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Chair

Mr. Bryan May

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order. Good afternoon, everybody.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, November 9, 2017, the committee is resuming its study of experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth.

Today the committee will be hearing from officials from the Department of Employment and Social Development, the Public Service Commission of Canada, and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

For the first hour, we have a number of witnesses here from the Department of Employment and Social Development: Ms. Rachel Wernick, senior assistant deputy minister, skills and employment branch; Monika Bertrand, director general of the employment program policy and design directorate; Benoit Tessier, executive director of employer liaison services; and Christopher Bates, director of trades and apprenticeship.

Good afternoon.

I believe we are going to get opening remarks from you, Rachel. You have seven minutes.

Ms. Rachel Wernick (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you.

My apologies for the slight delay. I went to Centre Block.

I'm glad I'm here, and I am really pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you about experiential learning and what we are currently doing.

We know that investing in work-integrated learning pays off huge dividends in the labour market success of youth. We know that 60% of youth say that on-the-job training and hands-on learning are the most effective instructional techniques, but fewer than half of those youth are actually enrolled in curricula that prioritize this approach.

[Translation]

Getting a foot in the door, or a chance to learn about the profession, is particularly crucial for vulnerable youth who many not have the networks to get that first chance.

Nearly four in 10 recent graduates in Canada take more than three months to land their first job, with one in 10 taking longer than a year. Moreover, perception from industry is that young people exiting post-secondary degrees are not job ready.

Graduates with relevant work experience are ahead of their peers. Data shows that bachelor's level graduates with co-op experience earn more than their peers, have higher employment and full-time employment rates, and are more likely to have paid off debt two years after graduation.

[English]

Overall, in Canada, labour market indicators for youth are very positive and compare very favourably internationally. Canadian youth ranked sixth among OECD countries, with an employment rate of 56%, compared to the OECD average of 41%. Canadian youth also ranked first in post-secondary education attainment among OECD countries.

You are looking at experiential learning, and evidence demonstrates that work experience is key to successful transitions for youth. Sixty per cent of post-secondary education, PSE, students say that on-the-job training is the most effective. In fact, enrolment in co-op programs at universities jumped by 25% in less than a decade. University students who graduate from these co-op programs earn \$15,000 more than their peers. For college students, this is \$8,000 more than their peers. We know that employers are more likely to hire students with work experience: 61% of employers selected graduates who had participated in some form of work-integrated learning in their programs.

[Translation]

Providing experiential learning opportunities is already a key element of our programming for youth.

Career Focus provides wage subsidies to employers and helps close to 7,000 youth obtain work placements.

Last year, Canada Summer Jobs nearly doubled the number of summer jobs for Canadian students, with a total investment of almost \$200 million serving more than 65,000 students.

[English]

Apprenticeship is another proven model for transitioning into well-paid jobs in demand across the skilled trades: 89% of apprentices who completed apprenticeships held a job related to their trade, and 25,000 apprenticeship grants were issued to youth aged 15 to 24 in 2016-17, representing about \$30 million in funding.

Most recently, the government launched a new partnership with industry and PSE institutions to offer work placements for students in STEM and business. This is an investment of \$73 million over four years that will create 10,000 new work-integrated learning placements.

This is how it works.

Employers are provided with a maximum of \$5,000 in wage subsidies for each new placement created. This amount goes up to a maximum of \$7,000 for students in under-represented groups, including women in STEM programs, indigenous students, persons with disabilities, and recent immigrants. We have had overwhelming demand from industry and PSE in the first six months, and we are almost fully subscribed for our first year.

[Translation]

Internships can give young Canadians the hands-on work experience they need to make a successful transition into the workforce. However, some internships—in particular those that are unpaid—can be unfair and exploitative.

Bill C-63 includes amendments to the Canada Labour Code that would prohibit unpaid internships unless they are part of the requirements of an educational program. Unpaid internships that are part of an educational program are covered by labour standard protections.

● (1540)

[English]

We also know that not all young Canadians are positioned for success in the same way and that tailored support is needed for vulnerable youth. Indigenous youth are less likely to finish high school at a rate that is three times greater than non-indigenous youth. Also, 26% of youth with disabilities were unemployed, compared to 15% of youth without disabilities. Skills Link, a stream under the youth employment strategy, helps young Canadians with multiple barriers get ready for a job through skills development. Pathways to Education is a program whereby participants from the poorest urban communities across Canada are now having above-average high school graduation rates and entries into post-secondary education.

[Translation]

We also believe that good quality and timely information and advice play an important role to inform career aspirations and support successful transitions.

Job Bank has been enhanced and we will continue to modernize it with current technology platforms to be youth-centred and user-friendly.

The recently launched Labour Market Information Council will focus on timely, consistent, and local labour market information for all Canadians.

[English]

Financial assistance is essential to removing barriers to post-secondary education access, and here again we have made some important enhancements. Increased non-repayable Canada student grants are now available to more students in low- and middle-income families. We've introduced the fixed student contribution, allowing students who work to continue to do so without having to worry about a reduction in their levels of financial assistance, and now no student has to repay their Canada student loan until they are earning at least \$25,000 per year. This amount is even higher for students with children.

[Translation]

Skills requirements continue to evolve, and credentials don't always represent the skills employers are seeking.

[English]

Despite significant investments and overall positive labour market indicators, when internationally compared, too many young Canadians are either not pursuing their education or not getting jobs aligned with their skills and training. Successful transitions from school to work will require more involvement of employers, and this is where increasing efforts on experiential learning and placements to meet the demand across all professions and sectors will be key. There is an opportunity to continue to enhance partnerships with educational institutions and employers. In this way, we get the win-win situation of students getting the experience they need and employers finding the talent they want.

[Translation]

We are exploring some promising practices for approaches that are most effective with particular groups, such as immigrant and refugee youth, indigenous youth, and gender specific youth.

[English]

We are in the very early stages of exploring our renewed youth employment strategy, and your study will inform our work. The key areas for action that we are considering include supporting smoother transitions from school to work, supported by quality learning and labour market information as well as work experience opportunities; ensuring that youth develop skills that keep pace with the changing nature of work; providing all youth a fair opportunity to enter the labour market and receive the support they need; and obtaining greater involvement of employers in youth employment.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information on our work, and now we're happy to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before we get started, I have a note here. I want to advise everyone that last week a serious incident occurred during another committee—that is, not our committee—when two interpreters were seriously affected by microphone feedback. I want to remind everybody here, both members as well as witnesses, that if you are speaking, have your earpiece as far away from the microphone as possible, please.

That said, we have a few new people here, so I wanted to welcome everybody who isn't normally sitting around this table. Thank you for joining us.

I believe we are going to start off with MP Nuttall, please.

• (1545)

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for the presentation. Certainly this is a very important issue in terms of youth unemployment overall. I was looking at some of the statistics you used in terms of our comparative ranking with the OECD countries. It's interesting that our unemployment rate among youth is down to just below 12%, I believe, but the number of jobs has actually stayed level. The number of young Canadians—of youth, as we characterize it under StatsCan—has stayed level. Despite huge investments over the past couple of years, we haven't seen an uptick in the number of youth working. We've seen an uptick in the employment percentage, which means the participation rate is actually getting lower and driving the unemployment rate down.

Can you give us some comments on that? Essentially, where do you think it fits in terms of experiential learning, and is there a higher employment rate, not just a higher salary, for those young people who are going through co-op programs and others?

Ms. Rachel Wernick: I'm just looking at my notes to clarify the participation rate. In Canada, for youth aged 15 to 24, it's 64.2%, and the OECD average is 47.2%. The higher ranking is on both the employment rate and the participation rate.

To more directly answer your question, yes, we have some preliminary but growing evidence that the youth who take part in co-ops and placements have more sustained employment afterwards, as well as higher salaries.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Thank you for that. It makes a ton of sense.

What I was actually referring to is the StatsCan data that shows that the real number of youth working is pretty much neutral, within 5,000 or 10,000, since this Parliament started sitting, which means that despite massive investments, the actual real number of jobs for young people hasn't increased at all. What has happened is that the participation rate or the number of youth seeking employment has actually gone down. That's what StatsCan shows on a monthly basis.

In fact, until July of this year, there were 40,000 fewer jobs for young people overall, despite huge investments in the summer jobs program and many other areas.

