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Chair

The Honourable Kevin Sorenson

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. This is meeting 88 of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Today we're here in consideration of report 6, Royal Military College of Canada—National Defence, of the fall 2017 reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

I welcome the following witnesses to our meeting. We have the Auditor General of Canada, Mr. Michael Ferguson; and from the Auditor General's office, Gordon Stock, principal.

From the Department of National Defence we have Jody Thomas, deputy minister; and Luc Cassivi, commander of the Canadian Defence Academy.

Following our deliberations on report 6 this afternoon, we're going to move into consideration of draft report 1 on the Phoenix pay problems. That will be the last 15 or 20 minutes of today's meeting, if that's all right.

We welcome you, and we'll begin with our Auditor General. We look forward to your opening comments.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ferguson (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General): Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to discuss my 2017 fall report on the Royal Military College of Canada.

The Royal Military College of Canada is a federally funded university. While other universities can provide the undergraduate education that officers are required to have, only the Royal Military college has the mandate to provide that education in a military environment with a focus on military leadership, ethics and training.

Our audit focused on two areas. First, it focused on whether RMC produced the quality of officers that the Canadian Armed Forces needed at a reasonable cost. Second, it focused on whether National Defence ensured the proper conduct of officer cadets and staff at RMC.

[English]

We concluded that RMC couldn't demonstrate that it produced officers at a reasonable cost, and we concluded that there were weaknesses in military training at RMC. RMC emphasized academic education over military training.

We found that the quality of RMC's academic programs was good but that the operating costs per student to provide that education were the highest in Canada—about twice the average cost for a student at a similarly sized university. Several factors increased the operating cost per student, including the number of programs offered, the salaries of military staff in non-academic roles, and the very low student-to-faculty ratio. We also found that the cost of educating and preparing officer cadets at RMC was almost twice that of producing officer cadets through other officer entry plans.

The higher costs at RMC were partly attributed to higher standards that it sets for its graduates. However, National Defence couldn't demonstrate that these higher standards resulted in officers who were more effective than those from other officer entry plans.

Furthermore, we found that the governance structure of RMC was characterized by confusion and conflict between academic and military visions, and there was no clear mechanism to integrate academic and military objectives.

Finally, we found that RMC didn't provide officer cadets with adequate training and leadership on the proper conduct expected of future officers. RMC depends on its military training staff, academic faculty, and senior officer cadets to work together to enforce rules, teach leadership, and instill military ethics. We found that military staff didn't always have the necessary skills or experience to instruct and guide officer cadets, and that the academic environment didn't consistently support teaching military discipline and values. While RMC took action when serious incidents of misconduct were reported, the number of incidents involving senior officer cadets showed that RMC hadn't prepared them to serve as role models for their peers.

• (1535)

[Translation]

During our audit period, National Defence conducted its own assessment of the culture and training environment at RMC. We found that many of the assessment's observations were relevant, and we included them in our report. However, in our opinion, the impact of the assessment is likely to be limited because more than half of its 79 recommendations did not recommend concrete actions but called for further study.

We made six recommendations to reduce operating costs, improve governance, and strengthen military training. National Defence has responded that it will address each recommendation.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening remarks. We would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

We'll now turn to our deputy minister, Ms. Thomas, please.

Ms. Jody Thomas (Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, and thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting me to speak with you and members of the committee about the Auditor General's sixth report on the Royal Military College of Canada.

[*Translation*]

I'm pleased to have the Commander of the Canadian Defence Academy, Rear-Admiral Luc Cassivi, with me today.

[*English*]

Admiral Cassivi is himself a graduate of Collège militaire royal.

The Canadian Defence Academy is the headquarters responsible for ensuring coherent and integrated professional military education for the Canadian Armed Forces. This includes overseeing not only RMC, but CMR Saint-Jean, the Canadian Forces College, and the Chief Warrant Officer Osside Profession of Arms Institute for non-commissioned member professional military education.

Rear-Admiral Cassivi reports directly to the chief of the defence staff. I have every confidence he will implement the changes necessary to ensure that RMC generates the best possible Canadian Armed Forces officers in the best possible way.

On that note, let me start by thanking the Auditor General for the work undertaken by his office in completing this report.

[*Translation*]

We appreciate his efforts to identify ways RMC could be further improved.

We agree with all six of his recommendations and have a plan to implement every single one.

We are also engaging the officer cadets themselves on this important conversation about the college.

[*English*]

Every year for the last five years, the graduating class has provided valuable feedback through a survey on their RMC experience. We take their feedback seriously and will continue to act on it as needed.

The Royal Military College of Canada, which is Canada's only military university, is a unique institution dedicated to maintaining and transmitting the profession of arms. Its mission is to produce officers with the ethical, mental, physical, and linguistic capabilities to lead with distinction in the Canadian Armed Forces. As a military unit characterized by military rules, regulations, and routines, RMC develops officer cadets' qualities of military leadership and trains them to lead subordinates, plan operations, and enforce regulations.

During the summer, officer cadets do on-the-job training or military training off-campus in areas such as logistics and infantry.

[*Translation*]

It instills officer cadets with the military culture and ethos that are the foundation of the profession of arms.

[*English*]

As a degree-granting university, RMC ensures that officer cadets enter the Canadian Armed Forces with the educational grounding to be effective in an environment where intellectual demands continue to rise. It has a proven history of excellence. Canadian military heroes, like Billy Bishop and Leonard Birchall, have graduated from RMC. So too have astronauts like Marc Garneau and Chris Hadfield Olympic athletes like Sharon Donnelly, and businessmen like Hartland Molson, to name a few.

I'm confident that in years to come, RMC will continue to foster and develop exceptional leaders for our Canadian Armed Forces and for our country.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

But I also recognize that changes are necessary. These changes will ensure the university can continue to meet the needs of its students of the Canadian Armed Forces, and the government and people of Canada.

[*English*]

Even before the Auditor General's audit, work was under way to assess how we could continue to improve aspects of RMC. General Vance ordered a special staff assistance visit, SSAV, to RMC in August 2016. Seventy-nine recommendations stemmed from that report when it was made public in March of last year.

General Vance committed to implementing all of them and added 11 related items for a total of 90 recommendations. In fact, several of the Auditor General's recommendations echo these findings. I am pleased to say that we've made progress on implementing them.

However, the Auditor General has helped us identify other challenges, and we welcome his perspective.

As the Auditor General has noted, many of our planned actions involve additional study. This is because the audit findings raise some key questions that we need to address to ensure that RMC produces high-quality officer cadets at a reasonable cost. What exactly do we expect from RMC and its graduates? How should RMC be similar to other academic institutions? More importantly, how does it need to be different to accomplish what we expect? What is the appropriate cost for that difference? The studies we have planned will help us answer those questions and more effectively implement the Auditor General's recommendations.

The Auditor General recommended that we improve and integrate the military training that officer cadets at RMC receive. We're doing that. This is a recommendation that we also arrived at through the RMC SSAV report.

As a result, we are currently reviewing the full complement of military training activities that officer cadets participate in throughout the year. For us, that means both the academic year which the Auditor General studied and the summer training period. One of the things that make RMC unique is the fact its students conduct highly focused military training with the navy, army, or air force during the summer months.

