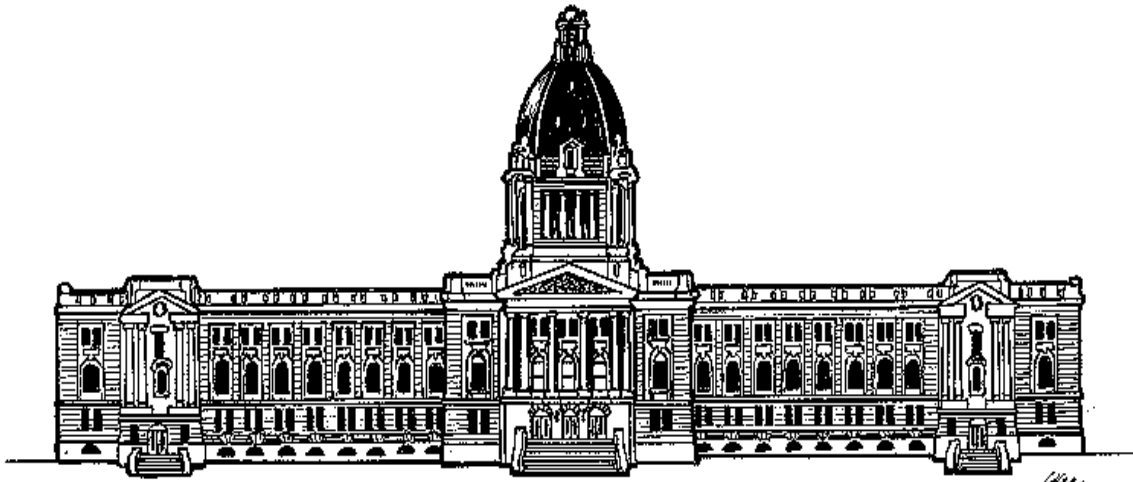




STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 11 – May 15, 2012



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-seventh Legislature

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Batoche

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Regina Coronation Park

Ms. Doreen Eagles
Estevan

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Moose Jaw Wakamow

Mr. Russ Marchuk
Regina Douglas Park

Mr. Paul Merriman
Saskatoon Sutherland

[The committee met at 14:55.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name is Delbert Kirsch and I'm Chair of the committee. With us today are Ms. Doreen Eagles, Mr. Russ Marchuk, and Mr. Paul Merriman. Substitutions are Mr. Scott Moe and Mr. Kevin Phillips and Ms. Cathy Sproule.

Bill No. 18 — *The Degree Authorization Act*

Clause 1

The Chair: — This afternoon we will consider Bill No. 18, *The Degree Authorization Act*. Minister Norris is here with his officials. Mr. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, and to committee members, I want to say thanks very much for the opportunity to appear before you today. Happy to make those introductions and then to have some remarks, Mr. Chair.

Here to my left is Clare Isman, deputy minister for Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration. To my right is Dr. Reg Urbanowski, special adviser to the deputy minister on post-secondary education. And in behind, we have Alicia McGregor, acting director of the ministry's legislative services unit. We also have Patti Bateman, the manager for the quality assurance branch, and Mr. Dave Boehm who's just behind me as well, and he's the assistant deputy minister responsible for the post-secondary education stream.

And I want to take this opportunity to thank all these officials, among others. And I think there are a few others that have joined us, or will be joining us, and if they're required we'll make sure they introduce themselves before they speak.

Mr. Chair, last December I had the opportunity to introduce Bill No. 18, *The Degree Authorization Act*. And we're here today to be able to provide a greater level of detail for the committee. I'd like to start by providing a little bit more in the way of context on why this legislation has been proposed and why it's needed. As you know, this new legislation provides the government with the ability to extend degree-granting authority to post-secondary institutions other than the University of Regina and University of Saskatchewan. Currently, Mr. Chair, Saskatchewan does not have, does not have a mechanism by which to evaluate requests for degree-granting authority from post-secondary institutions other than the two universities. Mr. Chair, this legislation would help to fill this public policy void and increase accessibility for post-secondary education by offering the opportunity of expanding opportunities for students to gain greater access to baccalaureate level education.

Mr. Chair, most other provinces have expanded degree-granting authority to institutions other than their principal universities. In British Columbia and Alberta for example, there are university colleges, technical institutes, and theological institutions offering various degree programs. As well, British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and the Maritime provinces have government-established quality assurance agencies to consider

institutional applications for degree-granting authority and to assess proposed new degree-granting, or sorry, new degree programs against established standards.

Mr. Chair, *The Degree Authorization Act* provides a mechanism to evaluate proposals for degree programs from post-secondary institutions other than the University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina. This legislation holds three key tenets. First it is meant to bolster accessibility for students in our province. As our population and our economy continue to grow, as many members will know, we have the lowest unemployment rate in the country at 4.9 per cent. We have the only balanced budget among provinces right across the country. And we see that today there are more than 11,000 jobs open and available across the province. In order to ensure that we can help meet what I call our talent challenge, that is the challenges associated with this red-hot labour market, we want to make sure that there is greater accessibility for students right across the province when it comes to post-secondary education.

Second, it ensures a robust quality assurance process. That is, the Act gives learners here at home and those coming to Saskatchewan the confidence in their decision to attain quality post-secondary education here. That makes sense. If we're going to look at expanding opportunities, what we don't want to do is in any way jeopardize the long held and much appreciated reputation of what Saskatchewan degrees mean. So that's that quality assurance. There's a balance there.

