

**HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**Wednesday, March 30, 2011**

**LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER**

**Department of Labour and Advanced Education  
Labour Market Agreement**

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## **Public Accounts Committee**

Ms. Diana Whalen, Chairman  
Mr. Howard Epstein, Vice-Chairman  
Mr. Clarrie MacKinnon  
Ms. Michele Raymond  
Mr. Mat Whynott  
Mr. Brian Skabar  
Hon. Keith Colwell  
Mr. Chuck Porter  
Mr. Allan MacMaster

In Attendance:

Mrs. Darlene Henry  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Jacques Lapointe  
Auditor General

Mr. Terry Spicer  
Assistant Auditor General

## **WITNESSES**

### Department of Labour and Advanced Education

Ms. Judith Ferguson, Deputy Minister  
Ms. Lynn Hartwell, Executive Director, Skills and Learning Branch  
Ms. Sandy Graves, Director, Employment Nova Scotia  
Ms. Vicki Elliott-Lopez, Director, Workplace Initiatives



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30, 2011**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Ms. Diana Whalen

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Mr. Howard Epstein

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Good morning. I'd like to call the meeting to order. We have with us this morning at the Public Accounts Committee witnesses from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. We look forward to the questioning that's going to come from our members. Before we begin I would like to have the members of the committee introduce themselves.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, what I might do is allow the deputy minister to introduce your team as well when we start. I am going to turn it over to Ms. Ferguson and I know you may have, as well, opening comments. In fact, we have before us copies of your opening comments. It's not as long as it appears, it's two pages. Ms. Ferguson.

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Thank you. I'd like to thank the committee members to be able to come this morning in my new capacity as a deputy minister of Labour and Advanced Education and talk about some wonderful work that we've been able to do in the department regarding the Labour Market Agreement.

Before I start, I'd like to introduce the team I brought with me. As I said, I'm relatively new so I need some help in terms of a lot of the details. I'm very lucky to have some fabulous staff members here this morning

On my left is Lynn Hartwell who is the executive director of Skills and Learning – formerly of Community Services. To my right is Vicki Elliott-Lopez, the director of Workplace Initiatives, but Vicki was the former manager of the Labour Market Agreement so she has basically lived and breathed a lot of the work that we’re going to talk about this morning and she brings firsthand experience which I think will be very valuable for the committee. Next to her is Sandy Graves, also formerly of the Department of Community Services who is a director of Employment Nova Scotia.

I’ll go through my comments and then we’re very happy to answer the questions the committee has.

The Labour Market Agreement is a six year bilateral agreement through which the federal government provides funds to Nova Scotia to complement labour market programs and services available in the province through the provincial continuum, including those programs that are funded through the Labour Market Development Agreement, or what we refer to as the LMDA.

Our department is responsible for facilitating the delivery of labour market programs and services to citizens of our province. The LMA provides supports for unemployed Nova Scotians who are not eligible to receive employment insurance benefits as well as employed Nova Scotians who do not have a high school diploma or who have low levels of literacy and essential skills. In Nova Scotia we have chosen to focus on service provision to groups of people who are traditionally unrepresented in the labour market and who have perhaps not been able to access the kinds of programs and services required to strengthen the chances of successfully attaching, maintaining and progressing within today’s labour market.

Since 2008, the year the agreement was first initiated, approximately \$21 million has been invested in programs and projects through the Labour Market Agreement and we are projecting a final investment of \$23 million for our current fiscal year. The investment decisions that we have made have been guided by some very specific objectives and principles and these include focusing on the client and improving services for Nova Scotians, building on existing capacity and assets within our community and government.

I do think that’s something in this day and age that is extremely important in terms of looking at how we work better together as government, look how we leverage our existing resources and really ensuring that we are allocating every dollar we can with what we have to ensure that the clients are receiving everything they can, increasing the participation of Canadians and immigrants in the workforce and enhancing the quality of skills development and facilitating workforce mobility while providing the necessary information to enable informed labour market choices.

Most of you are probably familiar with government’s commitments under the jobsHere strategy and as you can see, the principles we have used in terms of looking at

how we are going to allocate the LMA dollars fit very nicely with the priorities that government has established under the jobsHere strategy.

The LMA has a core budget of \$14 million every year, and then an additional \$8.2 million in federal stimulus funding through the Economic Action Plan was available in both 2009-10 and 2010-11 to supplement the LMA core budget. That has now ended. Because the agreement provides for the ability to carry forward unspent funds into future years, we are projecting an investment ability of \$20 million in the 2011-12 fiscal year, \$18.6 million in 2012-13 and \$16.6 million in 2013-14.

When the monies were initially received by the province, we knew that the monies could be carried over so it actually allowed us the time to work with our colleagues in government, to work with our colleagues in communities, to go out and actually talk to them, to hear first-hand from them what kinds of services and gaps are in your communities so that we were actually able to implement, look at and develop services that we knew would be helpful within the communities.

In the presentation that I've provided to you in your package, I've highlighted four specific programs that were funded through the LMA in the last fiscal year. These programs demonstrate how community-based organizations and sectors have worked with the LMA to provide specific opportunities for eligible clients. We very recently announced two initiatives under the LMA that I would just like to quickly highlight today. Works for You is the program under which Employment Nova Scotia invests LMA dollars and has a call for proposals every year. The programs I have highlighted in the presentation are examples of the types of investments we are making under the Works for You Program.

The second initiative recently announced is called Skills Up! This is a program which provides the kinds of financial and other tangible supports that African Nova Scotians need to participate in training and skill development courses in order to attach to the labour market. We are planning to invest in 100 clients per year over the next three years through the Skills Up! program.

As I said earlier, the LMA is a key contributor to the jobsHere strategy for the province and it invests in programs and projects that develop learning skills for good jobs. It expands labour market participation of under-represented groups and assists providing access to education and skill enhancement. It is increasing productivity in our current workforce by promoting continuous learning initiatives for citizens who do not have credentials.

Our 2011-12 annual plan is providing for investments in the area of labour market skills development, workforce attraction and retention, and workforce development. It is our plan to continue to use this agreement to develop other programs to meet identified gaps in labour market programming and we are currently researching the potential for investments in programs such as wage subsidy, training grants and bursaries for

under-represented groups in growth areas. We're also looking to increase the integrated delivery of our LMA dollars with LMDA dollars so that the people we serve will see a more seamless continuation of services.

I'd like to thank all of the committee members for your attention and we welcome your questions. Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Ms. Ferguson, and as is our custom, we'll begin with the Liberal caucus for the first 20 minutes of questioning. Mr. Colwell.

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Thank you very much, it's wonderful to see you here today. Congratulations on your new position, I know you'll do very well.

MS. FERGUSON: Thank you.

MR. COLWELL: I have a few questions, needless to say. The Labour Market Agreement implementation plan states, "It is clear that literacy is the foundation underpinning the ability of clients to successfully access higher levels of education and training . . ." and ultimately a job - that isn't said there, but ultimately a job. Being a former employer, one thing that always astonished me, we would bring people in sometimes right from high school and give them a document to go over and a lot of times they couldn't read it. Literacy skills were very, very poor. Even if we got someone in a secretarial position, we had to give them some basic tests to see if they could actually do any of the work that they were supposedly trained to do and a lot of the time they couldn't. This is a serious problem.

The Department of Education has recently made a decision to cut the Reading Recovery program and I think that's a step backwards. As a former employer - and employers are the people who really judge who they're going to hire and where they're going to work because they can, for the most part, move anywhere in Canada or in North America that they want to run their businesses. If people aren't trained well enough when they come out of high school to do the basic skills that they need, it's impossible for you and your organization even, and the organizations that are out there, to really try to get people employed makes the job very difficult and very aggravating for employers.

So with that in mind, and I know you're well aware of that, everyone in the province is but yet there seems to be a policy from the schools and the school boards that you push a child along because of their self-esteem. Now, self-esteem isn't very good when they can't get a job at the end of high school and if they do get a job, they can't keep it. So what does more damage, you know, really working with the child and the education system to make sure when they do graduate they can do the basic things. Employers are looking for basic things when they get a student out of high school to train them to do whatever is necessary in their company so they can make a profit and ultimately survive and employ more people.

What are your views on that? I mean this is a very serious, serious problem and we always dance around it. We sugar coat it and everything else but the bottom line is it's really causing serious problems for our economy.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ferguson.

MS. FERGUSON: Perhaps I'll start and then I'll get some added details from the folks with me. What I can say is that we would agree with you that the literacy issue is a serious issue and it's one that we take very seriously and that government over a number of years has committed a number of dollars and funds for. I very much appreciate your perspective as an employer. We work a lot with employers and certainly want to work more with employers to be able to assist them in terms of making sure they have the resources they need for the literacy skill and, in fact, the ongoing lifelong learning philosophy within their organizations.

I have been working very closely with our colleagues at the Department of Education and I know they are very committed on an ongoing basis to working on the literacy piece and we've had discussions through the jobsHere strategy and the workforce strategy which will be coming forward, where we've worked on those pieces together. So I think from a government perspective, there's recognition around the literacy issue and certainly we've been having discussions about how we can maximize the dollars that we're spending, get to the clients that we need to get to and work as a system.

