decisions on which infrastructure projects are a priority, can you go into a little bit more detail on what the decision-making process is behind these infrastructures? How do you make those decisions on which projects are the priority?

PETER HACKETT: In the department, we work with our client departments internally. Transportation is in our department, but our client departments - Education and Early Childhood Development, Health and Wellness, Justice - we work with them on their capital programs. For Education and Early Childhood Development - their current work on their current five-year capital plan - they'll make a priority of which schools they'd like to see replaced or which school should be new. We look at that and say which ones are in need today and which one we'll put on that list either by population or because it's old infrastructure. We work with our client departments to justify which ones should go ahead of the other ones.

Like I said, it's based on population growth. Same with Health and Wellness. What are their clinical needs across the province? Whether it be South Shore, in Pugwash, we're working on Cape Breton, the Halifax Infirmary project, we work with them to say, which ones do they need first to address their clients' needs, which is the patients? In Transportation, it would be the same thing. We put out our five-year plan - it just came out back in first of January. On that, when they put the projects out, particularly on the bridge side, they'll put them out in the need to have to go in on which ones are needed to replace first because of the safety part of it. There's a whole process internally with our staff, internally with Transportation working with our districts, and working with our district staff on the Highways side.

On the Building Services side, they work with the client departments, and our engineers and architects work with them to ensure they deliver the first ones in need first. That is basically the process, and it works quite well. Most of the time we're not in the situation we're in right now. We can deliver pretty quickly, and get things out the door, and get most of our projects done, but we do have to stagger a little bit, I think, right now because of the climate that we're in.

In normal times, we've gone through - for a lot of years on our capital program that has usually stayed quite - just a bit of progression over the years. We've been able to deliver everything pretty much as we put them out. Right now, we have a much larger capital program than we've ever had, so we're trying to put those things out to make sure we can deliver them on time and on budget, but making sure we can get them done as well.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I just have a little bit more follow-up on the Public Works side of those infrastructure projects. In rural Nova Scotia, the roads are - there's a lot of catching up to do, so to speak. Then, you know, you have bridges that are seeming to take a lot longer. That impacts what construction can be done. Is that something that some of that new capital plan project increase will look at - trying to address them simultaneously so infrastructure and buildings are being done? But also, how do we fast-track catching up on the infrastructure and the roads as well?

PETER HACKETT: The Province did give us some additional funding for bridges in the last budget, which doubled our bridge-replacement program, so that's been very helpful. Then obviously we've got more rural improvement money as well on the Rural Impact Mitigation program, which has been helpful for the paving part of it.

I think one of the issues in this climate that we're in that we haven't really seen before, which is kind of relating to the bridge program - we only have so many bridge contractors. For a lot of years, they were looking at replacement costs - we were putting between \$30 million and \$40 million in to replace bridges. We amped that up to probably between \$60 million and \$70 million now - double it.

We put more pressure on the industry to basically get to that level, which they will get to. They need to bring in people and materials and so on. You bring it up to a new level of capital, and the industry brings in the people they need. We're a little tricky right now, if you're talking labour shortage, but we're getting there.

I think that's one of the issues that we currently have in the entire world of capital, whether it's building infrastructure or highway infrastructure. We're in a different climate that's not as predictable as it used to be. The industry can't ramp up as they did. They know this is coming. They know this is happening. Things where we are now, with materials, labour, inflation - it's all kind of going a bit like this. Once that kind of levels off, which it's starting to, all the good money that we've got will be able to be put toward the bridges. The contractors will come in and they'll be able to get them done on time and get them on budget.

Right now we've put those out, but once again, we've had to stagger a lot of those projects because of the shortages and the costs that they're coming in at. That will level off in time, and the contractors will pick that up and we'll be able to deliver more with the funding that we have. Right now, because of the uncertainty in everything, contractors are sort of looking at all of this as risk, but we're managing that as well.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: This will be for NSCC. I graduated in 1990 at the I.W. Akerley Campus - 33 years ago. I decided I liked IT.

Adults are changing how they want to learn. How are you expanding different training and continuing learning opportunities for adults who are coming to NSCC for career path changes?