When we're looking at the trades and the co-ops, we see a lot of strong experiential learning opportunities there, no matter where you are in the country. Do we find that there is a higher rate for those

who go directly into employment in the trades, or is it about on level with other sectors that youth are graduating from?

Mr. Christopher Bates (Director, Trades and Apprenticeship, Department of Employment and Social Development): I believe there is a higher level with the trades, given that in order to go into the trade, you need an employer. It is the ultimate demand-driven program. When you're in an apprenticeship, you automatically have that for the start. In fact, over 80% of tradespeople don't experience any difficulty when first entering into the trade.

It's a pretty phenomenal statistic that they can go from sometimes having no experience whatsoever to being able to find an employer who is willing to take them under their tutelage to eventually become a journeyman. The outcomes and earnings are pretty phenomenal relative to other opportunities.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: This is for whoever can answer the question.

When we're looking at experiential learning, there's the employment issue. If you take monthly averages over the past three or four months, we have roughly a 12% unemployment rate among youth. The United States has 8%; Japan has 4%; the U.K. has about 12%, even though they're going through Brexit. When you apply that to experiential learning, the second item, which we don't really have a lot of data on, is underemployment.

If you apply experiential learning to that subject, do you have any data showing that if you go through a co-op, yes, you're going to earn a little bit more, but you're also going to end up in the field that you actually studied in?

• (1550)

Ms. Rachel Wernick: The answer is yes. The same evidence or research I was speaking to earlier shows that you're more likely to get a job in the profession you studied in if you have placements as an experiential learner.

On underemployment, you make a really good point. It's a key challenge for youth. It's part of what we're looking at in the renewal of the youth employment strategy, because there's this quality... If you don't get a good job, there's a scarring effect—that's the term we use—in that it's hard to get out again. This is part of the reason we think programs like co-ops and placements get you in the door and get you into the right environment in the profession that you studied in. They're that first transition. That's why they're such important tools.

To come back to your question, I'm not sure I'm going to answer it directly, because—

The Chair: Be very quick, please.

Ms. Rachel Wernick: —just on a conceptual level on participation and employment rates, it's hard to control for what's going on in the economy. As the economic cycle fluctuates, one can also say that if we hadn't invested in youth, the rates would have been even lower, because the investments allowed us to keep that at par in a period when there was quite a bit of downturn.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ruimy is next, please.

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here today. This is a subject that's near and dear to a lot of us.

On Tuesday, when the minister was here, we talked about the Canada summer jobs program. We talked about how the goal was to try to almost double the number of jobs that were held. I know that in my riding in the first year we didn't have a lot of uptake, because it was always closed to small business. In the second year, we went out and actually called about 500 businesses. We encouraged them to apply. As a result, there were a lot more jobs, to the tune of almost 100,000 jobs, because we created an awareness of it, which is something that is critically important.

I have two questions on that aspect. Is there a way that we can continue to increase the number of youth who are available and can get Canada summer jobs, but more in line with their... How do we get them to apply for those jobs or get employers to actually zone in on what their backgrounds are? I'm not referring to somebody standing at a gate and saying "Here's a ticket" or "Here, I'll make you a cup of coffee"; I'm talking about nurses, for instance, who can work as nutritionists or care aides, so that they can connect their summer job with the skill they are studying. I'm finding that this is a bit of a challenge. We're not making those connections. Is there anything you can say to that?

Ms. Monika Bertrand (Director General, Employment Program Policy and Design Directorate, Department of Employment and Social Development): Yes. In terms of increasing the number of youth for the Canada summer jobs program, a significant investment went into Canada summer jobs. You know that. There was \$339 million in budget 2016 to essentially double the number of Canada summer jobs.

Jobs with not-for-profit organizations are 100% subsidized at the minimum wage level. For businesses, it's at 50%. Of course, the rise in minimum wage, which is a good thing, puts pressure on the envelope.

There are a couple of reasons we are trying to get businesses more interested in the Canada summer jobs program. It is the quality of the work experience, of course, that's important, but it is also about being able to increase the number of Canada summer jobs youth who can benefit from the program. When you have 50% of the salary paid for by the employer, then of course you can double the number.

In terms of the quality of jobs, this is something that we are always striving towards. We advertise as much as possible, we make sure MPs advertise as much as possible, and we make sure that businesses are out there proactively looking for young people and advertising to young people. This is an ongoing challenge, but it's also an ongoing opportunity for us to make sure that people know about the program.

•(1555)

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you.

The answer is probably not the one I'm looking for, but do you in any way track the number of Canada summer jobs and what happens to them afterwards? You probably don't, but is there any tracking involved with that?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: We are starting to do that more. We have introduced a follow-up survey. We are now tracking students in the sense that we want to know more about the summer work experience. We want to know more about the quality of the employment and we want to know more about whether they feel more prepared for a job. We will learn a lot more from CSJ.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I visited almost 90% of summer students. I talked to them and I talked to the groups that are hiring them, and I was so happy to see people taking fishery courses in university. We were connecting them to fishery organizations and they were working with what they were doing. That was fascinating to see.

I want to jump ahead to the Skills Link program. It's another one that's big for me. I'm curious to know if you are tracking what happens. Generally in our case it's a five-week training program. How efficient is it? Are we using metrics to follow up? Is there a way to improve how that is evaluated?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Every five years there's a full evaluation of our programs. The youth employment strategy is delivered in collaboration with 10 other departments and agencies. The ESDC, our department, collects the SINs of youth who participate in the programs, which allows us to connect to CRA data, which allows us to follow their earnings and their reliance on passive income support.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Are there any reports that suggest that—

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Of course there are.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: How many of the 30 people in my riding who went to one session got jobs afterwards?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: It's more at the aggregate level. I would have to look at the technical reports to see if we evaluated by region, but we certainly have a lot of information on outcomes.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: That would be very helpful, because again it's so critical that whoever is executing the Skills Link program is doing an above-average job. We don't want them to be there for five weeks and then see them fall through the cracks. It would be great to have further information, and if you could submit anything of that type to the clerk, it would be great.

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now for six minutes, we will go to MP Sansoucy, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This topic is of great concern to me. You talked in your presentation about a youth rate of employment of 55.9%. So that is about one in two. Even though our average is above that of OECD countries, that merely shows that young people are facing difficulties all around the world.

I really like the program called *How It's Made*. I often visit companies in my riding. In particular, I visited the Neptune company. Someone was applying for a job at the human resources department. I continued my visit and, 45 minutes later, I ran into that same person who was already getting an introduction to the job. The owner said he could have hired 10 people that day.

On one hand, there is a labour shortage, but on the other, all these young people are out of work. We have to find a solution. There is also a demographic reality. Employers say that some employees are getting ready to retire, but that they cannot necessarily afford—especially SMEs—to hire a young person before the older employee leaves to pass on their knowledge. The older employee walks out the door with their knowledge. That is why a buddy or learning system has so much to offer.

In your presentation, you talked about a broad range of youth. As our study begins, I think it is important to lay out the federal government's role in youth education. Provincial governments have jurisdiction over labour laws. Federal jurisdiction extends only to the education of aboriginal persons, members of the Canadian forces, the Coast Guard, and offenders. The federal government can of course make investments through the Canada Social Transfer.

That said, I do not want to reinvent the wheel. We met with the Expert Panel on Youth Employment, which tabled a report last June and had met a lot of people. Its third recommendation is to rethink the delivery of youth employment programming. It recommends transferring all youth employment programs to the provincial and territorial governments.

What dealings does your department have with the provincial ministries that share the objectives and work with these youth?

In your minister's mandate letter, the Prime Minister asked her to work with provincial governments and post-secondary institutions to achieve objectives. I would like to know how that cooperation has been established.

Based on your shared objectives, how do you work together, while respecting your areas of jurisdiction?

•(1600)

Mrs. Rachel Wernick: We will each answer your question.

Mr. Benoît Tessier (Executive Director, Employer Liaison Services, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you for that good question.

Working with the provinces on skills development is in fact essential. For the student placement program the government created this year, we made a deliberate choice to uphold federal jurisdiction in this regard. That is why the government decided to invest on the employer side, to give employers wage subsidies, and to have a productive conversation with the provinces for them to reflect on investments in post-secondary institutions, co-op programs, and co-op offices at post-secondary institutions. As a result, we are currently having a very productive discussion with a number of provinces about a win-win model. The federal government can indeed play a role in creating more work placements in companies by giving employers fairly generous financial compensation to offset the risks they are taking. On the other hand, the government does not interfere

in the management of post-secondary institutions such as universities and colleges, among others.

