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**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on  
Resources**

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Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

## **RESOURCE COMMITTEE**

Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills

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Chair: Brian Warr, MHA

Vice-Chair: Jordan Brown, MHA

Members: Pleaman Forsey, MHA  
Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA  
Craig Pardy, MHA  
Paul Pike, MHA  
Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Kimberley Hammond

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Appearing:

### **Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills**

Hon. Gerry Byrne, MHA, Minister

Debbie Dunphy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services and Policy

Steve French, Departmental Controller

Patricia Hearn, Deputy Minister

Walt Mavin, Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment and Labour Market Development

Katie Norman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Immigration and Population Growth

Jeremy Reynolds, Executive Assistant

John Tompkins, Director of Communications

### **Also Present**

Hon. Pam Parsons, MHA, Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality

Hon. Sarah Stoodley, MHA, Minister of Digital Government and Service NL

James Dinn, MHA

Scott Reid, MHA

Chris Tibbs, MHA

Perry Trimper, MHA

Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party

Brad Russell, Director of Digital Strategy, Official Opposition Office

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Chris Tibbs, MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, substitutes for Pleaman Forsey, MHA for Exploits.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Pam Parsons, MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Sarah Stoodley, MHA for Mount Scio, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Scott Reid, MHA for St. George's - Humber, substitutes for Paul Pike, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank for a portion of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, James Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre, substitutes for Jordan Brown, MHA for Labrador West.

The Committee met at 9:05 a.m. in the Assembly Chamber.

**CHAIR (Warr):** Order, please!

Good morning. It's 9:05 and we'll call the meeting to order.

Before we get started, I'll introduce myself. My name is Brian Warr, MHA for Baie Verte - Green Bay, and it's my pleasure to chair your Estimates meeting this morning.

Before we get into anything I just want to announce the substitutions: Substituting for the Committee Member for Placentia - St. Mary's is the MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, MHA Parsons; substituting for the Member for Mount Pearl North is the MHA for Mount Scio, MHA Stoodley; substituting for Burin - Grand Bank is the MHA for St. George's - Humber, MHA Reid; substituting for the MHA for Exploits is the MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, MHA Tibbs; and substituting for the Member for Labrador West is the Member for St. John's Centre, MHA Dinn.

I'm looking for a mover from the Committee, we need to adopt the previous minutes.

MHA Parsons.

Seconder?

MHA Reid.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

**CHAIR:** I did check with the Members from the Committee, so we're fine with – we have an independent Member and we will offer some time for that Member to ask questions as well. All agreed?

Thank you.

Resume business, we're here this morning to consider the Estimates of the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills. I'll ask for introductions for you to introduce yourself to the Committee and then I'll pass it over for the department to do the same. So if we could start.

Your tally light is on, go right ahead, Sir.

**B. RUSSELL:** Brad Russell, Director of Digital Strategy with the Office of the Official Opposition.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**C. TIBBS:** Chris Tibbs, MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**J. DINN:** Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

**P. TRIMPER:** Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

**S. FLEMING:** Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party caucus.

**S. REID:** Scott Reid, MHA, St. George's - Humber.

**C. PARDY:** Craig Pardy, District of Bonavista.

**P. PARSONS:** Pam Parsons, MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

**S. STOODLEY:** Sarah Stoodley, MHA for Mount Scio.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

If I could start with you, Minister.

**G. BYRNE:** Sure. Gerry Byrne, Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, and MHA for Corner Brook.

**W. MAVIN:** Walt Mavin, ADM of Employment and Labour Market Development.

**K. NORMAN:** Katie Norman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Immigration and Population Growth.

**J. TOMPKINS:** John Tompkins, Director of Communications.

**D. DUNPHY:** Debbie Dunphy, Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services and Policy.

**P. HEARN:** Patricia Hearn, Deputy Minister.

**S. FRENCH:** Steve French, Departmental Comptroller.

**J. REYNOLDS:** Jeremy Reynolds, Executive Assistant to the minister.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Just as a reminder, if you have an opportunity to speak and you feel comfortable lowering your mask, that's fine as well.

Anyway, I will ask the Clerk to call the first subheads, please.

**CLERK (Hammond):** 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive carry?

Minister some opening remarks, please.

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all Committee Members and others in support.

I want to begin by expressing our sincere regrets, condolences and empathies on behalf of this Legislature – I'm confident in saying that – but on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to the Muslim community of Canada and to Newfoundland and Labrador. Just before my entry into the Chamber, I had an opportunity to speak with the president of the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador and to express that directly to the community at large.

As we all know, a very serious event recently happened in Hamilton, Ontario, which must cause us all pause and reflection on the causes of such an event, but more importantly how to combat. Islamophobia is very alive and well and it must be eradicated. Speaking with the president of the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, he gave me great confidence that we have a wonderful partner to direct energies in that effort.

The Muslim community of Newfoundland and Labrador are hurting right now and they continue to hurt following the mass devastation, the attacks in Quebec and this now is a follow-up consequence or it's a follow-up action. It is just simply deemed unacceptable and I'm confident that we'll be speaking further to this on the floor of this Legislature, but even just as importantly, in our living rooms, our kitchens, in our mosques, in our synagogues, in our churches and everywhere Newfoundlanders and Labradorians gather to have conversations about serious issues. This is, indeed, a serious issue.

With that said, on behalf of each and every one of us, and on my own personal behalf, I want to extend to the Muslim community of Newfoundland and Labrador and to Canada at large: We are with you. Our thoughts and our prayers are with you. We're with the families of the victims of an atrocious attack and we will act in concert and common cause to combat such attacks.

With that said, Mr. Chair, it echoes well for what we need to talk about in this Legislature, which are issues around multiculturalism, immigration, resettlement and welcoming new Canadians. This is what this department is really all about now, it is more focused than every before. We've had a series of structural changes,

which, I think, are very much appropriate and better to be able to deal with population growth, to arrest population decline and to advance population growth in our province, as we know we are a shrinking population due to demographics.

We are the only province in Canada forecasted to decline in population over the next series of years, if not decades. So the Premier has directed, from a machinery point of view and from a policy point of view and from a resource point of view, to add additional resources and capacity to be able to tackle that challenge.

This is really what the department has become focused on, in addition to a very significant, ongoing, substantive portfolio of skills development initiatives for those who face labour market difficulties and who wish to make a transition into new careers or to adapt new skills and new opportunities.

With that said, I am here with my Deputy Minister Patricia Hearn. Patricia was handpicked for this particular job. She comes with impeccable credentials in federal-provincial relationships. She is a collaborator and she gets stuff done. So I'm very delighted to have Patricia Hearn serving as our deputy minister in this new, restructured, refocused department, along with an incredible executive team, headed by Walt Mavin in Workforce Development and skills, Katie Norman in Immigration and Population Growth and Debbie Dunphy keeping us all together and structured and performing to top efficiency in Corporate Services.

With that said, we have a good group of directors and managers that I feel are some of the best that I have ever had the opportunity to work with in my 26-year career in government and public service.

With that said, we can begin a discussion, Mr. Chair, on the substance of the Estimates, but feel free to talk about any issues on policy that you would. I welcome all.

I will be able to deliver the briefing books. I usually like to distribute them prior to the discussion but I walked away without them. I was on an important telephone call and I walked

away without them this time but you will get them immediately after the Estimates.

The only thing I would say, there is one discrepancy within the book itself for \$3,200. It's found in a particular subheading under Executive and Support Services, 1.2.03, I believe it is. There was an omission of a \$3,200 expenditure which will be – it was just caught too late before the publication of the Estimates document, but it will obviously appear in the Public Accounts in October or thereabouts. It was just simply an oversight of one particular transaction. So, with that said, the book, as we understand it and believe it to be, is fair, complete and accurate to all other measures.

With that said, Mr. Chair, I'm ready to begin.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

1.1.01 to 1.2.03.

MHA Tibbs.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I share the minister's sentiments about the horrible tragedy that came about yesterday in our country. Of course, we are all about inclusion in Canada and in Newfoundland and Labrador as well. I'm sure the minister will be proud of my Member's statement I have coming up this afternoon.

Is it okay if I just run over a couple of questions beforehand, before we get into the –?

**G. BYRNE:** (Inaudible.)

**C. TIBBS:** Perfect, thank you very much.

We just discussed your briefing binder, and I appreciate that.

Minister, are you still applying zero-based budgeting?

**G. BYRNE:** Zero-based budgeting is still in effect, whether it be attrition targets or other measures. But we're always looking for good fiscal efficiencies and reforms.

If there are any specific questions, I'm sure that Madam Dunphy would be able to answer any specific questions you may have.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Are there any errors in the published Estimates book, besides the one we just talked about?

**G. BYRNE:** None that we are aware of.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Is the attrition plan still being followed? If so, what are the changes for the last year and this year, and how is it being measured?

**G. BYRNE:** The answer to the first part of the question is yes, and I'll ask Madam Dunphy to respond to the ongoing pursuit of that objective.

**D. DUNPHY:** Mr. Tibbs, yes, we continue to review all vacant positions when the recruitment exercise begins to see if there is an opportunity for attrition. As you're aware, we just went through a significant restructuring, but I can tell you that in the fiscal year '20-'21 we did eliminate four long-term vacancies as part of our attrition plan. There were also a couple of contractual positions that were eliminated, but those were related to functions that have transferred out of the department. Going forward, we do continue to look at our positions and have identified one or two for the coming fiscal year.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Ma'am.

How many people are employed in the department?

**D. DUNPHY:** Right now, as of June 8, we have 336 positions and approximately 39 vacancies at this time.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Ma'am.

How many retirements have occurred in the past year?

**D. DUNPHY:** Twenty-four.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Ma'am.

How many vacancies are not filled in the department?

**D. DUNPHY:** Thirty-nine.

**C. TIBBS:** Thirty-nine, we just said that.

Thank you, Ma'am.

Have any positions been eliminated, and what are they?

**D. DUNPHY:** So in the last fiscal year we eliminated eight. There were four contractual, one related to the public post-secondary review when it was in our department – education review. There was an executive support position that was a contract with an outside agency that we're being reimbursed for. That arrangement has now ended, so that was eliminated. We had one position at the Workers' Compensation Review Division and a temporary contractual position at the Labour Relations Board. So, again, they were ones that were now moved out. Then there were four long-term vacancies. They were an information management technician, a clerk typist III, a program development specialist and a word processing operator.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Ma'am.

How many layoffs have occurred in the department over the last year?

**D. DUNPHY:** None that I'm aware.

**C. TIBBS:** Excellent, thank you, Ma'am.

How many new hires took place in the last year?

**D. DUNPHY:** That I do not know. I can get that for you.

**C. TIBBS:** Sure, I'd appreciate it.

How many contractual and short-term employees are in the department?

**D. DUNPHY:** So currently we have one contractual position and we have four short-term temporary employment employees.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Ma'am.

And how many employees are working from home, versus government office right now?

**D. DUNPHY:** So over the past year we were – Minister, if you'd like me to continue, sorry?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, go ahead. You are a wealth of knowledge.

**D. DUNPHY:** Thank you.

So over the past year we were very fortunate that we were able to obtain laptops for the majority of staff. So when we locked down in February past we were very fortunate in that we had, I'd say, close to 95 per cent of people working from home. Since the election in the new fiscal year we've gradually been bringing back some staff like director level and that sort of thing and staff are dropping in as needed for various functions.

But for the most part, right now, the majority of our staff are still working from home.

**C. TIBBS:** Great, thank you.

Is the department investigating a permanent-work-from-home plan for some of these people?

**D. DUNPHY:** Right now, there is some discussion with the employer in general with the release of the *Together.Again.* plan. We are working with the folks in Treasury Board Secretariat to determine the appropriate way to address and we will certainly follow any guidance that they provide.

**C. TIBBS:** It's a moving target, I'm sure.

**D. DUNPHY:** Yes.

**C. TIBBS:** Did your department receive any funds from the contingency fund? If so, how much and what was it for?

**D. DUNPHY:** The main money – the only money, to my knowledge – that we received from the contingency fund related to the administration of the Essential Worker Support Program, and that was federal funding. We received approximately \$50,000 from the contingency fund in order to administer that program. Again, that was federally funded, so that money came from the federal government.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Ma'am.

Due to the reorganization of the department, there's a substantial restatement. Can we get a breakdown of that?

**D. DUNPHY:** Of what was transferred to the other departments?

**C. TIBBS:** Yes.

**D. DUNPHY:** Yes, certainly.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you.

Total population numbers are forecasted to decline until 2023 and then set to increase again in 2024-2025. Could we get a breakdown of the methodology behind these projections?