DON BUREAUX: If I may Mr. Chair, I'll say a few comments and then ask my colleague to comment on how we're changing the way of delivery at the college.

To your point, what we're finding is that the average age of a student at NSCC is about 26 or 28 years old. What that means is that our learners are coming to class with a life that has many dimensions to it - aging parents, children, careers - and that requires us to offer a much more flexible learning environment that meets them where they are.

I'll ask my colleague, Vice-President Provoe, to comment on some of the particulars that she's working on with her team to meet that changing style of learning.

JILL PROVOE: There has been significant learning throughout the pandemic as well. I have these charts I have delivered at previous presentations where you see the delivery of our programming, especially as an applied college, being pretty much fully online pre-pandemic, and of course we had this shift into 2020 because everything was locked down, so you're moving to online.

I would say we're still kind of digesting at NSCC, and as a post-secondary sector, what the learnings are from that. Of course, we're going to go back to a lot of in-person learning, which we have. But we are also not going back to this pre-pandemic reality of not having that flexibility, because a lot of students did enjoy that flexibility.

Now you're seeing about a third of our programming having what we would call blended offerings. They do a significant amount of the learning in person, but there's also some learning that they can do online, really enhancing that flexibility. We're seeing those learnings really shift into our official program delivery.

What is coming in the future? There's lots of conversation about just continuing to explore that flexibility. There are models out there that we are looking at where students literally can choose if they want to be learning in a classroom environment, if they want to be learning online. That of course comes with careful considerations to make sure our faculty are well prepared to deliver excellent programming in those environments as well.

We are always thinking about the future needs of our learners - looking at and analyzing our survey data, seeing what they're telling us, and trying to respond accordingly to ensure that we have the delivery that they require.

DON BUREAUX: Just very quickly, we're also working very closely with other post-secondary institutions so you are able to ladder your learning, or be recognized for your learning, so you can actually bundle your learning experience at the College and at,

say, St. Francis Xavier University and put that together for an educational experience that will help even more with your career going forward.

GARY BURRILL: Deputy Minister Czapalay, I wanted to ask you about the importance of the quality of work experience of immigrants. Particularly at this moment, we not only need people to come, we need them to choose Nova Scotia, so that initial work experience, the quality of that, is awfully important from the point of view of retention. In our offices, we do hear some about the Nova Scotia Nominee Program, that because of people's position, their status is tied to their employment. Employees are in quite a vulnerable situation, and it's a kind of situation that is prone to inadequate consideration in employees' circumstances.

We hear complaints of abusive work situations. I wonder if this is anything that's ever within the view of the department, on your radar, and is there thinking about what might be done to improve the working situations of people, particularly in the Nova Scotia Nominee Program?

AVA CZAPALAY: You're spot-on when you say that that first work experience is really important. We often talk about not so much recruitment but retention. If people are choosing to come here - and there's no shortage of people who want to immigrate to Canada and to Nova Scotia - then it's our responsibility to welcome them well.

I believe a committee member from this group once said: settle them well, and that really resonated with me. What does that look like? Through our immigration program, you referenced the Nova Scotia Nominee Program, but I'll mention the AIP, the Atlantic Immigration Program, that went from being a five-year pilot - now it's a permanent program. When it became a permanent program, we built a couple things into that program. It's the responsibility of employers now to take an intercultural competency training program. It's offered through the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia. All employers have to take it in order to be designated. You have to be designated to participate in the Atlantic Immigration Program.

Nova Scotia employers take that program. What we're finding from people who take the program is that they're asking for it to be offered as well to all of their staff. Employers are saying this is a worthwhile program, it's useful, and we want to change the culture of our workplace, so we want to make it more widely available. ISANS is reporting great uptake with the program.

The other part of the Atlantic Immigration Program is that employers are required to come up with a settlement plan for their immigrant employees. How did they settle well in their community? They're working with local settlement providers to work out a settlement plan. If they're offering someone a job, and that person is coming from another country to Nova Scotia to take that job, how are they going to be settled well in their community? That plan has to also be in place.