In terms of your comments around the employer piece, Vicki's title is actually the Director of Workforce Initiatives and it's actually her role and the role of her staff to go and work with employers exactly around the kind of comments that you've talked about today, making sure we understand what the needs of employers are and making sure as best we can we tailor the programs that we have and the supports that we have so that we can go in and actually assist employers and relieve some of the frustration that you've talked about and help the workers to ensure that they are able to transition through and move forward and meet the workforce needs that we have in Nova Scotia today. Vicki, is there anything you want to add to that?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Elliott.

MS. VICKI ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: Under the Labour Market Agreement, in fact, two of our priorities relate to your point. Our second priority is to increase the skill development for individuals and we are, in 2009-10 we invested over \$2.3 million in ALP programming and in 2010-11 we've invested over \$3 million in ALP programming and also in the creation of Skills Up! in recognition of the fact that we recognize that people more and more, to operate in a knowledge economy, will require post-secondary education so we are investing in individuals and we hope to increase that over time.

In addition to that, under our third priority or fourth, sorry, the Workforce Development priority, we have utilized ALP funding to increase the essential skills of our existing workforce. Again, we recognize that many of those who operate under level three literacy are in fact in the workforce currently and so we have utilized ALP dollars to increase essential skills training in the workforce. In addition to that, we've also achieved some jobsHere funding to increase that even further. So we are certainly recognizing that and taking steps to address those needs.

MR. COLWELL: Well, that's positive. One thing that I've run into in my own area and I'm sure this will be right across the province - we have a large number of people who are sort of, I call them semi-trades people. They're really trades people who don't have their documentation. They don't have the educational background to get the documentation that they need at this point and some of them would probably only need some training. The skills part they have totally and have been working and making a living but most of the time when they're making a living at this it's below what the going rate is for that kind of - I'll use a tradesperson for an example - well below that and that's very unfortunate. They can do the work, but they just can't get the certifications.

If they could get the certifications, they would increase their personal well-being and their families' well-being, of course and there wouldn't be a question of whether they're going to pay the rent or the grocery bill this month and those things that people have to address when they don't make enough money to properly look after themselves.

That could be cured so easily but the problem with this is, a lot of the people in my area are seasonal workers and they could be more than seasonal workers if they could get some training. They can't afford to take time off for the training. They just simply cannot afford to do it because they're looking after their families. With the income they do get, they use every penny and if they take a month or two months a year off - that's really what they probably need to do that.

Is there any program of that latitude in this sort of system that you could take somebody in the winter time when they're typically not working - perhaps on unemployment or maybe not, some of them don't make enough money to get unemployment or don't get enough weeks in, depending where they live - where you could give them a modest income during that time and train them at the same time and make the income dependent upon them going to the training?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Hartwell.

MS. LYNN HARTWELL: I'll start by talking a bit about the whole skill trades piece. My division includes the apprenticeship work and so I'm well aware that there are many people who, for example, have spent many years being a carpenter's helper but have never been able to write the qualifying exam to become a carpenter and get that



certification and actually work in that trade and charge the rates that would be according to that trade.

So we're doing a couple of things. We're working with the National Apprenticeship Group to essentially develop a new approach to the testing and certification; we're exploring what that could look like. There are some people that were drawn into the trades because their skill was in their workmanship, not necessarily in studying for academic tests. So what we're doing is exploring how we could do hands-on testing, how could we do a different approach that people could demonstrate their competency, show that they are able to perform the job but necessarily be penalized for not being able to write an exam or do things in the traditional testing way, so we're exploring that. That's the first.

We're also working within the province to look at how we could work with people - you described as semi-trades, people who are just below that designation - to see if we can help them develop a record of their achievements that could then be recognized as close to a certification or something that they could take when they leave one job and show that they actually have the skills. We're looking at some of those tangible things.

In addition to that, though - to answer your other question about if there are training programs available - for seasonal workers, they may be eligible for skill development training, which is through Employment Nova Scotia. If they're EI eligible, then they may be eligible for that funding, so that's one route. We have in the past, assisted people who are seasonal workers. Some of the programs are geared towards that. For those people who are not EI eligible, the LMA money is really the source that we have to provide training. We have funded organizations - up until the recent announcement of Skills Up! - to provide training supports more on the essential skills and literacy side, I would say, than specific trade-related training, but there is an avenue for them to work with the local Employment Assistance Services to work with community groups to see if there are upgrades available.

Our hope with a program like Skills Up! is that it will be the first time that we'll be able to have people get skill development who are not EI eligible. It is a pilot program; we're testing to see if this approach works and what supports may be needed for those people for whom attachment to the mainstream labour market, for whatever reason, has been a challenge. So we're testing it with this population because we know that there is a great need. I absolutely agree that there is a need that we are working to address people who are not EI eligible and who really still need some skill development.

MR. COLWELL: Just very quickly I'm going to give you an example of something that happened a few years ago. A very good friend of mine is in a trade and worked in the trade for many years, a very skilled tradesman, working on a union job. His certification was out of the U.S. for the job he did; never been a question. The Department of Labour came on site one day and said you can't work anymore - 45 years of experience, one of the best people in the industry in the province. What do I have to do? You have to have a test,

a practical test. I worked as a MLA for about a year fighting with the Department of Labour to get this test for this gentleman. They had to do a practical test. This particular test wasn't very complicated. For this gentleman it was something that was really a joke because they could have gone to the site and seen the work he was doing and that would have been it.

Anyway, after a long battle and many, many denials that this could happen, to the point that he wasn't going to be working anymore - think about that, he wasn't going to be working anymore, even though his employer wanted him there and would pick him ahead of a lot of other workers because he was such a good worker and did such good work - he did the practical test and at the end of the test, the guy at the Department of Labour says, I don't know why we wasted our time doing this. He said, I've never seen this quality of work before. That's what you're up against.

What are you doing to address that sort of issue? This whole thing is so aggravating to me as a former employer because there are so many good people out there that if an employer doesn't take the time - which normally they do not have and with the very competitive environment we have here in Nova Scotia where we're overtaxed, our fuel prices are too high and everything under the sun is against you when you start. Then, if you have problems and you have to train people, you just can't afford to do it.

You need people that have basic understanding when they come so you can actually provide the training you have to do for your particular business, which isn't addressed in here. It definitely isn't addressed in here. It's a huge issue for business to do these things. How are you interacting with the Department of Labour and Workforce Development? That's another issue that's been very, very difficult. I've never personally, as an employer, had a problem but when I see people that have had these problems, they just seem inflexible, and they're not interested in looking at other jurisdictions to see what they have done. The qualifications this gentleman had went way beyond anything that's required in Nova Scotia. It's wasn't from Europe, it was from the U.S.

MS. HARTWELL: I believe we are becoming more open to exploring how we can recognize learning, whether it has a formal credential behind it or has it been informally done. In this case, this gentleman may have had a credential from another jurisdiction. We have, as you know, in Canada some red seal trades, so those trades which guarantee mobility between provinces. It's a little harder when they're outside of the country.

I absolutely agree that we need to have a system set up to recognize and observe that. That is part of my earlier comment, that rather than worry about who has the piece of paper, if there can be a practical demonstration and not necessarily in a testing situation. In the situation of the gentleman you described, the appropriate response may be to go to a work site, look at the level of skill, assess there and then make a determination. It may not need to be a secondary level.

Right now though, I would say that the Act and the regulations are concerned with moving apprentices to the apprenticeship system but also ensuring and being able to identify that all of the safety features are covered off so that whoever is working as an electrician understands the electrical code and is able to safeguard safety in that sense.

I think we need to obviously keep safety in mind but we need to move a little bit beyond that because there are people who are entirely competent who may not have the credential, the straightest path to getting that expertise - they may not have the credential on paper. If we can assess them and maybe help fill any gaps that there are, because for some, if they come from another jurisdiction there are occasionally gaps in knowledge, for those to make sure we have the ability to help fill those gaps.

I don't think we have the luxury, in fact I know we don't have the luxury of allowing, not supporting people who have identified interest in working in the trades and not helping them get the papers that they need to work but also ensuring they have some labour mobility around our province and actually around our country.

MR. COLWELL: Well, this gentleman has worked in Nova Scotia for 35 years at this trade in Nova Scotia. There was no question, if it hadn't been for the employer and myself intervening, he wouldn't be working today - period. That's an awful thought.

MS. HARTWELL: Yes, I agree, and I'm not aware of that particular situation. I would say though it is certainly my intent to have an apprenticeship division that fosters the certification and supports that and is not oriented towards keeping people away from doing that work. So, I mean if that matter was to come up again I would hope that we would address it immediately in a very different way.

MR. COLWELL: Great, thank you. The other thing, in Nova Scotia we have a very high unemployment rate and yet there are a lot of jobs that aren't being filled in some industries. We're seeing a net loss of young people and a lot more people retiring. Our age demographic here is getting to the point where more people are not working, in retirement, than there are people working. If you factor in the people who are on community services and aren't able to work for other reasons, we're going to be in a really dire situation here in the province.

Has the department determined, or had a study, or reviewed how and why young people are leaving the province? I have my own feelings on this, but I would like to see what the department has done with this. A lot of young people have gone to other provinces and other countries to work.

MS. FERGUSON: I think, to Lynn's point, given the demographic challenges that the province is facing and given the large number of jobs that we need to fill, we need to be very strategic and really make sure that we focus our efforts to ensure that we're very much paying attention to the youth of our province and ensuring that we're doing whatever we

can to retain them. So what I will say is that youth were actually one of the targeted groups when we looked at the LMA funding and how can we provide that funding in a way to help groups that are under-represented in the labour market and have some challenges. We specifically looked at youth in terms of what can we do and how can we provide these funds in a way to retain them in Nova Scotia.