And third, Mr. Chair, it protects the long-standing reputations of the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina. As we engage in internationalization and enhanced relationships with other jurisdictions, our institutions look to build new partnerships. The legislation ensures these partnerships will maintain Saskatchewan's quality standards and that's increasingly important.

In the past, we've received requests from SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] and from Briercrest College, from First Nations University, among others, to actually look at degree-granting programs. The resulting discussion has been a simple one. Without enabling legislation, there is no way to actually even have a meaningful dialogue. The answer, because of this public policy void, was quite simply no, not at this time because we just simply do not have a mechanism. What this Act is meant to do is ensure that there is a mechanism in place for that dialogue to continue and for program evaluation to be undertaken. We think this aligns nicely with best practices from other provinces.

Once authorized, Mr. Chair, the institutions that are putting forward these requests will be monitored annually to ensure that quality is maintained. So here it's not simply a matter of one-off. It's actually a matter of ensuring that there's a sustainability that's built in to quality assurance. Monitoring will involve performance reporting by institutions and inspections conducted by the ministry. An institution will also be subject to a more comprehensive review every five years that will determine whether or not authorization for the degree program can be renewed. Again that's important regarding sustainability and quality assurance, essentially giving families and students that level of confidence.

On another matter, Mr. Chair, we've made every effort to protect the autonomy and integrity of our two universities. Our universities are doing solid work. They're both world renowned and we don't want to affect what they are doing, especially their operations and their successes. As a result, the University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina are exempt from this new legislation.

Mr. Chair, we've ensured that the use of the term "university" remains well protected and preserved within the Saskatchewan context. Institutions authorized to grant degrees will not be automatically granted permission to use the term "university." We are developing regulations regarding the use of the term "university." That will be based on best practices and sound advice from other jurisdictions. And here there are some real lessons to be learned. We are working with the Saskatchewan Education Leadership Unit, what we call SELU, that undertakes its activities out of the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan on this very point.

Mr. Chair, we've recently become aware of a degree mill. Really this is a bogus institution attempting to offer degrees that are illegitimate. This degree mill is using Saskatchewan as its address. That's not acceptable today. It won't be acceptable tomorrow. And we need more legislative instruments to put a stop to that kind of abuse — abuse that is under way, that we track, that we stop on an ongoing basis, but that we need some additional tools to hold other individuals and institutions to account because this kind of bogus degree through illegitimate universities — in fact they're not centres of higher learning at all, usually — this threatens to taint the strong reputation of Saskatchewan's post-secondary educational system. For this reason, the "physical presence" in the Act casts a very wide net and provides us with the legislative authority to prohibit these types of organizations from operating or appearing to operate in Saskatchewan. That latter point is very important — appearing to operate — especially when we think about web-based marketing that we know goes on around the world.

Mr. Chair, with respect to private post-secondary institutions, the proposed legislation requires them to have financial security in place to protect students financially in case the institution is unable to fulfill its contractual commitments with these students. Private institutions will also be required to have train-out plans in place to ensure students will be taken care of in the event that a program is discontinued. This is very important — again some of those lessons learned from other jurisdictions. Mr. Chair, financial security is an important consumer protection measure and one that is consistent across all the jurisdictions that we've reviewed.

The proposed legislation also ensures that students will have access to their transcripts. Regulations and policy will require institutions to make appropriate arrangements for the storage and solid security of these transcripts.

Mr. Chair, the proposed legislation also ensures the implementation of a robust quality assurance process to assess applications for degree-granting authorization. The first stage of the quality assurance review process involves a review of the proposed degree program to determine its fit within Saskatchewan's post-secondary system and how it will directly benefit Saskatchewan.

What's important here is we don't simply want to see additional programs being added on that replicate or imitate programs that are already in existence. What we want to see is that these new potential programs are making a tighter connection to the labour market, that is, making it easier for Saskatchewan learners to become Saskatchewan earners. An institution proposing a new degree program will be required to demonstrate labour market demand, student demand, and how the program aligns with the institution's mandate.

Mr. Chair, we have sought expert advice on these best practices. A governance advisory panel has assisted the ministry on the quality assurance governance issues. The panel included representation from the University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan, SIAST, Briercrest College and Seminary, and the Gabriel Dumont Institute. The governance advisory panel has provided advice on governance of the quality assurance board including the proposed size, structure, role, and composition of the board. The work of this panel was informed by research on quality assurance governance structures elsewhere in Canada as well as internationally, quite specifically Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, as well as the United States.

Mr. Chair, the quality assurance board will operate at arm's length from government and will oversee the quality assurance review process. It will operate independently from government for the purpose of conducting quality assurance reviews and making recommendations regarding applications for the authorization that have been referred to it by government. Mr. Chair, the composition of the board will be determined using a competency matrix that will reflect both balance and diversity.

Mr. Chair, we are aiming to make the quality assurance process cost neutral for the province. Taxpayers should not have to pay for an applicant to have an application considered. Institutions seeking authorization will have to pay for all the costs associated with the quality assurance review process. The fee will depend on the comprehensiveness of the quality assurance review that will be required. Mr. Chair, the maximum fee which will be charged for a full quality assurance review will be \$50,000. The fee is set at this level to ensure only serious proposals are submitted. If it is determined that an institution does not need to undergo the full quality assurance review process, the fee can then be lowered from \$50,000.