Those are examples of steps that we're taking to make sure that people are settled well. I will say that we also have a network of community partners. We work with the Department of Economic Development, for example, and the Regional Enterprise Networks, but we also have our own navigators, as I mentioned, and we work with chambers and settlement providers throughout Nova Scotia to ensure that people are settling well. That means welcoming communities as well as welcoming workplaces.

TONY INCE: My question is open to anyone. I've heard a lot of conversation around attracting youth, getting youth involved, trying to get them interested in the trades. Have any of you had conversations with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and talking about trades at that lower level in the schools? We have one school that has the ability to give some trade, and it's not being utilized enough. I'm just wondering if there are conversations at that lower level to try to grab those youth at that younger age.

[11:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: I think what we'll do in the interest of time - I don't want to mute any of your voices, but I think maybe just limit this response to three at the most, if there are that many who would like to respond so we can carry on with our conversations.

TRENT SOHOLT: The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has engaged in a variety of different sectors in different ways to get some activities at the grade level of six and seven. There's some intentional effort, even to the point where industry activities and industry experiences are being built into curriculum, and we're seeing that happen with some of the things in the construction sector.

Similarly, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency has youth expertise - and I'm trying to remember the exact title that they have - where they will go to classrooms as well to talk about the opportunities for apprenticeship across all of the sectors. A lot of that is being built into the early education process.

JILL PROVOE: I would add, for us as well, a lot of quite intentional recruitment happens in our public school system - people going out into schools, and encouraging folks to try our trades programming and other initiatives. That is certainly quite intentional from our recruitment team.

I would also add that we are in early conversations, and continue to be eager to have conversations about what it would look like to have more dual crediting opportunities within our high school system, specifically in the trades, so students can actually gain some credits while they are still in the post-secondary sector, and then when they come here, they're on a bit of an accelerated path.

That is, of course, a collaboration across some of the partners here today, but we're really keen and excited about what opportunities may come to give that opportunity to actually start on while you're still in the public school system. That is a pathway we are very eager to explore as well.

AVA CZAPALAY: I have to admit, when I first came to this position, I really had to double check a number, and that number was that 0.3 per cent of high school students go on to a skilled trade - I thought a one was missing. So, why is that? Why do we have 40 per cent going on to university, approximately 40 per cent to NSCC, and 0.3 thinking of skilled trades?

We do have to speak with young people sooner, and we also have to speak to family and friends and change the culture. I think Mr. Bureaux talked about professionalizing trades. A career in the trades is a very, very good career, and parents need to understand that, and that students can have a very fulfilling lifelong career in their community in the skilled trades.

You asked about partnering with EECD. We do school outreach. We're trying to get into the classrooms at a younger age to just start to plant that seed that skilled trades are an option for students to think about. We work in partnership with the construction association, NSCC, and many others. I love the trades trailer. When I was a little kid, I used to wait for the bookmobile to roll into Barrington. (Laughter) There are some kids probably waiting for the trades trailer to roll into their community and show them what it looks like.

We went to the Trades Exhibition Hall; it's amazing. If you haven't been, it really gives you a sense as to what the trades are that are available. I know that exposing young kids to the Trades Exhibition Hall would be a dream come true for a lot of students, but it's really changing the culture and making sure that those who influence children's decisions - teachers and parents - appreciate that trades are a wonderful career option for many students.

We're looking at the capacity that we have - both at the community college and in some of the high schools - and seeing how we can use that capacity during down times to offer things like Summer camps, and other things to really engage young people in trades-related activity and help them not only make the decision to go into the trades, but to make sure it's the right decision for them so that they stay in the trades.

THE CHAIR: Thank you all very much for those comments.

SUZY HANSEN: Members of the committee will know that a living wage is calculated based on actual expenses to show exactly how much a household would have to earn to cover all basic necessities and allow families to enjoy a decent quality of life. It is significantly higher than the province's minimum wage. For example, Cape Breton's \$20,

Annapolis's \$20.40, Southern \$20.55, and Northern - I think you guys get the point - \$20.40.

