

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, February 22, 2023

COMMITTEE ROOM

**Nova Scotia Community College: Annual Report, Skilled Labour Shortage, and
Continuing Care Assistants Recruitment Initiatives and Programs**

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Public Accounts Committee

Hon. Kelly Regan (Chair)
Nolan Young (Vice-Chair)
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Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Tom Taggart
Kent Smith
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Susan Leblanc
Kendra Coombes

[Hon. Brendan Maguire was replaced by Fred Tilley.]

In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Kim Adair,
Auditor General

WITNESSES

Department of Advanced Education

Nancy MacLellan,
Deputy Minister

Lindsay Wadden,
Executive Director - Strategy, Policy and Partnerships

Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration

Ava Czapalay,
Deputy Minister

Jennifer L'Esperance,
Senior Executive Director - Immigration and Population Growth

Department of Seniors and Long-term Care

Paul LaFleche,
Deputy Minister

Tracey Barbrick,
Associate Deputy Minister

Janet Lynn (JL) Huntington,
Senior Executive Director

Sarah Melanson,
Project Executive - Long-Term Care

Nova Scotia Community College

Don Bureaux,
President

Karen Churchill,
Chair, NSCC Board of Governors

Anna Burke,
Vice President - College Services & Strategy

Margaret Champion,
Dean - School of Health & Human Services



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2023

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Hon. Kelly Regan

VICE CHAIR

Nolan Young

THE CHAIR: Order. I now call the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. My name is Kelly Regan. I'm the MLA for Bedford Basin. A reminder to everyone to place your phones on silent. I'm going to ask committee members to introduce themselves, beginning with Ms. Coombes, who is participating virtually today.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I will note that officials from the Auditor General's Office, Legislative Counsel Office, Hansard, and the Legislative Committees Office are in attendance with us this morning as well.

On today's agenda, we have officials with us - a cast of thousands - from the Nova Scotia Community College, the Department of Advanced Education, the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, and the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, with respect to the Nova Scotia Community College annual report, skilled labour shortage and continuing care assistants recruitment initiatives and programs.

I'm going to ask the witnesses to introduce themselves, and I'm going to start to my left with ADM Tracey Barbrick.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: We also have a number of officials from the various departments, and because they may be called upon to answer a question, I am going to introduce them, but perhaps I'll just introduce them and we won't have them stand up, because they're not near a microphone.

[The Chair introduced the additional officials.]

THE CHAIR: As I said, a cast of thousands.

I will ask witnesses to make opening remarks. I'm going to begin with President Bureaux, then Deputy Minister MacLellan, then Deputy Minister Czapalay, and then ADM Barbrick.

Mr. Bureaux.

DON BUREAUX: Good morning again, and thank you, Madam Chair, for welcoming me and my NSCC colleagues here today. As I sit here, I'm really honoured to have a moment to talk about the Nova Scotia Community College. I'm also very honoured to be here with a number of our key government partners. I travel this country from coast to coast to coast, and I can authentically say that it's a unique environment in Nova Scotia, where we work so collaboratively with a number of government partners, all toward a common goal.

I'm also looking forward to responding to questions today that were drawn from our annual report. As you would know, we table an annual report every year as per our Act and highlight a number of successes and operational accomplishments in that report.

You've all seen our latest report. In it, we shared our consolidated financial statements, many updates on our construction projects - we have a number on the go right now - and certainly very important, a snapshot of student success through a number of graduate profiles. For us, it's a way to show in a tangible manner the results of our work towards the mission of the Nova Scotia Community College, which is to build the economy and quality of life of this province through both education and innovation. For us, it's a small glimpse - one of many opportunities to report on the impact that we're having here in Nova Scotia and beyond.

As many of you would know, the Nova Scotia Community College is comprised of 14 campuses: 13 physical campuses, an e-campus and a small number of learning centres throughout the entire province. We're proud of the statistics that about 96 per cent of the Nova Scotia population live within a half-hour's drive of an access point to our college.

Our work, our training, and our education are industry driven. Everything we do is with the mindset of making sure that our workforce of tomorrow is equipped to take advantage and participate in the economy of tomorrow.

As a pan-provincial post-secondary institution, we can provide these opportunities to our students who come directly from high school. However, many of our students right now, as you can well imagine, are older and more mature. The average age of the college student now is between 26 and 28, and we've seen a great increase in the number of individuals who want to be retrained, uptrained, and reskilled - again, to take advantage of the emerging economy.

Whether it's a campus or a student studying in any corner of the province, one of the proudest aspects of the Nova Scotia Community College is our accessibility agenda. We want to make sure that we are available for an individual who wishes to access a transformational experience of getting the skills that they need to change their lives. As you can see in our community report, we take the opportunity to create a narrative for Nova Scotians to see themselves in that report and see an opportunity for them to change their lives.

We're also very proud of the particular sectors that we're working on. We're pleased to be here today to talk about the emerging need in the health care sector and our response, working very closely with our government partners, as well as our industry partners, to respond to that emerging need.

Madam Chair, I very much look forward to this morning and to answering your questions, and discussing what I think is to be one of the most important organizations in this province right now: the Nova Scotia Community College.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Deputy Minister MacLellan.

NANCY MACLELLAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to be here with my deputy minister colleagues and our colleagues from the Nova Scotia Community College to talk about skilled labour, recruitment initiatives and programs, specifically related to continuing care assistants.

I'm Nancy MacLellan and I am the Deputy Minister of the Department of Advanced Education. Joining me is Lindsay Wadden, executive director for Strategy, Policy and Partnerships.

My career as a public servant began 25 years ago - shocking. Some of my previous deputy minister roles do include the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, and the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

This gives me a unique perspective on the times we are in now: a time when we are looking to train those special individuals who take care of older Nova Scotians; a time when there is unprecedented demand for health care workers; and a time when there is a need for more housing across the country. On a daily basis, I see how the team at the Department of Advanced Education is rising to that challenge and answering the call of these times.

The department's mission is to facilitate a proactive and inclusive post-secondary system so people can learn, grow, and thrive. The progressive education model for continuing care assistants is a great example of our collective work in action. We are well under way to reaching our shared goals. In fact, as the Deputy Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care will probably mention, we've recently met a great milestone; over 1,000 students have now enrolled in a CCA program, and their tuition, books, and fees were paid through the bursary program.

Through the progressive education model, 570 students have enrolled in the program since November of 2021. This model is currently being offered at CBBC Career College, Eastern College, Island Career Academy, and the Nova Scotia Community College. I do want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the NSCC team for being so responsive and flexible in response to government priorities. They're a valued partner. They play an important role in Nova Scotia's economic growth and prosperity, and while it has always been the case, NSCC's recent work right now when Nova Scotia's facing tremendous challenges and opportunities has been invaluable.

I want to speak for just a moment on the important contribution made by private career colleges as well. Approximately half of CCAs in the province graduate from a private career college. They've been offering this Work and Learn training for almost a year and a half. The Work and Learn model allows students to study three days a week and work two days a week in paid positions in continuing care environments throughout much of their training. Eastern College recently began offering this model to CCA students in Springhill and Stellarton. These are among 24 approved sites around the province and operated by private career colleges.

This localized training is important to help us attract and retain people to study and work in their home communities. It also helps us attract workers who reflect the population that they serve. For example, this September, Université Sainte-Anne will begin to offer a francophone Work and Learn program. Nova Scotia is attracting more French speakers, so this additional offering helps plan for a growing Francophone and Acadian population.

We are looking at diversification and the needs of our population for equity groups in other areas of health care as well. The department recently announced a 30-person nurse practitioner cohort for Mi'kmaw learners, and, in collaboration with other departments, we launched a Bachelor of Social Work cohort for 25 Black and African Nova Scotian learners. We're seeing strong interest in these offerings, and we're really proud of this

work. These are other ways the department is answering the call of our times, a call to collaborate, to innovate, and act.

I want to close by thanking all postsecondary students who have answered the call to work in some of our most high-demand sectors. Thank you for continuing to tell us what's important to you. Nova Scotia needs you, and we're glad you chose to study in Nova Scotia. We certainly hope you'll stay.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Good morning and thank you for inviting me to be here today along with the Department of Advanced Education, the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, and the Nova Scotia Community College. Joining me is Jennifer L'Esperance, the Senior Executive Director of Immigration and Population Growth in Labour, Skills and Immigration.