[Translation]

We consider that training to be an important part of the RMC experience, even though it doesn't happen at RMC.

[English]

As part of their academic study, all officer cadets study RMC's profession-of-arms core curriculum, which provides foundational military knowledge to prepare them for a career in the Canadian Armed Forces.

By undertaking this review, we will ensure that officer cadets' academic studies and military training are better integrated.

The Auditor General recommended that we explore ways to reduce RMC's operating cost per student. We're doing that. We are starting with a review of the cost per student, and we're reviewing the number of academic programs we offer at RMC.

Royal Military College prides itself on providing a rich and stimulating academic curriculum in both official languages that exposes officer cadets to diverse subjects, perspectives, and ideas, and it will continue to do so, perhaps though, with a refined offering.

The Auditor General recommended that we make sure the high standards we expect of RMC's graduation class are, in fact, required, and that they result in better qualified officers at a reasonable cost. We're doing that.

We expect a lot from officers in the Canadian Armed Forces and it is our responsibility to make sure our officer cadets are trained to meet the high demands. We believe RMC's high standards help motivate officer cadets to become the best officers and citizens they can be. We're looking closely at factors like retention and career progression to better understand how meeting those standards translates into career indicators for RMC graduates.

We are examining the cost of putting officer cadets through the regular officer training program and studying it against costs at comparable allied military institutions. So far, we are finding that RMC's costs are on par with, or less than, similar institutions in Australia and the U.S.

The Auditor General recommended that we more clearly define the role of the Commandant as the authority for the day-to-day business of the college and we are doing that. Per the SSAV report, we've already extended the length of the commandant's command tour to three years. That will allow for longer-term planning and ensure better continuity for each cohort of students.

[Translation]

We are also reviewing the academic governance framework.

[English]

We recognize that it is vital for leaders of RMC to clearly understand their roles and functions so that they can model effective and efficient leadership for officer cadets.

The Auditor General recommended that we revisit our criteria for appointing senior officer cadets to leadership positions, and we've done that. RMC exists to train military leaders, and one of the best ways for them to learn is by doing. This is why we view appointments to leadership positions as opportunities to develop. We also recognize the responsibility we have toward these young leaders and those in their charge. We have recently implemented a number of changes in the leadership appointment criteria.

As of January, officer cadet leaders are selected on merit using a clear list of criteria. They each are approved individually by the commandant, and every single one has a dedicated mentor from DND or the Canadian Armed Forces.

The Auditor General also recommended that military training staff should have the proper skills and training to help officer cadets develop their leadership skills. We agree, and we're doing that. Following a similar recommendation from the SSAV report, we have made sure that the military staff who are posted to RMC have the suitable rank and leadership experience to support the officer cadets. We are increasing staff orientation and training to ensure that they are well equipped for the tasks we require of them.

Since RMC was founded in 1874, it has evolved continuously to meet the changing needs of our women and men in uniform.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Today, Royal Military College is a university with a difference.

[English]

It trains some of our future officers absolutely, but it also provides professional development programs for our senior non-commissioned officers. It provides indigenous youth with one-year educational and leadership experience through the Aboriginal Leadership Opportunities Year. At the end of the year, these youth can choose to join the military, or they can return to their communities with new-found leadership skills. It is home to researchers who provide expert advice not only to DND, but to other government departments as well, in the areas of study like cyber, electronic warfare, and space. One of its unique assets is its SLOWPOKE-2 nuclear reactor, a research reactor that has been of benefit to Canada for over 30 years.

RMC is a national institution that trains leaders of tomorrow. We are committed to making sure it offers the best training possible but, we agree, at a reasonable cost. The Auditor General's report and our responses to his recommendations will position RMC to grow into the future as it has been doing for more than 140 years.

Thank you. We look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Arya.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Ms. Thomas, let me first commend RMC, which has excellent world-class knowledge and expertise in certain technologies. However, the Auditor General mentioned the cost of education is twice the average cost for a student at a similar-sized university. I don't need to go anywhere else to find further proof. This is the Auditor General's report, printed back to back in normal fonts and here is your speech, 22 pages. Why this waste? There's one-side printing, and half-page per page printing, and big fonts. We don't need to waste so much.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Thank you. Noted.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arya.

We'll now move to Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): That was a comment.

Thank you for being here this afternoon.

I would like to first open my comments with the following: RMC, as I have always known it, is a very prestigious organization and institution. Actually, in my riding of Sudbury, I know of three young men who are applying, and they were so excited at even the possibility of being accepted at RMC. It just shows the prestige of the institution.

I was looking forward to examining the report from the Auditor General, so I was not necessarily dismayed but a bit concerned. At the end of the day, when we look at the direction that it has taken over the years, and when you look at the fact that civilian universities offer the same programs, and at the end of the day your mandate of military training is not really a core principle, that academics is more important, it begs the general question—and I'm going lead off with that right off the bat—do we need RMC? If the civilian universities can do the training, if the military of Canada can also do training within its own structure, do we need it in 2018? I'd like either the deputy minister or Mr. Cassivi to tell us why we need RMC in 2018.

Ms. Jody Thomas: It's a very interesting question. I think we'll probably both want to have a comment on it.

I do believe that, yes, RMC is an essential and critical part of the infrastructure of developing officers within the Canadian Armed Forces. We are a diverse country, with diverse backgrounds. I think the more routes into the officer levels and the officer cadre in the Canadian Armed Forces, the better. Bringing people in through civilian universities, where they do the civilian ROTP program, through the reserves commissioned from the ranks, but also, equally, a group that goes through RMC, makes for a richer Canadian Armed Forces and a different set of experiences.

It isn't like other universities. It does offer academic programs equal to other universities, and we do focus on academics because it has to have a high academic standard in order to stay an institution. It is accredited like other educational institutions, so the academics do have to be high, but unlike most universities, students leave bilingual. All programs are offered in both official languages. While we do have to rebalance the military aspect of it somewhat per the

Auditor General's recommendations, the amount of military training and discipline, self-discipline, leadership, physical education, and military education that is received at RMC does make it distinct from other universities.

I'll ask Admiral Cassivi to respond.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Rear-Admiral Cassivi, you have the floor.

Rear-Admiral Luc Cassivi (Commander, Canadian Defence Academy, Department of National Defence): Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

To supplement what the deputy minister just said, it's the whole experience of RMC, from arrival at recruit school to graduation, that whole spectrum, that is very unique. The student who comes to RMC will attend classes. It's a must. He or she will learn a second language and will maintain a level of physical fitness that is above the normal standard for the armed forces in order to promote that desire to strive for excellence: to meet not the minimum standard but to strive for a higher standard, because that's what we expect our leaders to be able to inculcate going forward.

It is a unique experience from that perspective, and it is needed. We need diversity of experience and diversity of thought in our leaders moving forward, and the variety of programs that our officers in the armed forces join helps us achieve that.