**G. BYRNE:** I'll refer that to ADM Katie Norman.

**K. NORMAN:** That information we can certainly provide to you, but those forecasts are prepared by the Department of Finance. We'll collect it from them and provide it to your office.

**C. TIBBS:** Appreciate it. Thank you, Ms. Norman.

Just a final question for the pre-questions here, Minister: Total unemployment is forecasted to decline in 2022 substantially and then steadily increase until 2025. Could you explain that and could we get a breakdown of the methodology behind those projections as well?

**G. BYRNE:** Again, as ADM Norman had indicated, a lot of our projections in terms of labour force come from Economics and Statistics from within the Department of Finance. But I'm not sure, Walt or Katie, if you would like to provide the basis on which the budget documents incorporated that information?

**K. NORMAN:** Similarly, to my earlier response, we can certainly get you information from the Department of Finance. In terms of labour market information just generally, that's fed in from the various sector departments to inform the overall Estimates book and then that

information is reflected in the Economy document. That would probably be the best place to look in terms of where some of the labour market forecasting information is based on.

**C. TIBBS:** Sure. Thank you so much.

I guess, Mr. Chair, we can start line-by-line items now.

**CHAIR:** Yes. Anything from 1.1.01 to 1.2.03?

**C. TIBBS:** 1.1.01, Salaries: There's \$12,500 budgeted this year more compared to what was spent last year. What's the explanation for this?

**G. BYRNE:** I would believe you'd find that is proportionate increases in Executive Support, executive salary based on structured formats. Patricia Hearn, if you'd like to sort of step in on that particular detail.

**P. HEARN:** As it's noted in the binder that you will receive, it reflects, I think, what you would have heard from many other departments: There's an adjustment from last year. That would have included an extra pay period last year. Then the negotiated increases that were common to all departments are reflected in that as well.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Ma'am.

Transportation and Communications, there was \$32,600 less spent compared to what was budgeted. Can you explain this and give us a breakdown of what wasn't spent due to COVID?

**G. BYRNE:** Obviously, with COVID, there were very much lower travel costs due to restrictions related to COVID. There was a decrease prior to this year's expenses due to zero-based budgeting as well. There's a pathway for efficiency there. But that is in relationship to the fact that COVID restricted travel.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

General Administration, 1.2.01, Salaries: Budgeted Salaries are \$39,000 more this year than what was spent last year. Can you explain this, Minister, please?

**G. BYRNE:** We're moved over to 1.2?

**C. TIBBS:** Yes, Sir, 1.2.01, Salaries.

**G. BYRNE:** There were, as indicated, approved salary increases consistent with original formats with the negotiated benefits packages. Salaries were adjusted accordingly.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

1.2.01, again, Transportation and Communications: There was \$23,400 less spent compared to what was budgeted. Can you explain this and give us a breakdown of what wasn't spent due to COVID?

**G. BYRNE:** In terms of Executive Support, that would have been a number of – there were obviously lesser travel demands due to restrictions of COVID. In terms of what that line item might have dealt with in the past, I could ask Debbie Dunphy to provide some further details, but generally speaking, I think you'll find that that's a function of COVID.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

General Administration is continued, 1.2.02 Administrative Support, for Salaries, which is 01. There is \$155,400 more budgeted this year compared to what was spent last year, can we explain this?

**G. BYRNE:** Sorry, we're jumping around in subheads, where are we to?

**C. TIBBS:** 1.2.02, 01, Salaries.

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, okay.

There were savings that were related to vacancies and delayed recruitment process that caused the 2020-21 revised budget to come down by \$39,300 from the previous year's budget. In addition to that, there were approved salary increases as per the structured formats and salaries were adjusted across the department to reflect those actual requirements.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.



1.2.02, 01, Purchased Services, there is \$34,800 more budgeted compared to what was spent last year. Can you explain this?

**G. BYRNE:** With Purchased Services, this involves everything from banking fees to reductions in shredding services, copier costs, debt machines, all sort of different functions. In terms of that being a zero item in this current fiscal year and revised from last year, those functions were obviously not required.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Could we also get what banks were involved and the banking fee breakdown as well?

**G. BYRNE:** Ms. Dunphy, if you would.

**D. DUNPHY:** Yes, certainly. We would be using the bank that is the bank for the province, for the employer, but we can certainly give you a breakdown. Those fees include the use of debit and credit machines in our various regional offices as well. It's just done in the Administrative head.

**C. TIBBS:** Perfect. Thank you, Ma'am.

1.2.02, 02, Revenue, there was \$107,300 less revenue last year compared to what was budgeted. Can we explain this?

**G. BYRNE:** Debbie, I'll ask you to ...

**D. DUNPHY:** This related revenue account is generally – I'll call it a catch-all for the department. If we distribute monies, and organizations or entities are not able to spend it and they return it based on the contract, if it's a different fiscal year, it has to go back into a general revenue, and not back into an expenditure line. We have a standard budget that we use every year although this item does vary from year to year. Of course, with COVID, during '20-'21 there were lots of shutdowns and reductions so the revenue amount is still considerably lower. On the flip side, sometimes that means that organizations are spending their money and they don't have to refund the province, and that's a good news story. We monitor that every year to have a look to make sure we're budgeting at the appropriate level.

**C. TIBBS:** Great. Thank you, Ma'am.

1.2.03.01, Salaries, there was \$119,000 more budgeted this year compared to what was spent last year. Can this be explained?

**G. BYRNE:** I'll just ask you, Debbie.

**D. DUNPHY:** Sure.

When we compare the revised number, that is our projection, which is as close to actuals as we can get it. Sometimes the variance is low because of vacancies, but we still budget for the full amount of the positions for the division. We review our salary plan every year and ensure we have sufficient funding for the positions that are going to be filled during the year. Of course, as some of the earlier explanations, the increase often relates to the approved salary increases that were –

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I remind the Member that his speaking time has expired.

We will turn the table to MHA Dinn.

1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I certainly join the minister and my colleague in the Official Opposition in condemning the attack on the Muslim family in Ontario and condemn all forms of hate speech, hate action to our brothers and sisters who share this country with us.

I have a question with regard to – I heard it the first time I came as an MHA – zero-based budgeting. I heard the word attrition and now we have – I know it's in the budget, the whole notion of balanced-budget legislation.

As I understood it, zero-based budgeting was all about making sure that we spent only what we needed to spend, then we have attrition. I am assuming, then, attrition is designed – well, we know longer need to spend that so we're not spending it. I'm just trying to think how this will fit in with balanced-budget legislation. I would assume we wouldn't need balanced-budget

legislation if indeed we are already doing our best to count our pennies in this situation.

How will the balanced-budget legislation affect this department? How will they all work together? I guess this may be a little bit of a philosophical discussion, but I'm very curious as to how these are going to work together, especially in a department which is about trying to increase the population of Newfoundland and Labrador.

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll handle that from the basis – I think the Member properly pointed out that this is a small P political question and a policy question entwined into one. With that said, the policy is based on – and, again, referring to the Member's own description of the initiative, it's to build up, it's to look at expenditure, not simply from the lens of what did we do last year but to look at the expenditure from what do we need to spend to do what we need to achieve. That's what zero-based budgeting is, which the Member correctly sort of described, in my opinion, it's to look at things with a different lens, a different eye and a different view than what otherwise might be just simply to maintain a status quo momentum or inertia.

The interaction of balanced-budget legislation is also a rather straightforward philosophy that you should only spend what you take in. Any entity, a family, a business or a government, that has as its operating principle to spend more than it takes in, there is a consequence to that. But also to collect more revenue, the balanced-budget legislation also refers in the inverse to take in more than you spend to actually tax higher than what is needed to be taxed. Or to collect revenues higher than what may need to be collected is also a consequence of balanced-budget legislation, which I think everyone would agree with, that you should really only collect that which you need and don't overtax.

So that's the dichotomy of the two-way street of what balanced-budget legislation entails. Zero-based budgeting entails just simply looking with fresh eyes at what your objectives are and what you need to do to achieve those objectives. I think those are two fairly fundamental principles

of good governance and efficient management of public resources.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Do you anticipate, then, balanced-budget legislation impacting work that this department does in terms of, like, projects or initiatives that you would need to undertake to attract new people to this province?

**G. BYRNE:** I think actually it will have a very positive impact on the objectives of the department. One of the things about attracting people to come to Newfoundland and Labrador is many, many factors. I would not like to overstate any one particular factor but many factors are involved in attracting new migrants, new people to call Newfoundland and Labrador home. One of which – one of which is a stable fiscal environment for the province. Having stability within the province provides a great sense of security and stability for the individual or the family settling here. Having that process, that legislation, that philosophy in place makes Newfoundland and Labrador a stronger, more attractive place to attract newcomers to our province.

We are blessed by the fact that we also have significant resources from the federal government in our employment, development and skills operations to be able to make sure that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have access to resources. That's under contract or commitment from the federal government.

I believe this year, Walt, we have upwards of \$230 million to be able to spend on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, on Canadians and permanent residents to our province to be able to obtain the skills that they need to be active in the labour force and to make labour market adjustments.

To answer your question in short is that it is having such stability within, not only the individual workplace or the labour market for the ability for individuals to be able to make gains and make improvements with their own skills within the labour market is a positive but also to be able to create a more stable, overall fiscal economic and social environment for the

province that is an attractant for newcomers as well.

**J. DINN:** Attrition: How are positions lost to attrition determined? If it's because the function is no longer being carried out, that's one thing, or is it also that if we have a retirement, well, we won't be looking to hire back. If that results in increased workload, that's one thing. If it's actually that work is no longer being completed, it's another. But the person retires and now the work is shared amongst others, you've increased the workload on other members in the department. I'm just wondering how attrition is determined, if we no longer need a position that we're not filling it.

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The process of attrition is not a simple binary on-off switch that when a position retires, it automatically gets eliminated. There's an evaluation that's taken. Attrition targets are established, but each and every position is evaluated for its ongoing and future merit and requirement.

Debbie Dunphy, you might be able to jump in here with further details. But to suggest that – and I would not want anyone to leave with this notion that because someone is retiring, the position is automatically eliminated. That is not the case. There's an evaluation that is taken as to the utility and to the importance of the job function to determine whether or not it fits within the attrition envelope.

Debbie?

**D. DUNPHY:** The other thing we do consider is – you mentioned workload and the workload demands and what the demand is on a particular – whether it's programs or areas. There's always a consideration given to, can the workload be divided up amongst the remaining employees or is it a matter of, no, the demand in a particular area is too high and we wouldn't consider it. As the minister indicated, each position is evaluated based on the circumstances that we have in front of us for the time, and not just on a retirement.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Would it be possible to have an outline or the criteria of just how that evaluation takes place? I don't know if there's a matrix that would guide that. That would be appreciated if you do have that.

**G. BYRNE:** I'll ask Debbie Dunphy to look at our records to find out exactly what's in place, not only within Treasury Board, but within the department itself. Normally, these are taken on a case-by-case basis, but if there are specific directives or policies in place, we can certainly forward those to you.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Part of the minister's mandate is to attract skilled workers to immigrate to the province, but there are already skilled, educated people here who are stuck delivering food, driving cabs or unloading freight and storage because their credentials are not recognized. Is there a plan or intention to work with your federal partners to clear away some of the red tape preventing immigrants from reaching their full potential in our province?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, there certainly is. We work very collaboratively with the federal government on issues that are within a federal jurisdiction in terms of credential recognition and skills, but also within the context of ongoing bilateral agreements on immigration. The Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Immigration Agreement is about to be renewed.

One of the things that I think must be brought to bear in mind is that it is professional organizations and associations, self-governing bodies, that determine much of the accreditation process and accreditations are recognized – and this would be acutely so within health professions, engineering professions, other highly technical professions where skills are in demand. We have already begun a process, working with professional organizations, self-governing bodies, bodies that are mandated through statute of this House of Assembly, for credential recognition. We have engaged in pilot projects in the past and will continue to do so on credential recognition.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. The Member's speaking time has expired.

1.1.01 to 1.2.03, back to you, MHA Tibbs.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just have one more question for this subhead.

Last year there was \$18,400 less spent compared to what was budgeted. Can this be explained, Minister, please?