Experiences in Alberta, Ontario, and across the U.S. show that big increases in the minimum wage don't create inflation or job loss, yet the Premier has not agreed to accelerate the path to the \$15 minimum wage recommended by the Minimum Wage Review Committee almost a month ago.

My question would be for the Nova Scotia Construction Sector Council, Mr. Soholt: Can you explain how wages for skilled labour in Nova Scotia factor into the competition that we find ourselves in with other provinces around attracting and retaining workers?

TRENT SOHOLT: Wages are certainly a big topic. I can only speak to our ICI construction. Industrial-commercial-institutional is the sector that I work in - everything bigger than a house and not a road is the easy definition.

In our sector, we have very competitive wages that do usually meet or exceed the living wage. When we look at other jurisdictions, though, some of the things that we struggle with are hourly rates for projects in northern Alberta or northern Ontario could be significantly higher than that. There may be travel allowances that are built into that. There may be housing or accommodation allowances that are built into that.

Those are some of the things that we struggle with as a province, because we don't have that same industrial competition for work. The way our industry is kind of structured is we have sort of commercial institutional work, which would be the hospitals and the schools and what have you, and then we have industrial. On the horizon, some of the industrial projects that are being proposed - I think those will be a major attraction, based on a wage rate and based on sustainable employment for our province.

We're seeing Nova Scotia kind of evolve in a lot of new ways. But to your point, wages are something that we have to be mindful of at any given point to be competitive not only within the province, among sectors, but with other jurisdictions in Canada.

NOLAN YOUNG: I've got to make a comment. When you mentioned the 0.3 per cent that were going into the trades and the 40 per cent going into the university system, I know they piloted out west a major in a science and a minor in plumbing, right? I mean, we have the network here, thinking outside the box.

One other comment I just wanted to make would be around pre-apprenticeship. If pre-apprenticeship graduates could transition into a full apprenticeship registry, right, because of the direct entry, you could sign off with essentially no time. I think that would alleviate so much as well.

My question is to the Apprenticeship Board: Are there any plans during this modernization of apprenticeship? What are the plans? Is there anything around bridging to other trades? Is there anything around micro-credentialling, like we heard before? Maybe you could expand on that?

TRENT SOHOLT: I'll also invite some of my colleagues to speak on this as well.

There are multiple pathways to apprenticeship. I do want to share with the committee that we have a pre-apprenticeship pathway and we have a direct-entry pathway, when an individual can meet with an employer tomorrow and register as an apprentice, and as long as they have a certified journey person to learn beside, they can go through that process as well.

The agency is heavily involved with other staff through Labour, Skills and Immigration around micro-credentialling and with partners at the NSCC and other training partners to look at how micro-credentialling does fit into our education space.

There are multiple pathways, and that individual really has the ability to say, do I want to go to a community college route to pursue my training, to learn what it is before I get into employment? They can go to an employer directly. There are a number of bridging programs that go through industry as well, where maybe they connect with an industry organization, association council, union, or what have you, and there can be training opportunities that way as well.

What our message to youth is, and what our message is to future apprentices, is to find the path that works best for you. First find that career that's best for you, but then find that pathway. We have staff at the apprenticeship agency to help you navigate that process.

BRAEDON CLARK: I just wanted to ask Deputy Minister Hackett quickly about school construction as well. In the latest capital plan here, I believe there are 13 schools designated for construction. I have a new school in my riding that is opening in September, which is fantastic, obviously. But that school opening was delayed for a year. My understanding was it was due to material and labour shortages, not surprisingly. I'm just wondering if that experience is repeating itself across the province on the school side. Are you seeing delays in school construction as a result of labour or material shortages?

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to answer that, and I'm wondering if Gerard Jessome, the chief executive of engineering, could step up and just provide some more detail on it. We are on track with our school construction as we go through it for the most part, I think. One thing we are seeing is the cost. When we put our estimated costs together, when the tenders come in, they're usually quite a bit more than what we're expecting. A lot of that has to do with materials and the labour shortages.

I think specifically, the school in Bedford has some delays. Gerard can speak a bit about that, but certainly not just in the school world, but in the other infrastructure, the rural costs are being more inflated sometimes than the city costs because of the labour shortages in those areas. What ends up happening is that you get a school in maybe Cumberland County or the Valley and you don't have the labour there, so labour has to come in. You have to pay for food, accommodations for those contractors or they can back out.