As far as the balance between military and academic goes, the report, which we very much welcome, focused on the academic year. There is higher attention to academic standards through the academic year to ensure the students meet with success the requirements for graduating with university degrees. There is a careful balance based on the student and on the needs of the program in terms of having clear communication between the academic and the military wings throughout the year to achieve the best result possible. That's one of the things we took in from the report that we'll spend time on.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: All right. You've made your case that there is a need. The follow-up question to that is from the financial side. Basically, it costs twice as much. You have made your case that there is a need for RMC, but it costs twice as much as a regular institution. At the same time, you have a very low student-to-faculty ratio, which is great for the students, for sure, but again, at twice the cost of a regular institution.

How do you respond to that? I didn't see too much of that in your response.

Ms. Jody Thomas: I'm the accounting officer for the department. It is my responsibility to ensure the stewardship of public funds.

You've explained some of the reasons why the costs are higher: the low student-to-faculty ratio, the range of programs offered, and the fact that every program is offered in both official languages. Also, we have both an academic infrastructure and a military infrastructure supporting the students at the college.

We have to look at ways to ensure that we still continue to offer the highest academic standards that we can and that the military support and training are there, but at reduced costs. We are looking at rationalizing the number of programs offered—

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: You mentioned that before, but on the low student-to-faculty ratio, are you looking at possibly increasing the number of students? There were two things in that comment I just made.

One, how many applications do you get? Do you fill all your positions? Is there a waiting list of people who are refused?

Two, I would see RMC as a recruiting tool for the military. Last year, another Auditor General's report we had was about the challenges for the military in recruiting, so what I would see is that if we can increase the students, we would have an ability to recruit more easily, certainly for the prestigious institution that is RMC.

Ms. Jody Thomas: I'll ask the admiral to talk about the number of students coming in, but there is a fixed infrastructure at the college. Everybody lives at the college, so more residences, more cafeterias, and more library space...all of those things do limit the number of students we can take in.

One of the things that we do pride ourselves on—and it is a balance between cost and achievement—is the low student-to-faculty ratio. It does provide for a very privileged education and a very unique education. That is something that we think is important.

• (1555)

RAdm Luc Cassivi: Mr. Chair, in terms of the number of students going through right now, the college is running very much at capacity. There is a variation every year based on students who realize after a few months or after the first semester that it's not for them.

There is some variation in regard to those who realize that maybe the bar is too high for them and who voluntarily withdraw from the program, but overall we are at capacity and, yes, there are more applications than we have room to take in students. There is an option to increase there. It's one of the reasons why we are looking at capacity at CMR Saint-Jean through the ROTP CMC program over the next few years, as was announced in the “Strong, Secure, Engaged” policy. That's one element.

Through some of the studies we're doing in our programs, we're also looking to see if there are ways to bring in more mature students to the college. I don't have capacity in residence, but I have capacity in the classroom. We could look at ways to add in mature students, which would enrich the experience of the students by having with them uniformed folks who have worked in their field, can inspire them moving forward, and bring that mentorship element into the classroom.

As we study forward, we'll be looking at those options.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Rear-Admiral Cassivi.

Mr. Deltell, welcome to the committee. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. You are really making significant progress in French. Perhaps it's because the Royal Military College provides instruction in both official languages that you are honouring its commitment. Congratulations, Mr. Chair.

Madam, gentlemen, Rear-Admiral, welcome to Canada's House of Commons.

My attention is drawn to three themes, starting with the financial question, of course. The report states that this amounts to “\$55,000 per full-time-equivalent student and is the highest per-student cost in the country” and that, in a sense, “this is twice the average cost per student at comparable universities”.

In your report, Mr. Ferguson, you explain, and I quote: “... the number of degree programs offered and the low student-to-faculty ratio are major factors that contributed to this high cost.”

My concern is this. In the course of your analysis, did you discover superfluous and unnecessary expenses? We understand very well that there are many programs and few students. This is a special case. It's not a large-scale university, we understand that. So it's not really surprising that it costs more to study than at an ordinary university. Twice as much is maybe a lot, but my specific question is whether you've seen frivolous, futile, unnecessary spending where some housekeeping could be done, which would preserve existing programs while reducing the costs necessary for the college's activities?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Ferguson.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ferguson: In general, no, it was not about this type of expense. These were simply related to teaching.

We determined the number of students and faculty, as well as the ratio between the two. As a result, we identified different reasons why costs were high for students attending the college, but we did not find any worrying costs related to the type of expenses you mention.

[*English*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Just to be sure, was it part of your study to identify some unacceptable spending instead of the big picture of the college?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ferguson: Our goal was to examine the costs. During this examination, if we had noticed this type of cost,

[English]

we would have reported it, but we didn't come across it. We weren't looking for them, but we didn't find them either.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: That's a main concern. As you know, we are very concerned with spending public money. We do understand, and we do support the military college. We do recognize the fact that this is a special college, this is a special university with special needs, and we recognize it costs more for each and every student compared to other universities; but we just want to be sure that if there is some stupid money spending, buying the same object three times unnecessarily, and that kind of thing.... But I understand from your answer that you didn't pay attention to those details.

• (1600)

Mr. Michael Ferguson: Again, we did an examination of the cost structure of the college. We didn't identify any costs that particularly concerned us as being frivolous. We did try to identify what we felt the factors were for why the cost was higher. Again, the low student-to-teacher ratio was one of those things.

If we had identified frivolous costs in the course of that, we would have reported them.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you so much, Mr. Ferguson.

The other issue I want to address is the fact that the military move from place to place after two or three years. Gentlemen, this is part of your tradition. I know what I'm talking about. I was born and raised and still live in Quebec City, near the Valcartier Garrison,

[Translation]

I know this phenomenon well. I have childhood friends I knew, lost track of and saw again. Their parents were in the army and were then posted here and there.

My question is for you, Rear-Admiral Cassivi, but Ms. Thomas might also be helpful.

With respect to this typically military obligation to change locations every two or three years, do you believe that there should be an exception in the case of the Military College, since it still requires slightly longer follow-up?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: Thank you for your question.

It's interesting to maintain continuity in the mentoring and guidance we do through military training programs, and to ensure that people can continue to advance their careers.

Our current goal is to reduce the number of rotations of less than three years. We really need three years to get as many people as possible from the military wing and to be able to deliberately plan the rotations to maintain continuity that makes sense.

On the commander's side as well, we are keeping a minimum of three years to ensure a degree of program alignment and cohesion between the military and university wings. We want to be able to build a relationship of trust, because the personalities have a lot of effect on the results. For periods longer than this, it would depend on the case and the need for services. It depends on what is happening in the world.

In the past 10 to 15 years, for instance, especially given the operational demands in Afghanistan, this required much faster rotations. There were many operational demands and rotations at the front. So, there will always be some realities that will lead us to make some exceptions to the rate of rotation. However, our interest is to keep personnel rotation to at least three years.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Rear-Admiral, I don't have the honour of wearing your uniform, but I have always been surprised that the rotations are so short in the Canadian Army. I speak to you as a civilian, and not as a military member. I always wondered if it was efficient to make so many changes and rotations. You said that you try to keep personnel for three years, as if the three years were the target to reach. I understand that this is the current rule, but in your opinion and experience—I don't want to put you in an awkward position if your remarks go against those of the staff, so tell me if I'm going too far—do you think extending the rotation period to five years could meet your needs at the Royal Military College of Canada?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: It is an option that we are ready to study. It has advantages, I can't deny it.