**G. BYRNE:** Mr. Tibbs, would you be able –

**C. TIBBS:** My apologies. 1.2.03.

**G. BYRNE:** Yes.

**C. TIBBS:** Under Salaries, 01.

**G. BYRNE:** Yes.

**C. TIBBS:** Last year there was \$18,400 less spent compared to what was budgeted.

Grants and Subsidies, sorry.

**G. BYRNE:** Oh, Grants and Subsidies.

**C. TIBBS:** My apologies.

**G. BYRNE:** Yes. The Grants and Subsidies, this was a discussion last year at Estimates as well. There are a number of different initiatives that often are deemed by any reasonable person to be significant, substantial and worthwhile in doing, but often there is not a readily accessible or available source of funds to be able to do them.

Often, programs are designed for applications for tens of thousands of dollars, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars. Very rarely is a program designed to be able to provide Memorial University of Newfoundland with a small contribution to be able to get some health care professional students to travel to Nova Scotia to participate in a conference or a competition. The literacy award, for example, the premiers' literacy award; other organizations looking for a small amount of money to be able to do worthwhile initiatives, this is what this pot is for.

With COVID, of course, those activities became very rare, almost non-existent. That is why the funding was down. We spend it as it is needed and as warranted.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

That is all I have for that subhead.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr. Tibbs.

Anything further, Mr. Dinn, with our first subheads, 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive?

**J. DINN:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**J. DINN:** Under 1.2.02, Administrative Support, Employee Benefits were up by over \$20,000 in actuals for last year. Were there any unexpected payouts?

**G. BYRNE:** I'll ask Debbie Dunphy to reply.

**D. DUNPHY:** This is the workers' compensation costs for the department and it was a retirement payout of a worker from March of 2020 that was actually paid in the fiscal year 2020-21.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Still with that section, Professional Services: There was money budgeted for Professional Services, but it wasn't spent. The budget for this year is also zero dollars. What's the reason for this?

**G. BYRNE:** Professional Services, this relates, I believe, to audits. Walt or Debbie, you may be able to jump in here on this particular item.

There was an invoice for federal audit that was paid through the LMDA budget. It did not appear in the federal agreement and federal funds. That's the cause of why it was not able to be (inaudible). There was an increase in federal transfers through the LMTAs, through the Labour Market Transfer Agreements.

We took a decision wherever possible not to spend provincial money but to spend federal money where it was appropriate and capable of being done, and this was the case here.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under Grants and Subsidies, what was the pot of money for Grants and Subsidies spent on last year in that section?

**G. BYRNE:** Is this under 1.2.02?

**J. DINN:** 1.2.02.

**G. BYRNE:** It was annual funding for Stella's Circle.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

You may have just answered this with my colleague from the Official Opposition. Grants and Subsidies in 1.2.03: Why was actual spending so low?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, that was the question that MHA Tibbs had brought forward and the answer remains the same, which is that this was funding that was available on a policy basis to organizations that had activities, objectives within the mandate of the department, but there was no readily available source of funding to be able to do these. Often these are relatively small-scale funding requests, but do provide a strong incremental value to the department and to the client. With COVID, it was not able to be spent.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

Just back to a few general questions just to finish off that.

I applaud, certainly, the department, if there's a provincial dialogue, to work with the accreditation organizations to get our skilled immigrant workers into the workforce and to use the skills that they have.

If it comes down to that, there are certain courses or certain requirements met, is there a program to assist skilled and educated immigrants to complete the required training or courses to bring their credentials in line with our expectations, to bring them up to the level that is needed to be accredited?

**G. BYRNE:** Under the Labour Market Transfer Agreements, those who have been accepted as permanent residents within Newfoundland and Labrador are, indeed, eligible for job-training grants through the Labour Market Development

Agreement and through the Workforce Development Agreement, which is the bulk of our training funds. The short answer is, within the context of those who are either citizens or permanent residents the agreement treats everyone equitably and equally.

**J. DINN:** That will help them get their accreditation, then?

**G. BYRNE:** (Inaudible.)

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Priority Skills NL is supposed to attract educated and skilled individuals to settle in the province, but the criteria for academic candidates requires them to have completed a master's or a Ph.D. at Memorial University.

Can the minister explain the rationale for not including applicants with credentials from other universities from Canada and abroad?

**G. BYRNE:** We accept Memorial University of Newfoundland as our primary target for skills development. We also accept those with substantial work experience in specified fields of high demand and high need within Newfoundland and Labrador, so it's not purely academically based. We would like to consider those in bachelor's programs, in some respects, but the federal government does have restrictions on how far that particular program can operate, how deep it can dive in terms of those academic credentials. But it certainly does become a powerful force for Memorial University of Newfoundland to be able to attract not only students, but then future immigrants.

I will ask Katie Norman, since I think it's highly relevant, to give sort of a brief construct of how other universities could fall within this. But more importantly, uptake to that particular program.

**K. NORMAN:** Thank you for your question.

This is really, I think, to the minister's point. Priority Skills Newfoundland and Labrador is the first attempt of hopefully more to see in the future of innovation around pathways to immigration in Newfoundland and Labrador. One of the things that we were noticing was high

uptake in our Provincial Nominee Program and a lot of interest in our Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program, which we're pleased will be made permanent.

Priority Skills Newfoundland and Labrador is really focused on attracting highly qualified individuals to key sectors of our economy. We have the ability to focus on different areas as our labour market needs change, so three key sectors were an area of focus for the January 2021 application, which included aquaculture, the technology sector and health care. I'm pleased to say that upwards of 12,000 individuals have expressed an interest through that process to being considered for permanent residency in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Unlike other programs, it doesn't require a direct job offer, because that's kind of one of the areas where we've been looking at. We want to bring, obviously, individuals in who have a high likelihood of success in the labour market. Nobody wants to see the kind of situations, MHA Dinn, that you're referring to in terms of individuals who have skills but are unable to use them locally. We're trying to align the credentials that people are bringing with the local needs that we have and we're unable to meet within our domestic labour force.

We're in the process of, to use a colloquial term, fishing individuals out of the pool. We anticipate doing the first draw on the health care sector in the next number of weeks. There will be more to come on that. We are directly working with the employer community around identifying who has the best match of skills.

This is, as I said, an innovative pathway, getting employers involved, trying to increase the number of highly qualified individuals who choose Newfoundland and Labrador as their home.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

I'll just finish off on this with regard to education. I taught at Holy Heart. There is a significant number of students whose families are immigrants, and then there are those who are refugees who come. They're in the ESL program and they're in the LEARN program, so bringing their own education skills up. In many cases,

many of them have not been in school until they actually arrive here in Canada.

A couple of weeks ago I sat down with a group of them virtually, because I know the teacher; I taught there. I wanted to hear what they had to say about immigration, especially where it was in the Budget Speech and in the Moya Greene report about increasing immigration. They liked it here. They love it here. They said the key thing for them is school. That was the key thing for them, the school system.

Every one of them planned to go on to post-secondary education. A lot of them planned to go to MUN. That's where they planned. The parents were very much focused on education. Now, some of them have just arrived here, in relative terms, but the one thing that sent shockwaves – and I can guarantee you – is the whole tuition increase. It has them in a bit of a panic. You look at Memorial. It is a crown jewel – and I would say CNA, too – in attracting people, that education and affordability. If there is anything, it's going to have to be affordable to the people if you want to attract people here. The weather doesn't always recommend itself.

I'll leave it at that. That has to be something to encourage people to stay here. It has to be about keeping tuition affordable for people. A lot of these people have not had a chance to build up a huge nest egg to help put their children through the post-secondary education. Anyway, I'll leave it at that.

Thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** The Chair is recognizing the minister.

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Memorial University of Newfoundland is a valued, important and successful partner in attracting new Newfoundlanders and Labradorians through its academic programs, but upon graduation, encouraging them to stay. We're actively engaged and working with Memorial University of Newfoundland. We're hand in glove in our immigration efforts to get new graduates to attend. This is one of the reasons why the new Priority Skills pathway was developed. It was very specifically for that purpose.

We consulted with not only Memorial, but more importantly – or equally importantly – with the graduates of Memorial University who hail from other countries, from other places, and the notion of the immediate job offer to be able to attain permanent residencies to go through the pathways was a barrier, so we amended that barrier.

When it comes to tuition offsets, I think that it's fair to say that within the Budget Speech, the intention of the government is that, definitely, we'll continue to offer supports on a needs basis to students. I often reflect on this one: Post-secondary education was within the portfolio that I held. The Government of Ontario often advertises that they have free tuition. The reason why they advertise that is because when you take the federal grants and the provincial grants for post-secondary students, often the total accumulative value of those grants equal the cost of an undergraduate education for a domestic student in Ontario.

If you were to take that same figure or that same formula and apply it to Newfoundland and Labrador – and I say this with my tongue firmly planted in my cheek. I would not want anyone to take these words and convey them or construe them out of context. But if we were to take that same logic or that same philosophy in Newfoundland and Labrador, you could say, with my tongue firmly planted in my cheek, that we pay students. Whereas it is free tuition in Ontario, we pay students to go to university in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I say that just to deliberately bring attention to we have a very generous grants and subsidies program for tuition offsets and for attendance to post-secondary education in Newfoundland and Labrador. The government has said that it fully intends to make first consideration for those who may be impacted by any decision by Memorial University of Newfoundland to increase tuition rates.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Chair recognizes MHA Trimper.

**P. TRIMPER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thank you to the Committee for an opportunity to interact with this very important department.

Minister, I guess I will start by saying shukran to you for reaching out to the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador. I think that it is a very important to talk to the leadership of that organization in good times and in bad. This is certainly a very bad time, so thank you for doing that.

I look at this department as key to the future of this province, frankly. We just are not having enough children and we really need to figure out how we can fully embrace and retain the good people that are now becoming such an important part of our economy.

Sitting in Lake Melville, where I am – and my colleague who normally sits behind me in the House from Labrador West – our economies survive based on new Canadians, particularly the Filipino community, but also other nations. We couldn't do it without them right now. I am paying close attention to all the programs.

Minister, just thinking about some of the situations, you and I are often on the same routine coming back to St. John's. If I'm not getting a ride from you, Sir, I am probably jumping in a taxi that is driven by an engineer or a teacher from Libya or maybe Russia and so on. I am preoccupied with this frustration around accreditation by professional organizations. We have to find a better way, a more streamlined way.

I'm fortunate to speak a few languages and interact with some of these folks and, wow, I can tell we have something of calibre there. Not that driving a taxi is not a very honourable and successful way, but they have trained and were pursuing another career and hoping that Canada could provide them an opportunity. Unfortunately, we have them relegated to something else that they don't want to do.

I know my colleagues have brought this topic up already. I don't know if you have a comment, first of all, on that.

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is an important initiative. One of the reasons why Priority Skills pathways is so important is because the credential itself – the Memorial University of Newfoundland’s master’s or doctorate program provides the made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador credential for those individuals. But we have to understand that professional organizations, unless we are to step over them and their delegated authorities when it comes to accreditation of their own professional bodies, we have to work proactively and positively with them. We are doing that and are committed to continuing to do that.

They hold a high standard which we all accept and praise because we all want to be serviced by professionals, whether it be in the technical fields, in particular in the health care fields, by individuals who have high skills and are trusted to be able to provide those important services for us that can have a direct impact on us.

It’s also really important that energy be spent on examining what those credentials are from foreign jurisdictions to be able to integrate that. Often, organizations don’t have the resources to be able to do that kind of a deep dive, so that’s why the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is readily available, and has done so in the past, to work co-operatively with them to provide them with resources so that they can initiate that work. We’ll continue to do so in the future.

**P. TRIMPER:** I think there are two aspects that I’m wondering if we could spend some more energy on. Perhaps you are already. That’s why I look forward to always participating in these sessions, to learn more.

One is in the area of – so many of these folks, when they arrive here, they’re looking good on paper, and we have this challenge of meeting these accreditations. I’m wondering if there could be more of a job shadowing or a mentoring opportunity for some of the folks, especially those in the medical profession that could be side by side. If we could invest a little bit of financial support to help those people along. That’s sort of one element of it.

The other part I see is the emotional one and the family ties. So often, either through the Provincial Nominee Program or others – almost

hurdles for them to get their family members over. I’m just thinking that there could be so more support in that area.

I’ve become friends with many people in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, for example, from the Philippines and that’s often the big ask for help when they come to see, is how can I get my parents here and loved ones and so on. Two thoughts.