So I don't think we have all of the answers, but it's certainly on our dashboard and it's certainly something that we need to pay attention to in this department and, quite frankly, in every department in government to make sure that we really are looking at those communities - particularly our African Nova Scotian communities and our Aboriginal communities, where actually the number of youth are on the increase as opposed to the decline, making sure that we're getting in and working with those communities to do whatever we can to ensure that those young people know what's available to them, and that we're working with them to make sure they're in the best position they can to attach to the labour market.

Lynn may have some more specifics around this.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If I could, I'm going to interrupt you just because the 20 minutes is up and I know we can come back to that, or perhaps Mr. MacMaster would like to continue on that vein, but I'll turn it over to the Progressive Conservative caucus.

Mr. MacMaster.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. My first question is just a practical question, just to gain a better understanding of how the LMA actually works. Say if there were 20 people who were identified as underemployed and we had an idea that we could put them all to work on a new business venture, how could we access programming, what would it look like?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Elliott-Lopez.

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: So you're referencing 20, if we had 20 people unemployed and there was a new business venture, what kind of programming could be offered? Well, as was mentioned earlier, we're actually exploring the development of a wage subsidy program under the Labour Market Agreement, so that would certainly contribute.

A wage subsidy is where our funding is utilized to contribute to the wages, to entice an employer to hire people whom they wouldn't normally hire in the absence of a subsidy - so if they're willing to hire people from under-represented populations, then we would contribute towards the wages to help during that training period, under the LMDA that already exists for people who are eligible and for EI benefits and programs as well.

MR. MACMASTER: Would you consider if it was a brand new venture, something that didn't exist before, would you consider that as sort of a case where we've come up with some way that it might be successful? There's a lot of risk in a new venture, but say if people's wages were subsidized for the first year, we could find out if maybe the idea works, and if it carries on, great, we've just put 20 people back to work, it's a viable business model - is that something you would consider?

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: I think it would depend. We would probably have to look at - we would also have to look at it from a business plan perspective to see how viable the business was. At the end of the day our focus is on employing our clients, so we would need to have somebody look at the viability of the business. Certainly if it looked like a viable business we would want to support that.

At the end of the day our role is to support the clients, and if an indirect benefit is helping an employer then that's great, but there are also other venues through which new businesses can achieve funding to help business start-ups, and we would encourage businesses to look at those venues as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ferguson.

MS FERGUSON: I'd just like to say that our colleagues in the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, their role really is to work with new businesses in terms of start-up dollars. I think what we would do is work with our colleagues, and other government departments work together with them, which jobsHere really enables us to do, kind of a seamless continuum - you've heard me talk about it in the social services aspect, probably too much, but it's the same kind of piece here, that we're all in it for the same reason, in terms of promoting the economic prosperity for the province.

Our role is really in terms of the clients, and ERDT's role is really in terms of assessing that business and funding that business. What we would do is really work together so that in fairness to the clients or the business owner, or whomever, that we would work together behind the scenes to do what we would need to do in terms of moving that piece, if the business was viable in terms of moving that forward.

MR. MACMASTER: That's good, and we'd have to be careful - and I wouldn't want to be encouraging subsidizing a new venture that might compete with somebody who might already own a business in a neighbouring community or something like that, but there may be a project that I'll bring to you for your consideration at some point because there is a group of people who face losing employment in my region. I've been trying to work on some ideas where they might be able to transition to something else. If there's an idea that we have and we can limit the risk of it starting out by wage subsidy, and we're taking people who might fall on to long-term unemployment, and move them into

something where they might have a new future, I think that kind of sounds like that's the goal of the program - would that be the case?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Graves.

MS. SANDY GRAVES: Under the Labour Market Development Agreement, which is actually the agreement that targets individuals in receipt of EI, so if those individuals became EI eligible we actually do have a self-employment benefit where folks could work directly with service providers who understand, could do good assessment, and look at things like competition and ensuring that people are actually going to have a viable business plan.

The individual himself, or herself, is then eligible to retain their employment insurance while they participate in the program without penalty, so they are able to look at reinvesting in capital and so on. So there are probably a number of ways that that could be approached, depending - even a co-operative venture - there are a number of things, so I think we could probably help you to connect with the right folks.

MR. MACMASTER: Okay, thank you very much. Who would all of your partners be? I know there are a number of organizations that are working, I suppose, to help some of the same people. Who would you identify as your partners or people - you've just identified some through Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, and you mentioned EI, so I presume that would be through HRSDC?

MS. GRAVES: Well we actually, in 2009, the Labour Market Development Agreement devolved to the province, so we actually have responsibility for the delivery of the employment benefits and support measures.

The EI component remains with the federal government, so people retain their active benefits, and we provide under Part 2 of the EI Act. So definitely we have a partnership with Service Canada; we have an active partnership with a number of community delivery agents through a funding arrangement under the LMDA; we also, under the LMA, actively involved the Department of Community Services, the Office of Immigration, a number of the offices that are now in Communities, Cultures and Heritage, the Status of Women; and we also were at the time working actively with the Department of Education and they are now more closely affiliated with us. So we are really looking to the government agencies and departments that have an interest in the whole continuum of labour market attachment and invite them to the table, as appropriate. We are involved with the sector councils, with employers, so I think it's a really wide range of partners.

MR. MACMASTER: Does it ever get difficult or complicated when you're trying to work with so many different groups to serve the same people?

MS. GRAVES: It can be. I think that one of the things that worked really well at the beginning of the Labour Market Agreement in 2008 is when we knew it was coming we struck an interdepartmental committee at that time, and so the committee was involved with setting the priorities, with setting the guiding principles. One of the things that we knew we wanted to look at was not duplicating effort.

I think the LMA has been a really fine example of horizontal government. We recently in our department introduced an IT system, it's a business solution but it's IT-enabled, called LaMPSS, the Labour Market Program Support System. That is enabling us even more to look across and see where people are working together. Oftentimes we're at the table with the same employer or with the same community group, so we're looking to see how we can make sure we're focused on the right things, making sure our investments are appropriate, that clients are being appropriately served, receiving the package of supports that they need - and sometimes that means Community Services will put something in, LAE will put something in, and the employer often will bring something to the table as well. It's complicated, but it's worth it, I think.

MR. MACMASTER: One of the things I hear from employers is that sometimes they have difficulty finding people who will work. People might be on EI at the time and then they decide they don't want to work in a particular occupation. Is there anything that we're doing to try to - I think it gets to motivation, but sometimes I think people may not be motivated because they don't understand the opportunities that are in front of them for whatever reason. They may not have had the life experience in certain areas so if you can't see where you're going, it's hard to just take a step and start going in the direction - is there anything you try to do with these programs when you bring people in who are underemployed and you try to get them back into the workforce, is there anything you try to do to build their understanding or their wherewithal for the workforce so that maybe they feel a bit more engaged?

MS. GRAVES: I think we probably have some nice examples of success stories under the LMA, that maybe Vicki can speak to in a minute.

You've heard us use the term "essential skills" and that is one of the things that we try to focus on as a department and that often involves looking at motivation, at career development, and at career planning. Sometimes people have not made conscious career choices and so they will end up in an employment situation that is not meeting their needs on a holistic basis, and they'll find themselves cycling through unemployment or indeed over to income assistance and back through.

Many of our community partners are very skilled at helping people to look at why am I cycling through, what are the things that I really need to do to break that cycle? They tend to deliver a lot of programs that are rooted in the essential skills side of the continuum which really looks at decision making. In our department, we also have labour market information and intelligence. We work with helping people to look at that and use it

appropriately so that they can have a look at the demographic situation, have a look at the kinds of jobs that are going to be available down the road, and what fits best for them and their community and in their family.

I don't know, Vicki, if you have a couple of examples of programs where we've partnered those nicely?

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: Actually, a couple of the things that we tend to do with many of our programs under the Labour Market Agreement is to connect people directly with work. If we can offer them a stipend while they're attending, and create work placements as part of the program which we offer, we can show them the benefits of going to work every day and earning their own way.

We do have some great success stories. For example, we have a gentleman who had been on Income Assistance since he was 18 years old. He'd been on Income Assistance for years, and through an LMA-funded project we actually connected him with work - and he realized how great it was, that he could get up and go to work every day and he's now working after many years in the system. That's just an example of some of the great things that we have done under the Labour Market Agreement.

We also recently invested in some research trying to determine how we can reach people who aren't coming through the doors of our Career Resource Centres. We don't have the full report on that yet, but we are very interested in seeing those results to determine how to reach those folks and entice them to come back to work.

MR. MACMASTER: That's great because I think people find dignity in work and when they're engaged they're happier and if people are happy, well, that's a good sign that we're doing something right, I think.

One thing I've thought about for seasonal workers is if they get caught in working seasonally and using EI to sustain themselves throughout the rest of the year, there is going to come a point in time when they decide that they want to retire. If they've not been paying into the Canada Pension Plan, they're not going to be able to get the maximum benefit. We've had discussions in this Legislature about the Canada Pension Plan and how you certainly can't depend on it alone to support your income needs in retirement. I often think of seasonal workers; they only pay a fraction of the annual premiums into CPP and they're going to get a corresponding fraction of the benefit when they retire, when they decide they want to leave. Is there something that we could be doing to try to use that as a bit of motivation for people, if they can find employment year-round, that they could see the benefit of that? Is that something you've considered or that you might look at?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ferguson.