A number of provinces, including Ontario, New Brunswick, and Quebec—Premier Couillard talked about Germany's dual education system—, are considering or have already announced direct investments in post-secondary institutions. So we can say that there is good cooperation between the federal and provincial governments in this regard.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I would like to go back the recommendations of the expert panel or working group.

I would like to hear your opinion on the recommendations, including that of updating labour standards in Canada. Training and learning are of course essentially regulated by each province and territory, but the expert panel did recommend improving the labour standards in the Canada Labour Code in order to better address the precarious employment situation of youth. With respect to the law pertaining to atypical positions, for instance, the report recommended regulating temporary placement agencies and encouraging respect for labour rights.

A second recommendation pertained to expanding EI eligibility, since the reality of atypical employment among youth makes it difficult for them to meet the eligibility criteria. Another recommendation pertained to producing better statistics. You have given us various statistics.

I would like your opinion on these recommendations in particular. When an expert panel tables a report, how does the department respond to the recommendations?

•(1605)

[English]

The Chair: I'm afraid I have to give you 10 seconds. You are actually over 30 seconds past your time, Madam Sansoucy, but I would offer time for a very brief answer, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Rachel Wernick: That is a very broad question, but I will try to get to the heart of it.

Clearly, we always try to contribute to efforts by the provinces and territories. We believe that the federal government has a role to play in nationwide programs to ensure equal access to services and support. Youth are among the groups targeted by nationwide programs. We collaborate a great deal on transfers to the provinces, which are in the order of \$2 billion.

[English]

The Chair: I'm afraid I'm going to have to cut you off there.

Go ahead, Monsieur Robillard, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

All my questions are for the officials from Employment and Social Development.

Appearing before the committee last Tuesday, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour talked about drawing on European models for student work placements. She referred in particular to the model in Germany, which impressed her.

Can you tell us to what extent models from other countries in Europe influenced the design of the Canadian model that you have put forward? What has each model contributed?

Mrs. Rachel Wernick: I would say that, like any good public servant, when we prepare advice for the government, we survey the environment for promising practices, whether at the national, provincial or international level. Studying things that are done well, wherever that may be, is part of our daily work. There are several examples of promising practices. The minister talked about learning in Germany, but there are others that involve support for youth. It is part of our job to evaluate them before we offer advice.

Mr. Benoit Tessier: Let me give you a very specific example.

The new student career placement program, in which we have invested \$73 million over four years, draws directly on the dual training model in Germany.

So we launched a pilot project, together with Siemens Canada, a German company whose main office already had German experience.

The Canadian office in Oakville launched a pilot project that matches up post-secondary institutions with an employer to offer very valuable work placements that included skills development. The skills in question were more than just technical skills, including more basic skills such as negotiation, communication, and so forth. It was a great success for the young people.

Siemens Canada saw this project as an opportunity to look for its next Canadian CEO.

On the basis of this project, the program has been expanded across Canada and further developed.

Mr. Yves Robillard: Can you tell us more about the proposed ban on unpaid internships? Why are you calling for this change?

[English]

Ms. Rachel Wernick: I think I mentioned in my opening remarks Bill C-63, which amended the Canada Labour Code to prohibit unpaid internships unless they're part of an educational program. What we're doing with the educational program is making sure that, although unpaid, they're covered by standard protections, such as maximum hours of work, weekly days of rest, and general holidays. We believe in the importance, as we've said, of experiential learning, internships, co-op, but of course they need to be

[Translation]

given working conditions that are acceptable to all Canadians and that are in line with the Canada Labour Code.

Mr. Yves Robillard: How do you involve companies in the practical placement program for students? What kinds of companies can take part in the program?

•(1610)

Mr. Benoit Tessier: The program was developed with the cooperation of Canadian companies of all sizes and types, and with post-secondary institutions.

The program was designed to create partnerships with key sectors of the Canadian economy, such as the manufacturing sector.

Any company can take part in the program, whether large, small or medium-sized. The program is attractive to SMEs, however, since they have less money and resources and it can be more risky and expensive for them to hire students for co-op terms. Right now, companies of all sizes are taking part in the program, including SMEs.

One of our partners in the sector is responsible for recruiting the various companies from those sectors to participate.

Mr. Yves Robillard: Can you elaborate on how students, employers, and post-secondary educational institutions will benefit from the practical work term program for students?

Mr. Benoit Tessier: In our view, it is a win-win situation, or rather a win-win-win situation, since there are three parties involved.

The program allows employers to work with students who have not yet completed their studies, who are developing their skills, and to teach them about their business model and culture.

The program allows students to acquire new skills. As Ms. Wernick said at the beginning of the meeting, that allowed the students who wanted to enter the labour market to develop their skills during their learning process.

It also benefits the educational institutions because students are increasingly motivated to acquire work experience. They can see the benefits.

Finally, it allows the educational institutions to adapt their programs to current and future labour market realities.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Now we'll go over to MP Fortier for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello. Thank you very much for being here today. The information you are providing is really essential to the study we have just begun.

I am privileged to have two post-secondary institutions in my riding, Collège La Cité and the University of Ottawa. They are at the college and university level. These institutions often work with employers to offer their students practical learning opportunities while they are doing their studies. On the other hand, I note that there are also vulnerable youth. Some are poor or of a different ethnic or cultural origin. They might be members of a cultural or linguistic minority, or aboriginal youth. They are not necessarily able to put themselves in winning situations. We want to examine this in our study.

Are there any initiatives or measures in this regard?

Ms. Wernick, you said earlier that you had recently considered some best practices.

Please tell us about some of those practices that could help vulnerable youth.

Mrs. Rachel Wernick: Thank you for your question.

In many cases, vulnerable youth lack certain basic skills. They need job training. They are not yet ready for a work placement or to do well in it.

With regard to aboriginal youth and promising practices, I am familiar with the

[English]

aboriginal skills and employment training strategy. It's called BladeRunners, and it's in British Columbia. It's an example of a best practice, with a full wraparound service for the youth. You have to get at the desires and drivers of the youth themselves, and go through that process of what they want to do and why.

There are mentors and counsellors who are there with them as they go. They are the people who are in between the youth client and the employer, who do what is needed to help provide youth with sustained and successful experiences. For example, if employers don't have time and don't want to be bothered if the youth is late or doesn't show up or doesn't call to explain what's going on, then the intervenor does.

It's often for vulnerable youth, with what we call wraparound supports and case management. It's with those kinds of supports that address other barriers that are impeding them from reaching their full potential that we see success. In our renewal of the strategy, we're looking at how we can tailor more of these types of approaches for the different groups, whether they're indigenous youth, refugee youth, or youth with disabilities.

Grosso modo, that's the kind of intervention that seems to work.

•(1615)

[Translation]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

It is often difficult for young women or women in general to find work in science, engineering, or even in the trades.

Please tell us about existing or new measures that could help young women get into those fields.

Mr. Benoit Tessier: I can tell you about the work placement program the government launched. As indicated in the presentation, the program provides \$5,000 in wage compensation for young people. That is 50% of what a young person earns at a company. In the case of women who are trying to break into the sciences, mathematics, engineering or business, the contribution is even more generous. It is 70% of the salary, or \$7,000 for a typical placement, which is about four months long.

These are some of the measures we have implemented thus far.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Employers are often more interested in offering experiential learning to young people who are paid.

How can we really encourage employers to take part in and commit to this program? As the saying goes, it is often a question of money. How can we encourage them to take part in these programs, other than financially?

Mr. Benoit Tessier: That is a good question and we thought about it often in developing the program.

In my humble opinion, the beauty of the program is that it includes not only wage compensation for youth, but also a fund that is available to create viable, long-term partnerships between a group of employers in a given sector, or in a given region, and a group of post-secondary institutions with a view to building a long-term relationship. We also humbly believe that, because we are all managers and also hire students ourselves, it almost makes us want to start again. There are many brilliant graduates of those programs who, after one, two or three experiences—I can tell you with certainty that the employers have very positive reports and might then put a bit more energy into hiring students in the future.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go to MP Wong, please.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you folks for coming from EDC.