On the principle of age, I understand that it would be interesting, but rotations of more than three years would make it more difficult to meet the needs of the service in relation to producing personnel and assigning senior positions. It would also reduce the diversification of the experience.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Rear-Admiral.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you all for your attendance today.

In terms of the report itself from the Auditor General, I am reminded of the famous words of my late friend Jack Layton: "hashtag fail". This is a really bad report.

This military college has one purpose—to turn out educated, professional leaders for our armed forces—and you're failing spectacularly, in my opinion, on your core function.

I want to preface my remarks by saying that I have been to the college during my time as an interim defence critic when we had a leadership race. For the better of a year, I was the critic, and one of the things we did was tour there. Two things struck me. I was impressed by the professionalism of what I saw, but I was also struck by how much money was spent, and I will come to that in a second.

The other thing is that, in my background, I've also been the civilian head of the OPP and responsible for all policing in Ontario. I understand esprit de corps. I support the concept of the Royal Military College. I think it makes all good sense, given our importance as a G7 country, that the armed forces that we have may not be the biggest in the world but they should be the most professional. We can do that. I know that's what we strive for, and in many if not most areas, we achieve it.

I'm not against the concept or the money being spent, but I have to tell you, folks, that if you go into the boardroom, you'll find there are beautiful leather chairs, each one individually embroidered with the coat of arms of the college. It's all beautiful, but we don't have anything like that on Parliament Hill and most places associated with government. That's why I prefaced my remarks. I'm not opposed to the idea that we have an elite training centre. What I am opposed to is spending that kind of money and getting such abysmal results.

I also want to say, Deputy, that I had to reorient the way I was going to present things, because your remarks today really upset me. I'm going to go through a number of them, and I'm going to reflect what you said and then what's in the audit report. It doesn't happen very often, but sometimes we get this disconnect between what the audit finds and what deputies' communications people say they should bring in and brag about. When it's contrary to what the report says, that's unacceptable, and more work needs to be done.

Chair, I would ask if you could let me know when I have one and a half minutes left. I have one important item and I want to definitely make sure I get it in there. I don't want to lose it, because I get like that.

On page 5 of your report, just now, Deputy, you said:

The Royal Military College of Canada, Canada's only military university, is a unique institution dedicated to maintaining and transmitting the profession of arms.

On page 17, 6.73, here's what the Auditor General said:

Overall, we found that the Royal Military College of Canada did not provide Officer Cadets with adequate training in leadership and in the proper conduct expected of future officers.

That's a pretty big disconnect, Deputy, and it's not the only one. That's why I went this way. I was thinking, "Really, you could roll in here with this?"

Page 6 of your remarks—and I want to support my friend, Mr. Arya—is a bit much in terms of the waste, but that was dealt with. You said, Deputy, on page 6:

As a military unit characterized by military rules, regulations and routines, RMC [the Royal Military College] develops officer cadets' qualities of military leadership, and trains them to lead subordinates, plan operations and enforce regulations.

I'll bet the communications department was thrilled with this product.

What does the Auditor General say, as we re-enter reality?

The study also observed that there was no evidence to show that RMC graduates had a stronger grasp of military leadership or proper conduct.

The deputy goes this way. The Auditor General goes that way. It's really shocking. There's more.

●(1605)

In the deputy's remarks today, she said, and I quote, "I am confident that in the years to come RMC will continue to foster"—which suggests something's already being done and now they're going to continue that great stuff—"and develop exceptional leaders for our Canadian Armed Forces and our country."

When we come back to reality, we get this in paragraph 6.57:

National Defence's analysis of career progression among officers found that there was no significant difference between Officer Cadets who graduated from RMC and officers who entered the Canadian Armed Forces through other plans.

●(1610)

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay. Hopefully we'll get a chance to get to some of the other stuff, but you get my drift.

I don't normally have a big problem with action plans, I have a huge problem. I have been to the National Defense University in the U.S. That's where I bought this; bought it, by the way.

In their action plan, Chair, they say, "We will conduct a review and analysis to confirm whether the cost per student of operating RMC is reasonable, compared to similar allied military institutions." No. That is not the comparator. Take a look at what the purpose of the audit was. It wasn't to compare the professionalism coming out of RMC with other allies' results. That was not the study. The study was this, in the focus of the audit found on page 1: "This audit focused on whether the Royal Military College of Canada produced the quality of officers that the Canadian Armed Forces needed at a reasonable cost." The comparator is other training costs in Canada, not other allied military institutions.

If need be, I want to have a major fight on that one, because that's not what this study is about, to compare one elite organization with another elite organization to see how well they're producing. It's an interesting concept, but that's not what this audit was about. This was about how much it costs us to put somebody through RMC versus other processes and about whether we're getting better officers or not. And we are not.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson. You'll have a chance to come back.

Mr. David Christopherson: That was just a warm-up. I'll be back.

The Chair: You'll have a chance to come back.

M. Massé, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Christopherson, for that important preface.

As a result, to go into the details of what Mr. Christopherson has stated, I would like to understand from the figures provided by the Auditor General why the ratio of students to teachers is so different from that of other universities. For example, in your arts program, the ratio is twice as high. We are talking about 10 students per teacher whereas, in Canadian universities, there are 23 students per teacher. In science, it's three times higher or a little more, five students for one teacher, while in other universities there are 16 students for one teacher. In engineering, it's more than three times more. Explain to me why this type of ratio is found at the Royal Military College of Canada?

My question is for Ms. Thomas or Rear-Admiral Cassivi.

[English]

Ms. Jody Thomas: The student-to-teacher ratio at RMC is significantly smaller. We have a very large faculty. The intake of students is smaller every year, as we explained earlier, because of the size of the infrastructure and the training that's given there. We limit the number of students who come in.

One of the things we do pride ourselves on is the quality of education received. That is enhanced by a smaller student-to-teacher ratio. A first-year engineer in their first-year engineering seminar at RMC won't be in a theatre with 200 or 300 other students. It will be very small, with very focused education as a result.

[Translation]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Your instructors must have a strong interest in working at the college, given these ratios. I was lucky to be a teacher in another life, and if I had the number of students mentioned here, I would have been particularly happy. I think I would have had a great career at the Royal Military College.

Would you like to comment, Rear-Admiral Cassivi?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: Yes. There are other factors to consider, such as the fact that all the programs are bilingual and that, sometimes, an instructor teaches in English only and another, in French only. It's based on their availability.

With regard to the programs currently offered at the college, one of the criteria is diversity. We want people to have some freedom so that they can pursue and develop their interests related to their studies. In some of our programs, there are a lot fewer students than there may be elsewhere, which explains the current ratio. As part of the studies that we will be doing on some of our programs, we will determine whether it is necessary to streamline some of them.

You also have to look at the research that is done through these programs, which is a benefit to the Department of Defence. If you do research and professors are employed to carry it out, the fact that they teach at the same time in these programs is also an advantage.

It's not a linear equation. There are several factors to consider.