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The idea of job shadowing and of different innovative ways to prove credentials, to get accreditation is really something that we are doing. For example, we issued a broad-based request for proposals to organizations, to professional associations and others to offer to us options and requests for funding to be able to do that. It’s initiated and performed by the associations themselves. They know best what it is, how their profession works and how to be able to implement such a program such as that.

The approach that we’ve taken is to issue a request for proposals, to initiate pilot projects in this regard, to be able to flush out best practices for those associations, for those accreditation bodies. Also, the Workforce Innovation Centre – which is a provincial body that allows for innovative projects, research projects – on a quarterly basis, I believe, they issue requests for proposals for innovative ideas to be able to work on labour force, labour market challenges. This would be a perfect example of that. The Workforce Innovation Centre has done work in this regard. We have resources in place.

You, as a Member of the House of Assembly, through your own interactions as an engineer, as someone with technical competence and experience in the environmental sciences, reaching out to encourage that kind of work would be enormously helpful as well.

**P. TRIMPER:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

I think my final comment on this – and I enjoy doing it very much. I’ve been lucky to work for the UN and Foreign Affairs and CIDA in my career overseas in the Soviet Union and so on. I got to see how, when we would go abroad to provide technical assistance and so on, often the



people that we were there supporting within six months were now instructing us. I feel that there's a bit of almost a psychological barrier there holding us back somewhat. I think it's when you go through experiences like that that you start to realize if it wasn't for that language or that culture, we could really recognize the talents. So whatever you can do to integrate that as quickly as possible, you have a fan here.

I thank you very much and I look forward to more discussion. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Is the Committee ready for the question?

Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.03 carried.

**CHAIR:** Can I have the Clerk call the next set of subheads, please?

**CLERK:** 2.1.01 to 2.1.07 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall 2.1.01 to 2.1.07 inclusive carry?

MHA Tibbs.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** Again, I call 2.1.01 to 2.1.07.

**C. TIBBS:** Yes, thank you.

2.1.01, Employment and Training Programs, Salaries: There's \$898,400 more budgeted this year compared to what was spent last year. Can this be explained?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes. The budget difference is revised down – there was \$908,000 roughly – from the original 2020-21 budget. Salary costs in this area were taken within the Workforce

Development Agreement to maximize federal funding last year.

You may recall there was a decision by the federal government, as a COVID response, to increase for all provinces the labour market transfer agreements, the Workforce Development Agreement, specifically, the WDA, as a COVID response. At the same time there were challenges related to COVID, so while the federal government decided for all provinces to increase the WDA, there were some challenges because of COVID in spending WDA funds. So while we took every opportunity where we could within the mandate of the agreement or within the authorities of the agreement to replace provincial-sourced funds with federal-sourced funds.

Now, with that said, I'll just add this as an additional note, that we were not the only ones in that situation. As a result, the federal government did allow for an overrun – what's the word I'm looking for, Walt?

**W. MAVIN:** (Inaudible.)

**G. BYRNE:** Carry forward. All provinces were able to carry forward additional funds from their labour market development agreements, labour market transfer agreements this year from last year over and above what would be the normal formula, because all provinces face the same circumstances.

**C. TIBBS:** Perfect. Thank you, Minister.

Sticking with 2.1.01, Transportation and Communications: There was \$9,400 less spent compared to what was budgeted. Can you explain this and give us a breakdown of what didn't get spent due to COVID?

**G. BYRNE:** Yeah, Walt, I believe you might be the right source for this.

It was COVID-related. What, normally, would Transportation and Communications in that subhead be used for?

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Minister.

It was, as the minister noted and similar to other categories, as a result of COVID. There was less

travel related to FPT meetings, in particular. Also in there are some costs related to telecommunications, of course, which essentially stayed the same.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Sir.

Same heading, Purchased Services: There is \$13,100 more budgeted compared to what was spent last year. How can this be explained, Minister?

**G. BYRNE:** Under Purchased Services, that same subhead?

**C. TIBBS:** Yes, Minister.

**G. BYRNE:** Funding is provided – there are different software packages and so on that fall under this particular category. We had savings related to – we were able to buy some of the software packages or the licensing, again, through the LMDA, so it's sourced from federal funds.

These are very important software packages that are used by CSOs, community service officers, throughout the province, but we were able to source those funds through federal sources.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

We'll move on to 2.1.02, Employment Development Programs, Allowances and Assistance: Can you give us a breakdown, please, on how many clients were funded in each program?

**G. BYRNE:** Walt, take it away, if you don't mind.

**W. MAVIN:** Excuse me, just to make sure I'm on the right section: Which section again, please?

**C. TIBBS:** Allowances and Assistance, 2.1.02.

**W. MAVIN:** 2.1.02.

**C. TIBBS:** Yes, Sir, Allowances and Assistance.

**W. MAVIN:** In this particular category, this would be individuals that we are providing

employment development supports to, and that would include short-term assistance in the range of – they may need a specific type of clothing to attend work and so any of those types of things we would provide.

In 2020-21, there were 403 individuals that we provided that level of support. As well, under that particular category of Allowances and Assistance, we still have a tutoring, ABE placement support for non-EI eligible individuals, for our adult basic education students.

I'm just going through my list. I apologize because I have quite a number of numbers here –

**C. TIBBS:** I can only imagine.

**W. MAVIN:** – on programs. Adult basic education, skills development, there were approximately 370 individuals supported.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Sir.

Under the same heading, 2.1.02, Grants and Subsidies: There was \$42,223,400 more spent last year compared to what was budgeted. Can this be explained?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

This relates to the federal funding provided for the Essential Worker Support Program, the top-up program.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Can we get a list of each organization that received funding and how much?

**G. BYRNE:** I believe one will be provided in the binder that will follow.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

We'll move on to Employment and Skills Development – or, sorry, continued – 2.1.03, Labour Market Development Agreement, Professional Services. I'll direct you to Professional Services. There was \$430,800 less spent compared to what was budgeted. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** I'm just going to send you right over to Walt on that.

**C. TIBBS:** Your left-hand man.

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Minister.

Yes, last year, the department along with all jurisdictions across the country are looking to implement a new system called Targeting Referral and Feedback. Essentially, what that means is that the federal government, working in concert with jurisdictions, is providing information related to EI claimants as they begin claims. The whole goal of the initiative is to engage early in claimants' activity to encourage return to work.

Last year we had money allocated to develop a system to help facilitate that process. The Government of Nova Scotia was embarking on a similar system at the time, so it was viewed that we would work in concert with them. They're doing some of the development work and so we would defer our investment into the system development for that year and move it into next year.

**C. TIBBS:** Perfect. Thank you, Sir.

Purchased Services, 2.1.03, same heading: There was \$31,400 more spent compared to what was budgeted last year. Can this be explained, please? Under Purchased Services.

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, I believe Mr. Mavin had indicated earlier that we outfitted staff with laptop computers to be able to work remotely, and this is one of the major expenses under this particular line item.

**C. TIBBS:** All right. Thank you, Minister.

2.1.03, same heading, Property, Furnishings and Equipment: There was \$316,100 more spent compared to what was budgeted last year. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** Sorry, I will reverse myself. This is the line for the laptops.

**C. TIBBS:** Okay.

**G. BYRNE:** The previous line – my apologies on this; I misspoke. The Purchased Services were for liability insurance for participants in the LMDA project services and the increase was due to higher than projected costs for Career Cruising and accountability results management system and software packages. Sorry about that.

**C. TIBBS:** Great. Thank you, Minister.

2.1.03, sticking with it, Allowances and Assistance, I have quite a few questions here. I'll just concur with them.

There was \$21,872,600 less spent compared to what was budgeted last year. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, as we often refer amongst ourselves as sponsorship; this is school sponsorship. The number of individuals who came forward looking for assistance to attend post-secondary institutions, especially at our private colleges and the College of the North Atlantic, were down during COVID.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Same heading: There is \$2,420,000 more budgeted this year compared to what was budgeted last year. Can this be explained?

**G. BYRNE:** Walt, if you want to ...

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Minister.

Yes, I guess, this relates to the point the minister made earlier in terms of the provision that was offered by the federal government in terms of a carry forward into this fiscal year from the previous. This is the first time in the history of the Labour Market Development Agreement that we've had a carry-forward provision; prior to that, there was zero carry-forward provision. This essentially accounts for the additional funding that we have available this year and our projected activity under this particular program line and that we anticipate having more students in seats this year.

**G. BYRNE:** Excellent. Thank you, Walt.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

2.1.01 to 2.1.07 inclusive.

I'll turn in over to MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Under 2.1.01, the purpose of activities carried out under this heading, if I understand it correctly, is to help meet the labour market demand. What skills are in highest demand right now in the provincial economy?

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the question.

The labour market itself is best determined by participants within the labour market. If you look at the performance within the trades and activities within the trades and which trades really are taking up some of the highest interest, if you examine, for instance, the trades within the apprenticeship program, we still have a number of apprentices within the construction electrician trade. Carpenter, automotive service technician, industrial mechanic millwright, welder, heavy duty equipment technicians, steam fitter, pipefitter, industrial electrician and plumber and power line technician, this represents the top 10 trades by the number of registered apprentices in Newfoundland and Labrador. The top 10 apprenticeships, which I just scheduled off, they account for up to just about 75 per cent of all registered apprentices in the province.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Before I go any further, I'm assuming we can have that information as well, and any questions that my colleague asks, the answers, they would be provided to us as well.

**G. BYRNE:** Oh, definitely.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Is it possible to provide us with some idea of the gap between the number of people who currently have these high-demand skills and how many we need?

**G. BYRNE:** Labour market assessment and forecasting is performed by the Economic and Statistics Branch of the Department of Finance.

We work co-operatively with that particular branch to be able to forecast. One of the things about forecasting, I think it's fair to say, is those forecasts can pivot very quickly. We can forecast based on major project developments, when those major projects proceed. We can anticipate that the skills required for oil and gas projects will be very different than a transmission and electricity transmission project or an electricity generation project.

What we find is that it's really forecasting to be able to create great value, best value for the client, for the person to examine skilled labour force options. It's really done on a short-term cycle, but we can forecast, based on major project schedules, what long-term forecasts would be. It would be unfair to me to say that it is an exact science.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

With that in mind, then, you don't have a particular number of the gap of how many more we need because of that?

**G. BYRNE:** We work hard to always reassess and re-evaluate those circumstances to be able to pivot quickly, to be able to provide more accurate information as it becomes available. In the long term, it is a difficult forecast.

I'll just put it in context. In 2015, there were 1,700 construction electrician apprentices in place in Newfoundland and Labrador. Today there are about 900. The labour market adjusts within itself and we provide that information, to the best of our ability, based on the nature of projects. With Muskrat Falls kind of moving into generation and transmission, as opposed to construction, obviously, that directly impacts on that particular trade.

**J. DINN:** Yes. I'll probably come back to that. That's an interesting point.

How many people, then, go through the programs offered under this subheading in an average year? And how many last year? Did the pandemic affect program availability or uptake?

**G. BYRNE:** The answer to the latter is that the pandemic did decrease uptake in training programs. The decision by individuals to seek

new skills to train outside of their existing professions or to upgrade, the pandemic produced negative or downward pressure on that.

Mr. Mavin, if you wouldn't mind just giving us a highlight of the numbers.

**W. MAVIN:** Yes, thank you, Minister.

If I were to pick one, I guess probably the most significant subheading and program area would be our Skills Development Program, which is our financial assistance program for individuals participating in post-secondary training. This does not include block training for apprentices. This would include all programs that are offered through public-private training institutions across the province. Again, it does not include the block training.

Last year we saw a decrease of about 25 per cent in terms of the number of participants in our Skills Development Program from one year over the other.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

On average, how many people would go through the programs offered in this heading, roughly?

**W. MAVIN:** Specific to the 25 per cent I just referenced, in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020, approximately 4,000 individuals would've participated in post-secondary training. This last fiscal year it was a little over 3,000.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

How do these programs measure success? Minister, this is to your point of trying to figure out the labour market demands. Do you keep statistics on success rate of the programs? If so, is it possible to provide us with an overview of these statistics?

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There are post program surveys that are conducted. The survey of: Did an individual who participated in a post-secondary training program find employment within that specific scope of their training program? We do follow-up surveys with training institutions.

I will say, with the volume of participants and the fact that there is no mechanism to record their every movement post-graduation, it is somewhat difficult to do extended survey work with individuals who participate in training programs in a down-stream fashion, for example for several years post completion of the training. It's difficult to keep track of them, to do that survey work, but we do our best to maintain relevancy of the training institution to be able to work with their former students on post completion success within the workforce.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Would it be possible to have any stats that you do have or charts or otherwise, like the number of how many of those you have been able to follow and keep track of?