We all play an important role in growing and fostering Nova Scotia's workforce. This is key to building on the growth we're seeing across the province and addressing skilled labour shortages that all jurisdictions across Canada are facing right now. Finding solutions is what we are laser-focused on at Labour, Skills and Immigration. With our population goal of two million by 2060, we must be nimble and flexible, and we must work together.

Now, more than ever, Nova Scotia is opening its doors and welcoming newcomers from around the world. Immigration, migration, attraction, and retention are key to achieving this goal. It is also key to building the infrastructure we need, today and into the future. Governmental departments are working together on improving and building infrastructure. Nova Scotians are united in our effort to find solutions. We are collaborating with the private sector, industry leaders, universities and post-secondary schools, and, of course, federal partners. We are identifying labour gaps, attracting the talent we need, building homes and schools, and improving transit.

Other provinces and territories are facing similar challenges, and that means Nova Scotia is in a fierce competition, a competition to attract talented and skilled workers. We need to be innovative in our approach. We have shown that we are a trailblazer in this way. Through the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot, we participated in a recruitment strategy that centered our efforts in Kenya. The Province led a trip to a Kenyan refugee camp in partnership with IRCC, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Health Association of Nova Scotia, the MacLeod Group, as well as the Shapiro Foundation and RefugePoint.

We interviewed over 100 candidates in two refugee camps, as well as candidates in urban refugee camps in Nairobi. The result is that 65 more continuing care assistants will be working in Nova Scotia this year while making this province their new home.

[9:15 a.m.]

As mentioned, the MacLeod Group was part of the delegation. They made 50 job offers, and 28 health care workers were hired to work in Mahone Bay. MacLeod Group went one step further. It was critical that they support Kenyan health care workers with the tools they need to be successful in Nova Scotia. MacLeod Group bought three homes in Mahone Bay for their new employees. They continue to find solutions so workers can thrive in their new home province.

To address skilled labour shortages, we must make it easier for people to build their skills. We're working with partners such as the Nova Scotia Community College to allow easier access to upskilling. Equally, we know employers need support to recruit new talent, including youth. The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, with the Department of Public Works and the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, have an agreement where contractors bidding on provincially-funded construction projects must be engaged in the apprenticeship program.

We also have solutions that support employers, including Apprenticeship START. Employers may be eligible to receive up to \$25,000 for a new apprentice. If they hire an apprentice from an equity-deserving group, they may be eligible to receive up to \$30,000. Also, in response to industry need, the government changed the ratio of journeypersons to apprentices from 1:1 to 1:2 and added flexibility in supervision requirements to facilitate more opportunities for hiring and supervising apprentices in the skilled trades.

These are just a few examples of investments, initiatives, and partnerships that are helping us attract, retain, and support the people we need in Nova Scotia - people who can help build the houses and the infrastructure we need. More people make us stronger in every way, and when it comes to addressing our labour and infrastructure needs in Nova Scotia, people are part of our plan.

Thank you very much for your time. I'm happy to take your questions.

THE CHAIR: Associate Deputy Minister Barbrick.

TRACEY BARBRICK: I assure you, this group of people works very closely together, so it's like an old home week when we see each other. You were introduced to both of my colleagues behind me, Janet Lynn Huntington and Sarah Melanson.

For years, the continuing care system - including home care and long-term care - have been underfunded. Over the past year and a half, government has made significant investments to address long-standing issues facing the system - among them workforce shortages. These investments that have been made are focused on: supporting staff in the sector; training and hiring more staff; adding and improving long-term care rooms; and

providing the support seniors need to live in their homes longer by investing in home care and other supports.

Staffing is what we're here to talk about today, but of course, these things are all interconnected. Staffing is a critical piece of ensuring that older Nova Scotians receive the right care and support, when and where they need it. Our department is committed to building and stabilizing the continuing care workforce and making home care and long-term care great places to work, with opportunities for career growth that carry people through a working lifetime.

Government's workforce-related investments are designed to ensure we have the staff needed to provide care and support to seniors now and into the future through our short- and long-term efforts. These efforts so far have included: free tuition and books for 2,000 CCA students; an innovative Work and Learn program where students can learn while gaining experience and earning money; a targeted investment in CCA wages to address a specific shortage in CCA positions; national and international recruitment; and recognition of prior learning and skills, and opportunities for more training for staff.

Our efforts are paying off and we're seeing results. Through the temporary measures in place, the number of long-term care beds closed due to staffing has gone from hundreds to none. We are not yet done. We won't stop until we've made continuing care in Nova Scotia a sector of choice amongst health care professionals.

Earlier this month, we hit an exciting milestone when the 1,000th student signed up for a CCA program just a year after the free tuition program was announced. We're on track and halfway to meeting our goal of 2,000 CCA students over two years. Adding 2,000 people to this workforce.

I want to recognize Don and his team at the NSCC for their continued partnership with us on this front. NSCC has been an excellent partner and offers CCA programs across the province. This includes the traditional program for hundreds of Nova Scotians, with cohorts starting in September and again in March, and it also includes our new and innovative program of training with programs in Sheet Harbour to offer a Work and Learn program offered by NSCC.

I'd also like to acknowledge and thank our other partners in post-secondary private career colleges who also offer the CCA program.

We are excited about the work ahead and remain committed to investing in and supporting the thousands of Nova Scotians who make up the continuing care sector throughout the province. We look forward to taking your questions.

THE CHAIR: Okay, thank you very much. We are a little further along in our hour than we normally are when we begin questioning, so I just want to remind my colleagues that the second round of questioning will be considerably shorter than usual.

The time now is 9:21. We will begin with the Liberal caucus. Mr. Tilley.

FRED TILLEY: First of all, I'd like to thank you all for coming today and presenting to us and taking our questions. It's very much appreciated. I know how busy all of you are, so on behalf of the Liberal caucus, thank you for doing that.

Very interesting presentations - I have a little bit of history in NSCC, as most people know, but to hear from this side the good work that's happening both at the departments through government initiatives and at the college is really amazing.

I have a couple of questions. I'm going to start on the CCA side. This could be for anyone. What is the capacity for CCAs across the province - sort of the capacity in programs, both NSCC and private colleges?

THE CHAIR: Sorry, was that . . .

FRED TILLEY: It could be for the department. NSCC may or may not know.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps I'll go to the department first. ADM Barbrick.

TRACEY BARBRICK: I'll start, and some of my colleagues likely have information to add.

Currently, between the private career colleges and NSCC, we have a little over a thousand seats in this year that are fully registered at present. We continue to meet that thousand students per year for the next two years, and then we'll be evaluating the need as we go forward.

FRED TILLEY: That's great. So we have a thousand seats that we are filling. That's excellent. So what is the current gap? From a CCA employment standpoint, what is our need, I guess, in the system?

TRACEY BARBRICK: One of the pieces that came into effect based on legislation was a mandatory CCA registry that we established back in the Spring. There isn't a college for CCAs like there are for some of the other health professions. The need for CCAs in the system has been established based on surveys of employers, which is not an ideal way to assess the need.

The mandatory registry came into place in February, and now we will be positioned to understand exactly what that need is. We work closely with the Health Association of

Nova Scotia, which works with all the employers in the continuing care sector to establish that need. The 4.1 hours of care that was announced last Spring with our budget has added another 550 employees to the system, so the need continues to be there.

There are about 10,000 people who work in long-term care, and the CCA gap was about 1,400 about a year and a half ago. We now have all of the beds in the province open because the employers have been able to fill the positions that they need in order to open all of their beds. So we're moving in the right direction.

The mandatory registry will certainly help us with longer-term workforce planning. That's been a significant gap.

FRED TILLEY: Great, that's good news for sure. We know that the CCA occupation is a demanding occupation on employees and on their physical beings. We're training about 1,000 a year. Leaving for retirements or leaving for injury, can you give me an idea of where we stand with exits from the CCA profession?

TRACEY BARBRICK: Because we are working with 150 individual employers, outside of those surveys, the Province as a whole does not have specific numbers for each facility and their gap. However, it's absolutely a fact that retention has been an issue, and estimates at one point were that about 50 per cent of our registered CCAs were leaving the workforce.

We are seeing that start to stabilize with a number of interventions. The 4.1 hours of care means that the workers on the floor have more colleagues to help with things that they need to do to provide care, and our safety record is improving. We've made a number of investments in safety, including lift programs, various safety equipment, training on-site, and what we're seeing and WCB is reporting is a significant reduction in both lost-time injuries and length of time that the person is out of the workforce. All of those things certainly will help us retain the important workforce that we need.