•(1615)

Mr. Rémi Massé: I understand it well.

The report piqued my curiosity, so I visited the college website to see what programs and courses were offered. I must say that I was a little surprised. There may be a trail to explore.

Some programs on the French language, literature and culture include courses on medieval theatre, classical theatre, life and death of the great heroes of Antiquity and writing under the Old Regime. As for undergraduate programs in the English language, there are also courses on medieval literature. There are also courses on Shakespeare and 18th century satire.

To be perfectly honest, I would like to ask you how much these courses, which may be of interest to a person wanting to study the literature, could be useful and instructive for Royal Military College students wishing to pursue a career as officers in the Canadian Army, Navy or Air Force.

RAdm Luc Cassivi: As I said earlier, we are instituting some intellectual freedom. In fact, we want this university education to

help facilitate problem solving, critical thinking, and so on. Over time, we have embraced greater diversity by accepting that the faculty have some academic freedom.

All programs are approved by the senate of the college and are subject to the rigour of the process, as is done at any other university in the country. Since I'm not a member of the senate, my influence is very limited. However, we take into account research and interests to deliver programs that are more specific and what we need.

Mr. Rémi Massé: As I understand it, the audit took place between 2013 and 2016 or thereabouts. So you had the opportunity, a long time ago, to read the report and the recommendations. You said that you will study the teacher-student ratio and the programs.

Since you were made aware of the report's recommendations, what has National Defence done to find ways to reduce the cost of operations and instruction as well as the overall costs of the college?

In other words, what have you done since the report was tabled to analyze this issue?

The Chair: Ms. Thomas, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Jody Thomas: The report came out in the fall, in the middle of the academic year. We're not changing the curriculum in the middle of the academic year. We're working with defence scientists to look at the best mix of programs within the college. We've said in our action plan that we are doing a lot of studies. We are because we are not going to take precipitous action. We have very clear timelines on when we're going to perform and produce the results, which we'll certainly share with this committee.

The infrastructure in the college is aging. We're going to invest more in the college. While that's upfront cost, it will reduce operating costs over time. We are looking at the mix of academic and military staff on the campus employed by RMC. In some cases, we're putting more people there because we want to ensure more oversight of the cadets. In the short term, that may force up some costs, but we hope to rationalize the number of programs and ensure that we provide a high quality education by perhaps reducing the number of subjects. The opening of *Collège militaire royal* will also reduce some of the impacts on RMC itself.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Thomas.

We'll now move to Madam Gallant, please. You have five minutes. We're in the second round.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You mentioned the SLOWPOKE reactor, that you use it for neutron activation analysis, neutron radioscapy, tomography, gamma spectroscopy, delayed neutron counting, and liquid scintillation counting. That's pretty unique for a university. I know McMaster has one as well. Is any commercial research conducted using the reactor, or is it full to capacity in use by the students?

• (1620)

RAdm Luc Cassivi: We'll take that question and come back to you. I don't have those details exactly on what need there is. There is some civilian research, in co-operation, particularly with law enforcement, in some analysis that goes on for forensic purposes, but I don't have the research details with me.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I just wondered whether or not you were using that as a revenue generator of any type, because I know that's the way McMaster helps to defray the costs. It is costly to keep up to date with the CNSC and all the other safety regulations.

Does having that asset there allow for specialized roles for the officers who graduate in CBRN or any other nuclear-related professions in the armed forces?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: It allows for research that supports some of those activities, so yes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We learned in defence committee this morning that they're having a very difficult time finding people to fill the new role of cybersecurity. Is any attention being focused on providing a curriculum? You're already doing the background checks, which is a requirement for having a new unit doing this type of work. Is there any curriculum dedicated to that, to help the forces generate this new unit that is in the very nascent stages of standing up?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: There is a cyber curriculum offered at Royal Military College. Some is offered to the folks who are selected and who want to become the cyberwarriors of the future. RMC is also co-operating with the Communications Security Establishment on those programs, particularly at the post-graduate level, with some of the research that takes place there.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are you working with the forces in terms of what they need to have to fill the positions in the military? Do you work hand in hand with them, making sure your curriculum is benefiting the forces as a whole?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: Yes, we do, Madam.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Is enrolment at capacity, or is the low student-to-teacher ratio what you desire to have?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: Enrolment at the college is at capacity, based on the infrastructure we have for residency. There is room in class to take more mature students who would not live at the college.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: To the Auditor General, you mentioned that we don't have the quality of conduct expected of officers. Were you referring to a specific type of conduct, or a given instance that may have been in the news? Given there's no other university in Canada that is comparable to RMC, in terms of being able to compare leadership levels, what did you use as a basis of comparison? How were these conclusions arrived at?

Mr. Michael Ferguson: I'll start, and I'll ask Mr. Stock to provide the details. One of the things we looked at, for example, was the number of incidents that were investigated. We found that of the

types of incidents that had been reported, in which there was some accusation against a cadet at the Royal Military College, about half of them involved third- or fourth-year cadets. By that time we would have expected, if some of those leadership traits had started to develop throughout the four years, not to see these cadets involved in those types of incidents.

I'll ask Mr. Stock to provide the details.

Mr. Gordon Stock (Principal, Office of the Auditor General):

The way we did this work was that we looked at completed investigations. Our expectation was that these are members of the Canadian Armed Forces. They have to follow the DND and CF code of values and ethics. They also have to follow the rules of the college. There is a higher expectation of the officer cadets than there would be of people at a regular university. They are also salaried members of the Canadian Armed Forces while they are officer cadets, so there is a much stricter expectation, and we compared our work against that expectation, so that if there was an investigation or if there were serious incidents, then we looked at those and made our conclusions based on them.

From the academic side, we found that there was also a high incidence of plagiarism, close to 60%, as well as other academic issues regarding more senior officer cadets. In that perspective, we expected more of the senior officer cadets already there. They are a role model for the more junior officer cadets, and we did not see that they were performing in that way.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Mr. Chen, please.

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I read this report and it was quite shocking to see some of the numbers that came out, and I want to first say a big thank you to the Auditor General and his team for doing this work. Thank you also to the department for being here today.

Some of the numbers I saw in the report were \$55,000 per student, full-time equivalent, as the annual cost of education. When I looked at the operating expenses, I saw that as with many educational institutions, staffing is by far the largest cost.

When I looked at the responses from the department with respect to the AG's recommendations, I saw, when looking at recommendation 6.44 in the AG report, that "National Defence should explore ways to reduce the Royal Military College of Canada's operating cost per student and consider reducing the number of programs offered". To me, there's the matter of the programs offered, but there's also the matter of how much money you're spending to offer those programs, and if staffing is by far your largest expenditure, then you have to look there.

One of the numbers from the report with respect to science is a ratio of five students to one professor. In engineering, it's seven students to one professor. I've been to university, and I can tell you, first year, you walk into a science class and there are 200 students and one professor. I understand that you can have better learning when you have a lower pupil-to-professor ratio, but there comes a point where it just doesn't make sense. I'm pretty sure you can have a few more students for that professor and it won't make any difference in the level of learning for the students with that professor.

