



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Mr. Warren Steinley
Regina Walsh Acres

Hon. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 15:30.]

The Chair: — Thank you very much. Welcome everyone to the Human Services Committee for April 16th, 2019. My name is Dan D'Autremont. I am the Chair of the Human Services Committee. With us today we have substituting for MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Larry Doke, MLA Nancy Heppner; MLA Warren Steinley; the Hon. Nadine Wilson; and substituting for MLA Danielle Chartier, we have MLA Carla Beck. As well as we have MLA Todd Goudy.

Today we will be considering the estimates of the Ministry of Advanced Education: vote 37, Advanced Education; vote 169, Advanced Education; and supplementary estimates — no. 2 for vote 37, Advanced Education.

**General Revenue Fund
Advanced Education
Vote 37**

Subvote (AE01)

The Chair: — We will begin with vote 37, Advanced Education, subvote (AE01). Minister Beaudry-Mellor is here with her officials. And I would ask that the officials please introduce themselves before speaking into the microphone. Madam Minister, please introduce your officials and present your opening remarks.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To you and to members of the committee, I'm very pleased to speak to you all about the Ministry of Advanced Education and its budget for 2019-20.

And before I begin, I'd like to introduce members of my team from Advanced Education. So to my right is Mark McLoughlin, my deputy minister. To my left is Tammy Bloor Cavers, the assistant deputy minister for sector relations. Behind us is David Boehm, our assistant deputy minister for corporate services and accountability. On the other side of me here is Scott Giroux, the executive director of corporate finance. Kirk Wosminity is here, the executive director of student services and the program development branch. Then behind them is Mari Petroski. Mari is the executive director for the Status of Women office. And of course, last but certainly not least, my chief of staff Tessa Ritter is with us as well. And we will ask other ministry officials . . . I don't think we'll have any other ones come in today.

So, Mr. Chair, the 2019-20 budget is the right balance for Saskatchewan. We are carefully managing spending while investing in needed programs, services, and infrastructure for Saskatchewan people. It is balanced and it is sustainable. We have more to accomplish, but government, I think, is meeting its fiscal challenges.

This year's budget of almost \$728 million for Advanced Education ensures our investments are sustainable today and into the future. We continue to make significant investments in students and post-secondary institutions, while at the same time controlling costs. When combined with other investments in post-secondary education across government, the province of Saskatchewan will provide more than \$858 million in financial

and training supports for students and institutions. That's a 51 per cent increase across government over the past 12 years.

Government is investing 33 million this year in scholarships, grants, and loans for students, ensuring learners will continue to have access to high-quality programs. We have amended the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship. It's now needs tested. The assistance goes to those who require it the most, and when combined with the graduate retention program, support for students will reach \$111 million. That is a significant investment in our students.

Mr. Chair, we are also providing considerable support for post-secondary institutions: 673 million in operating and capital grants. We have increased operating funds to our two universities by 53 per cent over the past 12 years. Since taking office, the government has invested \$10 billion in post-secondary institutions and student supports. That includes 621 million in capital funding.

I'll take you through some of these items now in more detail. In terms of student supports, the Ministry of Advanced Education is firmly committed to our students. Students are at the centre of every decision that we make. We are investing a total of \$26 million into the Saskatchewan Student Aid Fund to provide grants and loans. Lower income students will receive upfront grants of \$1,000, and when combined with federal grants, they can receive up to \$4,000 per year of study. None of that level of support will have to be repaid. These supports allow students facing financial barriers to go to school.

It is important to remind ourselves that post-secondary education is a shared responsibility. Students and their families will continue to be asked to make a reasonable, fixed contribution to their education, and the key word is "reasonable." The fixed contribution ranges from between 1,500 to 3,000 per year, depending on the financial situation of students and their families. And to level the playing field, students with dependants, students with a disability, Indigenous students, and Crown wards are exempt from the fixed-rate contributions. That will keep post-secondary education accessible to people who have a lower income or face a particular challenge.