**G. BYRNE:** Whatever is available to us will be provided to you. Mr. Mavin, you might be able to elaborate a little bit on what is available so that the expectation is understood.

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Minister.

If I go back to any of the programming that sponsors through the LMDA, we work very closely with the federal government and all jurisdictions across the country in terms of an accountability framework. Part of that is, as the minister noted, post attendance follow-up surveying, but, as well, administrative data that the federal government would have access to. So they would be tracking EI claimants, as an example, who participated in an active intervention such as a skills development program to track whether or not they are employed two or three years out from graduation of their particular post-secondary programming.

As the minister noted, whatever information we have available in that regard, we'd be able to share it with you.

**J. DINN:** Perfect.

Just on the question then with regard to the Moya Greene report, she mentions in it about that government programs need to be evaluated to see if they are still meeting their requirements or if they're still achieving their objectives. There was a very clear need for accountability,

transparency and evaluation. I'm thinking what it would require especially if you're going to be evaluating a program, I mean, it comes down to how many people are working, how many are not working in that area and so on and so forth. I'm just wondering to put a more robust evaluation process in place, what would that mean?

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Premier's Economic Recovery Team, the PERT report that followed the deliberations of the team are obviously very valuable. It highlighted something that the PERT team – highlighted something which I think is of value and of interest to Members of this Assembly. We take those recommendations seriously and we're considering now as to how we can improve those methodologies to meet that expectation.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

2.1.01 to 2.1.07 inclusive.

Back to you MHA Tibbs.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, can you give us a breakdown of how the funding in this line item is spent? Sorry, 2.1.03, Labour Market Development Agreement, Allowances and Assistance, can we get a breakdown of how the funding in this line item is spent?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, you certainly can. Again, this is, as we referred to, student sponsorships. Wait, if you wouldn't mind taking it away as to what level of data we can provide.

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Minister.

As the minister noted, it includes people that are in sponsorship for post-secondary training. It would also include individuals participating in a job-creation program – an allowance. It would also include individuals receiving self-employment assistance.

We can provide you with the funding that was allocated per each of those program areas. I will note that we are in the middle of completing our annual audit, which we're required to provide to the federal government and those expenditures line by line would be made available.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Mr. Mavin.

Same heading, can you give us a breakdown of job creation partnerships, which we just talked about, for the last year including dollar amounts, group names, provincial electoral districts and how many were employed?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, we definitely can. It will be provided to you.

**C. TIBBS:** Great. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

Can you give us a breakdown of Self-Employment Assistance recipients, including dollar amounts and business names? Basically the same.

**G. BYRNE:** Within the context of privacy, I think I'll pass that over to Mr. Mavin to – there's full transparency of it, but we'll –

**C. TIBBS:** Of course, I'm not looking to breach any privacy, whatsoever. I want to make quite clear.

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Minister.

Yes, to the minister's point, due to privacy, I don't think we're going to be able to provide you with the list of individuals, which is essentially a good portion of the funding under that category line.

**C. TIBBS:** Okay.

**W. MAVIN:** But the type of information that we can provide are things such as the types of business, as an example –

**C. TIBBS:** That would be great.

**W. MAVIN:** – that are fund through the Self-Employment Assistance program.

**C. TIBBS:** We appreciate that, thank you.

Can you give us a breakdown of the ABE college payments by installations?

**G. BYRNE:** We will provide that.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

We'll move on to Grants and Subsidies, please. There was \$31,135,300 less spent compared to what was budgeted last year, can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** Go ahead there, Walt.

**W. MAVIN:** Thanks, Minister.

That would be a portion of the Job Creation Partnerships program. The funding for the Job Creation Partnerships program is broken down in two categories. There are the allowances that I referenced earlier that go direct to the participants, but there's also funding that goes to the sponsor organization, to the community development organizations, and such, across the province who are sponsors to the program.

In '20-'21, obviously, as in other program areas, we did see a decline in the number of projects that were undertaken for JCP. Wages subsidies is another program area that comes from Grants and Subsidies, and are subsidies that go direct to employers with the intent of creating employment. Again, we did see a drop in that program area. Those are just two examples and we can provide you with a fuller listing.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Mr. Mavin.

Sticking with Grants and Subsidies: There is \$32,535,500 more budgeted this year compared to what was budgeted last year, can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** Again, that was a fortuitous circumstance created by the ability – the federal government's authority that they granted to all provinces to be able to carry over uncommitted funds from the previous year.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Can you give us a breakdown of how funding in this line item was spent?

**G. BYRNE:** Again, Walter.

**W. MAVIN:** Yes, we can give you a full listing of –

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Mr. Mavin.

Can you give us a list of employers that receive funding through the JobsNL wage subsidies, how many jobs were created by each employer and how much funding they received?

**G. BYRNE:** I believe we can. On its surface, it's not subject to privacy limitations because, of course, it's a business entity receiving government resources and that must be made transparent. I believe that's the case, isn't it, Walt or Debbie?

**OFFICIAL:** (Inaudible.)

**C. TIBBS:** Much appreciated, thank you.

Can you give us a breakdown of the Labour Market Partnerships?

**G. BYRNE:** We can do that as well.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Sir.

Can you give us a breakdown of the Job Creation Partnerships for the last year, including dollar amounts, group names, their provincial electoral district and how many were employed? Different than the Allowances and Assistance section.

**G. BYRNE:** I don't know if that data is aggregated at the electoral district level, but as –

**C. TIBBS:** (Inaudible) cross compare.

**G. BYRNE:** – it's aggregated, we can certainly provide that to you.

**C. TIBBS:** Okay, perfect. Thank you so much.

Can you give us a breakdown of how research and innovation monies were spent over the past year?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes. Actually, this is an interesting thing because I remember this.

There are various categories, envelopes or opportunities within the Labour Market Development Agreement to be able to provide funding for various initiatives. Up until 2017, I believe, we, as a government, had not spent any money on research and development within the LMDA and we opened up with a volley through the creation of the Workforce Innovation Centre. That has proven a huge advantage to us. A lot of great projects have been done through the Workforce Innovation Centre.

The majority of our spending on research and development projects is a direct transfer through the WIC, then they solicit proposals through a request-for-proposal process to get ideas for innovative projects and then they indicate to us how they'd like the money to disburse. No, actually, I think we disburse it directly to the WIC and then they disburse it to the client.

So we can also provide you with a full list of projects. That's the Workforce Innovation Centre, the WIC, what projects they've undertaken so far.

**C. TIBBS:** Good stuff. Thank you, Minister.

Moving on to 2.1.04, Workforce Development Agreement, under Salaries: There was \$499,800 more spent compared to what was budgeted last year. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** I'm going to get Debbie. I believe, Debbie, it would be your shop.

**D. DUNPHY:** If you recall, back at 2.1.01, we had a significant decrease in the salary cost. Well, the increase is reflected here because it was charged to the federal agreement under the WDA.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Allowances and Assistance: There was \$177,100 less spent compared to what was budgeted last year. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** That's a lower than anticipated demand in this area, the majority of it being apprenticeship class calls that were unable to be held. So as an apprentice goes through their block they get the prerequisite number of hours

– you know this better than anybody. We didn't have class calls during the pandemic.

**C. TIBBS:** Makes sense. Thank you very much.

Grants and Subsidies, under this heading: There was \$5,026,200 more spent last year compared to what was budgeted. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** The federal government approved the additional funding under the agreement.

Walt, if you might be able to pick up the cause from there.

**W. MAVIN:** Yeah, thanks, Minister.

Back in the fall of 2020, the federal government, as part of the COVID response, provided approximately \$90 million of additional funding to the province under this particular funding area, which allowed us to increase our funding under program areas such as the Job Grant program and other programs that we support through the WDA program.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Mr. Mavin.

There was \$6,668,700 more budgeted this year compared to what was spent last year. Can this be explained, please?

**W. MAVIN:** Yes. Again, it goes back to the provision, the carry-forward funding from last year provided by the federal government in the fall of 2020.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Sir.

Finally, can you give us a breakdown of funding recipients for each program?

**G. BYRNE:** Would you be able to clarify? When you say a breakdown of funding recipients, we'd have to do an analysis as to whether or not we can provide the names of the individuals.

**C. TIBBS:** Sure.

**G. BYRNE:** Is there any other kind of more aggregate or macro-evaluation that you'd be looking at?



Debbie, would you know if we're restricted from -?

**D. DUNPHY:** Yeah. Well, certainly I think we can provide it by program, and certainly if there are organizations or employers.

**C. TIBBS:** Yeah, the macro or the higher level.

**D. DUNPHY:** But, again, not the individual.

**C. TIBBS:** Of course.

**D. DUNPHY:** Yeah.

**C. TIBBS:** Totally understandable.

Employment and Skills Development continued. Employment Assistance Programs for Persons with Disabilities, 2.1.05, Allowances and Assistance: There is \$2,593,100 more budgeted this year compared to what was spent last year. Can you, please, explain this? That's Employment Assistance Programs for Persons with Disabilities, Allowances and Assistance.

**G. BYRNE:** Well, we have the opportunity. A certain amount of the WDA, as we know, must be spent directly on individuals with barriers to labour market access because of a disability.

**C. TIBBS:** Of course.

**G. BYRNE:** So it's mandated by the federal government that a certain proportion be spent and we have additional funds, so we intend to spend it in that particular area.

**C. TIBBS:** Good area.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I remind the hon. Member that his speaking time has expired.

2.1.01 to 2.1.07 inclusive.

Back to you, Mr. Dinn.

Thank you.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Under 2.1.02, again we're visiting Employment Development Programs. Roughly, how many people go through the programs offered under this subheading in the average year? Again, a similar question to what I asked before. Last year, the numbers and if the pandemic affected program availability.

**G. BYRNE:** Mr. Mavin.

**W. MAVIN:** Given that there are various numbers of program headings, probably in the interest of time, it's probably best that we prepare that data and provide that information to you in a listing.

**J. DINN:** Thank you. That will be satisfactory.

Again, it's probably going to be the same answer, but I'll leave it out there, I guess. The key thing is: How do we measure success in these programs? If there are any statistics on the success rate of the programs, if you could provide us with an overview of those stats that would be appreciated as well.

**OFFICIAL:** (Inaudible.)

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 2.1.03 – I'm not sure if this was asked or not. Would it be possible to provide a list of the projects funded through the Job Creation Partnerships program last year? Is there any follow-up with project facilitators, after the fact, to gauge the impact of the program?

**G. BYRNE:** The answer to both questions would be yes. We can, indeed, provide that and there's always ongoing program evaluation. We have a number of different projects. In fact, Job Creation Partnerships are one of the most well subscribed, of highest interest programs that we offer within the portfolio. So we obviously want to make sure that's on target.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

So we'll get a list of that when you can. That would be great.

Under 2.1.03: What was the source of the unforeseen expense in Supplies last year?

**G. BYRNE:** On Supplies ...

**J. DINN:** It was \$60,700 and now there is nothing budgeted.

**G. BYRNE:** Oh, yes. This would be, not software, but soft items related to remote working of employees, such as wireless headsets, webcams for regional staff for Zoom meetings, as well as software packages.

**J. DINN:** No computers involved with that, though?

**G. BYRNE:** Not in this particular item.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

**G. BYRNE:** We get into that in Property, Furnishings and Equipment. Laptops would be in the Property, Furnishings and Equipment item.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 2.1.04: As I understand it, in the federal revenue line, it's over \$25 million. That's simply the carry-over?

**G. BYRNE:** (Inaudible.)

**J. DINN:** Perfect.

In 2.1.05, what are the sources of federal revenue listed here?

**G. BYRNE:** This is the Workforce Development Agreement, Mr. Chair.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 2.1.06, not all of the money allocated here was actually spent last year. I assume this has to do with the pandemic?

**G. BYRNE:** I'm sorry, the specific question again?

**J. DINN:** Sure thing.

Under 2.1.0.6, Youth and Student Services, not all of the money allocated here was actually spent last year. I assume this is due to the pandemic?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes and no. We had a significant influx of federal funds last year into student employment programming. That had an overall positive effect on student summer employment. But I would imagine there would have been some impact by COVID as well.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 2.1.07, Apprenticeship and Trades Certification: The *All Hands on Deck* report recommends a review of the apprenticeship and block training program in the province. Does the department intend to follow this recommendation?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, it's already started and it's an ongoing initiative. When we look at apprenticeship and trades certification, it's really important to remember that it is industry that has the lion's share of responsibilities and roles. We, as a department, make sure that we provide resources for support, for oversight, for just the general operations of the apprenticeship program, and we have a great team doing that. But it's really important to recognize that within the apprenticeship programming, we have trade councils, apprentice organizations that provide the oversight.