We see that happening more, and it's not just in schools. It's in road work, it's in hospitals and other things as well. That's something that I think that we have to be mindful of when we do our estimates and we do these projects. Every project we put down is an urgency to build. We have to build them - we just have to be mindful of the cost and the obstacles we're up against. I'll just ask Gerard, if that's okay.

THE CHAIR: We'll ask Mr. Jessome to please come forward.

GERARD JESSOME: There are challenges, but in an industry today with labour shortages, supply chain, inflation for sure, we're managing those risks.

With the school you mentioned, I think the opportunities that have opened up are more collaboration with industry across the board. That particular school is what we call a collaborative design-build project, so we're very closely with the contractor throughout the design process, throughout the construction process, to overcome those challenges.

I think that's the way forward to help manage some of those risks that we're experiencing. There have been delays - COVID-19 has brought a lot of challenges to us - but I think we're finding innovative solutions to overcome those challenges.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, and welcome to the big table. (Laughter) We'll pass it over to MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Before I ask a question, I did want to comment to the NSCC that my two years, it was 50 per cent, made it to second year and they didn't finish. So the point that you got 20 out of 20 - your staff are doing a great job. I've never heard of everybody coming in finishing. That's great on yours.

My question is actually going to go to Mr. Soholt. What are the biggest barriers and the biggest opportunities facing the adult populations that are wanting to go into retraining opportunities?

TRENT SOHOLT: Sometimes one of the biggest barriers that we see with individuals looking to apprentice or looking to the construction industry is just awareness of what the opportunities might be. It's understanding what occupations exist, where the demand might be, and the supports that are in place through the Province, through LSI, and through other departments to help advance that person's career.

The opportunities - that's going to be my closing piece. Opportunities abound right now for anybody who's looking at apprenticeship, anybody who's looking at any of our apprenticeable sectors, because we have four sectors under apprenticeship. There are opportunities in front of us, with population growth, with generational investment, with access to training unlike ever before, with just a nuance around procurement, being able to acquire apprentices beyond these projects. These are all opportunities that I think we don't take enough time to celebrate. We're doing really well in this province.

I'm happy to share with this committee, when I go across the country, my colleagues across the country say, what's Nova Scotia doing so differently that the rest of us can't figure out? It's having conversations like this. It's looking at innovative ways of engaging people in career opportunities, providing supports, bringing training to them in the community in some respects. It's looking at how one can transition from one sector to another.

[11:30 a.m.]

Truth be told, COVID-19 did introduce a lot of nuances that we weren't anticipating, and as a construction industry, we grew during COVID-19 because we were still active. We were deemed essential, and those who weren't able to find employment in their sector looked at construction as an opportunity as well.

What we need to do is really be open and share those opportunities, share the prospects, share the realities of working in our sectors, and strengthen our apprenticeship process so that we do have certified trades professionals coming out after their training.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I just wanted to talk a little bit. The health care project was asked about early on, but I just wanted to elaborate a little bit on, in particular, the December 15th announcement of More, Faster: The Action for Health Build - the comprehensive plan for improving health care services for Nova Scotians. Can you elaborate on why this new plan is a more comprehensive plan and also how that new plan is going to impact the amount of labour needed to deliver several major projects at once?

PETER HACKETT: I can only speak to the infrastructure portion of that. I can't get too much into the client part of it, which would be the clinical part. On that particular project, my understanding is that on the Halifax Infirmary particularly, the services will be the same. It will just be built at certain stages. It'll come along as those parts come on, and then there'll be other components to it as well. I think there's an addition to Dartmouth General Hospital and Cobequid Community Health Centre.

I guess as far as the importance of the labour part or the skills part, it's no different than what we were talking about in Cape Breton earlier: You can get a good part of the hospital at the Halifax Infirmary site done. You can get people into beds there quicker, and then you can move to another site, taking that labour sort of staggered, as the foundation

folk or frame workers or form workers go to the next site, then the next site, and then they come back. If you're flush with labour, maybe you don't have to do quite that, but if you're not, this is one strategy in order to get those projects done, and get them done on time, and get them done well. Then you come back and continue to do more. That is the mindset on this delivery.