I share some of the concerns Monika just mentioned about the youth who are most vulnerable. I have lots of experience working with immigrant youth. Because of the change in demographics, the latest statistics show that our number of immigrants is increasing. At the same time we're looking at young immigrants who do not have the skills, including the language skills, to find a good job. I understand that. I came from that background, and that training background too. Some colleges and polytechnics and universities are actually combining skills and language training.

There used to be programs like that. If you wanted to become a pharmacist's assistant, you'd only need to reach a certain level of English, and then you could learn both at the same time. Are there still those programs available, funded by the federal government?

•(1620)

Ms. Rachel Wernick: You're....

Hon. Alice Wong: They're called combined skills programs.

Ms. Rachel Wernick: It's actually a very effective approach for teaching language. If I'm going to have to learn language and vocabulary, I'd like to do it related to my area of interest or where I want to work, because then there's more motivation. You're exactly right.

It's not done in a national kind of way, but we're aware of a lot of best practices that take that approach. Most of the language training for refugee and immigrant youth is led by the immigration department. It's a combination of support through the school system, and then for some youth it's aimed right at the literacy and essential skills at the lowest end that they need to start learning the language. It depends a lot on the profile of the new Canadian, where their starting point is, what kind of programming they get.

Hon. Alice Wong: My next question involves young people with challenges.

Inclusion B.C. came to my office today. I'm sure they have gone to many of our other MPs' offices. One thing they have been doing very successfully is matching the skills of those young people, including adults, actually, with potential jobs. At the same time they're going to rural areas.

Very often young people don't want to leave their comfort zone. They want to stay. What they mean by a good job is to be very comfortable, sitting in front of a computer, with air conditioning. They never want to leave their comfort zone. There's a challenge of matching skills to jobs. There are people who don't have the skills, but then there are jobs looking for people. That's a mismatch, as we're sure, in some remote areas.

What I'm trying to say is that there used to be an employer panel for people with disabilities, including youth, of course. That was very successful because you had champions who were hiring people with challenges, yet they were very good employees. They proved it is a good business practice to hire those with challenges. They are punctual. They value their jobs. They're excellent. Instead of being a so-called burden to those employers, they actually reach out to other employers. I don't want to mention which one of the coffee giants is hiring a lot of those people. I won't mention names here.

Do you think that the federal government should encourage that pattern? I don't think that it's still on, still there.

Ms. Monika Bertrand: There were a couple of questions in there. I'll try to unpack that.

In terms of the skills mismatch, we don't just have it for young people, of course; we have it for all Canadians, and that is one of the biggest challenges we are trying to tackle. In that respect, we are looking at better labour market information—not looking at degrees as much as competencies and skills that are required for the jobs of the future—and providing the right information to young people, and all Canadians, so they can make the right choices in terms of the training they need for the jobs that are available.

In terms of the matching function for young Canadians, or any Canadian who might have multiple barriers to employment, for persons with disabilities, yes, we have the panel, and there is a champions' table. We know that when it comes to employers, it is not a charity question and it is not about convincing employers to hire

somebody simply because it's a good thing to do. There is always the corporate social responsibility, but it's really the return on investment that matters. For example, a young person with a disability brings a lot of benefits to an organization or a business in terms of diversity and loyalty.

Employer champions' tables have been effective at that and passing that message on. We probably need to do a lot more of that and encourage employers who are really active in this space. We have a very good example in the United States. There are several examples, but Starbucks in the United States, of course, is a big champion in that respect, with the 100,000 youth employment initiative.

Again, it's championing the message that there is a good return on investment for the organization, but there is also something in it for the economy at large. It provides a good, stable job and career ladder. Combining multiple employers in their efforts to hire youth, starting with those who might have more barriers in terms of entry-level jobs, means youth can then ladder up in their career to other organizations.

We definitely have some good examples out there that we are looking at as we move forward with the renewal of the youth employment strategy.

• (1625)

Hon. Alice Wong: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You're actually over by a minute, so I'm afraid you have negative time.

I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Morrissey. I'm going to advise him that he has about four and half minutes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Oh, you cut me 30 seconds, Mr. Chair.

My question goes to the assistant deputy minister, Ms. Wernick.

Your notes say, "Providing all youth a fair opportunity to enter the labour market and receive needed support to be successful." Some youth do not have a chance to go to apprenticeship and do not transition from high school to college or university because they fell through the cracks long before then. Could you expand a bit on how you are focusing on and targeting that group? How do the resources you are putting into this area today compare to resources of past years?

Ms. Rachel Wernick: Is the question specifically about those who are interested in getting into apprenticeships?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No, it's about the youth who are disadvantaged.

Ms. Rachel Wernick: Just in general...?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: They are just disadvantaged, for a whole host of reasons: single parent, addiction problems.... You have programs that deal with that.

Ms. Rachel Wernick: Yes. In the current youth employment strategy, the stream that addresses vulnerable youth would be the Skills Link stream. That's the skills development stream. As I said earlier, it's really about—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could I correct? I am aware, from the groups I meet with, that in the past the program used to give them experiential learning for a longer period of time, and it has been gradually watered down to where the experience is now questionable. What is your funding level in this area, versus in the past?

Ms. Rachel Wernick: In terms of experiences, I think you are referring to the Canada summer jobs program.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No, no. I am referring to the group you were speaking about, the disadvantaged youth, through the skills path, not through summer jobs. You are doing a very good job in that, and we've put a lot more resources into it. What are you doing today that's an improvement over what you were doing three years ago, for this segment of society that has very few supports?

Ms. Rachel Wernick: I'm sorry if I'm confusing things.

The Skills Link stream is the one that captures the most vulnerable youth, and we've increased investments from about \$68 million in 2014-15 to the current \$91 million in 2016-17.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: There's been roughly a \$30-million additional investment.

Ms. Rachel Wernick: That's right. The difference in clients is from six and a half thousand to almost nine thousand, so we're reaching a lot more youth with these additional investments.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: But I advocate that we have to do more. Do I have one more question?

The Chair: You have one more minute, sir.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I have a generalized question.

What is the most significant shortcoming in your list and suite of programs that you have directed at youth in this category that I'm referring to, that you could identify in the last several years? You did not start working with these issues yesterday or a year ago, so your department has expertise in this field from when the whole issue of dealing with challenges was new.

Briefly, could you tell me what the most significant shortcoming is?

•(1630)

Ms. Monika Bertrand: We don't agree on the shortcomings.

Mr. Morrissey: You don't agree? Oh, that concerns me.

Ms. Rachel Wernick: No, it's okay. I think it's probably a combination of things. I was going to say one of the biggest areas—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It's because we're studying and we have to make a report—

Ms. Rachel Wernick: No, it's totally fair. It's a rich subject area. It's going to be a great study.

One of the biggest areas for vulnerable youth is in what we call “essential skills”. Essential skills span literacy, numeracy, communication skills, learning and adaptability skills, document use, digital.... There's a whole area that we call essential skills. Vulnerable youth often need additional help there.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Now that you've identified that, what is your department's policy or planning process doing to address it?

The Chair: Give a very quick answer, please.

Ms. Rachel Wernick: There is a \$50-million program led by the office of literacy and essential skills. This is a good example of complementarity between the federal initiative and the provinces.

It operates like an innovation program, in that it takes promising practices and tests them to see what works best for which youth in which environment. Things that might work to teach essential skills for indigenous youth are different from what you would use with other groups of youth. It tests those and uses the results to influence programming at the provincial and territorial level. That's the way we work right now.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Can I get one clarification here?

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you provide some data to this committee on the issue you just referenced?

Ms. Rachel Wernick: You'd like data on essential skills? Sure. Yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for appearing.

I will say, just to advise my colleagues and you as well, that I attended the Conference Board of Canada summit on this very issue yesterday. They are incredibly excited that you're reviewing and updating the youth employment strategy. It was the main topic of the symposium both yesterday and today. All stakeholders that I spoke with—companies, universities, colleges—are very pleased at the work that you're doing, so I imagine you will be getting some feedback from them from this summit. They were also very shocked and surprised that we were doing this study as well. It was a great day.

Thank you so much for coming. We are going to suspend for literally 30 seconds to allow you to vacate and allow the next panel to come in and take their seats.

We are suspended.

•(1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1635)

The Chair: Welcome back, everybody.

I'm very pleased to get going on the next panel of witnesses. From the Public Service Commission, we have Patrick Borbey, president, and Roxanne Poitras, youth engagement officer. From the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, we have Paula Isaak, assistant deputy minister, education and social development programs and partnerships.