As well, Mr. Chair, when a new degree program is reviewed as part of the quality assurance review process, credit transfer opportunities will be considered, that is, making sure that there's greater ease for students and their families to understand what opportunities there are to move between institutions. This will make it easier for students to continue their studies at a different institution if required.

Regarding consultations, Mr. Chair, there's support for other post-secondary institutions being allowed to offer degree programs as long as proper quality assurance reviews are undertaken and public resources are not negatively impacted. We've consulted widely with stakeholders including post-secondary institutions here in the province, with students, with teachers, and other interested organizations.

Alex Usher of Higher Education Strategy Associates, a very

well-known entity recognized right across the country, conducted public consultations last year and provided his recommendations to the ministry in a report received last August. Working in partnership with leaders in our post-secondary system, ministry officials have developed an action plan to address the priority recommendations of the Usher report.

Mr. Chair, the ministry has consulted with its counterparts in Alberta and British Columbia as well as Ontario. These provinces had both degree-granting legislation and quality assurance processes in place for several years, and they were extremely helpful in providing advice and on sharing best practices and lessons learned.

Mr. Chair, we've consulted with both universities. Their responses to the proposed legislation have been both encouraging but also helpful. We've received letters of support from the presidents of both universities, but we've also taken and been mindful of some of the broader advice that they've had to offer.

Based on the entirety of our consultations over the last year, it's fair to say there is widespread support for the proposed legislation and for the importance of having a robust quality assurance process for people right here in Saskatchewan.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, this is an important and timely piece of legislation for students, for parents, for institutions, and communities right across the province. It's important for us to address this public policy gap for the future of our province. The Act acknowledges and respects the strong foundation of our two universities while making sure that we have a system that can continue to move forward with enhanced strength, with enhanced quality assurance, and with enhanced opportunities, most importantly, for our students. We also want to ensure there's greater accessibility, Mr. Speaker, while preserving and protecting the quality of Saskatchewan's post-secondary educational system, the long-standing, excellent reputation that our universities have achieved. And finally, Mr. Chair, the legislation is meant to align our province with best practices, both nationally and around the world.

Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to join you and all the committee members this afternoon, and I look forward to the dialogue that will ensue.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We thank you for that enlightening dialogue. And I believe Ms. Sproule has some questions. You have the floor.

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all the officials for joining us this afternoon. It's appreciated. And thanks to the minister for that fulsome introduction; you gave us a lot of information there.

The questions I have . . . I'll just start right away and ask the first question, and that is first of all, what Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions have been calling for this change or this legislation?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thanks very much. We've certainly had three recently call for this legislation. SIAST has put a call in

for opportunities on degree granting. Key priority here for SIAST is really about making sure that they're able to keep up with their peer institutions on a technical basis from across the country.

There are a number of institutions, technical institutions, that have seen some of their programs move from the level of diploma to the level of applied degrees. And so what we want to do is make sure that as it makes sense, again with the full quality assurance review process, as it makes sense that at least we can have this dialogue.

The fear is that Saskatchewan students will lose out on opportunities where quite simply some of the technical fields are just simply changing so rapidly that other institutions, other technical institutions across the country are moving to applied degrees, and SIAST isn't able to keep up. So that's part one.

Part two, we've certainly heard as well from First Nations University. And we have a multi-year agreement in place. That partnership between First Nations University and the University of Regina is rock-solid and it is absolutely vital. But as we look to the future over the course of several years, what we want to do is make sure that we have in place a quality assurance framework that can lead to an informed and fulsome discussion rather than one that isn't able to take place because of this public policy gap.

And then obviously the third one that I've made mention of is the Briercrest Seminary. The college is looking to actually offer some very limited baccalaureate degree-granting streams. And again, in order to have that conversation, in order to make sure that it's a fulsome dialogue, we need to make sure that we have the legislative authority. There have been others, but I would put them in a different class, in a different category. These would be the three institutions that certainly, on a contemporary basis, have made these requests.

[15:15]

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you very much. I guess the next question I have then is, what Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions have voiced concerns?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thanks very much for that. We went out and made sure that there were open consultative sessions. As I've mentioned, Alex Usher, we had him do a report and then actually participate in some of the consultative efforts. I think what I'll do is, Clare, either for you or for Reg to actually walk through what some of those responses have been.

That being said, I also know and some of the institutions have shared with me that as part of the official opposition's due diligence that there were a number of letters sent out requesting responses, and many institutions were good enough to kind of inform us of that dialogue, and that makes good sense too. So, Reg, why don't we . . . Dr. Urbanowski, why don't we get you to comment on the consultative process and some of the feedback that we've received from Saskatchewan institutions?

Mr. Urbanowski: — Okay. My name is Reg Urbanowski. And to comment on the question that you had with regard to any concerns that Saskatchewan institutions may have had in terms

of formal process that we did with the Alex Usher report, maybe just to review that.

We began with a learning event that we held last spring at which we had close to 90 participants representing a whole variety. We had sent out invitations to post-secondary institutions, student unions, faculty associations, professional bodies, and had a fair representation from across there. From that, Mr. Usher requested written submissions be sent to him. And from those submissions, he sort of aggregated the data and worked with the institutions, going back to do interviews. He came out to Saskatchewan to conduct interviews.

In terms of specific, particular bodies of concerns, I can't give you that particular data. But you know, there were concerns that were brought out in terms of people having a concern with regard to, did it mean that public funding would be dissipated more? Were there concerns regarding the universities, and would they have to go through a quality assurance process? Exactly where those came from, I'm not able to tell you because the data we got was in aggregate form. Does that answer your question?