I know you're doing a number of reports and you're comparing the cost per pupil with allied educational institutions. Are you going to actually look at the positions you are hiring and whether or not they are necessary? Are you going to look at how much they're being paid and whether that salary is appropriate to the amount of work they do? If you have a professor with five students, that's a lot less marking than a professor would have in a school that has 100 or 200 students. What do you plan to look at in your analysis?

Ms. Jody Thomas: There are a number of elements to your question. First of all, we'll take the salary of the staff. Those are public servants and their salaries are set by the Treasury Board based on their academic standards, qualifications, how they publish papers, and so on, like other academic positions in the public service. So I don't have specific control over their salary, and it's not based on their student ratio.

Mr. Shaun Chen: What about the non-academic staff, because in the Auditor General's report it was identified that the salaries of the non-academic staff was an issue?

• (1630)

Ms. Jody Thomas: Again, for the majority of the non-academic staff, if they're civilians, they're public servants and that is a public servant's salary or they're military, so of course, they're paid according to their rank. We can look at the number of staff and that's one of the things we will do over the course of the year.

Reducing the number of programs offered will help reduce the cost. The two programs you cite with a 5:1 and a 7:1 ratio are very specific science and engineering courses that we're offering in French at RMC. It is anticipated that, in the future, le Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean will offer those programs, so that we will have programs in French with bigger classes at CMR and programs in English with bigger classes at RMC. Again, that will increase the student ratio—not to anything unreasonable—and at a lower cost.

Yes, 7:1 is a very low student-to-professor ratio. We don't have an objective standard of what is reasonable. Certainly 200 is too high and we won't ever be at that point, but we take the point that we need to reduce the number of courses, so that there are more students in any one course. We have to look at the number of non-academic staff hired by the college and we have to look at the military staff.

The costs for the infrastructure are fixed costs.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chen, thank you.

Monsieur Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good afternoon, gentlemen, madam, Rear-Admiral.

I welcome the fact that my colleague Mr. Massé asked a very relevant question about the courses offered. My Conservative instinct bristled a little when I knew what classes they were.

On this subject, I would like to ask Rear-Admiral Cassivi and Ms. Thomas some questions.

Another item surprised me a little when I read the Auditor General's report, and it appears in paragraph 6.92:

Recommendation—The Royal Military College of Canada should ensure that before senior Officer Cadets are appointed to leadership positions, they demonstrate high standards of conduct and ethical behaviour.

Honestly, if there was one place where I thought that discipline was in order, it was at the Royal Military College of Canada. As noted, there was no response to this recommendation.

Rear-Admiral Cassivi, I would like to hear your comments on this.

RAdm Luc Cassivi: Thank you for this excellent question.

Yes, some positions have been granted based on merit in the past. That's the predominant method. However, we must also challenge our cadets. They must all be in command positions so that we can evaluate their behaviour, guide them and mentor them during this time. Otherwise, they will not have the experience and learning needed so that we can assess their leadership abilities at the end of the program. It's a balance.

People need to be trained for the highest positions, but for other positions as well. It's about giving the right challenges to the right people.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I understand, Rear-Admiral, but we are not talking here about the development of talents. We all know people who did exceptionally well in their studies but did not acquire the necessary skills to practise their profession. We are not talking about skills here, but about behaviour. In his report, the Auditor General talks about proper conduct and ethical behaviour. We are not trying to see whether the person is a good leader or not. We are talking about proper behaviour.

How can you tolerate that, Rear-Admiral?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: Students who are assigned to a command post will have a record of good behaviour. That is one of the criteria we established since the report was published.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: The Auditor General concludes that that is not at all the case currently at the Royal Military College.

RAdm Luc Cassivi: That was the case last summer. We made these changes after the investigation in order to ensure that these situations will not reoccur.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: We are talking about a few months of experience. What makes you think that the situation is resolved?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: I did not say it was resolved; I said that the selection process was settled. Each session, when senior officer-cadets are replaced, we will see whether there were mistakes. We will learn from these mistakes and correct the process as we were asked to do.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: In conclusion, we simply want to say that if there is one place in Canada where we expect that order, discipline, proper behaviour and ethics will be respected, naturally, it is the Canadian Armed Forces.

• (1635)

RAdm Luc Cassivi: Absolutely.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: You honour 150 years of history and tradition admirably, and we want this to continue for you. This, of course, requires good behaviour and a sense of ethics, and that is the kind of behaviour we expect from those who have the honour of wearing our uniform and defending our country, sometimes on the international stage.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deltell.

We have a couple of minutes left, and maybe I'll ask a couple of questions.

As we prepare our study, every once in a while there will come a question and we may want some clarification. The OAG reported that there was some discord between the military leadership and the academic leaders. I think you've already talked about part of the problem, in that the military was transferring out, rotating out, some of those who would be in instructor positions.

I have two questions. What is the strategy to bring in more academic leaders from the military? Is there a balance there? You want academia, and you also want those with a lot of military experience or only military experience. What's the balance that you're looking for?

The other question is dealing with the process of a young cadet coming up through the Royal Military College. What is the tuition? How does this work? Is their tuition paid for? Do they have partial tuition? Do they receive a salary if they are in the military, or as a cadet? What is the process there? How much training do some of these cadets have already before they come to the college, and are there those who sign up to receive the free education and have not had any cadet training in the past?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I'll maybe start with the second question and ask Admiral Cassivi to talk about the on-campus dynamics.

Young people—people of any age—can apply to Royal Military College as a way to be recruited into the Canadian Armed Forces and obtain an education. There are multiple ways of doing that. You can do that as a direct entry officer after you've finished your education. You can do it as a civilian university student through the civilian ROTP, and then there's this process. When students, young persons, are accepted into RMC, they are accepted both academically into the college and as members of the Canadian Armed Forces. They are assigned the rank of officer cadet. They attend the college for four years. In the summer, between their academic years, they go on job-specific training, whether it's basic officer training or trade-classification specific training, environment-specific training—army, navy, air force. When they leave the college, they have a university degree, they are commissioned into the Canadian Armed Forces, and they are then ready to begin training to become an officer in the forces.

The Chair: Is there a certain period of time that they must stay in the military? What is that period?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: It's about eight years. I'd have to double-check that.

The Chair: Thank you.

RAdm Luc Cassivi: It was nine in my time, but programs do change slightly.

As far as your question is concerned, Mr. Chair, as it relates to the balance and the academic versus the military culture going there, we need a balance. We do have some military professors on the faculty. The faculty delivers the academic program. It operates in the tradition and framework of usual universities, with academic freedom, a senate, and a structure that supports it. That is mainly largely populated by civilian university teachers with a small number of military faculty.

The military training wing that starts up with the commander as the head of the unit is there to provide the framework, the coaching, the mentoring, and the coordination of activities for all the other elements in ensuring that the leadership development goes on par. We need the balance of the two. There will always be tension. It's like any organization; there are cultures and subcultures. I'm a submariner. Surface fleet officers and submariners are different cultures. Army, navy, air force are different cultures. Fighter pilots and helicopter pilots are different cultures. There are always some tensions. Academic...needs more focus at this point for a whole bunch of valid reasons, or we need to do this military activity for a whole bunch of valid reasons, and there needs to be coordination. We'll always have folks who are focused on what they do, and there are some university teachers who believe that RMC is just any other university, and they're there to teach as if they were in any other university.