Each department will receive seven minutes for opening remarks, and we'll obviously follow that with a series of questions.

Please make sure that your earpieces are nowhere near the microphones. We had some issues with feedback in the past couple of weeks.

I will turn it over to Patrick. The next seven minutes are yours, sir.

Mr. Patrick Borbey (President, Public Service Commission): Thank you.

Do you mean seven minutes to me and seven minutes to Roxanne?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We understood there was a little bit more time. Perhaps since everybody has seen my text—I think it has been delivered—I think it's more important to hear from Roxanne than from me.

Since you have my text, Mr. Chair, I will give my time to Madame Poitras.

The Chair: You can split the time, but Roxanne, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Roxanne Poitras (Youth Engagement Ambassador, Public Service Commission): Thank you for the opportunity to share a bit about my experience as the PSC's Youth Engagement Ambassador.

I am new to the role, having only been appointed to the position about three months ago. I am the PSC's third Youth Engagement Ambassador and the chair of our Young Professionals Network.

[*English*]

I came into the public service as an FSWEF student, and as is the case for many, I did not get a job that was related to my field of study. Once I graduated, I was appointed to a clerical position. I stayed in that position for five years, as there were few opportunities for development or advancement. It was only after joining a young professionals' network and getting involved in my organization that I acquired more experience and expanded my network. I was then able to move around and eventually get a promotion in another department.

[*Translation*]

Since that time, these networks have been a crucial part of my career development. Even though I am only now getting to work on projects that are related to my degree, I believe that the path I followed helped me define the kind of professional I am and want to be.

A major part of my job is to help young professionals within the PSC lead, share and learn. I represent the voice of young professionals at various committees and events.

I am also called on to review things like policies, presentations and communications to ensure they will resonate with younger audiences.

[*English*]

Another part of my role is to support students and to make them an important part of the network. I find that students engage well with the network members, in part because they themselves were students not too long ago, and they are able to relate to what the

students are experiencing. I try to engage them as much as possible and utilize their interests. For example, this summer our students were called upon to develop a communications plan for active work stations. They successfully completed this job, and we're very proud to say that they contributed something meaningful to the PSC.

[*Translation*]

This job has opened many new doors for me—doing things I would never have had a chance to do in other jobs. For example, appearing before this committee, participating in last week's President's Leaders GC Twitter chat on renewal of the public service, and assisting in designing and implementing the PSC's student onboarding program.

[*English*]

It is also an honour to have the chance to help young Canadians at a time when the public service is placing such a strong emphasis on renewal and on attracting young Canadians into its workforce.

I would like to thank you once again for the experience of appearing before this committee.

● (1640)

The Chair: There are about three and a half minutes left if you wish, Patrick.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That's a bonus. Thank you.

You will see from my remarks that the Public Service Commission is certainly a very active participant in the renewal of the public service through our programs, through the programs for hiring students to give them experience through what we call the FSWEF, the summer student work experience program, as well as the co-op programs, which are very important and very valuable.

[*Translation*]

Of course, we also do recruitment at the post-secondary level. We are conducting a recruitment campaign at the post-secondary level, and we hope that students from one end of the country to the other will think of us as a career option. We encourage them to apply for positions in various career categories.

There are personnel shortages in the public service, for instance in information technology. We also need good communications agents and scientists. We need personnel in all areas. We hope that young people will choose careers in the public service.

We have a lot of activities to move this forward, and we can do more. Our programs are sometimes a bit slow and cumbersome, but we are working a great deal on modernizing them.

[*English*]

We have a very ambitious program to modernize our suite of programs, to provide better services, to provide better real-time feedback to participants and potential candidates, and also to support managers who are looking to match the skills that are required with what's available in the Canadian labour force.

Hiring young Canadians has to be a priority. We need to do a better job. We need to rejuvenate the public service. If you look at the statistics, we are not keeping up with the labour force. We need to do better. That means a fair amount of external hiring over the next few years.

As soon as we open up to external hiring, as my notes say, we also open ourselves up to greater diversity. There are a lot of Canadians from all kinds of backgrounds across the country, coast to coast to coast, who want to be part of the public service of the future, and our job is to make that happen.

Thank you. *Merci*.

The Chair: Thank you for being here, sir.

Now we'll go over to Ms. Isaak for seven minutes.

Ms. Paula Isaak (Assistant Deputy Minister, Education and Social Development Programs and Partnerships, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Paula Isaak, and as was mentioned, I'm the assistant deputy minister responsible for education and social programs and partnerships in the Department of Indigenous Services.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the committee for the invitation to appear here today.

I would like to also acknowledge that we are gathered on traditional Algonquin territory.

[*English*]

I'm happy to be here to contribute to your study on experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth. Indigenous Services funds programs and services that contribute to these issues in a number of ways, and I'll provide a brief overview in the next couple of minutes.

First, to address the critical need to improve education outcomes, the Government of Canada is making substantial investments in elementary and secondary education on reserve, totalling \$2.6 billion over five years, which started last fiscal year. This includes new targeted investments in language and culture, special education, and literacy and numeracy.

The department supports innovative and experiential learning activities through one of our programs, called new paths for education. Two key themes for this program in this current fiscal year are land-based education and physical activity and sport.

Land-based learning provides students with the opportunity to learn while connecting with the land. It provides culturally relevant experiences outdoors, with the land acting as the classroom and teacher, and it makes use of indigenous knowledge.

A holistic approach to physical activity and sport has the potential to improve the well-being, mental health, physical health, and academic success of indigenous students, as well as to enhance student engagement in school. Sports and physical activities can promote the use of indigenous languages, the involvement of parents

and community members in learning, and the enhancement of curriculum.

[*Translation*]

Additionally, we have worked closely with first nation partners to implement an inclusive and comprehensive engagement process aimed at developing recommendations for strengthening first nation education on reserve, based on the principle of first nations control of first nation education.

We are now working closely with first nation partners to jointly develop a policy framework that will shape the way forward for how the department supports different first nation approaches to ensuring first nations students on reserve receive a quality education that improves outcomes.

[*English*]

Second, we provide support for indigenous students to access and succeed at post-secondary education, since it is an important component of individual and community success. Post-secondary education not only helps to increase individuals' job opportunities and earning power but also helps communities build capacity and promotes learning for future generations.

To ensure that indigenous students have the same opportunities for success as other Canadian students, the Government of Canada is increasing funding to support indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education.

Budget 2017 provided an enhancement of \$90 million over two years, beginning this fiscal year, for post-secondary student support, to provide financial assistance to first nation and eligible Inuit students enrolled in post-secondary programs and to help offset tuition, travel, and other expenses. Approximately 22,000 first nation and Inuit students are supported annually by this program, and the enhancement from budget 2017 will support an additional 4,600 students over that two-year period.

Budget 2017 also provides support for Indspire, which is an indigenous-led charity that assists indigenous students with the financial support they need to pursue education, become self-sufficient, contribute to the economy, and give back to their communities. The Government of Canada is providing \$5 million per year for five years, starting this fiscal year. Altogether, this will provide over \$40 million over five years in bursaries and scholarships for more than 12,000 indigenous students through Indspire.

[*Translation*]

The department is undertaking a comprehensive and collaborative review of post-secondary education for indigenous students, together with Employment and Social Development Canada and indigenous partners.

In the review, we are engaging first nation, Inuit and Métis leadership to examine current federal supports, to understand what works and what requires adjustment, and to develop ideas and solutions that will improve access and promote post-secondary education attainment for indigenous students.

● (1645)

[English]

Another way in which we are supporting youth to succeed in the job market is through the first nations and Inuit youth employment strategy, which you would have just heard about from your previous witnesses. It is part of the youth employment strategy led by ESDC.

It helps first nations and Inuit youth between the ages of 15 and 30 to develop essential employability skills, gain exposure to career options, understand the relationship between education and labour market participation, and access co-operative work and study opportunities.

To enrich opportunities for first nations and Inuit youth, budget 2017 is investing \$100 million for this strategy over three years, which includes two programs: the first nations and Inuit summer work experience program to acquire skills, prepare for full-time employment, and earn income to support post-secondary education through summer work experience, and the first nations and Inuit Skills Link program to acquire essential job-related skills, learn about career options, and prepare for employment and career development.

[Translation]

The department has been taking action to improve the wellness of indigenous peoples by addressing the socioeconomic challenges that they face.