MS. FERGUSON: Have we considered that exact thing and had that exact discussion, I don't think so, but what I can tell you is that there has been a lot of discussion around seasonal workers, what are some options for seasonal workers that work for them yet at the same time work to help us address the labour force issues that we are addressing in the province. There is no easy answer around some of that. It's complicated, it differs from community to community, so there are a lot of things that we have to consider. There have been discussions, not just in our department but with our colleagues in other departments.

I think your point is well taken around the CPP piece and colleagues in the Department of Finance obviously are working on that file and the whole pension issue, which right now is obviously very important in terms of how everyone sustains themselves into the future. As we go forward with the jobsHere plan and as we go forward with the workforce strategy, I do want to tell you that the challenges and opportunities around what the seasonal workers face are very much going to be part of the discussion.

I think it's just important that we do it in a way that we make sure we understand all the issues, that we go out and speak with seasonal workers, that we talk to communities, that we understand what the need is and that we work together with people to look at some solutions, as we go forward. We're very interested to hear perspectives on that and if people have situations or things you'd like us to hear, we'd be very open to hearing that, so thank you.

MR. MACMASTER: I guess I would just like to make the point that if people are made aware of their future today, they might start thinking more about preparing for the future. I guess that goes for all of us but especially for somebody who is a seasonal worker who may not have anything when they go to retire. I think we owe it to them to make sure that we help them understand that there could be something for them there if they want to go out and get it.

When you're working with these people, I presume there is some kind of mentorship where you keep in touch with them on a regular basis as you're helping them move into the workforce. Can you tell us a little bit about how that is done?

MS. GRAVES: As I alluded to earlier, within Employment Nova Scotia we have partnership arrangements with a group that we call our Career Resource Centres and other service delivery agents. Our staff themselves do not directly case-manage - would be the language that we would use - individuals. We work with our partners in the community to do that and that one of the expectations would be that there is follow-up with any investment that we make. So specifically under the Labour Market Agreement, we require follow-up on a three, six and 12-month basis after the end of the intervention that we funded.

Although it has been since 2008, we're still relatively new with the Labour Market Agreement in hitting our full stride. The nice thing about the LMA is that there is the ability to - one of our target groups are employed individuals who still have skill shortage or need to enhance their skills in order to either remain employed or to progress in their employment situation. I wouldn't rule it out that if we had an intervention with an individual and at the follow-up it was determined that this person would achieve greater success with an additional intervention, that's probably something that we would look at and encourage our partners to consider as a part of their planning.

MR. MACMASTER: Would an example of that be like encouraging them to take advantage of adult education that might be offered to them?

MS. GRAVES: We really have a great division, branch, because we have the services for employers in the Workplace Initiatives branch so we might even be able to look at providing something onsite, if that was appropriate for not just that one individual but perhaps there was that demographic in that employer's situation. We've had specific programs that have looked at mentoring as the actual activity itself. That has proven to be fairly successful with new Canadians and immigrants to the province where they bring with them a skill, and a skill set that our economy needs, but it's different kinds of attachment supports that they need. So the LMA has been able to help us to mentor individuals in that case.

MR. MACMASTER: Would you have any sort of statistics on how many people have completed programs and have actually transitioned into the workforce full time, on their own, afterwards?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Elliott-Lopez.

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: Our annual report in 2009-10, we did some follow-up and keeping in mind that we do have one full year under our belt, we'll be doing more follow-up now because, as Sandy said, we do a 12-month follow-up, so if somebody is involved in an intervention for six months or more, we may not actually have completed that final follow-up yet, but looking at our initial results, they're very good. In 2009-10 we had 4,700 individuals who were helped between LMA and STTF and around 80 per cent of those said that they felt that the program in which they participated contributed to their employability, so good results so far.

MR. MACMASTER: Could you give us a timeline if somebody went in for a program, how long would they be in the program and the follow-ups thereafter?

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: It varies, very much so. So, for example, under a new Skills Up! program somebody may be in an intervention for two years or more and then we would do a 12-month follow-up after the end of that intervention. It could be anywhere from three months to two to three years, depending on their needs.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacMaster, your time is up right now, thank you very much. We'll have a second round in a little while. I'll turn it over to the NDP, Mr. Whynott, please.

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman, and thanks for coming. I'm going to get right to questioning here. I guess what I want to do is talk a little bit about, as my colleague, the member for Inverness, did around local employment agencies, in particular, out our way we have Opportunities Place in Sackville. They're a great resource for many people who have tried to access their help. I guess my first question is, do they receive direct monies from Employment Nova Scotia for their operations - I'm not talking in particular about that but as a broad sense, the agencies overall across the province - do they receive direct monies from the province?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Graves.

MS. GRAVES: Under the Labour Market Development Agreement we have what we call the Employment Benefits and Support Measures. So we are able to fund a range of employment assistance services. We call them EAS Agreements. Opportunities Place would be an example of one of those agreements. Under EAS, what we call community agencies to do, we contribute the funding directly from EAS through the Labour Market Development Agreement, so federal funding that is transferred to the province, and we're accountable for administering it and evaluating the outcomes of it.

Organizations that receive funding under EAS are called to provide job search and career development services to unemployed Nova Scotians regardless of EI attachment or not and they are also then able to provide what we would call assisted services. Their staff would work particularly with people who are in receipt of EI. This year we're looking at how we can also expand those to include individuals who would be eligible under the Labour Market Agreement to actually engage in a case plan. That often results in a referral to, perhaps, even another funded measure from Employment Nova Scotia such as skill development or self-employment benefit.

MR. WHYNOTT: So what might be the percentage of funding for an agency in Nova Scotia receiving funding from the province and then maybe some from the feds? Is it 50/50? How does that work?

MS. GRAVES: The reality for the majority of the EAS-funded agencies, the Career Resource Centres, is that all of that funding would now come through Employment Nova Scotia. It is, again, federal money that is transferred to us under the Canada-Nova Scotia LMDA. There may be some other partnerships that they're involved in as an organization. Other partners that come to mind tend to be - Department of Community Services may also be in there. Federally they may be receiving either funding through the Aboriginal programs or youth. The other part would be persons with disabilities, so the federal Opportunity Funds.

MR. WHYNOTT: You talked a little bit, previously, about holding those centres accountable for the money that they spend, seeing three, six, nine, 12-month evaluations, I assume. Do you evaluate the services that people are provided with, things like first point of contact for folks? I know I've received phone calls from people who contacted a particular facility and the first point of contact said, no, you're not eligible. So then they call me, I try to help them navigate and then we're able to go somewhere. How do you evaluate that service for the client?

MS. GRAVES: Under EAS, any unemployed Nova Scotian who wishes to avail themselves of the general services that organization offers is eligible on a walk-in basis and they have degrees of service. I think it would very much depend on what the person may have been asking for in terms of service. The reality is that under the LMDA there are some eligibility criteria for those assisted services that I was talking about, so a referral to skill development or self-employment or a wage subsidy, there may be eligibility criteria.

How we evaluate them, the three, six, 12-month follow-up is specific to the projects with the Labour Market Agreement. We enter into contribution agreements with those service providers through the LMDA. We have about 96 staff across the province who are very skilled program officers, who support those agreements on an individual basis, develop relationships with the service providers. We have a series of monitors that are required that range from on-site visits to a review of the agreement and the outcomes and so on, so we very much have a presence in that we take accountability for those investments very seriously and would look to work with the boards of directors or the organizations themselves if there were quality issues in service. Ultimately, if the quality was not there, then we would need to consider whether we would continue to engage in an agreement there.

MS. FERGUSON: Sandy talked very well about the overall accountability measures. I just wanted to add in a piece around the client service philosophy, which I think the devolution has only happened relatively recently in government terms. Certainly not to say that there isn't a client service philosophy there now, because I think there very much is. I think, not unlike we've done in some other departments in government, it's still early days for us, but something that's really important certainly to me in my capacity in the chair that I sit in, and I know with my colleagues here, is really continuing to work on a client service philosophy across the department. That's something that we will be working on over the next little while across the department and certainly working with our partners, together, to talk about what that really means and how we can do better on that.

I think it's something we can always do better on. If we keep it as our key focus, this is really all about the client, and in my other position as well I know we heard a lot about that we have to navigate the system. Our goal would certainly be that clients don't have to navigate the system, that the system self-navigates for them. It's still relatively early days for us and we have some wonderful service providers who, I am sure, could teach us some lessons on service delivery. I just want you to know that it will be a

significant focus for us over the next little while as we really start to look at what is the focus of the service we want to provide.

MR. WHYNOTT: You actually took the next question out of my mouth. I want to talk a little bit about on the next piece about how you're breaking down the barriers between the partners, not just the service delivery folks, but I'm also talking about the departments within government.

I think we've seen a lot of that - we always hear about the silos are up and the walls, it's really hard to get over the walls. I've certainly seen over the last couple of years that those barriers are being broken down. How are you going to continue to break down those barriers?

MS. FERGUSON: I think there's an obligation on all of us who work in government today to make sure we don't create them, and the ones that are left we break them down. I think we have made some great strides.

If you look, people often talk about the LMA piece and actually the devolution of how services went from the federal government into our current department. We actually worked interdepartmentally on that piece. I actually have found that the staff in my new department is already there in terms of the mindset and the philosophy because that's what a lot of it is in terms of always reaching out to your partners, always making sure you've consulted with other departments, and ultimately remembering that what we are all about is delivering service to the client.