Walt, I'd really like you to pick up on that, because this is kind of an important point of understanding how apprenticeships are governed and the oversight that is provided to the process.

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Minister.

To pick up on the minister's point, as we all know, the apprenticeship is an on-the-job experience combined with an in-class training program. On average about 80 per cent of the skills that are acquired by apprentices are attained in the workplace, so during their block-workplace training. As a result, we work very closely with the Trade Advisory Committees, who the minister noted.

What's important to note about the Trade Advisory Committees is that they are comprised of three key stakeholders in the apprenticeship system: employers, training institutions and journeypersons. For each trade, depending on the stage that it's at, in terms of the review, depending on whether or not it's a part of the

Atlantic harmonization program, they play a key role in setting the direction for that particular trade, including the plan of training, which includes the block exams and level exams.

The role that we play as a department is one of supporter, facilitator and coordinator. We work very closely with the Provincial Apprenticeship and Certification Board, who provides direction on apprenticeships. We can't understate the importance of the key stakeholders that we have in our apprenticeship system here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

In that same section, 2.1.07: The department was mandated to provide better access to online training and services for apprenticeships and trade certification. Can you provide an update on the progress in that area?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, we can. In fact, I'll begin by just exposing one of the products, one of the outcomes.

The virtual training strategist is an online computer system to assist those looking to take the Red Seal exam, the final national exam that we're having difficulties in: Individuals who have taken the exam had not been successful. The virtual learning strategist online program, which we're now working with the Province of New Brunswick collaboratively to develop an online training system to be able to support those that have gone through apprenticeship training and to boost their chances. People who had already met with less success than they would've liked, we're supporting that. That's just one example.

Also a lot of the block training now, through the pandemic there were elements of online support and training for that. That's a key component of how online learning has begun.

The other thing that I note is that often when an apprentice is employed and successfully employed, embedded in a business, the last thing they really want to do is to leave their employer and then to go into the classroom for block training. We're working to try to implement more and more programming so that the

classroom-based block training can be delivered at the workplace itself.

I'll just use this as a sort of an off-the-cuff example: You have an apprentice working in IOC making really good money. I don't know about you, but the last thing I'd want to do if I was in that situation is just say: Put the brakes on it all. Go to Seal Cove and let's go do some block training. If I were the apprentice, I'd want to try to do that block training as best as I could in Lab City.

We're always working to new ways to sort of provide that block training and to try to facilitate as much as possible no gaps, no stoppages in that successful employment, while at the same time getting apprentices through all the prerequisite levels that they require.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I remind the hon. Member his speaking time is expired.

2.1.01 to – oh, I'm sorry. We will recognize MHA Trimper.

**P. TRIMPER:** Just one question, Mr. Chair.

I just wondered if from this department's perspective you could provide an update on the Labrador Aboriginal Training Partnership and your role in it. I know there are some concerns about their future. Certainly, they're looking for the next big project. We had a very interesting Estimates here last night, and the ADM in Transportation and Infrastructure, Mr. John Baker, alluded to what I think is an interesting idea. I was going to reach out to Mr. Keith Jacque this morning.

He talked about the need for so many deckhands and other positions aboard the various ferries in our province. I just wanted to throw those two ideas out to you and just wondered what you're seeing for LATP. It has proven itself to be a very nimble and successful way to get a lot of folks with those needed skills into an opportunity right away.

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

Walter, you're intimately aware of the ongoing evolution of that, so please go ahead.

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Minister.

Yes, we have been a proud partner and directly involved with Keith Jacque and his team for the past number of years. The last conversation I know that myself and our team had with Keith was probably a couple of months ago. At that time, he had indicated that there was a little bit of concern getting to the end of the current federal funding that they had. We had talked about the potential for the department to be there to support them in some manner if there was a bridge period that they were looking at.

The Labrador Aboriginal Training Partnership is a key initiative. From our perspective, we are full in, supporting Keith and his team. We'll do what we can to support Keith and his team going forward because they've done some tremendous work in the Labrador area.

**P. TRIMPER:** Thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, MHA Trimper.

2.1.01 to 2.1.07, back to you, MHA Tibbs.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We're going to continue 2.1.05, under Employment Assistance Programs for Persons with Disabilities. Under the Allowances and Assistance, how many clients were funded under each program?

**G. BYRNE:** I'll let Mr. Mavin take that over.

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Minister.

The most significant program in this particular vote area would be the Supported Employment program, which provides assistance to individuals with intellectual disabilities to participate fully in the workforce. We have a network of 17 employment corporations across the province who do tremendous work in facilitating employment opportunities and supporting persons with intellectual disabilities in the workplace. We can provide more specific details, but on average, there would be in excess

of 500 individuals with intellectual disabilities supported through this program annually.

**C. TIBBS:** Excellent program.

Thank you.

Which employment corporations receive funding and how much? Could we get a list of that as well?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, you can.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Minister.

Under Grants and Subsidies, which organizations have community partnership agreements with government and how much was allocated to each organization?

**G. BYRNE:** We can get you that list.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll move to 2.1.06, Youth and Student Services. Allowances and Assistance: How many clients were funded under the tuition vouchers?

**G. BYRNE:** I don't know, Walt, if you have information readily available.

**W. MAVIN:** We'd have to go grab that information. It's a separate listing.

**D. DUNPHY:** (Inaudible.)

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Debbie, for reminding me.

In 2021, about 550 individuals.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much.

What would we do without Debbie?

**G. BYRNE:** There you go.

**C. TIBBS:** I bet you ask that all the time.

**G. BYRNE:** We do indeed. We do indeed.

**C. TIBBS:** Under Grants and Subsidies again, can you give us a breakdown of what

organizations have service agreements for youth and how many youth were funded by organizations?

**W. MAVIN:** Yes, we can provide that listing.

**C. TIBBS:** Great, thank you.

Employment Skills Development continued, 2.1.07, Apprenticeship and Trades Certification: How many active and newly registered apprentices are there?

**G. BYRNE:** Fortunately, I'm blessed with people who anticipate good questions and provide good answers.

Right now, we have, as of the end of the year, March 2021, 3,194 active apprentices in Newfoundland and Labrador and within the past year 371 newly registered apprentices.

**C. TIBBS:** Great. Thank you, Minister.

Keeping with at the same heading, how many block exams have been administered?

**G. BYRNE:** Within the previous year – and, again, March 31 of 2021 – there were 191 block exams administered.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

How many new journeypersons have been certified?

**G. BYRNE:** Within the journeypersons, the ...

**OFFICIAL:** (Inaudible.)

**G. BYRNE:** Whispers here telling me apprentices, 179. Yes, I can see that now.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

How many Trade Advisory Committee meetings have there been?

**G. BYRNE:** During the pandemic period, there were 51 Trade Advisory Committee meetings.

**C. TIBBS:** Excellent.

We'll move on to Salaries right now – sorry, Transportation and Communications. There was \$181,300 less spent compared to what was budgeted. Can you explain this and give us a breakdown of what didn't get spent due to COVID?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, there was a significant decrease. A lot energy is spent on Atlantic harmonization and working on that. Obviously, during the pandemic there was both a reduction of Atlantic and national meetings, which accounted for \$53,000 in the reduction. There was a reduction in employer meetings within the regions of around \$11,000 and divisional travel was reduced by \$10,000 with more virtual meetings being offered.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Professional Services: There was \$62,500 less spent compared to what was budgeted. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** During the pandemic, one of the things true with the Apprenticeship and Trades Certification programs is that site visits are made to training institutions. During the course of the pandemic with, of course, those institutions being either closed or reduced in operations, those site visits were reduced.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Under Purchased Services: There was \$3,904,900 less spent last year compared to what was budgeted. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** Under the industrial training program there were savings mainly related to the reduced demand as a result of COVID-19 under the industrial training programs. There were also reduced costs under the computer program implementation.

**C. TIBBS:** Perfect. Thank you, Minister.

We'll move on to Grants and Subsidies: There was \$236,400 less spent last year compared to what was budgeted. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** Walt, I think you might be able to take up that cause.

**W. MAVIN:** Thank you, Minister.

Essentially, it's lower than anticipated demand for apprenticeship programming.

**C. TIBBS:** Makes sense. Thank you, Mr. Mavin.

There's an additional \$89,600 budgeted this year compared to last year. Can this be explained, please?

**W. MAVIN:** This is specific to the Office to Advance Women Apprentices and it's simply the annualization of their funding for '21-'22.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Mr. Mavin.

Finally, can you provide a breakdown, please, of the Government Hiring Apprentices Program by placement?

**G. BYRNE:** When you say "placement," Mr. Chair, what do you mean by placement?

**C. TIBBS:** The departments, which department they would –

**G. BYRNE:** Oh, I see, okay. Yes, I understand. The program that facilitates other departments to hire apprentices within – yes, we certainly can.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, gentlemen.

That's all I have for that subheading right now.

**CHAIR (Reid):** MHA Dinn.

Just for the record, it's MHA Reid filling in for MHA Warr in the Chair.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was wondering who was behind the mask there.

Under section 2.1.07: There's a slight increase to the budget for Salaries. Was there a new position?

**G. BYRNE:** No, there was approved salary increases, plus the removal of additional funding under the 27th pay period. There is no new position created there.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Two other questions on this and then I'm done.

Under Purchased Services: \$6.1 million budgeted and quite a bit of money. Is it possible to give us a brief survey on what this money is usually spent on? I believe you talked about the industrial relations program, but I'm just wondering what normally would be spent here, typically be spent on in this section.

**G. BYRNE:** Walt, do you want to take it away?

**W. MAVIN:** Yes, the bulk of this money in this particular category is used to support block training. It's the purchase of block training for apprentices as they move through, and last year we saw a significant drop in the number of class calls.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Finally, federal revenue is also way lower than expected. What money were we expecting but didn't receive?

**G. BYRNE:** Go ahead there, Walt.

**W. MAVIN:** There was an adjustment there. The federal revenue here is through the Labour Market Development Agreement. Last year we adjust under the LMDA where we have requirements for funding. In an area related to my previous answer, when we were seeing a drop in the class calls there was a subsequent aligned reduction in federal revenue.

**J. DINN:** Just to go back to the block training. The \$6.1 million, that's basically for those who are – to go back and do the classwork that they need?

**G. BYRNE:** Go ahead, Walt.

**W. MAVIN:** Yes, essentially. As an example, when an apprentice does their pre-employment in welding, secures an employment placement, attains their required 1,800 hours in the workplace and then they're required to go to their first block training. The cost of that training, the tuition at the training institution, is provided on behalf of the apprentice through this funding.

**J. DINN:** So it's a form of tuition freeze or a benefit to a person doing the training. It's a form of tuition benefit, then.

**W. MAVIN:** Yes. The cost of training is provided through the department.

**J. DINN:** Okay. I was just looking at it in terms of the tuition freeze from Memorial University students as well. That's why I'm looking at the comparison. So there is tuition assistance or tuition is paid for those in trades (inaudible).

**G. BYRNE:** Mr. Chair, so it could be pointed out that not everyone who enters the program would be assisted. Those who are EI eligible would be able to avail of that particular program, but there are individuals who go through the program that are not necessarily assisted.

Within the apprenticeship program, if you think about it, there are some very lucrative supports that are offered highlighting the priority we put on the skilled trades. In addition, for those clients that are EI eligible, they can, indeed, get their pre-apprenticeship programming sponsored or supported. Then when they go into the workplace, there are relatively generous wage subsidies offered to their employer while they collect the prerequisite number of hours, working under a journeyman, to be able to meet the requirements for that particular block. Then when they go to the block training, if they are EI eligible, then there are sponsorships that are available and supports that are offered.

There is a full range of supports that are eligible, but not everybody. There are individuals that go through, that start the pre-apprenticeship program that are not EI eligible and that do so either through student loans or other means.

**J. DINN:** Would it be possible to get the full cost, then, or a breakdown of the supports? Like, the \$6.1 million, plus the wage subsidy offered to employers and so on and so forth. Would it be possible to have a – to those doing the trades programs and that. I'm just trying to get a – so I can compare apples to apples when it comes to tuition supports and that in place for MUN, plus the supports that are put in place for those doing a trade or entering the College of the North Atlantic or elsewhere. That's what I'd be

interested in. If you can provide that, that'd be great.