[English]

We are committed to working on a nation-to-nation basis with indigenous partners to improve education outcomes. The government has already taken some immediate actions with historic investments with respect to on-reserve education, post-secondary education, and skills acquisition. This work is an important start, but we know that much remains to be done.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Up first we have Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for coming.

There are so many questions. I have a couple of questions first to Mr. Borbey and Ms. Poitras.

Aside from the summer hiring programs, is the public service entry examination still in place? Could you update us on what the requirements are?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: There is a general test administered to all candidates through our post-secondary recruitment program. This is administered a few weeks after we close the call for applications. It allows us to do a first screening. We end up with a number of candidates who are available for departments to assess using their

own methods. If they want to use an interview or set a further test, they can apply it, depending upon which career stream the candidate may have applied to. In some cases the pool may be more limited than in other cases. Depending on its preference, the department may use various testing methods, which we also provide. We have all kinds of tests that are adapted.

Hon. Peter Kent: Once they pass the exam, they aren't under any obligation to immediately apply for a job, are they? They can screen opportunities as they come up and apply for those specific jobs, can they not?

● (1650)

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Well, they will be approached by us on behalf of departments to find out whether they want to be considered for a particular position, and then whatever that entails afterwards.

Hon. Peter Kent: Right. Is there a relationship between the public service exam and the foreign service exam, or is it separately...?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: It's separately administered. I believe it's not being administered this year, but it's certainly a very popular one. We provide support to Global Affairs Canada in applying it, and not just in Canada, but as you can imagine, across the world wherever people want to take this exam.

Hon. Peter Kent: Is the bilingual dimension of the public service exam or the foreign service exam an essential requirement, or is it one that can be acquired after passing?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: The language assessment is done separately. Candidates have the choice of taking these exams in the language of their choice. After that, if managers determine that they would like to fill a position that's bilingual, depending at what level, we become involved in assessing the candidates to see whether they meet the written, comprehension, and speaking requirements for it. We provide the ratings, and people either meet or don't meet the requirements.

There are positions that are staffed at all levels, including "English essential only" and "French essential only". About half of the positions are bilingual.

Hon. Peter Kent: I'm glad to see that recruitment has opened up again. I know that it was frozen for a number of years, but these are great career path opportunities. I tell post-secondary grads in my neighbourhood that the opportunities are almost unlimited among the opportunities that are there.

Ms. Isaak, speaking as the geezer at the table, when I went through school six decades ago, shop classes were a sort of early trajectory to apprenticeships. There were woodworking shops, metal shops, automotive shops in schools. These don't exist in many schools anymore, and they're in almost none of the indigenous schools. I wonder whether any thought has ever been given.... I know that resource companies, which are in close proximity to reservations or indigenous communities, offer some apprenticeship programs and opportunities, but not nearly enough.

Can you speak to that?

Ms. Paula Isaak: I think you're right.

Sometimes the schools on reserve have limited extra courses or classes that students are able to participate in, whether it's for such things as music or the equivalent of trade training. However, there's a greater degree of success, in fact, and higher participation rates of indigenous students in colleges and training centres, whether these are career colleges or accredited colleges on the provincial and territorial side. It is actually a stream that is fairly popular, and there are fairly high success rates for indigenous students.

Hon. Peter Kent: Lakehead University would be an example.

Ms. Paula Isaak: Exactly.

This is because it's often linked to jobs that might be available nearby.

As you mentioned—and you're right—resource companies also often reach into secondary schools and help to create the workforce, particularly when there are long-term projects, such as large mining projects, as an example.

Hon. Peter Kent: To follow on the very good questions from Mr. Morrissey about disadvantaged youth—and in many cases, indigenous youth would be in that category—does the Red Seal apprentice program exist, and is it available to indigenous youth who are acquiring skills, but perhaps not up to the level of their being transportable, either out of the territory or province or from province to province?

Ms. Paula Isaak: I don't know specifically, but I would imagine it is available. I could follow up; I'm not 100% sure whether it is.

Hon. Peter Kent: Right.

As far as universities are concerned, other than some universities that have established separate programs that recruit indigenous students, does the federal government encourage more southerly universities to open their programs to make available accommodation and transition, if you will, to academia in the more traditional southern sense?

Ms. Paula Isaak: Absolutely.

I didn't mention it in my opening comments, but part of our suite of post-secondary programs also includes a post-secondary partnership program that supports institutions to do just that. They create either curriculum that is dedicated for indigenous students or other services that we call wraparound services for students. In addition, the post-secondary student support—the dollars that are provided for students for tuition—also go to travel and accommodation costs. All of those costs are eligible for federal funding.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Fortier is next, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much.

I am really happy you brought this up, because I have the privilege of having two post-secondary institutions in my riding: the Collège La Cité and the University of Ottawa, where there a lot of youth from indigenous communities.

And so I have a lot of questions for you, but I am going to try to limit myself to two or three specific questions.

Ms. Poitras, your experience is very interesting. I know that there are barriers to entry. When I went door-to-door or when I meet young students, many of them tell me that they have trouble integrating the public service.

If you had two recommendations for them today, what would they be?

Ms. Roxanne Poitras: I would tell them to get involved and learn about the department they work for. If you stay alone in your corner, of course, you will only learn about what is happening in that corner. But if you take the trouble to find out what the organization does as a whole, then you will really have an opportunity to move.

I would also recommend that they get involved in networking. Personally, it was thanks to networking that I was able to obtain another position at the same level, and then was able to obtain promotions.

Those are my two recommendations.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Mr. Borbey, I have the same question for you. Earlier you said that more could be done, but how will you do that?

If you had two recommendations to make to us, what would they be?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: As I mentioned, our programs have to be more effective and more efficient. We have to modernize our approach and have more intuitive programs. For instance, when people apply through one of our programs, they have to receive feedback more quickly. Candidates often wait and wonder why they don't get any information. They wonder if they have been rejected by the program. We can do much better on that.

We have already improved our student programs, for instance. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we have streamlined the application process greatly, which has produced positive results and a better experience for students.

However, we still have work to do with our recruitment managers. Our managers do not want to take risks. However, they should look for candidates on the outside, train young people and transfer knowledge rather than always looking to the same pool of people who already work for the public service. All of the retirements mean that we will not make it if we only look for talent internally.

We need to take more risks and improve the experience of our students and young people who want to take part in the program.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

As I was saying, I have the privilege of having in my riding a large community of young indigenous people, and certain indigenous employers also, such as the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health and the Minwaashin Lodge. This summer, I organized a barbecue for the purpose of meeting the young people and the employers who took part in the summer job programs. The Minwaashin Lodge was very happy when two students decided to continue working for it afterwards. These were small successes.

Ms. Isaak, we really need to find solutions to encourage young aboriginal people to take advantage of such opportunities and to further their integration.

Do you think that our programs can do this, or do we need to make improvements? What improvements should we make?

Ms. Paula Isaak: I agree with Mr. Borbey completely.

We have to modernize our programs, which have been around for years. Currently, we are modernizing our programs with our partners. In fact, we absolutely have to find out about the communities' solutions, rather than providing our own.

We can do more, but we have to develop policies and programs in co-operation with the first nations, the Inuit and the Métis.

• (1700)

Mrs. Mona Fortier: What can we do to get greater participation from employers in certain regions, in order to support the most vulnerable young people, who are trying to get work experience while studying? I am thinking of the region I represent primarily, but also of other regions.

Ms. Paula Isaak: That is a good question.

In my opinion, we would get better results by encouraging businesses and the community in general to hire students and aboriginal youth. We entrust communication and integration to the community and enterprises, but we are not the ones who liaise with the enterprises. We can do better.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: If I understand correctly, there's work to be done at all levels.

Would the modernization of these programs have positive repercussions for these young people?

Ms. Paula Isaak: That is correct.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Sansoucy is next, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for their presentations, and I congratulate Ms. Poitras.

My questions are for Ms. Isaak.

Earlier, the representatives of Employment and Social Development Canada told us that young indigenous people were three times more likely than non-indigenous students to drop out of post-secondary studies. Since the education of indigenous youth is a federal responsibility, I think that our reflection and the committee's study should focus particularly on that aspect.

We are not starting from zero. Some studies are already ongoing. Among others, according to recommendations from the Expert Panel on Youth Employment, we need to target aboriginal youth. The panel asked the government to create urban healing and employment centres for aboriginal people, to invest in essential and educational infrastructure projects, to provide distance vocational training, as well as to create a fund for graduates to provide mentorship and participate in the entrepreneurial development of aboriginal youth.