Ms. Sproule: — So the two basic concerns were then dissipation of public funds, and what was the second point you made?

Mr. Urbanowski: — Quality assurance for the universities, that people felt that the universities already had a level of excellence and had internal mechanisms that they had for quality assurance and that they didn't want to see this as a burden imposed on the universities.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I can, and I don't want to interrupt the stream, but I think, you know, I think what we saw there was the need to stay very focused on what the specific public policy problem or opportunity was. And the public policy gap did not in any way put in question or jeopardy the reputation of the universities. That's not what really informed this dialogue.

The public policy question was, if others wanted and were seeking the opportunity to even be considered for degree granting, including applied degrees, there was no mechanism. And so the significance of this, it was not to call in question the reputation and track record of our universities. It was simply to say, in order to facilitate the dialogue, in order to consider what some additional options may be on degree granting, this is going to focus on those other institutions, not the university. And I hope that offers a little bit of context. So again, sorry to interrupt, but I just wanted to make sure that was the very focused dialogue.

Ms. Sproule: — It is helpful and to articulate what you see as the actual policy gap and where the legislative gap was. Was there any consideration when you identified the gap to perhaps fill it through using the universities in a more fulsome way or, you know, rather than going the direction you chose?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. And the answer certainly is, we have some, I think, some real successes there. We have seen from both institutions, both the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina, some very strong collaborative partnerships develop with other post-secondary institutions here

within the province and then others outside the province.

In some key areas, and I'll speak specifically for example, it makes a lot of sense. So as the decision was made to shift to the two-provider model for nursing education, that is, to have the University of Saskatchewan and then on the second provider, a new alliance and partnership between the University of Regina and SIAST. That made an enormous amount of sense for us, and we were very comfortable for that. On the other hand, we can anticipate or we could envision a very technical program that's on offer, for example, at SIAST where its peer institutions across the country have shifted to applied degrees and SIAST students are not able to get those additional classes, not able to tap into that additional expertise, and quite simply the universities would not be in a position to participate. It's an area of strength that SIAST would have. It's just simply the evolution in the field.

Reg, do you have some specific examples? Nursing comes to mind obviously. We have some other examples.

Mr. Urbanowski: — The master's degree in the North.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That's exactly right, yes.

Mr. Urbanowski: — Which is a partnership between the University of Saskatchewan and the University of the Arctic, as well as Northlands College would be another example of those. And there are a number of those that are partnerships from outside the province where we've been able to leverage the expertise at the universities.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And this doesn't prohibit that at all. It simply says, consistent with most other provinces if the dialogue is sought, at least we have an avenue, an instrument to facilitate the dialogue.

Ms. Sproule: — Okay. Going back to the two concerns that were raised by Mr. Urbanowski. What do you feel are the exact provisions in the legislation that will address the concerns that they raised regarding dissipation of public funds and the quality assurance process if they already have an established, rigorous quality assurance process?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll get Dr. Urbanowski to, just to continue.

Mr. Urbanowski: — First of all to address the issue of the universities with regards to the Act, they are exempt from the Act. And I think both universities have in fact expressed a desire to work with the quality assurance board to develop an audit process. And this is on their own request, that they saw there being a value to being involved in a quality assurance process in another way. And so we'll work with them with that.

With regard to the dissipation of funds, we've created in our process an eight-step process for quality assurance. The first step of the process is a ministry review. And as the minister spoke about in his opening remarks, it is an application that is submitted to the ministry and that the ministry will then be required to do an evaluation based on labour market demand. And part of that will look at any funding requirements that may be part of the application if there's talk about a use of funds.

But I also want to make it clear then that steps 2 through 8 are part of the quality assurance process. If there is a request for public funding, the application, then the decision is made. But there has to be a budget process. We did not want to create a process outside of the budget process for a new program. So it would go through the normal process for budgeting that would occur if you're talking about the use of public funds, and a decision would then be made in that process.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And if I can, even in the initial dialogue, in some instances, it has been made explicitly clear this is not about additional public funds. This is about drawing on the dollars that are already there and essentially being able to have the dialogue. And I appreciated the candour of the institutions that made that clear too.

Ms. Sproule: — You indicated in your opening remarks that there will be things like appropriate fees established for the process of becoming approved for degree-granting status. And I see that, for example, in section 16(3) of the proposed legislation, I think this is the reference that Dr. Urbanowski was referring to where:

(3) The minister shall not issue an authorization unless he or she is satisfied that the applicant has:

(a) given security that complies with any prescribed requirements and is adequate to protect the interests of students; and

(b) made adequate arrangements to protect the interests of students by ensuring:

(i) . . . [they] have access to their transcripts;

(ii) that the arrangements comply with any prescribed requirements.

So when we see the word prescribed, we are forced to turn to section 23, and that's the types of regulations that the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make. So when we look in, for example, 23(h), that's where we see the fees being prescribed for the quality assurance review.

And I guess my concern and question is that there are close to 20 regulatory areas where we haven't seen any proposed regulations. And the first question is, when will those regulations be made available? Because it seems that the meat of this particular legislation will be found in the regulations. This is a very short Bill with only 22 substantive clauses outside of the regulatory authority, and so it's very difficult to get a sense of how it's going to look until these regulations are passed.