**G. BYRNE:** We certainly can provide a certain amount of information in that regard. I would not want any Member to assume that it's a fixed cost. Different programs have different tuition expenses. Different employers, through the wage subsidy, will be eligible for different amounts of support.

Memorial University of Newfoundland, of course, is a different entity; not under this department. I guess one could argue that – not to be argumentative about it – the supports of \$230 million-plus for Memorial University and a grant in lieu, which are not provided to the private institutions, we'd have to factor that in as a tuition offset or consideration of tuition.

Would the hon. Member be able to refine his request so that we can better understand it? Because there is certain information that we can provide at an aggregate level for the trades, but I think, Mr. Chair, he may have also asked for comparisons to Memorial University of Newfoundland and that's more of a difficult comparison for us to be able to make.

**J. DINN:** I'm just trying to find the line here now, the exact number with regard to tuition-offset amounts for Memorial. I'm just trying to compare the total number of support that would be comparable for the trades through CNA. That's basically what I'm looking at. I think it was some \$60 million-plus in terms of grants or the tuition offset.

Anyway, I'm just trying to get an idea of, like, what's the amount of money – the money that government will no longer provide, I guess, after this, but comparing that to what's provided in the trades. Whether it's through the \$6.1 million for tuition, wage subsidies and so on and so forth. That's what I'm looking at. I'll get the exact number and refine that for you, Minister, but I'm just trying to figure out what is the amount. Because I'm assuming that \$6.1 million will continue after this year and after next year.

**OFFICIAL:** (Inaudible.)

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, that's funded through the LMDA. So, yes, if the –

**J. DINN:** Ah, so I have it here. It's \$68 million for tuition offsets. Now, I'm assuming it's not going to be anything close to that, but I'd be interested in just seeing what – sort of like what I'm looking at, the total amount of supports, financial resources that are put in place to those entering the trades versus those who enter university.

Thank you.

**G. BYRNE:** We can certainly do that.

**J. DINN:** I'm done with that section now.

**CHAIR:** No further questions on those sections?

**C. TIBBS:** No, we can move on to the next, when you're ready, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** Okay, we'll vote on those headings.

Sections 2.1.01 to 2.1.07 inclusive, do these subheadings carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.1.07 carried.

**CLERK:** 3.1.01 to 4.1.02 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

The question is: Do the subheadings 3.1.01 to 4.1.02 inclusive carry?

The next speaker is MHA Tibbs.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3.1.01, Client Services, Salaries: There's \$871,000 less being budgeted than what was spent last year; can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** I think Debbie or Walt – Debbie?

**D. DUNPHY:** In '20-'21, we charged less of our provincial salaries off here under the LMDA, so the cost was higher under provincial dollars. But going forward, what we've done is we had to – again, as I noted at the beginning of our session, we review our salaries annually, so we did look at attrition and we had to remove the funding for the 27th pay period, which is significant in this particular activity, and we've added on the salary increases.

But as you'll see from the investment made in Immigration, there is a significant increase in salary cost in that branch and so to assist in facilitating some of those increases, some of the new positions for Immigration, we did find some vacant positions here that we've eliminated under this head but will show up to create positions under the immigration program.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Ma'am.

Under Transportation and Communications, there's \$34,900 more budgeted this year compared to what was spent last year. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, can that be explained?

**D. DUNPHY:** We reviewed our travel requirements and, of course, the last fiscal year was impacted relating to COVID. But one of the things that are covered here are postage as well as telecommunications. There are 19 regional offices across the province, so there is a significant cost for that communication and for some travel within the offices and to various worksites and such. We did do a refresh on what we anticipated for '21-22 and we did increase the budget slightly.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Ms. Dunphy.

Purchased Services: There was \$107,500 more budgeted this year compared to what was spent last year; can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** There was, last year, lower than anticipated costs due to the offices being closed for a portion of the fiscal year. The staff were working from home during COVID, so those Purchased Services faced downward pressure as a result.



**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, there was \$31,500 more sent last year compared to what was budgeted. Can this be explained?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, it can. For this particular group of client services officers, this was for laptops working from home.

**C. TIBBS:** Laptops, good stuff. Thank you, Minister.

We move on to Immigration and Workforce Development. I have a couple of general questions here for you.

Can you provide a breakdown of the provincial nomination program numbers and the Atlantic Immigration Pilot endorsement?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, we can. The PNP, Provincial Nominee Program, numbers from January 1 to April 30 in 2021 – we did face a result from COVID and travel restrictions and so on. We still had a total number of principal applications of 87, with 75 family members following suit, for 162 in the first quarter of 2021. In 2020, we saw an overall result of 760 PNP applicants, up from 2019, which experienced 689 applicants and their families, which is up from 2018 when we saw 497. PNP numbers and AIP numbers were on a relatively upward trend for the past number of years.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Can you provide a breakdown of retention rates by immigration class with a comparison to the Atlantic provinces by landing year?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, we can. I don't have it in front of me right now but – yes, I do, actually. Wow, amazing.

So there's some conversation that occurs that Newfoundland and Labrador is not doing so well when it comes to retention rates. When we compare it to our Maritime neighbours, actually Newfoundland and Labrador is doing exceptionally well.

We've always strived to do better, but in the last five years since 2013-2018, for example, where

we have hard statistics, PEI had a retention rate of around 40 per cent. New Brunswick had a retention rate of around 48 per cent. While Newfoundland and Labrador had a retention rate of almost 51 per cent. So we exceeded both the retention rates of PEI and New Brunswick. Nova Scotia in a five-year period did very well with 62 per cent. But we're anticipating that with our increased emphasis on retention that we'll start to improve those numbers as well.

**C. TIBBS:** Excellent. I hope so as well.

Can you provide a breakdown of retention rates of international students and out-of-province, domestic Canadian students that have attended our post-secondary institutions by landing year?

**G. BYRNE:** That's a very, very good question. I'm going to ask Katie Norman if you might have some of that readily available.

**K. NORMAN:** Thank you for the question. That's something that we'd have to connect with Memorial University on, but we certainly will do and advise if we can provide that.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Ms. Norman.

We'll move on to 4.1.01, Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism, Salaries. There is \$802,800 more budgeted this year, compared to what was spent last year. Can this be explained, please?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, we can. This common fiscal year, as the budget reflected, there was an increase in the staffing complement within the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism. We intended to provide an additional 18 positions in that office, with six coming from within existing budget sources. That's for the first six months and when it's annualized, it will come to about \$1.3 million in annual salary increases.

So we took a decision. I'll proactively or preemptively answer potential questions. For Newfoundland and Labrador to succeed in a national competition for interest and performance in immigration to attract new applicants to our PNP and AIPP streams, what would be required to be able to meet what other provinces are performing at? So we took the example of other jurisdictions. To meet our

intended target of 5,100 new Newfoundlanders and Labradorians per year, we looked at other jurisdictions and how they were resourcing their offices of immigration. We looked at their number of staff, how much they spent on promotions and other things and in order for us to succeed based on existing data, on existing performance that we can glean from other provinces, this was the resourcing level that would be required.

**C. TIBBS:** Excellent, thank you.

Professional Services: There was \$51,400 more budgeted this year compared to what was spent last year. Can this be explained as well?

**G. BYRNE:** On Professional Services, there was increase related to training for staff and the Newfoundland and Labrador contribution to the Provincial-Territorial Immigration Secretariat. The annual fees and other things such as promotion are needed for publications. We needed access to copyrighted stock photography, which was \$5,000. It's different things like that.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Purchased Services, there seems to be \$1,045,800 more budgeted this year compared to what spent last year. Can this be explained and give a breakdown as well?

**G. BYRNE:** The additional funding this year, as noted in the budget that was read recently, we're spending resources on active promotion of Newfoundland and Labrador as a desirable place to seek permanent residency. This year we're anticipating a \$1-million drawdown on promotional activities, and annualized that will become \$2 million. Again, this was taken not just by arbitrary; this would be a nice thing to have. We looked at other jurisdictions that were successful at attracting 5,100 people per year and how they did that. We drew on those experiences to be able to come to the conclusion that in order for us to be successful in that kind of a global competition for hearts and minds, these are the resources we needed to spend.

**C. TIBBS:** Excellent. We want to be competitive. Thank you, Minister.

**CHAIR:** MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Under 4.1.01, is it possible to have an update on the implementation of the Immigration Action Plan and how many recommendations remain to be implemented?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, I'll ask Katie Norman to go through some of the nuances of this. Katie was intimately involved in previous experiences within Cabinet Secretariat on this and now takes up the role as the chief in charge of getting this work done.

Katie?

**K. NORMAN:** Thank you, Minister, for that.

MHA Dinn, we can certainly provide you an update on where we are with the Immigration Action Plan. That's something we're actively tracking. As you're probably aware, we're in year five of that action plan now. Getting to the point where, yes, it's important to look back on what we've achieved. I think there is recognition within the department that with government setting such an ambitious target, I think, where demographics would suggest where we need to be of welcoming 5,100 newcomers, we're looking at those actions to, I guess, challenge ourselves to say: Are they the most ambitious they can be and will they get us to the target?

We can certainly provide you with an update. I think there are 50-plus actions in the plan. We can get you detail on that in terms of looking back at what we've accomplished for sure.

**J. DINN:** Excellent.

Do we have an idea of how many recommendations remain to be implemented? Are we 75 per cent complete or ...?

**K. NORMAN:** I don't have that number in front of me, but we can include that with what we provide to you.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under Purchased Services, it was far lower than it was expected: \$53,000 down to \$23,000 and then up to a million-plus.

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, I can speak to this, Mr. Chair.

Purchased Services, not only that particular bracket, includes our intention to up the pace and magnitude of our promotions, our international promotions. Encompassing that is also trade shows and venues. Expos is probably the better way to describe that – immigration expos, our attendance at immigration expos during COVID-19. We've often attended expos in Brussels, in Dublin and other places. During COVID, they were not taken up. We reduced our expenses accordingly.

**J. DINN:** Basically, you're looking at, this year, that as we get COVID under control more or less, these expos and that will proceed and we'll be present there.

**G. BYRNE:** Well, hopefully. Some of these expos will be run virtually. There's been a pivot within the organizations, the structures that sponsor or host those kind of venues or expos. That number also includes the intention to be more aggressive in terms of promotional campaigns, both digital, online and other medium, to be able to promote Newfoundland and Labrador as an attractive place to consider moving to.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

I'm familiar with job fairs and the like, so I would assume here a similar thing. Certain people who go to this are looking for an opportunity elsewhere and in other parts of the world, let's say. You're probably looking at professionals, tradespeople and so on and so forth.

**G. BYRNE:** That's correct. We participate with the other Atlantic provinces in booths. We cost share booths at immigration fairs in Brussels, in Dublin and other places, in Paris.

We're not going to necessarily abandon those markets. I use that word kind of loosely, but we're not going to abandon those. We're also going to look more seriously at untrodden ground. Hong Kong is an active place where we need to be promoting Newfoundland and Labrador as an attractive place to live, within the Hong Kong community. There are other places.

I had a very interesting conversation just about a week ago with the ambassador for Uzbekistan to Canada, the United States and Mexico. He's housed in Washington. They have an embassy that services North America from Washington. What he explained to me is that Uzbekistan has a population of about 27 million people, I think, a huge number of which are young and highly educated, relatively used to a reasonable standard of living, but without jobs. They're young, highly talented and looking for places.

The Government of Uzbekistan is actively trying to place young people in various places where – I suspect to relieve some domestic political tensions. You have young people, highly educated, very highly skilled, with not a whole lot to do. It wouldn't be a great place to be. The Uzbekistani government is actively looking for places for their citizens to be able to live, to work and to generate families. I don't think Uzbekistan would necessarily be considered in the past a target market or a target place for Newfoundland and Labrador immigration, but sometimes you just have to think outside the box.

This was an opportunity that came to us not from our own, sort of, reach or search. It was the ambassador to Canada from Uzbekistan that reached out to me, and so we're actively working. That's just one of many examples where the same trodden ground it not necessarily going to be as fruitful as fresh eyes, as new ground.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

I go back to a point, then, that we made at the beginning, which has to do with assisting immigrants and that who are already highly skilled, highly educated and are stuck delivering food, driving cabs and so on and so forth, and who are probably looking at the jobs that they want. They want jobs where they're going to be able to use their skill sets. Again, if they're coming, then I'm assuming they're expecting to work in their field, so I guess we still need to make sure that those supports are there as well.