FRED TILLEY: I've got lots of friends in that industry, and I know the injuries that they incur on a daily basis, so it's good to hear.

I just want to move a little bit to the international recruitment side. The fact that we have this need for not only CCAs but health care professionals, we have a need for skilled trades professionals in Nova Scotia. Just reading through some documentation, when we look at prospective immigrants - and I'm glad to hear about the trip to Kenya and bringing in some health care workers. But what I noticed in the 2022 reporting, it showed that the largest group of immigration is around food service supervisors with 574, followed by cooks with 415. If we look down and look at carpenters, we're at 34, and drywallers 11.

We know that there's a housing crisis in Nova Scotia. We know that there's a major need to bring in more skilled trades, but also I would echo that on the health care and CCA

side. Can you give us an idea, other than this one trip, what are the plans - I guess it's for Deputy Minister Czapalay - going forward to attract more immigrant workers to both health care and skilled trades?

AVA CZAPALAY: Certainly, as I mentioned, we're focused on growing our population to 2 million by 2060. This requires about 25,000 people to stay in Nova Scotia every year, either by coming in through immigration or in-migration, or just simply staying in Nova Scotia to work and not leaving.

Last year, we grew our population by about 35,000. I know you're from Sydney and you'll know that number - it's roughly the size of Sydney. We have to think about everything that's in play to grow our population. You've referenced immigration, so I'll focus my response on immigration, but just to make sure you're aware that, as important as attracting people here through immigration is, there's also creating welcoming and safe workplaces so that people choose to stay here and not leave Nova Scotia.

We had a record year last year in terms of landings. We just received a Stats Canada report, and we had over 12,000 people land in Nova Scotia in 2022. That was a record year following a record year. Our numbers for immigration continue to increase.

We are very strategic in our immigration focus in terms of health care and construction workers, but of course, if employers are asking us to help them with an immigration stream and an immigration process to bring more workers in - for example, you referenced the restaurant and hospitality sector - we'll work with them as well to come up with solutions. We don't see it as an either/or - it's simply let's have Nova Scotia have a robust economy, all elements growing and supporting one another.

Specific to the Kenya trip, that was a unique experiment that we tried with the federal government, approaching skilled workers in refugee camps who had skills that we needed and people who needed to start a new life. We went with an employer - MacLeod Group - to Kenya to find health care professionals who wanted to use their skills and to come here and work. I just want to mention that the fact that we've identified 65 people, interviewed . . .

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay, I'm just going to interrupt you now because we do occasionally have blasts. There's blasting next door, and we just heard a horn, so we may have a blast go off. I just want to warn people so that they don't fall out of their chairs because it can be actually quite significant.

Sorry for the interruption, but I just didn't want to have anyone have heart palpitations. I don't think you need to put your head between your knees or anything like that.

Deputy Minister Czapalay.

[9:30 a.m.]

AVA CZAPALAY: I'll try to rally my thoughts here. (Laughter) Really, what I was saying - I wanted to assure this table that our efforts to attract the 65 CCAs through the refugee camp doesn't end with simply going there with MacLeod Group and with other partners and attracting them to come here.

I know that efforts have been made to ensure that housing is available, and also the employer has been holding meetings with the local community to ensure that people in the community know how to welcome newcomers, especially newcomers who have been in a refugee camp, sometimes for quite some time. It's an all-in communities effort to retain people here.

FRED TILLEY: Thank you very much for that. It's wonderful. I think it's actually more important on the welcoming side than it is on the attraction side, so I'm glad to hear that.

The question I have, I guess, is on the international side and with regard to skills. How do we vet the skills of the individuals, and then how do we upskill them if need be when we get them here in Nova Scotia?

AVA CZAPALAY: Thanks for that great question - I think your background is showing. (Laughter) In terms of identifying the right people, we put together our recruitment missions in partnership with other departments like Health and Wellness and Seniors and Long-term Care, and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment. We usually take employers with us - Nova Scotia Health Authority, for instance - or the Health Association of Nova Scotia, it could be the Construction Association of Nova Scotia or, in this case in the Kenya example, MacLeod Group. Sometimes employers will ask an organization to represent them on-site, and sometimes they'll go themselves. It's a bit of both.

We participate in immigration fairs internationally where people who are seeking to leave another country and start a new life will go to these fairs. They'll go with their resumes and be ready to describe their skills, and we'll be there ready to help them along with employers who can look at their resume, talk about their skills, and get that in-depth knowledge about what they have.

Also, we'll have our immigration team there to help them understand what their pathways to immigration will be in Nova Scotia. It's a multi-pronged effort, but it pays off, as you can see with our population continuing to grow in leaps and bounds.

FRED TILLEY: I have a thousand questions but probably seven minutes left. I was really intrigued by the concept of supporting staff. Retention is a big item keeping people in jobs, and the recent CCA increase was an example of that. There was one group that was

left out of that, and I hear from these folks - the PCW classification. According to them, they're a couple of courses or modules short. Just hoping that there's something that can be done to help PCWs in the field as well.

My question is around supporting for retention and attraction. The program that has been in place, I think it's called MOST - around skilled trades and the income tax piece. Has there been any thought to a similar program in order to possibly attract and retain health care workers from other provinces?

AVA CZAPALAY: MOST is More Opportunities for Skilled Trades. It provides a tax incentive for skilled trades workers under the age of 30. On their first \$50,000, they get a tax break. The program is managed through the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. No other programs that I'm aware of have been announced to date, but we'll see how effective MOST is after everyone files their income tax this year.

We know from talking to our navigators that people are asking about it. We have a marketing campaign right now focused on Ontario and Alberta that is promoting MOST, and we're getting quite a few inquiries about it. We're optimistic that the MOST program is having an impact. It might be that differentiating factor in the competitive environment that I mentioned in my remarks.

FRED TILLEY: I'm going to move to some questions for our NSCC folks. With regard to the skilled trade piece and the shortages that we're seeing in that area, and also in the health care area - and I know from experience the hard work that goes into the programming - is there anything further that government can do to help grow enrolment? Is there capacity to grow enrolment in some of these programs? If so, do you believe that's a good idea? How could we move that forward?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bureaux.

DON BUREAUX: Again, another great question. I think the quick answer is yes - I think increasing enrolment is always a good idea in terms of meeting the market demand for labour right now.

What we're finding is the traditional model of education where students start in September and graduate in June - that's an agrarian-based model. It was created 100 years ago when workers were needed in the Summer to harvest the fields. That model is no longer relevant, given the modern economy. So we're working hard to have more of a continuous intake and more starts during the year. Our government partners are very open to that, recognizing we could have a January start, we could have an off-cycle start.

Also, we're looking at more 12-month of the year programming. So you'll drive by an NSCC campus and see the buildings being used in the Summer. It's a different model in terms of utilizing our educational assets.

Another thing that we need to collaboratively work on - our research tells us that for a young person looking at a career, the determinant is still predominantly at the dinner table. The influence of parents on a young person's career choice is still very high. So as a community, as a province, we need to continue to change the narrative of what an excellent career could look like in this province. Unfortunately, in the skilled trades, a number of years ago we changed our focus from being proud of the craft of being a tradesperson to perhaps focusing more on IT, if you will.

I think we need to get back to recognizing that a skilled trade is an honourable way to make a living. If we have parents believing in that, that will shape the future of their children. For us, we need to collectively not only deal with the incoming students, but the influencers in their life going forward.

FRED TILLEY: I think that's a perfect segue to this comment. I'm sure that I'm almost out of time . . .

THE CHAIR: A minute and a half.

FRED TILLEY: We won't have much time for a question here. With regard to those influencing types of discussions - I know NSCC has been around since 1996 as it sits today, but still it's the best kept secret in the province. When you talk to people in the community and you talk to those influencing parents, there have to be ways in order for us to get into those dining rooms and those kitchens.

I know one of the things that we're talking about today is the annual report of NSCC. I think that's one of the ways that we get in. Nova Scotians, in my experience, relate more to storytelling and they relate more to visuals. If they can see themselves in an occupation, I think that's important to continue ensuring. I think we all, as government officials and as citizens, can help to have those conversations. We're all involved in things outside of our occupations and ensuring that people understand those opportunities and the future that is available in those skilled trades in Nova Scotia.