We need to look – you know, in government sometimes we look inside out, but it's really important in this department that we look outside in, and we really figure out what is the best way to deliver those services. So we're continuing to have ongoing dialogue with our colleagues at the Department of Community Services around the broad spectrum of employment services that we provide, to make sure there are on-ramps that people know how to get on, that eventually it will be single-entry access so we'll figure out the things behind the scenes.

I've been really, really pleased in terms of what I've seen so far in the department because this crew really gets it in terms of making sure we develop those kinds of systems from a whole-of-government perspective. Obviously there are certain departments that have certain programs and there are certain rules and regulations in legislation that's attached to all of that, but we can respect that and still at the same time create systems that really are about assisting the client.

In terms of how jobsHere was developed and how the workforce strategy is being developed, I can tell you there really are very few silos there and, if there are, there is lots of discussion about how we address that.

MR. WHYNOTT: Very quickly, because I'm going to share my time with my colleague. I think what's important here is - let's say I'm a troubled Nova Scotian who became unemployed, where would be the first point of contact? Would it be the local service provider or would it be Employment Nova Scotia who would then just say call your local employment - can you kind of guide me through that just very quickly?

MS. GRAVES: It could be either. The reality is that if you become an unemployed Nova Scotian, we would try to make known to you what the service providers were in the community. Oftentimes we've maintained our partnership with Service Canada so an individual who is involved with Employment Insurance would actually be made aware from Service Canada where the local service provider is.

However, if an individual called into an Employment Nova Scotia office, they would also be quickly guided to a service provider. I think, as the deputy has said, our intent is to make sure people get where they need to go with the least fuss.

MR. WHYNOTT: Thank you very much. I'm going to share my time with Ms. Raymond.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Raymond, please.

MS. MICHELE RAYMOND: Thank you very much, and I very much appreciate some of the information I'm getting on this because this is, as you have mentioned, a very complicated subject and it does have a huge impact on some of the members of our society who haven't necessarily been participating as fully as they might be able to.

I'd just like to add, following on the comments of my colleague, I have been wondering what amount of money was allocated, if any, for the training and the certification of employment counsellors with the service providers. Is that something that comes through the LMDA and was there money allocated before the selection, or after the selection, for the training certification of counsellors?

MS. GRAVES: Under the terms of their EAS agreement, each organization would actually identify what their professional development needs are, so there was not necessarily a formal drive from government prior to devolution to create specific training or certification. We engage in agreements with existing organizations and they are then responsible for the hiring and the professional development of their particular staff. It is supported through the actual agreement.

We are now in the midst of looking at that quality piece, so very engaged. We actually have what we're calling a focus group of EAS service providers through the creation of the Labour Market Program Support System to talk about what a standard could be, what a standard should look like in the Province of Nova Scotia. We want to work sort of with our colleagues in the policy shop and in our labour market partnership shop to

understand what Nova Scotians should be able to expect in terms of consistent service across the province, and I anticipate then that that would be again supported through the terms of those agreements.

MS. RAYMOND: Well, as you say, it's early days and this makes it all the more important that there is evaluation of a consistency of service because, anecdotally, one hears there is a little inconsistency across the board.

That's actually not really what I was wondering about as much. You had mentioned that many people in the workforce currently are below a Level 3 of literacy. You talked about the use of the LMA money to increase essential skills and so on. Certainly one of the concerns that I always have with people who come through my door is that their participation in the workforce is very, very much limited by what they are able to expect from the workforce in terms of wages.

We know that a number of jobs currently available are either part-time jobs or completely benefits-free. This is often the females; very frequently it is this. Something I heard this morning is some 66 per cent of women with children under three years of age, across the country at this point, are part of the workforce. We certainly know that does not mean that they are necessarily participating at the highest level of the workforce. We also hear that many studies show that it is the mother's level of education which is the single strongest determinant of their child's final level of education.

When we have women who are already in the workforce, a young age, they may very frequently be participating in the part-time, sort of benefits-free - what are we doing to ensure that essential skills are there, particularly for women with children who are in the workforce, and could you tell me a little bit more about essential skills and what they are and how they translate into workplaces with benefits and workplaces without - and I realize that is about three separate questions.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ferguson.

MS. FERGUSON: I talked earlier that the LMA has certain under-represented groups in the workforce that we have actually looked at in order to target our funds, and one of those is women. We are aware, like you are aware, that there are significant challenges; in fact I think our research that was quoted to me recently has been that there's a real issue around ensuring that women, particularly in rural parts of the province, are able to obtain their GED designation. So what are the kinds of things we can be doing to assist those women to get their GED? - and there are child care issues and transportation issues, all of that obviously goes into the package.

I think what is important for us, along the points that you made, are really to ensure that we understand what the challenges are and that we are able to do the best we can to focus our LMA dollars to actually go in there and target some of those programs.

We've also been talking, because we're all in the same department right now and we're the department that has the adult high school, which is an absolutely fabulous, fabulous resource - and I don't think we talk about it enough, but it's kind of lauded across the country as really being one of the best models. So a piece of that is saying, well okay how can we expand, what can we do in terms of the services we're delivering through our adult high schools to make sure that we're able to bring women in to - I guess you've talked about women already in the workforce but we'd be talking to help them transition into and then, once they're there, what are the kinds of services that we need to look at?

Obviously, some of those challenges are different in rural Nova Scotia than in urban Nova Scotia. So we are starting to look at some targeted programs and that is also an area, I think - Sandy talked earlier around - how we're still liaising with our employment support colleagues at the Department of Community Services. I do know when I was there we had specifically broken down our Income Assistance caseload to look at how can we revamp our employment support services in particular to really assist single women with small children. I think between the two departments there are a number of things that we can do in terms of really looking at assisting those women and addressing their specific kinds of challenges - and Vicki may have some more specifics to add to that.

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: I can actually provide some great examples of work we've done under the Labour Market Agreement. One of the programs that we've supported through LMA funding is the One Journey Program - and I'm not sure if you're familiar with One Journey. It is a program whereby- it's a unique partnership between industry and government and training institutions and non-profits where a project team comes together when an industry recognizes a shortage and people are trained in essential skills, interviewed, and they're guaranteed jobs at the end.

One of the programs that we've expanded across the province is CCA, Continuing Care Assistant. As we know, primarily women are participating in that program and so we have women who were assembly line workers in some of the manufacturing plants that have closed who are now working as CCAs and making substantially more money and being able to support their children. We also actually have one of those One Journey programs offered part time for working women, so it is to help women who might actually be participating in the health care sector in a lower paid occupation to increase those skills and bring them up to get their CCA designation and therefore earn more money.

We actually also support Women for Economic Equality in a great program called Women Unlimited and it is increasing women's participation in good-paying trades positions. Hypatia, which is their sister organization, works with employers in the trades to help prepare the employers to accept women into those positions. So we are doing some really interesting things under the Labour Market Agreement.



MS. RAYMOND: I would say that is an especially strong piece if you're able to do part-time support for people who are already in those jobs, which aren't necessarily fully supportive although they're there part time.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Raymond, your time is up and we'll go to our last round of questioning, which is 14 minutes each for each caucus, and I'll begin with Mr. Colwell.

MR. COLWELL: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and just a couple of quick questions. Of course I have a couple more questions. I believe in 2006 the productivity in Nova Scotia remained about 16.5 per cent below the national average and the third lowest among all provinces. The program that you have hopefully will address this issue because productivity is a major issue in companies being successful in employing people - what are you doing in that area?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Hartwell.

MS. HARTWELL: We recognized as well that productivity is an issue and that the impact of the workforce within productivity is really something that we need to address. The Productivity and Innovation Program, which was announced late last year, which is a \$25 million program has two streams: There is a focus on capital investments, so helping businesses make capital investments that will improve their productivity and innovation and their criteria around that; and the other stream is really about training, and that is where we are partnering with the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism.

It's really exciting because for the first time we have some funding that we can apply for workers who are already in the workforce, helping employers provide the training for their existing workforce. I think we are coming to the realization that the workforce we have today is going to look very much like the workforce we have tomorrow so we really need to invest in the workers we have now and to help them upgrade their skills.

The training side of the Productivity and Innovation Program, PIP, the training side is called the Workplace Innovation and Productivity Skills Enhancement, or WIPSE, and the focus there is for employers and other organizations, it could be unions, sector councils, other organizations that represent employers to apply for training that will enhance the skills and the innovation for those workers, all in that quest to increase the productivity.

It's actually a great marriage of the two streams, you have an employer that could maybe purchase a new piece of equipment, a new capital investment, at the same time there's also the funding from us to support their workers to get the upgrading on that equipment. Of course, once those workers have that skill, that's a skill they can take to other employers. There's also an investment in the people side.

MR. COLWELL: That's great, but are you going to track this and see how our percentage improves, if indeed it does?

MS. HARTWELL: Yes.

MR. COLWELL: When will you be reporting that, on a regular basis or yearly?

MS. HARTWELL: I believe it will be yearly. The applications for the program just started, I think, at the end of January. I've seen some very initial reports of who has applied, a slow start, I would say, but picking up momentum as people are hearing about it and we're getting out and spreading the word. I think anything in that regard would be helpful.

The hope is that not only would we be able to report on uptake and which training is provided, but exactly to your point, that we can measure that there has been an increase in productivity as a result.