Last week, at the Youth Strategy round table on "A Common Vision for Youth Employment in Canada", the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations made recommendations pertaining to aboriginal youth.

How does your department take into account recommendations like this that concern you? How do they influence your programs?

Ms. Paula Isaak: Such studies influence us a great deal. In the review of our programs aimed at supporting post-secondary students, we take into account all studies like this, as well as the ideas provided by indigenous groups, experts, students, parents and members of the committee. We really take all of this into consideration.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: You are talking about a complete review of your programs aimed at supporting post-secondary students. I wonder what led you to think that this review was necessary.

Had you identified specific problems?

Ms. Paula Isaak: Yes, in some aspects.

First of all, very little money is available. We receive more requests for funding than in the past. And so we must modernize the program. It is very passive, if I can express it that way. It is simply a program in the context of which people may be granted subsidies. It is not linked to the economy. It was designed by people in Ottawa and not by aboriginal groups. Consequently, it does not reflect their points of view or needs. It has been in existence for years.

We have to launch a collaborative process with indigenous groups so that we can develop a new program that truly reflects their interests.

• (1705)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: What is the status of the review?

Ms. Paula Isaak: We are just starting out. We have just begun.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Fine.

Have you worked out a schedule? When do you think you will publish a report, with recommendations?

Ms. Paula Isaak: According to the previous budget, we have two years to carry out this review which we have just begun. We are going to issue recommendations before the 2019 budget, but it will not be a report as such.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

You referred to the Youth Employment Strategy, which is particularly aimed at young people.

Have you observed any obstacles or gaps in the implementation of this strategy, more particularly as concerns first nations youth?

Are the programs reaching indigenous youth, and to what extent?

Ms. Paula Isaak: It's always possible to do better, but these programs are having a lot of success.

Communication with students and young people is always a challenge. In addition, in remote communities, there are few jobs or economic opportunities for young people, which is also a challenge. Nevertheless, the two programs are a success.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Do you have mechanisms to evaluate the progress to date?

Ms. Paula Isaak: Yes.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: How do you do that?

Ms. Paula Isaak: Employment and Social Development Canada conducts a comprehensive horizontal assessment. I don't know if they have finished it, but I can check. The department is renewing the program. We are going to take part in the process.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we go over to Mr. Ruimy, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you for coming in today. I loved your story. I think there are lessons to be learned from it.

Ms. Roxanne Poitras: Thank you.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Unlike MP Fortier, I don't have post-secondary institutions in my riding, and this makes it difficult. We have seven high schools, and their students have to go outside the riding for higher education.

I want to focus on the federal student work experience program. You say in your brief that you recruited more than 7,000 students. Elsewhere in your presentation you say, under "Student Hiring":

Young Canadians are interested in joining the federal public service. We know this because the number of applications we receive remains high. ...[We] received nearly 55,000 student employment applications and over 53,000 graduate recruitment applications.

Are those 55,000 student applications for the federal student work experience program?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, that's the number of applications we received in the last period, which was last spring through summer. The 7,000 is a number that dates back to 2015-16. I don't yet have up-to-date numbers for the more recent year, but it has been increasing over the years.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Are the 7,000 students your quota mark, the number you're allowed to hire?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: No.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Fifty-five thousand applications is a lot. How many could you possibly hire? Why can't you hire more?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We don't do the hiring; we just facilitate the connection between the students and the hiring managers. It's up to the managers to determine within their budgets how many students they can hire, or whether they can. If there were 55 applicants qualified and they all could be hired, we'd be happy, but 7,000 is the most recent number of those who were hired. We're hoping that number increases over time.

That's just the FSWEF. We also have the co-op programs. The federal government is actually the biggest employer of co-op students in Canada.

• (1710)

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I'll get to that one in a second, but I want to come back to that 7,000 number. Is this just a summer program, or is it—?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, it's a summer program, but it's very flexible. Once the students are hired, they can continue beyond the end of the summer on a part-time basis, for example. There is opportunity to extend.

For example, here at the Public Service Commission we've kept our summer students over the fall and winter on a part-time basis, and then they're available next summer if we want to rehire them, or if we potentially want to hire them on a full-time basis when they graduate.

Talking about pathways, it's a really interesting way to create a pathway towards longer-term employment or a career.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I agree. My office has had four summer student interns through the parliamentary system, and I kept them all on afterwards.

I'm a little shocked, however, at the number. There were 55,000 student employment applications, but only 7,000 were hired. That's why I'm curious to know whether you are keeping statistics to see why more are not being hired.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We're doing that kind of analysis. In some cases students may be available but want to work in a particular region, yet there are no positions available in that field. If they want to work in the scientific field but want to live in northern Ontario, there may not be a direct match. At the end of the day, there are many reasons that you may not have a direct match.

As I said, depending on the budget they have available, individual managers may have more money available from year to year, or less. There's been an ebb and flow. During periods in which there has been less budgetary availability, we've seen a dip in the employment of students; in other years we've seen an increase. Right now I think we are on the upside.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Who's connecting? If I'm a student and want to get a job, I send my application in to where?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: You send it to us, through the FSWEF—

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I send it to you, and you guys actually do the matchmaking?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, and after that we do the referrals. We do the matchmaking based on the interests of the student and what the manager is looking for. We'll refer a number of people. They then can assess five or 10 of them and decide who they want or whether they want to hire all of them.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Does the post-secondary co-op program work similarly?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: The co-op program is a much more flexible tool, because at the end of the day we have agreements with universities and colleges across the country. Those agreements are the basis upon which the student matching is done. If you're at—I don't know—the University of New Brunswick, and you have 20 students who are specializing in nursing, and you have an arrangement with Veterans Affairs, and they're looking for nurses—

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Let me jump in; I have only a short period of time to ask you questions.

Again I'm going to ask you: you get 53,000 graduate recruitment applications, and...that's the co-op program, right?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: No, this is for the post-secondary recruitment program.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I'm sorry. I'm going to jump ahead, because your notes say of the co-op program, "I admit the program is underutilized outside of the National Capital Region." You've brought in 4,500.

My question is, if it's underutilized, how do we take advantage of it? How do we make it more utilized? How do people from my riding take advantage of these programs?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That's one of the challenges I've set for our organization: how do we better promote those programs, how do we make sure that the fine universities that have those programs are better known by departments and agencies in the federal government, and how do we encourage regional managers to better utilize these programs?

In the NCR, we don't need to do a lot of promotion. People know where the programs are and know where the students are—

Mr. Dan Ruimy: There's life outside of the NCR.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: As you saw in my notes, we do a lot of outreach. We want to be more targeted in our outreach and spend more time with those institutions in trying to make some matches.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Morrissey is next, please.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to follow up on my colleague's question.

If you have the high demand in the capital region, what are you doing to better educate the students and those other universities and colleges about this program so that they can be successful? We have a lot of federal offices outside of Ottawa that would be a great opportunity for young people to utilize.

• (1715)

Mr. Patrick Borbey: This is part of our outreach strategy. We have deputy ministers assigned to be the champions of particular universities and colleges. They have the role to go to those universities and promote employment programs and opportunities and try to help with the matchmaking. The Public Service Commission is there to support those deputies.

Last year, we had a really interesting experience—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How many deputies would be involved in this? Do you know?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I don't know; perhaps 40 or 50. We're looking at making sure there's a deputy for each university so that we cover the whole country.

Last year we had a really interesting experience. The champion for the University of Montreal is H el ene Laurendeau, who is Paula's boss. She arranged with the university to have a group of 60 or so students actually bused to Ottawa. When they came to Ottawa, a dozen or so departments with managers were there and did what they called speed staffing. This was for co-op assignments. As a result of

just that activity, half of the students were placed in a co-op assignment.

That's an example in which, with a university we might not naturally have gone to, we brought people together and ended up having a pretty successful outcome. Half of the students eventually got co-op assignments.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Are you tracking reasons that candidates were turned down?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Do you mean reasons that candidates were turned down when they had been referred to managers?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That would be pretty complicated. We'd have to go back and survey. If we refer five candidates and the manager takes the one who they feel is best suited, it may also be that when they're talking to the candidates, the candidate says, "That's not really what I want; I want something else." There could be a multitude of reasons.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: To follow up on that point, it would concern me, especially in a region where there isn't a lot of opportunity, that while a candidate might not be ideally suited, with some oversight within the area, he or she could find valuable work experience. It is a good point for us to follow up on.