GARY BURRILL: I'd like to think, Deputy Minister Hackett, a little bit more about the hospital redevelopment. This business of a shortage of skilled trade professionals in hospital construction, this is not a Nova Scotia problem, right? It's a big time in the hospital redevelopment world across the country, and we do hear - I'm sure you would hear a lot more than I would, but I hear a little about how in other parts of the country - innovative things are being developed in order to draw and attract people to certain projects. I think of that project in Terrace, B.C. where they've reorganized all the schedules in order to make it attractive for people to come in.

You've spoken about staggering as a way of addressing the situation in Nova Scotia, but are there other things that we are doing or could be doing at a time when demand for hospital construction work is so intense across the country to make our projects more attractive to those particular skill sets that we need?

PETER HACKETT: Earlier, Chief Executive of Engineering Jessome mentioned about collaboration. There is a lot of collaboration going on with the industry on school construction and specific health construction with the contractors and the designers and the estimators about how we can deliver these projects so that we're a little unique in the process that we're doing them. We are looking at innovative ways of trying to make those work. We've done a P3 project right now in Bayers Lake, we're doing construction management projects in Cape Breton, and they're about bringing in trades in certain sectors and staggering those projects as well.

The one thing - and I mentioned earlier - that is unique is that the Province, not just the private sector - and you've talked about housing, you've talked about all those things - we are in a whole different world in the sense of our capital construction. Our capital program is probably the highest it's ever been, and the one thing that we've worked on for years that was probably pretty standard and pretty normal construction were roads, schools, public buildings, and in the private sector there were apartment buildings and houses. It was pretty much like that for a long time, and then the graph on - and I'm not an economist, so I don't pretend to be one - but the graph on the economy's kind of gone like this and it's a little bit shaken, as well, because it's not as stable as we hoped, but the demand is there.

We've never really had a demand for this much health care, and we haven't had a demand for even the road infrastructure that we're into. Population growth - we have a Joint Regional Transportation Agency we created to look at transportation needs in the region of HRM and outside of HRM. We're in a really different environment.

On health care, if we can get to a position that we can show the industry that we're going to be building more hospitals - whether it's the HI project, Cobequid, Dartmouth, expansions to other parts - and we create an actual economy and an actual industry here, I think that becomes really quite more collaborative. For my colleagues here, they can see how to get the skills that we need to do that, and they can get the people through the schools that we need.

MLA Ince mentioned about going into the classrooms as well. If you know that there is going to be a health care component that's going to go on for years and we're going to do health care work, you can get kids interested because there's going to be a future for it. It also brings our prices down, and it also gives us a good product.

I think we're just on the cusp right now of working with the industry to be innovative on the health care delivery. I think with our client at the Department of Health and Wellness and the Nova Scotia Health Authority, looking to the future of health care, I think we're in a really good spot to bring collaborative and innovative ways to deliver health care in this province going forward.

TRENT SOHOLT: I'd just like to add to that. Around the uniqueness and the innovative aspect of these projects, communication has been increasingly growing with Deputy Minister Hackett's team. Industry and the departments are communicating very closely on these major infrastructure projects. The requirement, though, for apprenticeship on these projects is innovative. The requirement for diversity on these projects is innovative. That is something that we are very proud of, and should be very proud of in this province.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince, with about three minutes to go.

TONY INCE: We have heard from stakeholders that one of the challenges has been keeping students in the programs. They're finding that the students they are working with or support leave the program before it's complete. I was just wondering if Mr. Bureaux or Ms. Czapalay, if anyone could speak to that.

DON BUREAUX: As Deputy Minister Czapalay said, even in our world, it's fine to recruit somebody, but if they leave at Christmas, then that's not necessarily a success. We spend considerable time on retention. Retention or lack thereof can occur for many reasons. It could be a family issue, or we've had people who have had their brakes go in their car, and that expense at that moment in time is too high for them.