Coming from Northside-Westmount right now, I can tell you, with the new hospital being built in Sydney Mines and a new hospital addition in Sydney and a new campus on the waterfront in Sydney, there's a lot of people working.

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for Liberal questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the NDP questioning. Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thanks to everyone for being here. I'm very happy to know that parents still have influence over their children, as I have an eight-year-old and a 10-year-old. It's really heartening, actually. But I promise I won't steer them in some - although when they were born, I joked that they weren't allowed to go to art camp ever

and that they could only go to doctor camp, but that's changed. Anyhow, you may see them at the NSCC before too long.

I just wanted to say, firstly, it's great to hear about the 1,000-person milestone in the CCA program. But it begs the question, why is that successful? And I would dare say that free tuition has a lot to do with it. People can go into a job and know that they're not going to be saddled with a bunch of debt when they start to work.

My first question is for anyone, I guess. Are we looking in Nova Scotia at more programs where the tuition is made free for the skills in the trades that we need workers in?

THE CHAIR: President Bureaux.

DON BUREAUX: Thank you for the question. I think free tuition obviously has a big part to play in that. There is considerable public debate around the world about the success and the impact of free tuition in post-secondary.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just want to clarify I'm not talking about universal free tuition - I'm talking about targeted programs. Are we thinking of targeting certain programs with that?

DON BUREAUX: Targeted programming with free tuition - free tuition cannot be the only lever that we use. There have to be other levers, including things like other supports, daycare, and the work conditions. We've been working very closely with numerous private long-term care providers and having them recognize that the work environment also has to change - the work environment that these workers are going into.

For example, in recent conversations with Jason Shannon, he recognizes in working with unions that the work conditions - and he's making great strides. Janet Hazelton will say this publicly. The work conditions have been dramatically improved, which creates a more attractive work environment.

So free tuition is part of it, but if we look at the multiplicity of levers, there are many more than just free tuition. I would think, though, that if there are other shortages in the future, yes, of course I think free tuition would be a tool that we could use.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister MacLellan.

NANCY MACLELLAN: If I may add, we have actually implemented programming for paramedics, we've implemented the program around the African Nova Scotian social work cohort, and there is very much active discussion around how we can create better incentives for folks to enter the workforce and enter the training that will be matched with the needs of the labour market.

[9:45 a.m.]

SUSAN LEBLANC: Our caucus has heard some issues with the CCA program - the Work and Learn program - especially coming from some of the smaller nursing homes. In the program, people have to put in 280 hours, and the nursing homes pay their wages, but not all of the smaller homes can afford it. We've heard about at least one facility that's been rejected for funding to cover 20 students in the program. It seems to me that the program makes sense. One would think there would be a higher retention rate with this kind of program because folks are already working, so they know what they're getting into, as it were, because they're working as they learn.

I'm wondering about that. On top of that, my understanding is that the students who are in the work-to-learn program don't qualify for EI or for any student loans. I'm wondering if the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, and also the Department of Advanced Education, is looking at the issue of smaller nursing homes not being able to get the funding to cover the students, but also the students not being able to get other funding while they're doing that program. Can Deputy Minister Barbrick speak to that?

TRACEY BARBRICK: There are few things packed in there. I don't know the specific circumstance that you're speaking of, but happy to follow up on that. Typically, when we do a work-and-learn placement, the conditions for success have to be there. There has to be sufficient staff to provide a preceptor or oversight and training as part of the work. They have to have their beds open in the facility so that they are actually operating at regular operation circumstances.

If there was an arrangement that was declined, it's possible that they hadn't secured enough people to put a cohort through the program, because the most efficiency for the program is to have a full intake. If the full intake can't be secured, it doesn't necessarily make sense to run a program for three or four people. That may or may not - I'm not sure of the circumstance. I'd be happy to follow up on that.

The other piece, in terms of wages - all of our facilities are funded at a standard level for their staffing. If there were a specific facility, typically they have enough vacancies within the organization, to cover off the wages for two days a week of work. If there's an individual facility that is unable to do that, we can certainly follow up, if you want to let me know who those were.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Great, thank you. Going back to the NSCC for a minute, our province is facing a shortage of skilled workers - we know this. It's difficult to tell from the annual documents how the college plans to meet the skilled labour shortages. Is there a year-over-year strategic plan that shows that the NSCC plans to fill which gaps and by when and why?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bureaux.

DON BUREAUX: Yes. The annual report is but one way that we report to the community. Depending on the need in a particular moment, that tool will be used for different reasons.

What we found in our research over the past couple of years is that COVID-19 was really the third major jolt the world faced in the past 23 years, since the turn of the century. We had 9/11, we had the stock market crash of 2008, and in the past three years we've had COVID. With COVID, we recognized that it was a health crisis, an economic crisis, a social crisis - but it was also a crisis of hope. We saw people losing enthusiasm.

We used that report for the past couple of years to share with Nova Scotians the art of the possible. We want them to see themselves in that report - to imagine what a different life could look like in a post-COVID environment.

Our other tools that we use to report to the community include things like our strategic plan, which is very focused on things like the future of work, the digitization of the economy, the recognition that diversity, equity, and inclusion have to be considered as we build a new economy, climate change, and the list goes on. We also include an annual business plan that we file with the provincial government. We have a balance score card. There are multiple tools, depending on the need, that we use to report to the community and clearly outline what our goals and objectives are.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaking of that - especially the equity-seeking groups - does the Nova Scotia Community College have benchmarks for women and underrepresented people in the trades? If you have those benchmarks - which I assume you do and I'd love to hear about them - could they be included in the year-to-year documents?

I totally accept and understand the need for hopeful documents, but it's also good to know if we have goals and we're meeting them. I'm wondering if they could be included in the upcoming annual documents?

DON BUREAUX: Great idea, and yes, they can. Absolutely. We try to capture the stories of diverse individuals. If you look at the report this year, the eight or 10 stories, we try very consciously to have all members of our community see themselves in the report. However, to your point, that is very qualitative. It's a storytelling.

In terms of the quantitative measures, yes, we do have benchmarks. We do have a very robust equity agenda, and we're proud that in some areas we're exceeding it and in some areas we need to do some more work. That would be an excellent part of our future report to the community, to be - to show that exactly. Our balanced scorecard, also, our organizational health measures also speak to our work toward reaching our diversity targets.

SUSAN LEBLANC: For the skilled trades where there needs to be capacity built, what in your mind gets more people in and out of the programs, and into the workforce? What needs to be done to do that? Do you know off the top of your head which trades need more capacity, and how you would build that capacity in the schools?

DON BUREAUX: Every one of our programs has something called a PAC, and that stands for a different name. (Laughter) It's a Program Advisory Committee, and that Program Advisory Committee is resourced by people in industry who are giving us up-to-date, just-in-time feedback on employment trends, their needs for a future workforce. We then incorporate that feedback into future planning for our programs.

It's an art and a science. Many people often say to us, you have a large wait-list in Program A - why don't you just double the offering? Well, that's not that simple because that large wait-list has to be matched with a large demand on behalf of employers. It's always that kind of healthy tension between what the market needs, the supply, and what students are demanding in terms of the demand, and I can assure you, that's a constant analysis that we're doing on a regular basis.

There is a larger piece that I would share with this committee: the changing of demographics. Twenty-five years ago, there were many more predominantly young men in Nova Scotia growing up in a farming community, in a fishing community who were working on machinery, and they would tend to be the individuals who would pursue a career in the trades. Two things have changed: there are fewer young men doing that now, and the trades have dramatically changed.

It's no longer a dirty profession where people come in and get their hands dirty. It's a profession that requires high skills in IT, technology, so we're attracting many more non-traditional entrants. Many more women are entering the trades right now, and we're very proud of that.

SUSAN LEBLANC: For instance, we know that according to the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, trades that are at risk of not meeting the market conditions right now: industrial mechanics, welders, powerline technicians, iron workers, motor vehicle body repair people, industrial electricians, the whole list.

In terms of those trades, where is the college at in terms of what we're just talking about? Are you increasing the capacity for those trades? Is that happening right now, or are we a couple of years behind?

DON BUREAUX: Again, we would be adjusting the program mix on a regular basis, working very closely with the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency where they would tell us that there's a large demand for electricians, for automotive repair professionals. So yes, that constant ebb and flow in changing of program mix is happening right now as we speak.