Would a situation arise in which you might have five or six candidates apply who were turned down, and the position then was not filled? Would that happen?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We have a delegated system. We delegate the responsibility for hiring to managers. We can design programs and make them as effective as possible and create pools that managers can draw upon, but we can't force managers to use them. We hope that we encourage them, that we provide some value to both the candidates as well as the managers, but at the end of the day the matchmaking has to happen at that level.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Would there be a benefit of a more broadened definition and interpretation of the position to be filled within the public service, within those areas, so that the manager would fill the position?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I'm sorry, but I can't really answer that. It's a level of speculation.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Not really.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I'm trying to understand your question. If a manager has a position to fill in Regina—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It may have been too narrow a definition of the skill required for the position to be filled. Recognizing that we're dealing with young people who have no experience, or youth with no experience, maybe if this is occurring a lot, we have too narrow a definition.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: If it's too general, then you will have 250 candidates referred.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: But you may fill the position.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I think the positions are being filled. If the manager normally—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How many was that?

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Seven thousand.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Managers are looking for specific skills and competencies, and we're trying to match them with what candidates bring. That's how we try to make things happen.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How do you identify priority skill shortages in the public service that may be coming, and then how do you go out and educate young people that these are the areas they should be focusing on? How do you reach out, especially to the universities and colleges, and present the areas where we're going to be facing critical skills shortages?

• (1720)

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That's a great question. In fact, in some cases I think we need to intervene before university and reach into high school. For example, there are initiatives to try to encourage young women to study in science and the STEM areas, and that has to be done at the high school level. By the time you get to the university level, it's a little bit too late. That's one of the things we're looking at, whether in some cases we have to reach down a little further.

We consult across the public service with managers to find out what their hiring needs are. We'll go to a specific department.

For example, we know that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is going to be hiring significant numbers of people to deliver on the oceans management program. It's a government priority. Then we ask what specific skills they are looking for. Then we try to make a match with some of the universities across the country that have programs that produce graduates in these areas.

After that, we have targeted outreach strategies. We did this recently with the University of Victoria, for example. The Public Service Commission, in partnership with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, went to the University of Victoria and had a very focused job fair. That's a way to be able to identify those needs.

Some skills are required across the public service, such as computer science, which I mentioned. There we created a specific stream on our post-secondary recruitment, sending strong signals to all institutions that this is an area that we're going to be hiring in.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Those are ways that we try to do that matching.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Wong is next, please.

Hon. Alice Wong: I'm sharing my time with MP Kent. How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have six minutes.

Hon. Alice Wong: Perfect.

Mr. Borbey, you had mentioned job fairs. I have four universities and career colleges in my riding, and I used to teach at one of them, a polytechnic university.

You mentioned job fairs. One of the very successful job fairs in my riding has federal government departments and colleges and trade schools that are also recruiting students at the same time. When these students look for jobs and cannot find the right match, they realize that maybe this is an area they need to go into. These colleges then also refer them to potential employers, such as the public service.

How active are you in those job fairs?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We had 272 outreach events—job fairs—last year, quite often involving deputy minister champions as partners. There's quite a lot that's being done.

We are trying to be more targeted in our approach. For example, over the last year we've prioritized universities with a strong aboriginal or indigenous student population. We're being a little bit more targeted because we know there's certainly a demand, and when we look at our stats, we don't get as many applicants who are self-identifying as indigenous, as we do, for example, with visible minorities. Certainly with women, we don't have a problem. Much more than 50% of our applicants are women.

We try to be targeted in our outreach so that we're not using a shotgun approach. Partnerships of the kind you've described, that bring a number of universities or colleges together, are also a good way to maximize the use of our resources.

What we've been guilty of over the last years is not having a consistent presence on campus. We'll show up from time to time, and then we expect everybody to know who we are and the value that we bring, the career streams. We're glad we have people promoting careers in the public service, but we haven't done enough of that ourselves. Just showing up once a year or once every second year will not create that sustained relationship, which we also have to develop with the professors and the faculty so that they can also be part of our messaging.

Hon. Alice Wong: Thank you.

With reference to first nations youth who are not in northern communities, on the Lower Mainland we have a good population of young people who are unemployed and who are from the first nations. Are there any specific programs that you...? I know that there are successful programs, but the funding dried up.

Ms. Isaak: Can you give me some ideas? Are you working on that as well, those who are not in the reserve areas or northern territories?

Ms. Paula Isaak: I will speak briefly, because they fall more under the responsibility of Employment and Social Development Canada.

There are what are called asset holders, which are aboriginal skills and education training agreements that are negotiated with organizations that provide those services to indigenous people. Whether they're on-reserve or off-reserve doesn't matter; they serve the whole population, young people, older people, everybody. There are targeted programs, mostly under ESDC, that fund targeted skills training, employment, and case management programs for indigenous people.

•(1725)

Hon. Alice Wong: Thank you.

Hon. Peter Kent: It's great to have a name and a face attached to a success story, so I'd just like to congratulate Ms. Poitras for the determination and persistence to craft a career path that seems to be working for her.

Do you self-assign in your youth ambassadorial duties, or are you called or assigned to visit different groups?

Ms. Roxanne Poitras: Not as of yet. I've only dealt with the students and youth from the PSC. I do take part in the YPN, the young professionals network of the NCR. We have meetings and events with all the networks together, but I've never really been called upon.

Hon. Peter Kent: Is there some potential in this area?

Ms. Roxanne Poitras: I believe so.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Ms. Poitras is too modest. Part of her role is also to advise us on how we can make sure that our programs are working well for young Canadians. We're looking for her to play a leadership role within the Public Service Commission, but also to have a broader impact. Certainly we're looking forward to working with Roxanne in that capacity.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you very much.

Congratulations.

Ms. Roxanne Poitras: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Fortier, you have approximately two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

I had the privilege of being the president of the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française, 20 years ago. Today, I still meet people from the federation, several of whom are young francophones who live in minority communities and want to work in the public service. They want to express themselves in French in their

workplace, but they often find themselves in strictly anglophone environments.

How do you deal with the fact that young francophones work in a context where English is often the language used, when they may have trouble working in that language?

Ms. Roxanne Poitras: I have never really worked with students who were strictly English-speaking or French-speaking.

At the commission, almost all of the students can express themselves in both languages. For certain positions, they are required to be able to at least speak the other official language. According to my experience...

Mrs. Mona Fortier: So, there are positions that require that you be able to express yourself in both official languages. Tell me about this, just so that I can gain a better understanding of that situation.

Ms. Roxanne Poitras: These positions are generally related to client service.

I had the opportunity of taking part in the recruitment of several students for what the commission calls the "student cloud". These students were not called upon to work on a particular project, and so had to be quite multi-skilled. During one week, they would help one team, then come back and go and work with another team. They were expected to be somewhat bilingual in order to meet the needs of the organization at that time.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Mr. Borbey, did you want to add something?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes. In the national capital region, the majority of positions are bilingual. That is also the case in the bilingual regions.

Federally, 43% of positions are designated bilingual. You may know that Mr. Mendelsohn and I are the authors of a report that was published recently, on the use of both official languages in the federal workplace. I invite you to study this report. It contains several observations that support what you have been saying.

Certain departments are models. At the Public Service Commission, for instance, the use of French and English is very common. We begin sentences in one language and finish them in the other. In other departments, however, the situation is more problematic. We explained this in the report.

•(1730)

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Fine. Thank you.

I am done, but I think that Ms. Sansoucy would like to ask a question.

I'll let you decide, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Be very brief. You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I would like to take advantage of Ms. Isaak's presence to ask her to send the committee data on the number of young Inuit and young first nations people who take part in the various programs. I think it would really be interesting in the context of our study.

Was that brief enough?

[English]

The Chair: That was fantastic. Thank you.

Thank you very much for attending today. This is going to be a very exciting study. It's probably going to take us well into March to wrap it up. I feel very invigorated, given my experience yesterday at the Conference Board summit on this issue. I'm really looking

forward to getting into it. Thank you for helping us kick off this study well.

Thank you to all my colleagues. Have a good weekend if you're leaving. If not, I will see you tomorrow.

The meeting is adjourned.

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