So the question is, when will they be available to view? It sounds like you've already made some decisions, like 50,000 being a cap on quality assurance. I assume there are other decisions that have been made that we're not aware of and haven't sort of had any fulsome . . . There's that word a third time, fulsome. I apologize to the committee. There hasn't been any complete, I guess, not disclosure but provision of information in terms of where these regulations are going to go.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Great. Thanks very much for that important question. First and foremost, we anticipate that over the course of the summer and within weeks that the regulations will be ready. Secondly, that they will then go through both internal review processes that we have and public consultations and public scrutiny. So I anticipate that probably by the end of summer or early fall, we would envision having those finalized.

But certainly it is our intention to have a fulsome process, open, transparent, and especially with this community. This is, the post-secondary community is a very special community in Saskatchewan, and we want to make sure that we can draw on the experiences and ideas and insights of members from across the communities as well as members of the public.

Ms. Sproule: — Yes. You know, I know, I understand how the regulatory process makes life easier for legislators and why it's simpler sometimes just to put those types of provisions in the regulations. However I have commented a few times since I came to this Assembly that it makes it difficult for scrutiny of legislation when much is contained in regulations. So it's difficult to have an idea of the complete plan until we see the regulations.

Another question that I would like to ask at this point is the types of degrees. What types of degrees do the interested institutions wish to award? And I think you've answered that somewhat. Briercrest is looking at a Bachelor of Arts, and what about SIAST? What types of degrees are they hoping to be able to award?

[15:30]

Hon. Mr. Norris: — First and, you know, first and foremost, what's important here is undergraduate degrees. Certainly Briercrest has an interest in the arts, and appropriately so, given some areas of expertise that certainly they've been working on over the course of some years. Of course that needs to go through the quality assurance process.

SIAST itself, you know, we anticipate again that these are probably going to be some of their technical programs. And we've certainly had some ideas exchanged, you know, with SIAST, with some requests, mostly on the technical side. What I would identify — I don't want to prejudge SIAST; I want to respect, you know, the institutional prerogatives that they have — but I would suggest that most likely they'd be on the applied degree side.

Ms. Sproule: — I'm just wondering, I have a degree from the College of Law in the University of Saskatchewan, and when I got the degree it was called an LL.B. [Bachelor of Laws], and recently they've changed the name of the degree to a J.D. [Juris Doctor] I believe, which to me doesn't change at all the substance of the learning that's occurred. It's just a different name, but other jurisdictions are doing it. Do you think that in terms of the applied degrees that the institutions like SIAST would be looking at, is this sort of changing the name, but the substance of the program would remain the same? Is it like a rose is a rose is a rose?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The Canadian ministers of Education and Advanced Education group called CMEC [Council of Ministers

of Education, Canada] has a specific term where there's a notion of a degree with an applied focus, and so a shortened version of that is a notion of an applied degree.

We're, you know, we've certainly seen that SIAST is a willing partner and participant. We've certainly seen that. At this stage, what we'd, you know, I think what we'd like to do is actually see what those are going to look like. So as I say, I anticipate that's going to be the kind of tone and tenor of proposal or proposals from SIAST. I don't want to prejudge it, but certainly based on peer institutions from across the country, those are the kind of, I would say, kind of evolution of credentials. And I think that's really what you were making reference to as far as the University of Saskatchewan's College of Law. The evolution of credentials is something that we're mindful of.

There are two issues: we want to make sure that our students, that our learners and institutions have all the opportunities that others across the country do; and we're also mindful of making sure that the quality assurance process can ask the substantive questions, those very questions. Is this simply an evolution in a name, or do we actually see substantive, meaningful changes that kind of accompany this? And I'll go back to the College of Law for this, and that is there are curriculum changes that are being proposed in the College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan as I understand it. So experiential learning is a component that I think is gaining with some emphasis. So I use that as a mere reference.

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you. The next question I have is, will this legislation ensure that there is not a duplication of program offerings by any of the degree-granting institutions?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well I think as I highlighted in the opening remarks, I wouldn't be as prescriptive as that. You know, the notion that the quality assurance process would immediately or automatically block those kind of programs, for example, a general arts degree.

I think if the broad theme is to make sure that there's greater accessibility, that there are opportunities for students that in other communities in the province that may not have immediate access to Saskatoon or Regina or some of the regional campuses where some of the programming goes on, that you know, I hope there is what I would probably describe as a judicious eye that the quality assurance process and those involved in it will maintain. And that is, if there's an obvious duplication with very little connection to the labour market, I hope all the appropriate questions are raised, that the process is thorough.

On the other hand, I don't, from the vantage point that I have and with kind of very sincere humility as far as what that will look like in future years, I wouldn't probably be that prescriptive as to say there simply can't be. It's simply to say the quality assurance process needs to take that into consideration as well as market alignment and job openings and opportunities. So I probably wouldn't quite go there if I could.

Ms. Sproule: — I appreciate the fact that you can't sort of predict the quality assurance process. I mean that's a good point. I guess for me when I'm thinking about Briercrest wanting to provide a Bachelor of Arts degree to their students

and the point you made about accessibility, is that the focus of Briercrest is they think they're providing more accessibility to students because where it's located is very close to Regina? So you know, what do they add in terms of accessibility that Regina, for example, or Saskatoon wouldn't have for students that are planning to get a Bachelor of Arts?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think those are important questions, you know, and I wouldn't want to speak on behalf of Briercrest. Certainly having been out to the campus there, I think it's a very distinctive and distinguished learning community and environment. I think that, you know, again if and as they look at pursuing some opportunities or options in some specific fields of the arts, for example, they may have a very thorough grounding in work relating to ancient history that I hope that would, you know, be taken into consideration by the quality assurance process.