Through the process of modernization, we bring our military staff in and we orient them. We have opened the orientation period to the faculty members, too, to reassert why RMC is different from other universities, and in order for them to understand better what we're trying to achieve for the cadets through the training year. That helps reduce the tension. We're hoping through time that will help reduce the tension between the two.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Massé.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will follow up on the questions I asked earlier.

In his report, the Auditor General pointed out that some years, in some programs, particularly the French studies program and the English literature program, there had only been one or two graduates. This probably indicates that certain programs need to be reviewed.

I understand the challenge. The college wants to offer a complete range of programs. As I mentioned earlier, I was a teacher as well as the director of a college in Gaspé, where I am from. In Gaspé, the challenge is to get enough students into the programs. There are many CEGEPs, in Rimouski, Matane, Quebec and Montreal. It's important to offer general programs that attract students. Keeping that up is important. Since the number of students is declining, the challenge is to not abolish programs, because that makes an institution somewhat less attractive.

So, three to five colleges got together and used new technologies to continue to offer their programs. This was done through distance teaching. These tools allow students, some of whom are in other cities and in certain cases at home, to benefit from a range of programs that are important to them. These can be college level programs in literature, languages, nature sciences or the humanities, for example.

Perhaps you could see whether you could use new technologies to offer certain programs in co-operation with the other colleges, so as to reduce costs.

Have these avenues been explored by the Royal Military College of Canada?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: Thank you for your question.

These are indeed avenues we are exploring. I am from Gaspé myself. I lived in Gaspé and in Carleton-sur-Mer in the detachment.

Mr. Rémi Massé: Oh, really?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: Yes, and those avenues are important. Some of this new technology is used in co-operation with other organizations, such as the Royal Military College St-Jean, which collaborates on quite a large scale with the Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu CEGEP.

Mr. Rémi Massé: I see.

RAdm Luc Cassivi: As for accreditation, we want to make sure that if people leave the college, they can transition easily and obtain their CEGEP diploma, for instance. Professors from both campuses also collaborate. We also work with Queen's University, in Kingston. The networks are growing. We have to consider these possibilities. That is one of the tools we can access over time.

Moreover, students have changed. The report does not address that, but this concerns us from a pedagogical standpoint. Many civilian universities are also looking at this. We are faced with a new generation of students. Being connected has always been a part of their lives. They learn in different ways, and their social relationships are different. Their expectations are different. We consider that as well. We may have to modernize our teaching, and the way in which we offer programs.

• (1645)

Mr. Rémi Massé: Out of curiosity, I'd like to know what happens to students who do not obtain their diploma. I suppose that they have the opportunity of pursuing a military career. What is the game plan for the students who don't graduate from the college?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: If they do not obtain their diploma, what career management options do they have? They can leave the college. In that case, depending on the reasons why they did not

obtain their diploma, they may have to reimburse part of the tuition fees for the time they were in college.

Otherwise, they can become non-commissioned military, in a trade of their choice, on condition that space be available in that area. They can also join the reserve force.

If they complete their basic officer's training, which ends at the end of the second summer, they have more options. If they don't complete their basic military qualification, then the situation is somewhat more difficult.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson, please, you have five minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks very much, Chair.

To pick up where I left off and to give the deputy an opportunity to respond, as you can see, in my opinion, the remarks were getting at the heart of the report and whether you're serious about making changes. To me, your remarks, Deputy, through you, Chair, at best are an unintended false positive impression. They've left that. At worst, they were a deliberate attempt to spin this committee, in which case I would worry about the seriousness of the commitment to make change.

Deputy, I now give you an opportunity to defend yourself and your remarks and anything else that you wish to say.

Ms. Jody Thomas: I apologize, Mr. Christopherson, that you thought I was trying to spin or mislead this committee. That's absolutely not my intent. It's not how I manage.

There are 90 recommendations out of the SSAV report that the CDS initiated before the Auditor General had begun his report, because we knew there was a problem at the Royal Military College. We agreed with every recommendation that the auditor made, and we are pursuing all of the recommendations. The SSAV report is about 50% complete now in terms of completing the actions, and we will do a follow-up on the SSAV and, of course, the Auditor General and this committee will be following his report very carefully.

Some of them will take time. Some of them are structural changes to the college. Some of them are structural changes to how we provide the education in the college. Some of the things we need to do will require investment in the college, because the infrastructure is not in good shape. That wasn't what they studied during the audit, but it is something we are responsible for ensuring we maintain.

The changes to the expectations of the cadets are well under way. I think this is a cyclical issue, and the education and the development of officers in the Canadian Armed Forces is something that requires constant attention. We have to evolve as the student body evolves, and we have to change our approach as the expectations of society change.

In this case, we've swung too far to the academic side of the house, and we probably reduced our focus on the military aspects. That is what Admiral Cassivi has been charged with examining, and as you've heard, he is very active in doing that.

I think there are some things in terms of the student behaviour, the officer cadet behaviour, that we need to consider. They're students, they're young, and they make mistakes. We would rather they make their mistakes at the college than on the battlefield, and they have opportunity to make mistakes. It is good that the Auditor General has pointed out to us some of the failings and perhaps how we dealt with them, but he also noted that when there was a serious transgression, it was dealt with immediately.

The health and welfare of the cadets at RMC are amongst the chief of the defence staff's and my greatest priority. He's changed the structure of the oversight of the college in order to ensure that he has a direct line of sight in, which is why it now reports through Admiral Cassivi, and Admiral Cassivi reports directly to him. It's why he initiated the SSAV report.

I don't think that we're spinning. I think there are changes that need to be made, but I will disagree with your characterization of the performance as being abysmal. I think there are ways we can improve how we show value for money, but I can't guarantee to you that the cost of educating a cadet at RMC will equal the cost at a civilian university. It is a different structure. It has different outputs. We have to prove those outputs have value and that we get good value from them.

• (1650)

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Admiral Cassivi wanted to—

Mr. David Christopherson: No, I'm good, thank you. I'm tight on time. If you tell me I have lots, I'll gladly hear from him.

The Chair: You're a minute over, and I'll give you some more time.

Mr. David Christopherson: Then I'll gladly hear from the admiral.

RAdm Luc Cassivi: To be clear, the chief of the defence staff gave me clear direction. My mandate is to deliver results on these reports, and he told me I would be there for three years at least to make good on that, and you'll see the issuance of these reports on that. He's reduced my scope of responsibility so that, one, I can focus solely on professional military education and the profession of arms; and two, I can report to the highest management body of the chain of command, which is the armed forces council.

I have a direct link to the decision-makers to ensure that we can bring the changes required to deliver on these reports.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair. That's helpful. I appreciate that.

Deputy, thank you very much. That was the kind of answer I was looking for, and we can disagree.

To your last point, I didn't expect that it would be the same cost to turn out world-class elite professional military leaders, the same way a university would, and give them a degree at the same time. That's not practical. However, when we're spending that much more money and not getting the value added, then I bring your attention to the conclusion that the Auditor General came to, and this should be your biggest worry, in my humble opinion. I'll quote from page 23:

We concluded that the Royal Military College of Canada could not demonstrate that it produced officers at a reasonable cost, and we concluded that there were weaknesses in military training.