Mr. Chair, in addition to the grants, there's more non-repayable supports for our students. We're investing a further \$7 million into scholarships. That includes the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship, which will provide \$500 to a maximum of \$2,000 to high school graduates since 2012 who need it the most.

Government is also providing \$3 million in funding in 2019-20 for the Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship program. Since the program began, more than 27,000 scholarships have been awarded. Last year nearly 3,400 scholarships were granted, with an average award of \$2,000. Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarships are targeted at students doing cutting-edge work in emerging fields and in priority areas. They also provide funds for international education, including students studying abroad.

We will invest an additional \$400,000 this year in the Mitacs program. Mitacs is a program that matches highly qualified personnel with companies and institutions that can benefit from

their skills in order to advance research and our economy. Mitacs will support graduate student internships with Saskatchewan industry and international research opportunities for Saskatchewan students and incoming international students.

Mr. Chair, the budget continues to provide tuition tax credits to thousands of graduates through the graduate retention program. Since the introduction of the program, 69,000 highly trained professionals have benefited by choosing to establish careers right here in Saskatchewan. Approximately 406 million in graduate retention program tax credits have been paid to those graduates for the tax years of 2008 through to 2016. The graduate retention program helps us keep the best and brightest, with tax credits of up to 20,000 per graduates who support our economy by living and working right here. And in some cases, undergraduate tuition ends up being completely reimbursed through the GRP [graduate retention program]. The program will provide 78 million in tax credits this year, a powerful recruitment tool for Saskatchewan employers competing for scarce talent.

Mr. Chair, this budget strikes the right balance by providing strong support for our post-secondary institutions. Our universities, colleges, and technical institutes will receive almost \$673 million in operating and capital grants. This stable level of funding will allow our sector to continue offering a high-quality education to our students.

Over the past 12 years we have increased funding to our two universities by 53 per cent. The cost of living over the same period has increased by 25 per cent and enrolment has increased by 22 per cent. So we are doing our part. The University of Saskatchewan receives 57 per cent of its operating revenues from the province and the University of Regina receives 53 per cent.

Students recognize the value of an education in Saskatchewan, and in a recent survey 93 per cent of graduates said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of their education here. And 85 per cent reported that they are working, most of them in fields directly related to the fields in which they had studied.

We're also doing our part in supporting the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan. The ministry has maintained its commitment of 88 million to ensure the college remains fully accredited and provides quality medical education. When combined with the funding from the Ministry of Health, government is providing nearly 172 million to support the College of Medicine in 2019-20. That's an increase of nearly 5 million.

We've also maintained our investment of 22 million in preventative maintenance and renewal, and that will permit our institutions to replace equipment and make necessary repairs.

Over the past 12 years we have provided 621 million in capital funds to our partners in the post-secondary sector.

Mr. Chair, our government remains committed to the path of reconciliation with our Indigenous communities. The post-secondary participation and success of our First Nations and Métis citizens is critical to our economic and social well-being, and it is getting better. The ministry will invest more than 17 million to support Indigenous post-secondary education institutions and programs. That investment will be

complemented by almost 28 million invested by the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training in skills training and employment initiatives for Indigenous people.

Over the past 12 years, government's direct investment in Indigenous post-secondary education has increased by 71 per cent. The most recent survey saw more than 16,000 Indigenous students enrolled in post-secondary education, and that's an increase of 33 per cent since this government was elected. Over the same period, the number of Indigenous people with post-secondary credentials is up by nearly 50 per cent. That is an additional 10,700 people who have succeeded in post-secondary education.

I'll take you through just a few of the many specific measures contained in this year's budget. In 2019-20 the Gabriel Dumont Institute will receive nearly 3.6 million for the Saskatchewan urban native teacher education program.

Advanced Education will continue to provide targeted funding for two specific initiatives that support efforts to have Indigenous students stay in school and succeed. We will provide 581,000 to Saskatchewan Polytech for its Indigenous student success strategy. The program, which has been in effect since 2011-2012, works to address barriers to student completion. It includes a summer transition program where out-of-town students work with advisers who help them to sort out some of the details like finding a place to live and arranging for child care. The program supports students throughout their education with Indigenous students' centres on each campus, and the centres provide space to study and socialize. They also host cultural, education, and recreational activities.