MR. COLWELL: The other thing is in 2007 Nova Scotia had the second lowest labour force participation in Canada at 63.7 per cent. Are you also going to track that with your program to see how that improves? A lot of things in this program aren't new. The federal government was doing this anyway. Do you really think the program run by the province will be better than it was with the federal government? To prove that, are you going to track this number as well because this is a very important number as well?

MS. HARTWELL: To answer the direct question, do I think it will be better, I think it will be more responsive to the province's needs. I'm thinking now of the LMDA agreement. We have continued, and the language we use is, we've stabilized the programs as they've come from the federal government and we're just now turning our attention and our energy to transforming that in a way that will meet the province's needs.

By that we can focus on particular populations. There's a range of interventions that are available from skill development to self-employment benefit or job creation partnerships, which I'm sure you're all aware of. We can now look at what the province needs both in terms of who are the workers in Nova Scotia and what are their skills but also what's the workforce we want to build? Before we had that devolution from the federal government, we didn't have the ability to make those decisions and now we do. That is a really tremendous opportunity.

The issue of the underrepresented in Nova Scotia is a huge one. The numbers are quite startling. We've done some very initial number crunching. The what if, what if we could bring Nova Scotia's participation rate to the national average, how many more workers would that mean? In some cases it's not huge, but in some cases it is significant. I'm thinking in particular of people with disabilities, if we could support more people with

disabilities to participate in the labour market, because Nova Scotia has the highest rate of disability in the country.

There's a labour pool there that is untapped, which has economic benefits, but huge social benefits as well, and I see the two complementing one another nicely. We have a real focus in the LMA, but I think throughout all of our programming, how can we get more people who are not participating in the labour market to their fullest potential? How can we get them engaged?

So I think on the LMA, the LMDA, but also in some of the other things that I'm responsible for, so in the adult education and apprenticeship, there really is a focus on underrepresented and I think to your point we have to be able to track and record that there has been some progress.

There have been lots of interventions for those populations and it's really important that we focus on the interventions that are successful and move us forward and we stop doing what's not working. To help us move that forward, just one last thing I'll say is that some of the LMA money is supporting what we are calling employability tables. We have four employability tables for African Nova Scotians, Aboriginal people, Acadian Nova Scotians, people with disabilities, made up of community representatives. Service providers, people who are on the ground and are representative of those communities and working with those communities so that we can actually have that conversation. What hasn't worked in the past, what needs to work now? How can we get more people in the labour market and supported in the labour market so that they basically succeed.

MR. COLWELL: The thing is you indicated earlier this is a six-year agreement. Is there a clause in the agreement to continue this past six years? If not, are you planning for the future for the province to fund this because it may be one of these programs that we've seen so many times. The federal government will give us this wonderful amount of money and then it vanishes for good.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ferguson.

MS. FERGUSON: You're right, it is a six-year agreement. There's absolutely no commitment at this stage that the agreement will continue. That's obviously something that government is looking at on a broader basis in terms of all of the federal money that's transferred to the provincial government. Obviously something that we'll have to consider if that comes to pass.

MR. COLWELL: The concern is, and hopefully you're very successful with this and I'm sure that you will have some success, but it's a very daunting task that you've undertaken. One which the federal government hasn't been that successful at quite frankly, when you look at the numbers. You're being handed some money, no guarantee that it's going to continue, and it's a substantial amount of money. I know it's too early at this point

but it's something that you hopefully have a contingency plan for to move forward. In case the money does go because I think this is a very important program and I know in my community, in particular, a Black community, it's making a significant difference and has for a long time. I want to give credit to the people who operate in my area for the fine work that they're doing and the work that you are supporting them with. So I want that on the record.

The other thing is I see you're going to do some IT work and I understand IT work. How much is that going to cost and will that take away from the money you're going to spend actually on the in-client?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Graves.

MS. GRAVES: When the LMDA devolved to the province, one of the terms in the agreement was that we could continue to use the federal system to administer our programs until 2012. So there was a supplemental agreement that is in no way impacting on programs or staff, or any kind of delivery within the province from the federal government for us to develop the business enabled IT project that we've called LaMPSS.

So our first release was in November 2011 and it focuses on agreement management. We chose within Labour and Advanced Education to take advantage of that supplemental agreement and to invite some of our other provincial partners who are also involved with labour market delivery to become involved in that IT system. So we've actually maximized, I think, the agreement that has come from the province and I believe it's \$12.8 million over a period of time, so from 2009 through until 2012 when we're actually fully implemented. Because of the way that we've chosen to roll it out, the Department of Community Services and the Office of Immigration are also now being able to take advantage of that system.

Our next release will be focused on the EAS service provider, providing them an opportunity to robustly case manage the Nova Scotians whom they are providing service to, a portion of which will be information that comes back to the province. We've also developed this system in a way, and they were at the table with us actually developing it, so that they're able to manage their other agreements and their other requirements from other funding partners, through that system, so again hoping to achieve some efficiencies there.

MR. COLWELL: Is there a plan to fund this past 2012? What would the continuing operating costs of this be for the system itself?

MS. GRAVES: The system then will move into becoming a capital asset of the province and will use just our regular provincial IT support. What we've done is we've actually, through the Labour Market Development Agreement, there were some FTEs that were transferred, not all came with staff in them, so we're using the LMDA administrative

component to provide that continued support but, again, not at the expense of programs or staff that would be working with clients.

MR. COLWELL: It worked very well. You should be commended for that. I think this is a great program. There are a lot of other questions that I really want to ask about it. I know in my area where we have a lot of people in the African Nova Scotian community who really have a hard job getting employment and a lot of them - I referred to earlier - are stonemasons that do not have their licences as bricklayers and the bricklayers as well. They make a very modest income, part-time, instead of making the top rate that they could be making if they're working on a unionized job or a regular job with a non-unionized shop. Is there a specific program in place to help these people get certified? I'm just using this one as an example.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Hartwell.

MS. HARTWELL: I think the skill set program that was just announced for African Nova Scotians could fund training that leads to a certification, so if it is a training gap, then the training could be funded. If the issue is that there are supports needed to get ready for the certification and go through the certification process, there is not a specific program but I would put forward that our industrial training and certification officers who are in my division would, and should, be providing the supports for any individual to go through the certification process and recognize that some people may have particular needs or may have particular challenges. We have industrial training and certification officers; it goes all around the province. Their role is to help people through that process, recognizing again that some people have particular challenges.

What I would suggest for anyone in that situation would be to contact the Apprenticeship and Training Division and work through that but, as I said, if there is a training gap, we now have this program that could provide some training funding for people in that situation.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Colwell, your time has elapsed so we'll hopefully see a continuation of those questions with Mr. MacMaster.

MR. MACMASTER: When we were speaking earlier, you had mentioned that sometimes people think that an intervention may last from three months to, say, up to two years. What determines the length of the intervention?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Elliott-Lopez.

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: Under the Labour Market Agreement, we actually have determined through our guidelines that our clients will be case-managed through the LMDA EAS services, so again working in tandem with LMDA in creating a nice marriage of the two different funding arrangements. Through case management, clients' needs are

determined so programs don't necessarily just open up and anybody who wants to participate can participate. They are required to visit an employment counsellor. They are required to have a needs assessment done and so it's very individualized and we do offer a milieu of services around the province to work with those different needs and to accommodate those different needs.

For someone, it may just be a simple wage subsidy so they may have the training but not the work experience and maybe all they need to attach is a 20-week wage subsidy. For somebody else who is facing multiple barriers to employment, they may require a longer term intervention and they may require some employability skills, followed by a program like Skills Up!, followed by a wage subsidy, so it's very determined by the individual's needs.

MR. MACMASTER: What kind of jobs are these people engaged in throughout the program?

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: Again, it depends on the intervention. For example, we have funded a couple of Jumpstart to trades type of programs whereby there is a specific focus on trades, so when somebody comes into the trades program, they'll raise their essential skills through some literacy and essential skills programming. They'll work through their employability barriers and then they'll be placed in a work experience position within the trade. It could be construction, and we also have some in the hospitality sector, some in the tourism sector. It really depends - we are trying to look at areas where there are skill shortages. So some of those that I just mentioned, particularly in the trades, where we recognize that there are skill shortages, we tend to like to focus our programming in those areas.

MR. MACMASTER: Thank you. Some industries have taken advantage, and you've just mentioned a couple of them - I think of TIANS, I guess, the tourism industry has taken advantage of the programs. How can we encourage other industries to do the same?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Hartwell.

MS. HARTWELL: I think uptake from industry/business employers is a perpetual challenge for us. We are working closely with ERDT and with Nova Scotia Business Inc. to have a push out there, to focus on employment engagement, how we engage those employers. So I'm actually working with the chambers of commerce, with the regional development associations, really anywhere we can get in the door.

I think there was some mention of our Workplace Education Initiative, which is a long-standing program, quite successful, where we provide really reasonable amounts of money - \$2,500, \$3,000. There are instructors who go right on the work site and provide

improvements to literacy and essential skills. Last year I think we had about 1,600 people take advantage of that program and our hope is to actually double that in the coming year.

I would say there are a lot of repeat employers and employers who have seen the benefit and come back. It is probably by word of mouth that we get a lot of the new ones. There is a focus with some of Vicki's staff around the province, the field staff, in getting out and trying to recruit new employers. There really is quite a reasonable investment from employers in terms of time for employees to take part, but that the costs are available, the same as the WIPSE program that I mentioned.