I think what that offers . . . Certainly students that I've spoken to at Briercrest, they would stay longer on that campus. There's a sense of community, and many have asked me very directly and explicitly when I've been out there, you know, could there and would there be a way for us to pursue our studies. You know, I think the location component is one that the quality assurance process will be able to determine, and again I hope with a judicious eye but also an eye to understanding. And I think that, you know, there are some real advantages to people feeling comfortable in specific learning environments.

And you know, I started my post-secondary career, I had a lot of opportunities. I was very, very fortunate, mostly with patient people that were able to endure a fair-to-middling student, but I started at a very small college. And that worked very well for me, and I felt very, very good about that. And then I went to a smaller university and both were just fantastic — it, in my opinion, helped to make all the difference — and then moved on to both the University of Saskatchewan and University of Alberta.

So I'm kind of a fan here because I think some students may select and their families may see that this makes sense for smaller campus communities and probably learning environments that suit individual needs.

Ms. Sproule: — I guess it all comes down to the quality assurance process because, as we know, there's a number of colleges here that are providing fine courses and, you know, precursors to degrees, at least here in Saskatchewan. And you know, certainly I know there's ancient history classes being provided by both of our universities as well. I took a number of them when I was a student.

So you know, like I said, the quality assurance process is probably driving this entire legislation in some ways. I did have a faculty member from the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] come visit me as a constituent and raised serious concerns about the quality assurance process and the fact that it's separate from what the universities are doing now, and certainly was concerned about decisions regarding programming and how that body will operate. So I guess in some ways it will be a wait-and-see process and hopefully it will go well.

Another question . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I could . . .

[15:45]

Ms. Sproule: — Sure, absolutely.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Just to speak to that because we actually have put a little bit of thought into that. Both universities and universities across the country have very significant internal quality assurance processes. They're internal.

I guess one option could be, and we kind of weighed this, one option is you could require institutions, for example, in the future I have no doubt that one of our regional colleges might put forward a desire to participate in this process. And we thought about, you know, one of the requirements, should there be a requirement to build up an internal review process that would mirror governance as we would know it at either the University of Saskatchewan or University of Regina or any contemporary Canadian university?

Why we've gone to this is is that we think, as far as programmatically, this notion of having an external body working collaboratively with these other entities may afford a process that is every bit as thorough and at the same time may actually provide an opportunity to do this in a more cost-efficient and effective factor or method. So you can imagine, rather than having prolonged discussions about roles of potential bodies like university senates or academic councils, here is an opportunity where here's a dialogue, here's a quality assurance process, and if and as that process is approved, we could see in very short order classes being opened up and opportunities being opened up for our students that are every bit as valuable within those specific, narrow niches — and I really see this as being specific, narrow niches — every bit as thorough as at the two universities.

And so whether we think about the Southeast and, you know, the new energy training centre there and what that can evolve into over the course of several years — whether we're talking about in the North, where we know there's more work to do with First Nations and Métis students — it's not to prejudge anything. It's simply to say, the quality assurance piece has to, as you say, kind of drive the process. And it's our determination to ensure that that is the case, and that's been the case based on best practices in other Canadian jurisdictions.

Ms. Sproule: — Were there any concerns raised in your deliberations regarding the capacity for the quality assurance boards to oversee such a broad range of programming? Like there could be applied sciences, theology; there's such a wide range that could be presented by these colleges or these institutions.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, this certainly came up in our deliberations, and we spent a fair amount of time. I think what I'll do is ask Dr. Urbanowski to go through this. I will simply say that at the heart of this is a matrix-based notion where the required expertise can be brought to bear for specific subject matters or specific programs. And if and as there are different proposals put forward that, again, those could be complimented or supplemented by those with other areas of expertise. But I'll actually get Dr. Urbanowski because it's a pretty thorough process that I think we've put in place.

Mr. Urbanowski: — So the quality assurance board, like the minister said in his opening remarks, will be balanced in terms of diversity and representation. But the quality assurance process itself for each application involves a number of steps, and one of those steps is to determine the organizational capacity of the institution to deliver a particular program. And to do that, the board will strike a panel of three experts from across the country who will come and provide an evaluation of that organizational capacity based on the standards and criteria that we've developed.

Once that's been done, they will issue a report. The report will actually then be provided to the institution. And they are allowed to sort of develop a rebuttal to the report. That complete set of the rebuttal and the report itself from the organizational review panel then goes to the board for their deliberation.

The next step in the process then is to review the actual program itself. And the board will strike another panel of three experts to ensure that we've got the expertise on there. And it's the same process. The panel will come out and do a site visit and issue a report. It goes to the institution. The institution will then provide a rebuttal, and all of that information will then go to the board in helping it to make its determination.

Ms. Sproule: — So that process will be in the regulations?

Mr. Urbanowski: — Yes.

Ms. Sproule: — My next question is regarding the funding of private post-secondary institutions. And we saw money flow to some private post-secondary institutions through the knowledge infrastructure program. With this legislation passing, does the minister think it will mean that more public dollars will flow to private institutions?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I don't envision it. If I'm not mistaken, there are some dollars that flow . . . There are some dollars, modest in scope for the most part. There are some dollars that do go to some of the private institutions, mostly based on their affiliations with some of the public institutions. And so all of this is done through budgetary deliberation, and that process isn't going to change. And I don't, you know, anticipate any significant changes.