The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies has a student support services model that supports students from recruitment all the way through to employment. It will receive 356,000 again this year to continue its work. Government has provided this annual funding since 2014-15 in response to its 2013 joint task force on First Nations and Métis education and employment.

Mr. Chair, all of our institutions are working every day on specific programs and services to encourage and engage First Nations and Métis students, and I commend them on their efforts and urge them to continue working on this very important file.

Mr. Chair, my ministry continues to work on priority files and ensure we give our students the best opportunity for success, and we will focus on pathways. Students must be able to see a clear line leading from education to employment. It's why we've worked with the Ministry of Education to encourage coding in the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] classrooms. It's why we've been focusing on robotics.

There is other work, critical work, that must be done on this file. We'll continue to work on dual credit programs to give high school students an additional incentive and place them on the road to success. And we will continue toward recognizing other forms of learning. The classroom is a great place to learn, but it's not the only place, and our system is getting better at recognizing the valuable life experiences that some of our more mature students bring.

Our system is also responsive to the labour market. The world

changes fast and our institutions must be nimble to meet the evolving demand of students, businesses, and the economy. Our students are competing in an increasingly competitive global marketplace, and we've seen enormous growth in the number of international students studying in Saskatchewan. International student enrolment is up by 39 per cent. International students increase the richness and diversity of the post-secondary experience. They contribute to their schools and our communities. They drive economic and cultural growth. They help Saskatchewan produce truly global citizens who can shine anywhere in the world.

But we've also been encouraging Saskatchewan students to study abroad. The experience they bring back is invaluable to our schools, our communities, and our economy. And since we started encouraging international education, the number of Saskatchewan students studying and working abroad has increased by 41 per cent.

[15:45]

Mr. Chair, we will remove barriers to success. We will insist that our partner institutions are continuously improving and looking for more efficient ways to deliver their programs. And we will keep working with our partners on ways to improve student mental health and well-being. Mr. Chair, our partners in this sector have been paying more attention to psychological health and safety over the last number of years, and I really applaud them for their efforts. We'll continue to work with them.

My ministry will host a summit next month with post-secondary institutions. It will be a symposium where we will join with our partners in the sector to discuss challenges and successes and to share best practices. It's important to pay attention to the physical and psychological health and well-being of the people who work and study in our post-secondary sector.

Mr. Chair, my ministerial responsibilities extend beyond Advanced Education, and I'm honoured to also serve as the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. Our government remains committed to improving women's economic security and personal safety. This year's budget of 375,000 includes additional funding to create a permanent position in the Status of Women office. It's a strategically placed role that will advance and champion strategies across government aimed at reducing and preventing interpersonal violence and abuse.

We are placing resources where they can do the most good to benefit women and the major issues impacting families, and we are beginning to see some results. Employment indicators for women in Saskatchewan remain positive. Saskatchewan has the second-highest employment rate in Canada for women at 60 per cent. The average hourly wage for women in Saskatchewan is the third-highest among provinces. Women in Saskatchewan are better educated. More women are obtaining degrees, certificates, and diplomas than ever before.

And the Status of Women office is working with Innovation Saskatchewan on a project aimed at applying some analysis to policy. The goal of this project is to produce data and provide a baseline to study trends and assess behaviours on access to our technology incentive program, and we are working hard to close the wage and entrepreneurial gap. We are actively engaging with

the business community to work on strategies aimed at increasing women's job prospects and economic mobility. And these are just, I think, a few examples of how the office is doing things differently. It has shifted its focus from awareness to action. And it will work with its partners to lead change this year and in the years to come.