Again, I have to reiterate: Planning cycles are here and now, and five years down the road. What we're recognizing is that we need to go back into the education system, not only to Grade 12, but to Grade 9, and how people realize that there is a viable career that you can live a very, very wonderful life in Nova Scotia pursuing that.

Unfortunately, public policy of the day was to remove shops, if you will - technical centres - from our high schools. I remember the days that we had very few high schools in this province that had that kind of learning opportunity. Now we have over 25 high schools in Nova Scotia that have modern advanced technology centres. We're getting students again coming into NSCC who for the first time are not experiencing what it means to be in a trade. They're experiencing it in high school.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I think it was Deputy Minister Czapalay who mentioned - I forget who it was, actually. We were talking about the 4.1 hours of care in long-term care and how that has changed the work environment for the workers who are there now. I'm going to ask you about that.

We've heard about this for the last couple of weeks at Public Accounts Committee or at Health Committee - I get them all mixed up - but union and long-term care advocates have pointed out the importance of enshrining the 4.1 hours of hands-on care into legislation in order to improve the workforce recruitment and retention.

Will the government present changes to the Homes For Special Care Act this Spring with those changes?

THE CHAIR: ADM Barbrick.

TRACEY BARBRICK: Thanks for the question. I think we talked about it last week.

In order to achieve 4.1 hours of care, we needed 550 more staff in a workforce that had been historically underfunded. We were digging out of a ditch. In order to put in legislation, today or any other day, that an employer or a service provider must be able to provide 4.1 hours of care - a national leader - when they can't actually hire, is unrealistic.

The first step to all of this was that in the Spring budget, we put \$25 million in new money to support these service providers to get to 4.1 hours of care. Now 70 per cent of them are ready to go, because they've got all their existing vacancies filled and all of their beds open; 50 per cent of them are actually there now. They're actually delivering 4.1 hours of care.

As we pump out people into the workforce, we improve the safety to keep them there, and we've increased their wages. Then we get to a point where it's realistic to say: You are now legislated to have this many people on the floor. Otherwise, we're setting the

system up to fail. We announced the 2,000 new workers, or the free tuition, only a year ago. We announced the 4.1 hours of care and the \$25 million, which will be \$35 million when everybody's fully staffed, in the Spring.

All of those things are in place. We're moving toward ensuring that those service providers can be in compliance with legislation before we pop legislation out. It's absolutely a piece of the mix, but it has to be realistic for them to deliver and achieve that.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I hear you. I hear that, but I also think about, for instance, the environmental goals legislation. Legislation can be - what's the word?

THE CHAIR: Aspirational.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Aspirational, yes. So why not put it in as an aspiration and give yourself two years to accomplish 100 per cent at that level? I feel like this is what the professionals are asking for, to have it baked in so that it can't change with a government change or anything like that, that it's much harder to change. I understand that that is why, for instance, the unions - NSNU and CUPE - want that baked in.

I hear what you're saying - I just disagree. I feel like it could go in this Spring - and we will call for it to go in this Spring - because it can be aspirational. It can be a future goal, like the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act.

We were glad, obviously, to see the government accept the Minimum Wage Review Committee to an accelerated \$15-an-hour minimum wage. Of course, we also know that it falls very short of the living wages across the province. What is the department doing to work toward closing the gap between the minimum wage and living wages across the province?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Of course, we have a committee of volunteers comprised of both employers and employees who make up the Minimum Wage Review Committee. Their focus is on balance, trying to appreciate the needs of businesses in Nova Scotia as well as the needs of employees. The Province received a report, I think in December, and the minister took some time to hear from other organizations and groups, and then accepted the report. So the minimum wage is going to \$15 an hour as of October 2023.

We have spoken to this group before about our Nova Scotia Works offices. We have a division within our department called Employment Nova Scotia, and within that we have the Nova Scotia Works program, which provides supports to underemployed and unemployed people throughout Nova Scotia in over 50 communities. Literally in every community in Nova Scotia or nearby, you see a Nova Scotia Works office. People can go

to these offices, or we also have skills online as well. Increasingly, more and more people are accessing our programming online.

[10:00 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for the NDP questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the PC caucus. Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Thank you to the witnesses. I'll direct my questions to NSCC - big surprise, I guess, since I formerly worked there. In one of the reports, it indicated that 94 per cent of NSCC graduates are working in Nova Scotia, and as someone who graduated in the late '90s and spent many years out West, it's tremendous to have that many within the province.

Would you have an estimate on how many of that 94 per cent would be working within their field? The second part of that is: What will the college be doing to support career opportunities following graduation?

DON BUREAUX: I don't have that first stat at my fingertips; we're going to see if my colleagues can draw it out for us.

The second question about what we do in terms of post-graduate support - Mr. Tilley mentioned earlier that 1996 was an important year in NSCC's history. In 1996, the government of the day moved NSCC from a vocational school model into a modern college with the passing of an Act and the creation of a board, and we moved from being a government entity to a more independent entity. I use that time because we're fairly young in terms of the post-secondary sector in the province of Nova Scotia where our university partners are hundreds of years old.

Where am I going with this? It's only been in the past 25 years that we began to really double down on our alumni population. We now have in our alumni database, if you can believe it - over 100,000 Nova Scotians. That means 1-in-10 Nova Scotians in the province right now have been a graduate of the Nova Scotia Community College. If you look in this room, approximately 20-25 people, there are probably two or three people in this room at least who are NSCC graduates - a stat that I'm very, very proud of.

Now that we have that group captured, we are able to provide supports to them in a more robust way. That includes everything from insurance premium reductions to coming back and interacting with the college. Often, alumni are sought for fundraising, and that's not our goal. Our goal is to reach out to our alumni, connect with them in a way to help them continue in their careers in a long lasting way in Nova Scotia.

NOLAN YOUNG: I think it was a couple of weeks ago - it might have been in Human Resources Committee. Deputy Minister Czapalay mentioned that right out of high

school - I can't remember the figure, but the number that were going into the trades, it was a significantly low number. However, a lot of people were coming into NSCC as young adults instead - 25-28, I think I heard.

What efforts does NSCC make to help recruit young adults to the programs and to retain them once they're there?

DON BUREAUX: The attraction of young adults to the college is something that we've recognized requires a broad-based approach. As I mentioned earlier, we still know that young adults in their late teenaged years still rely heavily on the dinner table conversations to have career counselling, if you will, in the home. What we're also doing more of is going to community.

We still recognize that there are certain communities in the province of Nova Scotia: people with disabilities, people living in poverty, our African Nova Scotian community, our First Nations community. There's still a gap between the connectivity with the college, and we wanted to close that gap. You do it by actually getting into communities.

For example, at Wagmatcook in Cape Breton, we've opened up a learning centre on reserve. That learning centre on reserve has been an incredible way for us to become part of the community and increase the trust and the opportunities for those students. We have a large connection with high schools, with career centres, our connection across the board with our partners here today. This is not something that we can do by ourselves. We have to work collaboratively in partnership.

I'll finish off by saying that when we do programming now, a lot of our programming is shorter. It's micro-credentials, it's getting individuals trained and uptrained and retrained. Therefore, we have to work with our industry partners and our employers, who recognize the benefit of one of their employees coming to study for a short period of time.

NOLAN YOUNG: Thank you for that answer. I think you may have touched on this question a little bit, so I'm going to re-tweak it. Does NSCC take into account labour market needs when deciding what programs and how many seats to offer at its colleges? If not, how are changes to program and seat offerings determined in general?

DON BUREAUX: Yes, 100 per cent, in terms of input from industry. That input from industry is here and now - what they need tomorrow in terms of a workforce, but also a degree of predictability. If you look at trades, look at the future of alternative energy in Nova Scotia, students being trained today will be working in jobs tomorrow that aren't even defined today or don't even exist. It's the need to train an individual for the jobs that they're going to get tomorrow, but also to develop a lifelong learning mentality - that they will have to update their skills in the future, and that's okay.

The famous stat everyone is hearing right now is the first people to live to 150 years old have already been born. They're amongst us already with the advances in health care. I know that's a frightening stat, but the truth of the matter is in the past 100 years, we've gained about two years of lifespan for every decade. We're going to get to 150 years old. I say that because we're going to have more people working in their 60s and their 70s, and that's going to require more people to be retrained later in life. As an institution, we need to be ready for that.