When you make reference to the knowledge infrastructure program, we came out of the gate there ahead of the federal government in what we called the booster shot. We were very pleased that the post-secondary sector had been identified as a priority area for infrastructure. We were able to put dollars on the table. And then we were especially pleased that the federal government — with signals sent from our government but also others right across the country as well as the post-secondary institutions themselves — that the federal government followed suit.

And if I'm not mistaken, the knowledge infrastructure program was a \$2 billion initiative. We were able to capture some significant federal dollars. And so it became a cost-sharing program where, if I'm not mistaken, there were between 117

and \$118 million invested in about 21 different projects across the province. And that has allowed us to catch up on some key areas of infrastructure deficit. Always more to do, but we were very pleased with that initiative.

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you. How soon might institutions be awarding degrees?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again, I certainly don't want to preclude options and opportunities here that may come along that are certainly the purview or will be the purview of quality assurance, but roughly speaking, we would anticipate 2014.

Ms. Sproule: — Yes. I understand that there's no certainty here.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — It's just ballpark as far having the Act proclaimed and the regulations working with the institutions. Yes, I think that's likely.

Ms. Sproule: — All right, thank you for that. A couple of questions about the definition of physical presence. And these were concerns that were raised actually by the faculty association at the University of Saskatchewan, which I believe you've seen these comments. And from what I understand, it could be nothing more than a postal address or a telephone number that would establish physical presence. And of course, there again is some prescriptive possibilities under the regulations which we haven't had an opportunity to see. So how would it be that we would provide degree-granting authority to an institution here that only has a phone number, for example, and no physical presence other than that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well this is absolutely vital for us to address. We in a sense . . . And it's important that this is part of the legislation. But quite candidly this is a gap that would need to be addressed regardless.

I'll just tell a little story here. Based on a web address that we were able to track down, we have a pretty thorough quality assurance piece on this from within the ministry. And we're not alone. We work with other provinces and other jurisdictions on this matter because it's of the utmost significance. But I will . . . And we'll get copies for the committee.

Here's an entity called Hillmax University. It then offers 24-hour customer support centre and some other type of options for engagement. Hillmax University central office, 232-6 Hillmax, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, S4P 7J4. Telephone 1-416-978-9060 or 1-416-978-92012. This is nonsensical. We pursued Hillmax with vigour immediately upon finding this. And I wish I could say this was isolated. This is an ongoing challenge that we have regarding notions of what does a physical presence or the perception of a physical presence mean in the 21st century.

This is a clear and obvious abuse. That address doesn't exist with anything connected to an entity or organization called Hillmax University. We know that because as we contacted Hillmax University, they changed the website, they changed the address, and they disappeared.

So I think it's a very important point that a representative from

the faculty association would raise, but this is real time, right now. And what we want to do through this legislation is actually strengthen our capacity to prevent this kind of abuse from occurring, and first and foremost for our own students and our own families. But what's happening is that this is being advertised around the world, especially to international students where families are making and students are making choices about potential educational options and career options. So again we'll get copies made and distributed.

The question's a fair one. I would say it's connected to the Act, but it's also active and operational as far as having to need some additional authority even right now. It's a great question.

Ms. Sproule: — I guess as far as the Act goes, section 3(3)(e) allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to continue to prescribe other elements of physical presence. So the list right now is any one or more of the following, so presumably then there could be an institution that is given degree-granting status even if their physical presence is elsewhere in terms of real property or office space or whatever, but they just simply have a telephone number here in Saskatchewan. I mean that's the way I read clause 3(3)(b), is that it's in one or more of the following, and a telephone number is that one thing.

Is that possible?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. I'll get Dr. Urbanowski to walk through it. It's a good question. It's an important one and we've thought a lot about what this actually looks like.

Mr. Urbanowski: — So the intent of casting the wide net that we did was to ensure that we had discretion about which institutions need to be brought into the quality assurance process. It wasn't so much as giving people the authority to grant a degree as to say, if you're an institution claiming to be from Saskatchewan, we want to be able to say you need to come through the quality assurance process.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We require it I mean, essentially, is the goal. And that way we will have an additional instrument to kind of take the fly-by-night operations and continue to put up an enduring and strenuous fight against their existence in this province.

Ms. Sproule: — Okay. A couple more questions, I think, and I will be turning it over to the rest of the committee for their questions if they have any.

On clause 4(1)(e), I'm having trouble understanding what that means, and I'm just going to read it out:

Subject to the regulations, no educational institution shall directly or indirectly do any of the following without holding an authorization to do so:

And it's (e).

(e) advertise a degree program respecting a degree to be granted outside Saskatchewan if the advertising is done in a manner such that, in the minister's opinion, it is not reasonably evident that the degree is granted by an educational institution outside Saskatchewan that is not

authorized to grant degrees in Saskatchewan.

Can you put that in layperson's words for me?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Actually I can't. It exceeds my capacity. But Dr. Urbanowski has the great capacity to offer translation, so we'll task his capacities.

Mr. Urbanowski: — The intent is simply to make sure that if we have a program that's granted outside Saskatchewan, that it's indeed put out that way and that if there is going to be a degree granted by an educational institution, that . . . If there is going to be a degree program offered outside Saskatchewan that is actually put forward that way and that if it's an institution outside Saskatchewan, that it is actually put forward that way. Perhaps this could have been said a little simpler.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Reg, maybe a quick example. What might that look like?