I'll jump ahead to the last paragraph:

the Royal Military College of Canada risks becoming just another university and not providing the Canadian Armed Forces with the leaders it requires.

Again, yes, I think we accept that it's going to cost a little more money to have that level of professionalism, but to spend that much more, twice almost, and not deliver the type of officers that the mandate spells out is a failure, and in my opinion, an abysmal one.

I see you're anxious to get to the mike; fine. I'll give you a question that you can focus on for that. I'm going to the Auditor General next, so I'll give you that heads-up.

When will we start to see measurable results?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson. Next or now? You're going to the Auditor General now, or after Ms. Thomas?

Mr. David Christopherson: That's to the deputy. I have just one quick question to the Auditor General, and then I'm done.

The Chair: Ms. Thomas.

Ms. Jody Thomas: I believe we produce high-quality officers. I don't just think, I know, the officers in the Canadian Armed Forces are extraordinarily high quality, demonstrating that there's value for money and that we are getting a different quality of officer out of RMC. That work has begun. It starts now. It will be ongoing. It's not something we're going to take our eye off at all.

That we did not demonstrate it doesn't mean necessarily that we have not done it. The work ahead of us is our performance measures to be able to prove that we are producing high-quality officers, an officer cadre that is worthy of this kind of investment. Demonstrating it, I do believe we produce very high-quality officers who have the highest ethics, professional training, and academic standards.

Mr. David Christopherson: Nobody is questioning the calibre of our current officers. The point is that they're not any better going through that expensive system than if they go through the alternate systems.

Thank you, Chair, for the indulgence. I do appreciate it.

I have one last question, to the Auditor General.

Sir, you may or may not have had a chance to see the action plan, but reviewing the government responses and your interaction with them, are you satisfied at this point that the department has a grip on this and that they're going in the right direction to get the types of outcomes that the deputy has just outlined and that we do agree is our desired outcome?

• (1655)

Mr. Michael Ferguson: As you well know, it really takes an audit for us to give an opinion on something, and the question is about something that we haven't audited.

What I will say, though, is that there is the report, the special staff assistance visit report, the SSAV report with the 79 recommendations, plus the other 11, and there is our report. What we have seen and what we said in our report was that there have been other studies of the Royal Military College before that identified many of the same types of issues that either we found or the SSAV report found.

What I see it as right now is an opportunity for National Defence and the Royal Military College to use both the SSAV report and our report to put together a real action plan. The SSAV report, again, identified a number of places that needed more study, which concerned us. We can accept that there are places that need more study, but what we would want to see is that in terms of whatever concrete actions have been identified for the SSAV report, the ones that come out of the further study will be added; that there will be a comprehensive inventory of all the concrete actions that come out of the SSAV report, out of our report, and out of the further studies, so that then people can see what is going to be done.

I see that really as the opportunity. We have heard from the witnesses a desire to put in place and act on their action plan, and the discussion today has impressed on everybody the need to actually do that.

This is a starting point. We'll have to wait and see what actions actually happen, but I'll give them the benefit of the doubt that this is going to be the right starting point.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have one quick question for Ms. Thomas, and then Ms. Gallant will have the final question of the day.

You speak of training and putting out quality, officer-type graduates. Are you attracting elite students, the cream of the crop? We say we expect elite at one end, but what about the other end? Are we getting students who want a free education as their number one reason for coming? Are we getting students who want military training, as in their whole life they've wanted to be in the military, they've wanted to be an elite officer. Is that who we are attracting, or are we attracting those who say their dad or mom or whoever went through military training and they guess they're on the same road. Do we need to do a better job in recruiting elite students, for example, to the Royal Military College?

Ms. Jody Thomas: The academic and social expectations of the individuals who are applying are at the highest standard in the province and across the country. The young people we are attracting to RMC, have high academic averages, are active in sports, are volunteering in their community, and have good social awareness. The recruits we get are quite extraordinary and it's always been like this for RMC.

As I was telling the Auditor General earlier, I remember when I was entering university, women were not allowed to go to RMC. Two years later, they were. The standards for the people who were applying then, Ontario scholars as an example, are the same today. We attract the best of the best. It's not people who just want a free ride.

The program is too difficult. Between the academic, athletic, leadership expectations, and just the rigour of military life, nobody is

going to come to the college for a free education when you have to get up every morning to do PT, get dressed, go to class, put on a uniform and march around the campus, and expect you have required sports every afternoon and required study time. That structure doesn't attract people who are just looking for easy and free.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Gallant, please, it's your turn.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If you were charging tuition, what would the dollar amount be, and would it be graduated for the subsequent years?

Ms. Jody Thomas: The cost per student is \$55,000. We've not worked out—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: All right. Civilians with no intention of joining the military are not even offered an opportunity, okay. There are no—

RAdm Luc Cassivi: If I may, there are opportunities for civilians to take courses. They do a lot in distance learning and through other programs, particularly on the post-grad side. I'd have to check. I don't have the figures for tuition. I haven't done the reimbursement of tuition for someone recently, so the figures are not in my head. But if civilians or students who desire to leave before graduation take a course, they would reimburse a set tuition fee.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are there post-grad studies that civilians can take and get a Ph.D. there?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Yes, there are master's and Ph.D. programs at RMC, but we don't charge tuition to anybody who enters the four-year program. They go through as a cadet and enter the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What is the tuition for the master's and Ph.D. students?

Ms. Jody Thomas: We'll get you those figures.

RAdm Luc Cassivi: The majority of students are military. A master's degree like the Master of Defence Studies is an RMC degree, it's offered through the Canadian Forces College in Toronto, so that matches up with our mid-grade major, like colonel, professional military education program. Other master's degrees are offered. There are sponsored post-grad for military officers, for example, in the cyber program or for advanced engineering to support important work with assistant deputy minister materiel or under a specialist program that we need through the forces.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Would the master's and Ph.D. also be available to foreign students?

RAdm Luc Cassivi: We don't have many foreign students at the military college. We have a foreign program where students operate out of RMC Saint-Jean because of capacity, and they do most of their distance learning program through RMC. We have an exchange program of one semester with a few military academies around the world for some of the students. Some semesters, we have a student from Annapolis at RMC, and one of our students is in Annapolis for a semester.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you. Those are all my questions.

The Chair: Thank you, committee, and thanks to those who have been subbing in on our committee today. I want to thank Deputy Minister Thomas, our Auditor General and his staff, Mr. Stock, and Mr. Cassivi for being here and answering our questions. We wish you all the best as you meet some of the recommendations you're working on.

If you leave here today and all of a sudden you think that you should have answered a question differently, please get back to us with some of the answers. As you were speaking, we did go on the website, and some of the costs for some of those programs are on the

website. However, if you would still provide us with a schedule of those costs, we would very much appreciate it.

We will just allow you time to make your exit. Thanks again for attending. We will have the committee stick around as we have another matter of business we want to deal with.

We'll suspend for about two minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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