Under Grants and Subsidies: Money was left on the table last year and we're nonetheless increasing the budget for this year. What types

of new initiatives, that we're looking to support, what would they be?

**G. BYRNE:** With the Grants and Subsidies, they were revised down last year to \$315,000. That was, indeed, from COVID-19 impacts on organizations and the ability to lever more federal funding. While there was some downward pressure on demand, as a result of COVID, it reduced activity within our partner organizations, as a result of COVID. The other cause of this was we were able to lever federal funding for projects, which resulted in savings of provincial funds.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 4.1.02, Workforce Development and Productivity Secretariat: There's a significant drop this year in the budget for Salaries. Have people been moved out of the office or will the jobs be eliminated?

**G. BYRNE:** Walt, I'll get you to look at that. Oh, sorry.

**K. NORMAN:** Neither, actually.

What was occurring here in the budget for the last number of years was Newfoundland and Labrador was hosting two intergovernmental secretariats. One was the federal-provincial-territorial Forum of Labour Market Ministers and the other was the Atlantic Workforce Partnership initiative of the Council of Atlantic Premiers. There were six contractual positions associated that were being funded out of the Workforce Development Secretariat. Those secretariats have now moved on to other provinces, respectively, and the individuals have returned to their home positions within the department. That's why you see that reduction there for Salaries and across various operating was because the federal and intergovernmental initiatives have moved on to other jurisdictions.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

I know you mentioned this in answer to another question: What was the number of regional offices that we currently have under 3.1.01, Client Services?

**OFFICIAL:** Nineteen.

**G. BYRNE:** We have 19.

**J. DINN:** Nineteen. Thank you.

A quick one: Why did spending on Professional Services come in under budget last year?

**G. BYRNE:** There was a decrease in cost related to the labour market, to the secretariat – both the FLMM, of \$110,000, and the AWP, of \$10,000, which ended on March 31, 2021, for the reasons that Katie Norman has described.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR (Warr):** Thank you.

3.1.01 to 4.1.02 inclusive.

Back to you, MHA Tibbs.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Under this heading for Revenue - Provincial: Is this the \$250 fee for processing of provincial nominee applications?

**G. BYRNE:** This is under 4.1.02?

**C. TIBBS:** Yes, Minister.

**OFFICIAL:** (Inaudible.)

**C. TIBBS:** 4.1.01.

**G. BYRNE:** 4.1.01.

**C. TIBBS:** Yeah.

**G. BYRNE:** Revenue - Provincial, and I believe the answer is: Yes, it is.

**C. TIBBS:** Perfect.

Just a follow-up question stemming from that: If immigration is forecasted to increase, why is the amount of revenue in this line item budgeted to be the same as last year?

**G. BYRNE:** I will get Katie to answer that. I'm just trying to – sorry, I'm going to hold you up.

Katie, would you be able to provide a synopsis of the forecasting?

**K. NORMAN:** Certainly.

In terms of the province's commitment to immigration, to the target of 5,100, that will obviously happen over a period of time. There have been impacts at the federal level in terms of processing times, so we're anticipating – really, we're at a point of recovery, trying to get back to earlier levels of immigration that we've seen.

The thing I would note, as well, with the provincial revenue there, is that not all components of the immigration program have fees. We anticipate seeing increases in areas like international graduate students, which there is no fee. So any increase there wouldn't be reflected. I think it would be in later years, you know, consideration of what the fees would be and what that would look like would come later on.

**C. TIBBS:** Perfect. Thank you, Ms. Norman.

That's all I have for this subheading.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Yes, please, just a few more questions and done.

4.1.02, Purchased Services: The budget was spent last year, yet this year the budget for this item has almost been completely eliminated. I'm assuming that's to do with the secretariat, then.

**G. BYRNE:** (Inaudible.)

**J. DINN:** Yeah, thank you.

**G. BYRNE:** Just to be sure –

**J. DINN:** I had a head nod. I wasn't sure.

**G. BYRNE:** Yes, it is.

**J. DINN:** Yeah.

**G. BYRNE:** Yeah.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

There's a similar to pattern to budgets under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, the same reasons?

**G. BYRNE:** Yes. Katie, (inaudible).

**K. NORMAN:** Yes, that's accurate.

**J. DINN:** No Grants and Subsidies budgeted for this year. We also notice that there will be no federal or provincial revenue either and I guess that would be the same thing.

**G. BYRNE:** (Inaudible.)

**J. DINN:** Perfect. Simple answers to simple questions.

I'm done with this section.

I have one general question. There's projected to be an increase – I guess, for a lack of a better term – in climate refugees, as the Earth's mean temperature is expected to increase. It's going to have devastating effects on those that may depend on it for – like when it comes to food production. Have there been any discussions with your federal counterparts, provincial counterparts and other jurisdictions about plans to deal with this, if and when it comes, and probably more likely when it comes? Because the people who will be coming in looking for a place to live may not necessarily have the skill requirements that the province is looking for.

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Within the space that is maintained, influenced or controlled by provincial and territorial governments, we're responsible or we have a role to play in economic immigration. The federal government maintains overall jurisdiction under the constitutional authorities for immigration. The purpose of the Provincial Nominee Program, as well as the Atlantic Immigration Pilot project, which roughly follows the same suit, provincial governments still nominate to the federal government. This is true of all provinces in Canada, with some variation in Quebec itself, which has been granted greater autonomies.

But the recognition here is that within the immigration role, provincial governments,

including Newfoundland and Labrador, still nominate to federal governments on economic immigration. We're very successful. We'll be growing in our success in terms of economic immigration.

In terms of refugees, this remains a federal role, responsibility and jurisdiction. All decisions around refugee resettlement, including acceptance of refugees internationally and partitionment or distribution of refugees within the Canadian Federation for resettlement, all of those decisions are taken by the federal government exclusively, with discussion with provincial governments as to allowable or acceptable targets.

It is the federal government that is responsible for resettlement. Upon arrival of refugees within a province, the federal government maintains responsibility for resettlements for up to a year and beyond. Newfoundland and Labrador is one of only two places that we are aware of – two provinces – where the provincial government does indeed engage in activity for resettlement. Even though it's a federal sphere, a federal jurisdiction and federal resources are applied to it, Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick are the only two provinces that we are aware of that actually supports the federal government in refugee resettlement.

We do so very deliberately. We want our refugees to be successful. We negotiate with the federal government on an annual basis on the number of refugees that would come to Newfoundland and Labrador. The federal government has the final say. But we want that resettlement to be successful.

Yes, the answer is there are ongoing discussions with our federal counterpart on refugees and future demand for refugees. It's part of the FPT, the federal-provincial-territorial exercise on immigration to have these discussions both bilaterally and multilaterally within the Canadian Federation. We're always involved in forecasts for anticipated refugee resettlements.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

The only other comment I would make has to do with the population. If you have a chance to read the book the *Empty Planet* by Bricker and

Ibbitson, they postulate that, worldwide, the population of the world is actually now starting a decline. One of the things that they do say is that Canada has done a much better job with regard to immigration. We're going to rely more and more on immigration than ever to maintain our populations. I think the replacement rate is much lower than what is needed.

I go back, then, to some facts, statistics that you provided. When it came to the retention rates, Newfoundland is 51 per cent and we're still higher, but not much than New Brunswick and PEI. But Nova Scotia seems to be doing remarkably better at attracting people or retaining them, and I can think of several reasons why. Obviously, in Newfoundland and Labrador, the need for immigration is significantly greater.

I'm just wondering: What, then, is Nova Scotia doing that they seem to be – or what are the factors that makes the retention rate higher there than it does in any of the other three Atlantic provinces and what can we learn from it?

**G. BYRNE:** Well, that's a very good question. We're studying it.

One of the things that Nova Scotia does do, in terms of attraction, for example, is they have 10 universities. Nova Scotia hosts 10 universities with 48,000 students annually. It's worth noting whenever we make comparisons of Newfoundland and Labrador to Nova Scotia in terms of post-secondary education, Newfoundland and Labrador provides more support for Memorial University of Newfoundland in its base operating grant than the Government of Nova Scotia offers to all 10 universities in Nova Scotia combined. Nova Scotia has higher tuition costs, especially for international students, yet they're attracting more immigrants.

It's a valuable conversation and I'm glad you raised it because sometimes what appears to be straightforward, or A meets, goes to B and goes to C is not necessarily always the case. Nova Scotia has 48,000 university students that come to it annually; it offers less support for its 10 universities than Memorial University of Newfoundland is offered by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for one university.

They've met with certain successes. Sometimes examining Nova Scotia is worthwhile, but it's not necessarily a perfect apple-to-apple comparison. They do have a pretty strong – I would argue Nova Scotia has been in the field longer than us so they have more institutional knowledge and capacity in terms of immigration, but it is our intention to surpass them.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

That's it, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

We'll turn the table to MHA Trimper.

**P. TRIMPER:** My final question, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to ask about Welcome NL, a very interesting initiative that was piloted in the Happy Valley-Goose Bay area in 2017 as part of *The Way Forward*. It's ended and I just wondered why it stopped and what the department is feeling in terms of whether there's a possibility of something like that returning. It was a partnership with Municipalities NL.

**G. BYRNE:** I'll get Katie Norman – I have some overarching awareness of the program itself, but I'm not as familiar with the details. We might be able to get you those details, unless, Katie, you're prepared to speak to it now.

**K. NORMAN:** I don't have the information off the top of my head, but certainly, we can provide an update on where the funding came from and whether the increased funding and settlement under Grants and Subsidies this year may be an option for that organization.

**P. TRIMPER:** Okay, yeah. Thank you.

It's interesting, you know, it was sort of a larger-than-life present hunt. It was well received in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and the Upper Lake Melville area, I thought. Interacted with hundreds of new Canadians. Worked well in partnership with the Association for New Canadians. Anyway, I think it would be good to see it reinstated, or if there were particular faults with it, if you were to consider some way to improve on that and come back. It was that real

hands-on, almost a navigator support for the employer and the new Canadians seeking an opportunity in our country and in our province.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Is the Committee ready for the question?

Shall 3.1.01 to 4.1.02 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 4.1.02 carried.

**CLERK:** Total.

**CHAIR:** Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, total heads, carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** I offer MHA Tibbs some closing remarks, please.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. A job well done by you and MHA Reid.

Thank you very much everybody for coming today and giving us the information. It's very, very important, and moving forward now I think your department is more important than any other for population growth and immigration and whatnot. I can see that the department is in competent hands after meeting the minister's team today. So I applaud you all for the work that you do. Like I said, it's very important and it's very important to me as well.

I look forward to working with the minister moving forward over the next couple of years and everybody in the department. I know I've spoken to Jeremy now a couple of times and very accommodating. I thank you very much for your help. I look forward to working with you to bring much success, pride and prosperity back to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, MHA Tibbs.

MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I, too, certainly join my colleague in recognizing the importance of this department. Certainly, with an aging population and a declining population in many ways, having young people, families and that staying here is important. Certainly, the students at Holy Heart are a prime example of that; many of them are planning to stay here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We just need to make sure the conditions are right and that they will want to stay here and that they get their education.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Minister, I'll offer some closing remarks for you as well.

**G. BYRNE:** Well, thank you to the Members of the Committee.

I really appreciate the exchange we've had today. I hope it was informative for you, but it was certainly very helpful to me, being able to focus my mind on a couple of issues, in particular related to apprenticeships and to immigration.

I also want to echo some of the comments, the respectful attitude that was held to the executive of the department. I really have to say I'm blessed with my dream team. We will have some obvious challenges over the coming years as we come out of COVID, but I also reflect on the fact that these challenges often open up new avenues, new on-ramps for new ideas to be able to adapt to new realities and so we look forward to that.

Thank you all very much. I really appreciate being here today with you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

Just before we end the meeting, I, too, want to thank both the department and the Committee for their participation this morning and certainly to our Clerk in her diligence in the preparation of this meeting. Again, thank you MHA Scott Reid for filling in for me to attend an item that I had to attend to this morning.

We will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Environment and Climate Change, which will be our next meeting, tomorrow, Wednesday, June 9 at 5:30 p.m.

Seeing nothing else on the agenda, I look for a motion to adjourn.

**C. PARDY:** So moved.

**CHAIR:** So moved by MHA Pardy.

Thank you, everybody.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.