Mr. Urbanowski: — So we would have an institution, let's say Brandon University would offer a degree or Rotman School of Management would advertise a potential degree that they're offering, right, through the *Leader-Post*. It will be a Rotman degree if it's not seen to be an institution here. It's given through Rotman in Ontario. So as long as they make that clear, that this is a degree that's not a Saskatchewan degree; this is actually offered in Ontario but we're going to do it through a combination of online and whatever.

[16:00]

Hon. Mr. Norris: — One of the regional colleges or something like that.

Mr. Urbanowski: — But it's actually going to be that Ontario degree, if that makes any sense.

Ms. Sproule: — So if they advertise it otherwise, it would be in violation of this piece of legislation.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Ms. Sproule: — Okay. I think I get it. Just one last question then. In terms of the concerns regarding these fly-by-night, nefarious people granting fake degrees, how have other jurisdictions dealt with it? Have you looked to them and see how they're dealing with it?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, this is — and I'll get Dr. Urbanowski again to deal with this — this is an issue that comes up on a regular basis with the dialogue with other ministers of Advanced Education across the country. We've spent some time as well at CMEC kind of looking at some of these. I wish I could say here's kind of here's the final chapter and verse on how these can be stopped or how this poor practice can be curbed. This is part of an ongoing effort, again identifying bad apples and bad actors, that we are continually — and we're not alone — having to be innovative and creative on how to track, how to capture, how to stop any affiliation with Saskatchewan.

And I'll get Dr. Urbanowski to talk specifically about . . . I

think AUCC [Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada] has brought this up. I think UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] has brought this up. It's especially tragic when you see people from the developing world with few resources being lured into these traps where there is no intention, there is no institution that's legitimate; there is no degree or certificate or credential that's associated with it. Dr. Urbanowski, I mean, AUCC's there. UNESCO's there. This is an ongoing challenge.

Mr. Urbanowski: — So one of the first issues, I think, for us was to look at some form of public education that we could provide to the public. And so on our website we've created a short page on how to recognize a degree mill and questions you might want to ask so that you can determine whether a site can possibly be a degree mill. And I think that that's important, the public education piece.

The other piece is to look at interjurisdictionally what can we do. And it is an issue that we have worked with with our Ministry of Justice because we are bound somewhat. The law doesn't go as fast as the Internet has developed. But as the minister has said, there has been initiatives we are trying to work through with CMEC; UNESCO has issued as well some comments on transnational education and the use of degree mills. The UK [United Kingdom] has developed a site where they publish known degree mills. We want to make that available to people in Saskatchewan as well. So between education and looking at interjurisdictional issues, I think those are probably our two biggest initiatives.

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you. I remember the days when it used to be on the matchbook, but we've got the Internet now.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I could, I'd like to kind of take this opportunity, Mr. Chair, to make a public service announcement and that is, the ministry's here to help. If individuals have any questions, family members or students, community members, members of the corporate community that may have questions about new signs going up near or around their businesses, to please get in touch with the ministry. There's lots of contact information available on our website. We are here to help. We do our very best to monitor on an ongoing basis, but there's nothing like having the knowledge and awareness of people right across the province that can help us really capture these bad apples. It's important, not only again for the Saskatchewan context; it's important for the global context.

So I just wanted to take that moment to say the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration can be found on the Government of Saskatchewan's website and it's an open invitation for those watching and listening, please be in touch with us if you have any questions, comments, or concerns on this area because we want to protect Saskatchewan students first and foremost.

Ms. Sproule: — And this is, I promise, my final question. And you've used the term degree mills. I've never heard that until today. I'm assuming these are the bad apples. But is that a common phrase used?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, it is. It's almost a notion of the mill being produced and the credential just kind of flying out

the door and this, it complicates things. Wearing my Immigration hat, this complicates the immigration process. For employers, this complicates and adds real resources in time on quality assurance. And then of course for Saskatchewan students and Saskatchewan . . . or students everywhere, many have absolutely the best of intentions and they begin to inadvertently kind of stumble in. And it often costs a lot of money, and it takes time and sometimes missed opportunities for other programs and things like that.

So yes, these degree mills, bad apples, bad actors, bogus universities, whatever we call them, we want to make sure that in Saskatchewan and across the country we do our best to eradicate these bad actors. They are disruptive agents and entities.

Ms. Sproule: — All right, then. With that, Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister and his officials for their complete answers and responsiveness to my questions. And if any other members of the committee have questions, I will turn it over to them.

The Chair: — Thank you. First I would like to thank the minister for the document. It is now tabled as HUS 6/27, Hillmax University.

So if there are no further questions, we will begin with the vote on the clauses. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 26 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: Bill No. 18, *The Degree Authorization Act*. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 18, *The Degree Authorization Act* without amendment.

Ms. Eagles: — I so move.

The Chair: — Ms. Eagles moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Thank you one and all. If, Mr. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To you and all committee members as well as to those working to facilitate the committee's operation here within the Legislative Assembly, as well as most especially the officials from the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration that have worked not simply today, but have worked tirelessly to put in place, I think, this very, very responsible piece of legislation. I offer my sincere thanks to everyone in, I think,

helping to foster and facilitate new opportunities for our students but also greater assurances for families and citizens alike in the new Saskatchewan. So thank you very much.

The Chair: — Thank you. I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment.

Mr. Merriman: — I so move.

The Chair: — Mr. Merriman has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — This meeting is now adjourned. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 16:10.]