NOLAN YOUNG: We've seen increased demand for seats at NSCC for the CCA programs following our government's commitment to cover tuition and raise CCA wages. What has NSCC seen in changes to demand since government announced the CCA wage hike? What is the college doing to accommodate the increased interest we're seeing, particularly in rural areas?

DON BUREAUX: I'm so sorry - can you repeat the question?

NOLAN YOUNG: There's an increased demand for seats at NSCC's CCA programs. I'm just wondering what the college is doing to accommodate the increased interest we're seeing, particularly in rural parts of the province.

DON BUREAUX: Obviously, in order to meet the increased demand, we're providing more program sections, so we need to increase the capacity to deliver on that. We're also recognizing the need, as I mentioned earlier, to be more flexible in our delivery. Something that we learned with COVID - and it's a famous line that we use all the time - is that when COVID came on that Friday the 13th in March of 2020, the future arrived 10 years early in the world of education. We had to move quickly in the world of hybrid learning, blended learning, technology-enabled learning.

What we're finding now is that for students who have different ways of learning, we're able to offer something called Universal Design for Learning, which is much more conducive to different learning styles. I think that we've become more flexible and more responsive, and an organization that actually is able to meet learners where they are in a much better way than we ever have right now. That's becoming alive with the CCA program.

NOLAN YOUNG: Thank you, President Bureaux, for those answers. I'll pass it on to my colleague MLA Taggart.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: Thank you, Chair. My first one is to Deputy - I'm sorry, President Bureaux. (Laughter) You're going to have a new job before you leave.

What steps is NSCC taking around performance indicators, strategic goals, targets, and baselines? What steps are we taking to ensure that NSCC is accountable for spending and performance?

DON BUREAUX: There's an old wise saying in the world of education that the success of any post-secondary education institution boils down to three key measures: enrolment, program quality, and budget. If any one of those three begin to falter, they talk about a spiral down. If your program quality goes down, your enrolment goes down. If enrolment goes down, your budget goes down. If your budget goes down, program quality goes down.

At the very core of what we do, we want to make sure that every single day we're focused on the quality of our programming to meet the needs of Nova Scotians to get the education they need. We do that in a way that's very fiscally responsible so that we do not in any way violate the trust that Nova Scotians have placed in us in the management of public funds.

In terms of enrolment, we do everything we can to ensure that students are making the right choice for the right program, and once they do that, they are able to be successful. So from that very core model of three key measures, we then blossom that into an organizational performance-measure document in which we measure a multitude of key indicators of success.

One of the things that I'm most proud of is some of the independent economic studies that have been done over the years. Prior to COVID, we were engaging a third-party independent organization to measure economic impact on our graduates and the Province of Nova Scotia. The numbers were outstanding. I'll share those with the committee, Madam Chair.

We suspended that during COVID, but we'll get back to measuring that. I would hold those numbers up against any publicly-funded institution in the country in terms of return on investment for the shareholders of the Nova Scotia Community College - who, quite frankly, are the million people who live in this province.

TOM TAGGART: I need to say that I'm a huge supporter of the Nova Scotia Community College. My family has done very well as a result of it. It plays a huge role in the future of Nova Scotia, so I look forward to just kind of having a look at that document.

I'm going to change gears here a little bit. Earlier this morning, people talked about the NSCC being the best-kept secret and stuff like that. Certainly I've known about the NSCC, but I didn't really realize the role it played in health care and pre-university kinds of studies.

I wonder if someone could discuss or explain to me a little bit about the 2+2 agreements you have with universities and what they're doing to promote this pathway, and how this is benefiting post-secondary students.

DON BUREAUX: I wouldn't mind taking a stab at that. Again, I'll begin with general and get to specific.

The implicit contract that we're forming with our learners now is different than it was when we were attending post-secondary. The learner of today wants to be able to bundle, to blend, to ladder, and to combine educational experiences.

One of the biggest movements I've seen in the province in the past 25 years of my work in post-secondary has been the collaborative relationship in this province among the post-secondary sector. Folks like Deputy Minister MacLellan and Deputy Minister Czapalay recognize that when a student enters an educational pathway, there should never be any walls created. That should be a flow-through that's very smooth.

With that in mind, we've worked very closely with our university partners to create pathways - a term that we use that basically describes the flow back and forth. In many ways, people consider that flow to go from NSCC for two years into a university. That's been very successful. When you talk to employers, they tell us that the human capital product at the end is a very well-prepared human capital product for the economy of tomorrow. As we talk about the fourth industrial revolution in this province, and we're competing with the best in the world, we need a highly skilled, trained workforce.

What's happening now, Mr. Taggart, is we're seeing more and more students coming the other way - an individual with a four-year degree wanting to top that off with a specialized advanced diploma or graduate certificate. Again, we're creating ways for those students to flow back and forth.

I'll end off by saying, you can't end when you're 22 years old. Education policy, for the longest time, was between the ages of four and 24. That has to be between the ages of four and 84. We need to create that pathway for a 24-year-old, but also a 54-year-old or a 64-year-old.

TOM TAGGART: I'm not sure there's a lot of people who know about this, community college in advance of university or higher education in that way. I wish I had time to tell the story about my daughter, but I don't. Maybe offline sometime. Last Summer, it was announced that Nova Scotia Community College would add 120 practical nursing seats. How many of these seats have been put in place so far? I just think it's great.

DON BUREAUX: Those seats are fully subscribed. We know that they'll get excellent jobs at the end of their studies. I know I'm biased, but I do believe that the Nova Scotia Community College is successful only because of - and I'll say it again - the

collaborative relationship that's created as a system of post-secondary in Nova Scotia. It's the system that's successful, not just us. The system has three legs to it, sir. It has government, it has post-secondary institutions, and it has the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency. Those three have to work together, and we are.

[10:15 a.m.]

TOM TAGGART: This one is to either you or the Department of Advanced Education. It's a follow-up, I guess. Can you provide an update on new and expanding programs in health care at community colleges and how that will help our shortage of health care professionals across the province?

DON BUREAUX: When we talk about health care, we often talk about the urgent need of LPNs and CCAs, which is our area of specialty, but it's much broader than that. You think about allied health programs, physiotherapy assistants, pharmacy technicians, occupational therapy assistants, medical lab technicians.

As we work with our provincial government right now to expand the scope of practice of all health professionals, we're realizing that graduates of NSCC will have a larger role to play in the solution going forward. We are expanding not only in CCA and LPN, but we're seeing demand right across the board.

Let's take medical lab technicians, for example. That's an area that we worked very closely with government to expand the capacity and the graduation rate. Those individuals are walking across the stage after I give them their diplomas, down the stairs, and into a great job in every corner of this province.

I would just remind that as we're telling the story of the health care programs at NSCC, we have over 2,000 students studying over 40 different programs in the breadth of health care provision.

THE CHAIR: Over to Mr. Smith now for two and a half minutes.

KENT SMITH: I have a bunch of questions related to the CCA program, and I have one MOST question sprinkled in. I'm probably not going to get to all of them in this round. Hopefully I'll have a chance to follow up in the second round.

Before I get to my questions though, I just wanted to follow up with ADM Barbrick, because I heard at the Health Committee last week a number that relates to the number of beds that were closed in long-term care. At the Health Committee, I think you referenced there were 550 last year, and then seven. I think I heard you in your opening remarks say there were zero. Can you offer some clarity on that for us, please?

TRACEY BARBRICK: It really is a testimonial as we talk about the things that we've done to alleviate the pressure on the workforce in both long-term care and home care. It is the wages, it is the 4.1, it is the safety investments.

It was about 14 months ago that we had 500 beds closed. I'm pleased to report at the end of last week we have zero beds closed due to staffing. We had some flood damage to a facility down in Western Zone, but to staffing, we're at zero, which means all of the service providers in the province have been able to fill their vacant positions so that they can open those beds.

That does not mean this is done - this is a work force that has changed a lot over the years - but we are headed in the right direction. I'm thrilled to see that number last week.

KENT SMITH: That is great news to hear, and I can only imagine the smile on Minister Adams's face when she gets to report that information.

With under 30 seconds to go, there's not really much point in going into a question, but I'll lead up to it to say I'm going to present a timeline in the next round of questioning, starting in the Fall of 2021 and some of the announcements that we made then and follow-up question on those. Then in February of 2022, there's another piece of information I want to ask a question about, and then I will wrap up with my MOST question from June of 2022 as well. There we go, set up for next round.