We talk a lot about wraparound supports. How do you support somebody from the classroom door out? That classroom door out support is student services. It's everything from mental health assistance to urgent aid is a term that we use to provide, whether it's food or a hot water tank that's gone. The key is to allow students to be aware that those options are available.

When a student leaves for a reason that they don't want to leave - some students will leave a program for the right reasons, and that's perfectly fine. But for a student who leaves a program because of a hardship, if we can't capture that before it happens, then nobody wins. The student's self-confidence goes down, there's an empty seat that continues in that program all the way along, and the market does not receive that unit of human capital that's required to help the economy grow and prosper.

When you talk about education now, there's a tremendous effort on that R-word of retaining that student for the right reasons.

TONY INCE: I've seen it in your shipbuilding program, your women's programs, so it's nice to hear that it is expanding.

THE CHAIR: MLA Young, you have 30 seconds.

NOLAN YOUNG: In 30 seconds, can you talk about some of the work around the fishery with NSCC?

DON BUREAUX: Obviously, the fishery sector in Nova Scotia is a very large, important sector for us. It's an industry which is in need of highly skilled labour. Our Nautical Institute and our School of Fisheries are two areas. I know our dean of trades and transportation, Tom Gunn, is working in a very progressive way to even modernize that more, to look at the marine sector in general and look at the many opportunities often overlooked by our youth who think a career in the ocean sector is on the back of a fishing boat which is a great career, but it's much broader than that.

THE CHAIR: That concludes our question-and-answer period. Thank you all, members, for the great questions, and thank you, our witnesses, for all the great answers and great dialogue here this afternoon.

Before we leave, I'll ask if our panelists here would like to deliver any closing remarks. Deputy Minister Czapalay, we'll start with you.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thanks for the great conversation on a really critical topic. It's been recognized around this table today and elsewhere that Nova Scotia is experiencing rapid growth, and we're committed at LSI to growing our province to two million people by 2060. We know that goal is bold, and we're focused on attracting and retaining newcomers who will help us meet our labour market needs and grow our economy.

We're also committed to connecting our youth here in Nova Scotia to employment opportunities right here at home, particularly our equity-deserving communities. We want skilled workers to know that they have a bright future in Nova Scotia where they can work to build their lives and contribute to the incredible growth our province is experiencing.

Nova Scotia isn't alone in facing gaps in our labour market. We will continue to work across government, work with partners in communities to find solutions to challenges. Labour, Skills and Immigration - which also includes the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency - is laser focused on finding jobs for people and people for jobs.

PETER HACKETT: I just want to say thank you for having myself and my team with me here today, and the colleagues at this table to talk about this important item on skills and labour shortages. It is a challenging time for us in the department, and to be able to deliver projects to the Province of Nova Scotia, but we do the best we can. We're very innovative, and we do pretty much complete everything we start and we do a great job of it. We take pride in doing that. It is challenging, but I just want to make sure that people understand that it is an exciting time as well. It's a time for growth in the province.

We've had some really great opportunities, really great projects out there. I don't think this province has ever seen this type of growth before in the economy. Some of the great things that the folks at NSCC and Labour, Skills and Innovation are doing - it's challenging, but it's also exciting. I think it's something that we as a department are looking forward to those challenges going forward.

DON BUREAUX: I want to extend that arrow of gratitude. Thank you for welcoming us into your world to have this very important conversation, and welcome to our world. I think collectively this is what we think about morning, afternoon, and evening.

The notion of accessing an education that will prepare you to build the economy and quality of life of Nova Scotia, I'm proud to say that it is a collective agenda that we have in the province. As I travelled across the country, I'm proud. When I come to a group like this, we might have people from different groups, but I think collectively we're all committed to serving the province in the best possible way that we can.

I'll just finish off by saying that we're proud as a college. We have 17 locations, 96 per cent of the population of Nova Scotia lives within a half an hour's drive of an access point of NSCC, so we see the entire province as our market.

TRENT SOHOLT: Thank you for the invite to join the committee today. I really appreciate it.