I believe we are going to have a push to really make employers aware of the resources that are out there. For some, particularly smaller employers, taking the time to fill out an application form is something that is challenging for them, they are so focused on their operations. So we need to be more responsive and do a little more of the legwork.

For some employers they don't necessarily yet see the benefit in upgrading their workers' skills because then the workers might move on. I think that realization - and again, as I said, the workers we have are the workers we are going to have - is starting to hit home. We are starting to have more employers who are recognizing that the gaps in literacy, the lack of essential skills, the lack of certifications, those things are becoming stumbling blocks and a new generation is not going to stay with an employer that is not investing in them.

I think the tide is turning on its own and we are actively trying to encourage and recruit more employers to take advantage of the programs that we offer.

MR. MACMASTER: Because those employees might be able to do more for those industries or those companies if they're given a chance to improve their skill set.

MS. HARTWELL: Absolutely.

MR. MACMASTER: Have you considered approaching industry associations, like in other industries, and then let them approach the companies in their sector of the economy?

MS. HARTWELL: We have, with ERDT, our sister department as well, when the productivity investment program was being developed there were some initial conversations with the manufacturers' organization and other big organizations that can impact a lot of employers to try to spread the word.

We're also meeting on a regular basis with sector councils. Again, they often can touch smaller employers, particularly in rural areas, who may not have the same impact. We're also exploring a little bit of an unconventional route in that we know that we have folks at the Department of Education who work with employers in a different role, in that

they take on high school students as co-op students. I firmly believe that if an employer is supportive enough of learning that they are willing to take on a high school student for a short-term co-op then maybe that's an employer who has an interest in learning, an interest in developing their workers in a new way. So we need to, across government, share that information to the extent that we can, just to reach out. So at this point we're exploring every avenue we can.

MR. MACMASTER: What should an industry or an employer bring to the table when they approach you? I mean one thing they would have to bring, there would have to be a shortage of jobs in that area and where they have a need to put some people to work. What are some of the other things that they would need to bring to the table, I guess, to capture your interest to say, yes, we want to work with you right away?

MS. HARTWELL: I honestly believe that there is actually an offering from most employers in the province, maybe all employers, because the needs are different. So there are employers who are in growth industries where there's a lack of workers with the skills that they need. There are programs that we have, particularly some of the new program offerings like WIPSE where we can retrain their existing workforce, work with them. They need to bring an interest in doing it. They need to bring some flexibility in providing learning time for their employees and in some cases, particularly for larger employers, they need to bring some matching training dollars. For the smaller employers though, particularly under the WIPSE program, that's not an issue. It really is an openness and a flexibility to provide the learning supports.

For other employers where it's, I would say, an industry that's in transition or where there have been layoffs, or maybe some more traditional sectors, perhaps where they haven't had as much innovation in productivity improvements, there is another set of programs. So I think it can be for every employer. Even an employer who's moving forward and needs a high skill set and employers who actually may need a more traditional skill set and have a more steady workforce, maybe a seasonal workforce. We do have different programs that meet the different needs because the end result is all the same. We want to have a workforce that can respond to the economic needs now and in the future.

Of course, our department also has a social agenda in that we also want individuals to be able to fully participate in the economy, in the community, in their lives as much as possible. So for us, the more that we can engage employers and move things forward, the better.

MR. MACMASTER: I presume most people find out, like the individuals who benefit from the programs, I suspect they find out usually through the normal course of service delivery, if they're on assistance or if they become unemployed. They seek out help from an office of government that's there to help them. Is that how most people, from the employee side I guess, find out about these programs?



MS. GRAVES: Yes, I think that we've developed strong partnerships as we've said with the Department of Community Services. So one of the first stopping points really, when an employment support service worker in DCS is working with a recipient of income assistance, is to determine the range of services that they may be eligible for. Some of those services are currently delivered by LAE or by community partners. So the appropriate referral would be made. In the community I think, you know, many of the organizations are well-known in the community. They're mostly storefront operations so you can walk into a mall and see a career resource centre or it will be, you know, in a very accessible area somewhere in the community. So people would come in and the staff there are very in tune with what the current offerings are.

We have a fairly robust back and forth with service providers so, for example, when Skills Up! was announced last Friday, present in the room at the announcement were a number of service providers. As the announcement was being made, simultaneously materials were being sent out across our 70-plus organization of service delivery agents so that they all had the application forms and the up-to-date information. So we try, you know, and I think we are successful. Any time there is a new offering like that, we're quickly disseminating the information to our partners.

Lynn mentioned the employability tables. We use those tables to sort of make folks aware. So we take advantage of every opportunity that we have to let people know about the program offerings that are there.

MR. MACMASTER: I know the answer would be that it varies because in every case it would. But have you developed some kind of an average amount of time that it takes - if somebody comes in, they're unemployed, they're looking for an opportunity, how long does it take to take them from there to being placed under one of these programs?

MS. GRAVES: I don't think we have that information here. I can tell you it's going to be easier to get with the introduction of LaMPSS. In the actual agreements though we do provide an analysis of a per-client cost, and so on, for that intervention from the time they walk in until - so I don't have the information here but probably could look to see what we have in terms of averaging to make that available.

MR. MACMASTER: That would be great if we could have that information back to the committee. I think it would be great, it's important that - I'm sure you would agree it's important - the sooner we can get people to take advantage of the program, we're saving dollars somewhere else in some other form of assistance. If we're keeping track of our progress and if we continue to improve it, we're serving people all that much better. I would be curious to know what the statistics would be on that.

My next question is, we've seen industries where there's been a large loss of jobs. How nimble is the program to go in and say there's 20 people out of work here, there may

be an opportunity to get them all back in a certain project, how quickly can you put something together to help those people?

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: I would actually say very quickly. We have transition teams established across the province comprised of a number of partners. At the table would be workforce initiatives, our workplace education coordinators, we also have ERDT at the table, we have our ENS counterparts.

Transition teams established across the province are able to step in and respond very quickly. We may have information sessions, so Service Canada will step in and explain the EI system; ENS will step in and explain the current EAS services that are available, and workplace education coordinators play a unique role in that they can actually step into the work environment and perform a needs assessment. They can determine where they are in terms of essential skills and start providing essential skills programs on site, right away, before the place even closes.

Larsen's is a great example of that. We have at least five programs running right now and the doors haven't even closed at Larsen's. People will be well prepared to step into a new program or a new venture. There are people who didn't have their GED who are writing their GED and may be able to take advantage of skill development and go back to NSCC through ENS.

So as soon as we hear of a closure, we're able to step in. One Journey is another great example. As we know the Valley has been hard hit with a number of closures lately and we've been running some One Journey programs there so people who have been laid off have been attached to work right away; as soon as they exit the One Journey program they have guaranteed employment at the end. I would say that we've been very responsive to the needs.

MR. MACMASTER: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The time has elapsed and I'm going to call Mr. MacKinnon for 14 minutes.

MR. MACKINNON: Yesterday I was very proud to be involved in an announcement by your department of \$172,000 for the Pictou County Women's Centre. That was just one component of that announcement. That was for the Starting Point program, a program that I have been involved in. Most of the graduations that have taken place from that program to date - I think it's a 16-week program - and at the end of that period of time it is just amazing to see how the skills have developed. Every time there is a PowerPoint presentation made, it doesn't just show the skills that have been developed, it shows the self-esteem and the confidence building and so on. It's a program that I think is amazing.

Having said that, can you comment on this and other success stories?

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: I could talk for a long time about the success under the LMA. That's a great example of a success whereby we're bringing women, who aren't typically under-represented or attached to IA, back into the workforce. As Lynn alluded to earlier, our social mandate is not only about working, it's about participating fully in your workforce in your community, increasing self-confidence and being happy in what you do.

Our Constructing the Future program through the Black Business Initiative, I would say, is another great example of where partners have come together and we've been able to offer 25 African Nova Scotians the opportunity to participate in essential skills programming. We have some wonderful success stories whereby they've gone on to attend the Nova Scotia Community College or attach to businesses in the local area in trades positions that they're really enjoying.

I can give single-person success stories, for example, a widowed single mother in rural Nova Scotia who had been on the system and had little hope. She was provided with an LMA-funded wage subsidy and a local employer used that money to invest in increasing her skills and now she has full-time employment and she is able to provide for her family. LMA investments supported a program that provides mentorship and skills training on the job. We had a youth participant involved in that, again coming from a low-income household, and he was able to purchase his first vehicle upon obtaining employment. The self-esteem that comes with that is incredible.

So yes, One Journey programs are another great example; people attending the graduation ceremonies and receiving the first certification that they've ever received in their lives and going on to make \$35,000 per year in starting positions. Those are some of the great things that we've been able to do under the LMA.

MR. MACKINNON: Thank you very much for that. One of your mandates is the self-employed and I understand there was \$145,000 announced this week for the Centre for Entrepreneurship Education and Development. Will some of that money be used for self-employment for those in the self-employment field?

MS. ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: Yes, this is a funding announcement as part of Works for You. We support a program under Works for You with CEED called Second Chance. It's a program whereby youth involved in the justice system have a second chance to attach to the labour market. They use an entrepreneurial model so some of the youth may actually go in with the intent of starting their own business and move on to starting their own business. They may have the entrepreneurial spirit fostered and decide to go on for further training. We actually have Second Chance members that are now in university.