THE CHAIR: All right, we'll now move into our second round of questioning. We'll begin with the Liberal caucus. You have eight minutes, Mr. Tilley.

FRED TILLEY: Again, thank you all for the great answers today. My question for this round is around the Apprenticeship Agency. We understand the importance of the Apprenticeship Agency with regard to our workforce in Nova Scotia, ensuring people are moving through the system in a timely manner and that sort of thing.

I noticed in 2022 on the website that there's a new interim CEO. I'm assuming the CEO was retired or let go, or what happened there, but I didn't see any news reports around the new interim CEO. Can we just talk a little bit about how that process played out and what the rationale is?

AVA CZAPALAY: Good timing, because the advertisement just went out for the CEO of the Apprenticeship Agency yesterday. Just getting the word out there that we're looking for a new permanent CEO. The former CEO moved and is now the head of our Skills and Learning Branch. That is, of course, our largest branch at Labour, Skills and Immigration, and she brings a great skillset to that job.

The reason for the change was because we feel that the Apprenticeship Agency and our Skills and Learning Branch can be knit closer together. Both are very, very essential to the labour market challenges that Nova Scotia faces, and I feel that the work of those two - with the agency and the branch working closely together - will be a big solution for Nova Scotians in terms of joint programming, and better delivery, and joint understanding of where to put resources.

We do have someone as acting CEO. It's just in an interim role. That doesn't require an announcement. The person is just acting for six months until the new CEO is hired.

FRED TILLEY: I'm sure it doesn't require an announcement, but we do see a lot of news announcements on when we're changing, so we've noticed a lot of changes over the last number of years. Can we talk a little bit about the process? What process would have been involved to appoint the new interim CEO?

AVA CZAPALAY: As deputy minister, I have the authority to make changes when I see the need to make changes. The focus was on the Skills and Learning Branch, as the senior executive director there had retired. We ran a competition, and at the end of the competition, there was no clear individual whom I could appoint to that role, so we had someone acting.

There are some significant pieces in play in the Skills and Learning Branch. Namely, that branch receives a lot of federal money, so we have in the neighbourhood of around \$140 million in federal money coming in. Those contracts needed a seasoned eye to keep an eye on those and on the negotiations. It was a strategic decision, one that our minister endorsed - and three months in, one that I'm comfortable with. It was the right one.

At the same time, the Apprenticeship Agency has a lot of work that it's doing and a lot of work that it can do. Of course, I work closely with partners like the Nova Scotia Community College and Mr. Bureaux, as well as the Apprenticeship Agency Board, which is an industry-driven board, to discuss what we are looking for as we go forward. We have a modernization agenda before us. It's in our minister's mandate letter.

As I proceed with that modernization agenda, we have some things that we want to do in partnership with the Community College, and in partnership with our industry partners and community partners to really make apprenticeship a third choice. When people think of university, or they think of community college, we'd like also for people to think of apprenticeship as a third option.

FRED TILLEY: With the current interim CEO, was that a promotion from within, and do they have experience in the apprenticeship industry?

AVA CZAPALAY: The current acting interim CEO is from the private sector. He was retired. I didn't want to appoint from within because I would assume some of the senior team might be interested in the permanent position, so it left that option open. Working closely with the board and with our partners, and of course myself with a sharp eye on things - and our former CEO didn't go very far as she's still within the department. Everything is well in hand.

FRED TILLEY: Just further along those lines, can you give us a timeline? I'm understanding that this time it was a national search for a new CEO. Can you give us a timeline on when we'll have this position in place?

AVA CZAPALAY: The position was advertised starting yesterday nationally, as you mentioned. My goal is to have someone in place in June.

FRED TILLEY: With the previous competition that you mentioned that wasn't successful, was that a national search as well? What took place there?

AVA CZAPALAY: That was for the Senior Executive Director of the Skills and Learning Branch, and that was a search that we worked with the Public Service Commission on.

FRED TILLEY: That one was unsuccessful. Then it was an appointment to that branch from the current, so now we're doing a search for the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency? Is that correct?

AVA CZAPALAY: That's correct.

FRED TILLEY: Can you give us an idea, with regard to the programming with the Apprenticeship Agency, of the future that we see with expanding the apprenticeship side of the business? As President Bureaux mentioned, there are the three legs of that stool, and apprenticeship plays a large role in that. We've seen some programming come out of that area. Can you describe what your marching orders are going to be for the new CEO when they arrive?

AVA CZAPALAY: First, I might just be clear on what apprenticeship is. I was anxious to mention it earlier when you were asking about free tuition. Apprenticeship is a way that a worker who has an employer, who's a journeyman, can acquire skills and advance through those skills at various levels. When they demonstrate the skills that they have, they can go to the Nova Scotia Community College or to another contracted agency to write a test - which is free - and take courses - which are free - and move through the skills. A number of trades programs require apprenticeship in order to advance through the program.

Our vision is to expand apprenticeship significantly. We see it as a solution for our skilled labour shortage. Right now we have a marketing campaign that aims at attracting skilled trades workers to Nova Scotia who are work-ready right this minute, and that's because of a harmonization program that we have with other provinces. If you're a welder somewhere . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for Liberal questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the NDP. Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is to the department. The Province collects millions of dollars in fees in a given year from people who are meant to be in long-term care but who are remaining in hospital in an alternate level of care and due to there being no bed available in long-term care. These folks are being charged for long-term care services but are not receiving them. Can you explain the rationale behind the policy?

THE CHAIR: ADM Barbrick.

TRACEY BARBRICK: When a person has been medically discharged from a hospital, and there isn't a spot for them to be placed in a nursing home, the accommodation policy that applies in the nursing home segment of the health care spectrum also applies in the hospital environment. So the person is assessed against their income, and they start to pay the accommodation rate that would be required in the nursing home.

That is not a Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care policy, just to be clear. That's a Nova Scotia Health Authority policy within the hospital walls.

KENDRA COOMBES: Just to follow up on that, are they receiving the same care that they would receive in long-term care that they're receiving in this hospital of alternate level of care? Yes or no is fine.

TRACEY BARBRICK: They would be subject to the acute care model within the facility in the hospital.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you. I'll switch it up. We recently heard from CUPE about the unintended consequences of the much-needed CCA raise on other staff. There are many long-term care workers who are also critical to the safe operations of homes who do not receive this wage, and are also CCAs. We've got cleaners, laundry workers, food service workers among them who are often doing multiple roles. How is the department addressing this issue?

TRACEY BARBRICK: The targeted investment that was made in CCAs in the province a little over a year ago was to respond to a significant deficit in the position. Nova Scotia's CCAs were underpaid on the national level, which was leading to a crisis in CCA capacity, which meant some of those 500 beds were closed because they didn't have

sufficient workers. It was in the space of the continuing care system, so that was a targeted investment made to solve a very near-term crisis.

[10:30 a.m.]

The remaining wage-related matters are really for the bargaining table. The Department of Finance and Treasury Board is responsible for bargaining with all of our organized labour associations across the province. The rest of those issues would be addressed and resolved at the bargaining table. We encourage anyone who's not actively at the bargaining table to get there so that those things can be addressed.

KENDRA COOMBES: I find that answer unsatisfactory - I mean no offense by it. It's just that we have seen time and time again that government is going out of the collective bargaining process to deal with these issues. We just saw it with the CCAs. That was a prime example of going outside the bargaining process to provide better wages. We've seen it with the issue with the ECEs.

So to say that it's for bargaining table - absolutely, of course it is. But this government has gone continuously outside of that to provide raises to wages. Wouldn't you agree that long-term care cleaners, laundry workers, and food services are essential to the running of those homes?

TRACEY BARBRICK: Of course. Everybody working in the continuing care sector is critical. Again, we encourage all who have expired contracts to get to the bargaining table to resolve some of those issues.

KENDRA COOMBES: I know the budget is coming up. Along with collective bargaining, is the department making any advocacy on those increasing wages?

TRACEY BARBRICK: That really is a question for the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, where the mandate for bargaining is held.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'll rephrase it. I was just asking if the department is making any advocacy? We've heard about departments that are spending a lot of time - they say they're talking to other departments, that they're not working in siloes. I'm just wondering, if the department is saying that these workers are essential, critical to the safe operation of these homes, that they need a wage increase as well. This is what our suggestions are.