At the Apprenticeship Agency, we are very unique. As a government body, we are industry driven and industry led, so I'd like to really highlight that that is what makes our Apprenticeship Agency unique. These generational projects really do provide a platform of opportunity for this province. I really want to share and highlight - and I mentioned this earlier - it's an opportunity for us to procure better, to invest back in Nova Scotians better. It's an opportunity to advance our apprentices and help them complete their apprenticeship journey on these projects. This is a really big opportunity for us to see our workforce of tomorrow built here in Nova Scotia.

With that, I would like to echo that this is an exciting time. I've been in this sector now for over 17 years, and I've never felt the excitement as I do today in talking to employers, labour organizations, our training partners, and our provincial partners. I very much again want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

THE CHAIR: Thank you all for coming, and thank you to all of our guests who have been sitting here this afternoon; wonderful to see you all.

That concludes our meeting. I think what we'll do is we'll have a two-to-three-minute recess just to allow for our guests to leave the room before we begin our committee business.

[11:45 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:49 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. We'll carry on with our committee business. Just a few notes I have received here from the clerk.

The first topic is our witness for the February 28th meeting on support for firefighters. There was just some clarification of Michael Sears's role with the Halifax Professional Fire Fighters Association - IAFF Local 268. The motion passed on this topic specified Captain Brendan Meagher and/or Michael Sears, vice-president. Mr. Sears is at present a member of this organization, but he does not hold a board position. The current president and vice-president of the association, Captain Brendan Meagher and Joe Triff, are not available for the February 28th meeting, but they have said that they're happy to have Mr. Sears represent them. They note that Mr. Sears is the Halifax Professional Fire Fighters Association's representative of the Atlantic Provinces Professional Fire Fighters Association, where he holds the position of Nova Scotia vice-president.

As for comments or discussion, it really doesn't require any action from us, since Mr. Sears is already an approved witness for the topic, but I wanted to clarify his title just for the record, in case any member has any concerns about it. No discussion from there? All in agreement that Mr. Sears is good to go? Thank you.

The other topic of discussion, just to have a brief conversation about, is after the last meeting, some members spoke informally about the possibility of moving this committee's regular meeting time to afternoons to make travel easier. The clerk has advised that the committee calendar has an open afternoon space on the first Tuesday of each month. Community Services meets in the morning, so Human Resources could meet on that afternoon, the first Tuesday of each month.

When the House is sitting, the committee could do what it does now: holds a brief meeting in the morning just to consider agencies, boards, and commissions. There would

be no conflict with the Community Services Committee on those days because it doesn't meet during the House sittings.

Meeting earlier in the month has a further advantage. If some event, such as a snowstorm, forces a meeting cancellation, it will be easier to reschedule a new meeting in time to meet the committee's mandate to meet at least once each calendar month to approve ABC appointments. The committee's approval of ABC appointments is just one step in a long process, so the clerk asked staff in the Executive Council Office whether they can accommodate such a change. They have said they can, so long as they have at least three months' notice. If the committee agrees today to start meeting on the first Tuesday afternoon of the month, the clerk can arrange for the change to take place in May.

Those are some notes for discussion to throw out there. There was an informal conversation last meeting. I could just put it out there. Are there any comments on that last topic I just discussed?

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I'm fine with it. The three months, if that's what it takes for them to be prepared, that's fine. I would propose that the meeting be 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. on those days, and that way, like I said, when the House is sitting, it would be 10:00 in the morning, because really, that's when it always would have been before. I'd just like to see if that works for everybody.

TONY INCE: Listen, folks, I'm in agreement with whatever you want to do. I'm in the city and I don't have the same challenge as most, so whatever you wish to do, I'm in agreement.

THE CHAIR: If there's no discussion, we don't really have to have a motion. Do we have general agreement that the committee is open to changing our meeting to the first Tuesday of each month between 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. unless we're in the House? We don't need a motion. We're in general agreement.

If that is said, is there any other business? Seeing no other business, the date of our next meeting is February 28th from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The topic is support for firefighters and the witnesses, as we discussed, are the Halifax Professional Fire Fighters Association - IAAF Local 268, the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, and the Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia.

With that, do I have a call for adjournment? The meeting is adjourned.

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