Again, another great success story where we've been able to support people who have a really hard time attaching to the labour market and developing their skill sets and

self-confidence. Oftentimes what they say is people who are involved in the justice system have an entrepreneurial spirit, and it's about fostering that and using it productively to attach to the labour market.

MR. MACKINNON: I'm going to share my time with the member for Cumberland North but one last quick one. Another area that you're involved with is assisting those who are employed who do not have a high school diploma. For decades and for various capacities, I have helped and encouraged people to get their GEDs. What direct involvement do you have with the Department of Education's GED program?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Hartwell.

MS. HARTWELL: We, through the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning, provide both a high school diploma and the GED, so we work very closely with the Department of Education. Obviously, the GED standard is actually a North American-and-beyond standard. So I would say our relationship has only increased over the past few years as we're seeing that young people who are coming out of the high school system who still need a little bit of upgrading before they can attach to any kind of post-secondary. We are finding a place for them in our School for Adult Learning and also supporting them through some of our partnerships with the Nova Scotia Community College to do some preparatory work so that - I have a colleague who describes it as having lots of on-ramps, we have to have a lot of on-ramps to the education system.

We work closely with the Department of Education to make sure that we're not stepping in where we shouldn't be but that we're providing, in some cases, a soft place for students to land to kind of get a new start.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Skabar.

MR. BRIAN SKABAR: Thanks very much. That kind of broaches on what I was getting at but first of all I'd just like to mention that I had the good fortune to attend a graduation ceremony for CAN-U students. Well, they were students from Amherst; the function took place in Oxford. They got their certificates and they had great big smiles on and, among other things, they did develop the discipline to show up on time, sometimes on time, but they got the idea of what it was to show up on time and the projects that they completed were very rewarding both for them and the instructors and anyone who had the good fortune to be with them at that graduation.

Now I'm familiar with Community Services programs and community supports and what EAS services do, but is there any kind of roadmap anywhere of the programs and services, like a single-entry window. We have the Cumberland Adult Network of Upgrading, so CAN-U, the adult high school, CANSA, the Career Resource Centre, and ESS. Even some of the staff there, don't know where they fit into the whole mosaic of the system.

Again, there appears to be some duplication or spots missed. I'm not saying there are, necessarily, but I can't quite navigate the system myself and I've been around it for kind of a long time, as many of our, probably all of our MLA colleagues here have by now as well. So is there a way to make obviously simplify the whole network?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Graves is it? Who would like to do that? Ms. Graves.

MS. GRAVES: There are a large number of service providers across the province. I think that one of the benefits of having the Labour Market Development Agreement and the LMA now resident in one division of a government department is that we're able to look across and identify some of those areas of gap. Definitely I think that's one of the areas of priority for us, to look at where are people not receiving services that they need.

I think it's fair to say, do we have areas of duplication, where perhaps we have competing service providers in one area that we may want to look at how can we maximize the investment in that area and still ensure that people are receiving the kinds of services that they have.

Our Web site itself has on the sidebar links into the various programs and services and then there is a continual link, I think, onto a list of service providers. One thing that I will mention again, and I sound as if I am beating the LaMPSS drum, but I guess I am a little bit, when we have our second release there is kind of an electronic business card exchange process through LAMPS that will allow service providers to list themselves in an information exchange situation, so that folks will be able to go on and have a really nice view of who is out there offering what service and how to do referrals. Ideally those referrals will happen electronically. So we're aware that that's a need, the community has raised it as a need and we are doing our best to make sure that people are sharing the information.

MR. SKABAR: All good to hear, thank you. Did I hear that there were 70 service providers and 70 service delivery agents in the province? Did someone mention that?

MS. GRAVES: Under the EAS funded arrangement we have, I believe it goes between 68 and 70 organizations that we are currently doing business with to provide employment assistance services and that's one of our six EBSMs. So when I talk about an external service provider, they are our primary point of entry for individuals and then they often would provide information to unemployed Nova Scotians around the other kinds of services, like many of the ones that we are speaking about here.

MR. SKABAR: Once somebody gets into the system, I'm sure the people involved help them navigate through it. Has there been any consideration at all given to maybe putting many of these, if not all, under one standard of the umbrella of NSCC and have that be the primary service delivery agent in the region and incorporate a number of them in one space?

MS. FERGUSON: I think you raise a really good point around making sure our services are navigable, that there aren't any overlaps and that they're really client focused in terms of making sure clients can easily access all the services.

That's something that now we've had a year under our belts - you can imagine, obviously, given your background in terms of the devolution from the federal government to the provincial government, everything that's involved in that. There was a lot of work in terms of the transition and then in terms of the pieces that have followed that. Now there's an opportunity for the department to look at where we are. What are the services? How do we deliver them? How do we look at - within the boundaries that we have within the programs - what are the ways we can really maximize looking at those services in terms that we really make sure that they respond to the needs of Nova Scotians?

I'm kind of a form follows function person. I think as we begin to look at what are the services we're delivering, are we meeting the needs we need to meet? Once we've had time to go through and look at that discussion then the next piece is around what's the best way to deliver those services. We're not there yet in terms of your suggestion per se. We are there in terms of saying we will over time look at all of this.

The other piece that has really come to my attention is that a lot of those services have grown up because of the direct need in the community. A lot of those services, some of them are large some of them are small, but there's a very direct need for that particular resource, be it for women, be it for persons with disabilities, that has grown up in that community. I think it's important for us to really understand that, to be respectful of that and not lose all of the good pieces that have grown up in that system, yet, at the same time, we do have a system that's easy for the clients to navigate.

So, whatever the perfect number is, I don't think at this stage we know what it is but I think what we do know is that we need to have a horizontal service. DCS is looking at their service delivery initiative in terms of looking at single entry access. Once that happens at DCS and there's actually a committee between our department and DCS to look at how we'll fit into that, I think there will be some opportunities to decrease the need for the navigation.

I totally hear your point on the fact that sometimes our own people in the system don't quite know who and how they should be referring. I think it's really important that we do that in a way that really minimizes all of that kind of stress for the clients. It's something that we're going to look at but I think we need to look at it in the context of what are the services that we need to deliver across the province. I think it's really important that we understand and have that discussion first.

MR. SKABAR: I understand the sort of delicate nature of maintaining a balance between structure and flexibility needed in particular communities. I know also you've

only been at it for about a year and it will likely take a whole lot longer than that. I'm glad to hear it's on the radar and you're working toward that.

MS. FERGUSON: Absolutely.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Skabar, your time has elapsed. That was a good closing.

I'd like to thank all members of the committee for their questions. Before I turn it over to any final comments you may have, there has been one request for information on the timeline from entry to placement. That was from Mr. MacMaster. In following up with Mr. Skabar's question, I would like to ask that perhaps you could provide us with an entry point for MLAs when we're trying to work on behalf of our constituents. We were talking about how we navigate if we have difficulty and therefore it's hard for us to help others. So maybe if you could provide us with some sort of an outline of services and a contact point, it would be very helpful to all of us as MLAs. Even after eight years I, as an MLA, can tell you the most difficult thing or case I receive is how to help people trying to enter the workforce and trying to rebuild their lives.

There's one other request I'd like to make and that is that there haven't been really many questions on the issue of young people in Nova Scotia, young educated people, who are leaving our province because they have difficulty attaching to our workforce. Employers have suggested to many of us that they would hire somebody without experience if there were a subsidy to take them over the training period because they keep asking for one, three or five years' experience. They would like to hire some of the younger ones but they feel there's a cost to them in the training.

I don't expect an answer today but I wondered if you could address that and perhaps just provide that as well when you get back to us.

MS. FERGUSON: We would be happy to do that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Now, if you have any closing comments, we would love to give you the floor.

MS. FERGUSON: I would like to very much thank the committee for your interest into the programs. I would also offer along the lines of helping provide a contact. I would say to each of you, any time, anything you hear or have questions, we're more than happy, in fact we want to hear that information from you in the department. If we can arrange meetings too within your specific constituencies and ridings with our key staff, we would be very happy to do that and provide any information.

We always welcome the opportunity to talk about our programs to make sure that everybody knows about them so we really value and look forward to any information you

may want to share with us and if there are any questions we didn't get to answer today, we would be happy to do that. I want to say thank you very much to the fabulous staff that I have in the department who have been very patient and kind with me and I think you get a sense this morning of how lucky I am in terms of the people that I have around me. I've gone from one department that cares very much about the clients, I'm very pleased to say, to another department that cares equally about the clients that we all serve in Nova Scotia.

I think we all see tremendous opportunities to continue to work together to really ensure that we are helping the people of Nova Scotia attach to the workforce. So I thank you all very much for the time and the opportunity.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for being with us today and just for the committee members, we don't have any new committee business on our agenda right now.

I just wanted to let you know I have received a letter from NSGEU asking that we provide the information that we're getting from our previous two meetings on to them as well. As you'll remember, at the last meeting we were speaking to the Public Service Commission and there was a long list of requests for information on demographics and jobs and all kinds of things. So we're going to provide that. I have no problem with that, I think we asked in a public meeting so any information should be public. They had also asked for some information that we'll be receiving on public education funding.

So that's just by way of keeping everyone informed and our meeting next week will be the Department of Justice on the Lighthouses Program. So if I could have a motion to adjourn?

MR. CLARRIE MACKINNON: So moved.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

We stand adjourned.

[The meeting adjourned at 10:57 a.m.]