TRACEY BARBRICK: We really do encourage all bargaining units across the continuing care sector to address their labour needs at the bargaining table.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'll take that answer as a no, that efficacy is not happening.

I have just one question regarding housing. It was mentioned in somebody's opening remarks - or maybe it was an answer to a question, I can't remember now - that community organizations have purchased homes. My question is two parts: 1) why - is this due to the housing crisis that we're in; and 2) why is it on the community organizations to find the money to get these homes? I just want to expand on that remark.

AVA CZAPALAY: I think it might have been in my opening remarks where I mentioned that MacLeod Group had acquired three houses to house their continuing care assistants from Kenya. The point of the comment was that the skilled workers who are being recruited from refugee camps are coming here through our EMPP stream, and the employer is making extra efforts to ensure that they settle well.

It was more a comment on retention and the importance of making sure that people settled well and are housed and cared for here, and that the community is also prepared to receive them. I think that was the comment you were referencing.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for NDP questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the PC caucus, and back to Mr. Smith.

KENT SMITH: As I referenced, I'm going to start in the Fall of 2021, and most of my questions in this round are going to be directed toward Ms. Barbrick, just because I'm focused on CCAs and that seems to be your area of expertise. After hearing you at the Health Committee meeting last week and hearing you today, you know a lot about the topic.

In the Fall of 2021, our government made incredible investments in CCAs: investments in recruitment, and investments in recognizing past skills and experience. Obviously, the investment in the tuition was something that was huge, but I want to talk a little bit about the Work and Learn program. I will say, Ms. Barbrick, the way to a politician's heart here at this table is to reference their hometown in your opening remarks. You referenced Sheet Harbour so that I didn't have to bring it up.

Using Sheet Harbour as the example, we know there was a very successful Work and Learn Program that took place at the Eastern Shore Memorial Hospital. I'm curious to know, more broadly, how's the uptake been on that program? What's the future of that program look like? Any other details that you can share? I know you did reference it a little bit in one of your earlier answers, but anything else you can share would be helpful.

TRACEY BARBRICK: The Work and Learn program - that model has accessed a whole new level of worker. In some cases, it's people who already worked in the continuing care sector, maybe in housekeeping or in dietary, and with an on-site Work and Learn model where they don't have to travel someplace and incur the cost of travelling, that they

can do the training on site has accessed a whole new level of worker for whom CCA certification might not have been achievable.

In addition to that, they work two days a week paid, which can help offset the cost of other things and school. Right now, we have about half and half, people in the traditional classroom setting CCA, like we always had, many of whom are with Nova Scotia Community College, and a little more than half in the Work and Learn model.

The other little shout-out that I'd like to give is that NSCC has recently launched a part-time evening and weekend NSCC cohort of CCA traditional learning students, but making it accessible to those who may work Monday to Friday in a different type of job and they want to advance their earning potential by becoming a CCA in the evenings and weekends. Those kinds of creative solutions are how we are going to access some new workers.

The other things - not part of your question, but I need to provide as an interest point - is the recognition of prior learning is the other pathway for somebody to become a registered CCA. Typically going through the RPL process costs the applicant some money, and it's now free. So we've got another 700 people who are going through an RPL certification process that augments and adds to that traditional CCA learning and the Work and Learn model. Lots of creative things to try to get at people who wouldn't otherwise be in the programs.

KENT SMITH: That's great. Just to circle back to the Sheet Harbour example, the Scotiabank in Sheet Harbour unexpectedly closed. From that there were several staff members who were going to become unemployed. I know for a fact that several of those folks ended up in the Work and Learn CCA program. It was a great option for those folks who otherwise may have had to leave the community.

That was in Fall 2021. We're going to fast forward a little bit to February 2022, when we launched the CCA registry. I work in a land of logic, so it seemed pretty logical to get a starting point to know how many CCAs we have.

I'm wondering if you can explain how we're using that data to better plan for the future, now that we know exactly what we have as a starting point?

TRACEY BARBRICK: We are just rounding a year that that mandatory registry has been in place. We have just shy of 9,000 registered CCAs now, which is tremendous. But the value in that tool is the longitudinal understanding of what's happening with that workforce. For an RN or a physician, the college and their associations allow line of sight to what's happening to those workers over time. We haven't had that insight into CCAs.

What we had for an understanding of what happens with somebody who graduates from a CCA program was through really NSCC's post-graduate surveys. It was an estimate

based on how many people they were able to reach to determine how many people are staying in the sector.

With the mandatory registry, we will have a much more accurate understanding of whether these things are working. So free tuition - are we attracting the right students? Are they staying in the sector? With the bending of the safety concerns, as things start to improve there, are we seeing a change in how many people stay in the sector? That will give us a much better understanding.

The other piece that's very important to us is a lifetime career in the continuing care sector. If somebody graduates or does the Work and Learn program, becomes certified as a CCA, what is the path into maybe an LPN certification? And there is already an LPN-to-RN pathway.

As we start to look at how we keep people in this sector, how are these interventions working, and are they showing the dividends that we hoped that they'd show? It will be a gamechanger in understanding this workforce that has been a bit of a question mark.

KENT SMITH: I appreciate that answer. I'm going to fast forward to June 2022, when we made the official launch of the MOST program - the More Opportunity for Skilled Trades. I'm not sure who the best person to respond to my question will be, but I will say that it was a monumental day for us. It was something we talked about during our campaign and then we were able to announce it.

I ran into a friend of mine who works at the Irving Shipyard, and I've never had - I took a picture with Ms. Taylor Keizer, who's a welder at the shipyard. I've never had a post go more viral than just a very benign photo of Ms. Taylor Keizer and me in front of the shipyard. That got a lot of traction for me personally on the Eastern Shore, but I'm curious. How are we marketing this MOST program to make sure that those apprentices under the age of 30 know that they can take advantage of this tax benefit?

Ms. Czapalay is nodding as if she'd like to answer.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay, you have one minute.

AVA CZAPALAY: We have Phase 2 of a marketing campaign active right now that's targeting Ontario and Alberta. The focus of the campaign is to attract skilled trades workers and also health care workers. For the skilled trades workers, MOST is front and centre.

My colleague Jen L'Esperance slipped me a note to say that we've had 120 inquiries about MOST as of January. It's resonating. Skilled trades workers - I mentioned in my earlier comment that it's a differentiator. There's a lot of competition. They can go anywhere. Their skills are mobile, so what makes the difference between choosing to come

here and somewhere else? We're hoping that MOST, as well as some other things mentioned today, makes a difference.

[10:45 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith, you have 15 seconds.

KENT SMITH: Well, that gives me time to say thank you once again on behalf of the government caucus for being here today. We appreciate all the information and appreciate your knowledge. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: The time for questioning has now elapsed. I want to thank our committee for coming in today. You do have the opportunity to make brief closing remarks if there's anything further that you would like to add. Does anyone want to make closing remarks?

Seeing no one jump to that, I'm actually just going to declare a two-and-a-half minute recess so we can clear the room and move on to committee business, okay? Committee is now in recess. Thank you, everyone.

[10:45 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:48 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: I now call the committee back into order. I would ask the committee members to resume their seats please and we're going to continue with our meeting.

We do have correspondence here. We had some correspondence from Mark Peck from information requested from the January 25th meeting. Also, we had information from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing that came back. So, I would just bring that to the committee's attention.

Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just wanted to register my disappointment in the response from Mr. Peck. We were hoping that he would be at that meeting, so we asked those questions which I appreciated very much. However I feel like the responses, especially in the places where he said, "I can't speak to what happened in the past. You would need to refer to the findings of the Auditor General" - the whole point of asking him these questions was so that he could shed some light and some clarity on those situations. I just want to register my disappointment.

THE CHAIR: Yes, I noticed that, too. He may not have had anything further to answer, and I suspect from what he wrote that he was not aware of them personally. I think

we're left in an uncomfortable place at this point. I'm not super happy with it either. We've done our best at this point to get to the bottom of the situation that the Auditor General raised for us, and at this point, I'm not sure what else we can do.

Is there any further discussion about that? Seeing none, is there any other committee business?

Seeing none, I will just let the committee members know that our next meeting is March 1, 2023. We will be in camera. Our witness is the Office of the Auditor General re the 2023 report of the Auditor General - effectiveness of the Green Fund over the first two years.

If there is no further business, I now adjourn the meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 10:51 a.m.]