Last year the office expanded to provide oversight on response and implementation of the 19 recommendations coming from the domestic violence death review panel. It is coordinating a government-wide response by strengthening the existing partnerships between ministries, and it is actively consulting with stakeholders. And that's critical because eliminating interpersonal violence and abuse is everybody's responsibility. It's a community problem that requires a community response. Government, communities, organizations, and people must all work together to tackle this complex issue. And government can set the tone by continuing to promote healthy and respectful relationships and by discouraging behaviours that support or promote violence.

The Status of Women office does not provide direct programs or services. It fulfills its mandate by working across government and with the community to enhance initiatives. Some of those are aimed at improving women's economic situations. Some are aimed at improving job prospects. Some encourage greater educational achievement. Some save lives. The office will continue to work within government and Saskatchewan communities as a whole to particularly address the high rates of interpersonal violence and abuse.

So, Mr. Chair, the 2019-20 budget is the right balance for the people of Saskatchewan. We are meeting our fiscal challenges, but we have, I think, more to accomplish. That's why we must take a carefully balanced approach that manages spending while investing in needed programs and services for Saskatchewan people.

We have a high-quality training and education system here that empowers the people of this province. And I'm very proud of our post-secondary partners. We will continue to work with them on pathways for our students. We will ensure that students have choices that are aligned with the needs of our growing labour market. We will encourage the post-secondary training and education system to respond to changes in the market with programs that meet the needs of both employers and students. And we will continue to make investments that improve the participation and success of First Nations and Métis students.

We will encourage institutions to continue working to improve student mental health and well-being. We will continue to ensure that students remain at the centre of everything we do. Their success is, of course, our success in Saskatchewan.

Thank you very much for listening, and I look forward to answering any questions from the committee.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Are there any questions from the committee? I recognize Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister, and thank you to my colleagues here today, to Hansard and those behind the scenes broadcasting today, as well as those watching at home. I'm sure

that there are hordes of them. And thank you to your officials as well for being here this afternoon.

Minister Beaudry-Mellor, this is the first time we've had a chance to be in Advanced Education estimates today. So as I warned Mark earlier, if I ask questions that may seem rudimentary, I'm curious and I'm still learning how all of this fits together. So I hope we have an enjoyable and enlightening three hours here together this afternoon.

I'm going to try to move systematically through vote 37, starting with central management and services, (AE01). My first question is with regard to the number of FTEs [full-time equivalent] within the ministry and if there have been any significant changes there.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Thank you very much. There has been the addition of one full-time staff member in the Status of Women office.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Are those funds allocated from elsewhere or is that new funding for that FTE?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — It is new funding.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. When I was getting ready for today, I noticed — I believe it was last year or the year prior — the mention of one employee at the University of Saskatchewan. Is that no longer the case that there is a ministry employee at the University of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes, we do still have that individual at the University of Saskatchewan.

Ms. Beck: — Just what is involved with that role at the University of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — That position has been in place for a couple of years, and the purpose of that position is to provide a conduit between the ministry and the University of Saskatchewan. Of course the University of Regina is located here as is the Sask Polytech campus, or one of the polytech campuses.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Perfect, thank you. My next question which isn't following as systematically as I suggested earlier . . .

A Member: — It already went off the rails.

Ms. Beck: — Already off the rails. Well we might as well go off now . . . is around capital. Is it correct that there are no major capital announcements for the ministry in this budget year?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So we do submit capital projects from year to year to SaskBuilds, but this year the preventative maintenance and renewal funding is the same as it has been in previous years at 22.4 million.

Ms. Beck: — So when the universities have a major capital request of the ministry, can you just describe that process, what it looks like? I'm more familiar with the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] system, but if you could describe how they would go about making that request.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So if there's a capital request, it comes in to the Ministry of Advanced Education. The Ministry of Advanced Education works with the institution to assess that request. And ultimately that request is submitted to SaskBuilds for consideration in a competitive process with other projects that are being considered across all of the ministries in the Government of Saskatchewan in terms of its capital plan.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. And do we have a count or a scope of the number of projects that were requested in this fiscal year?

[16:00]

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — There were no new capital submissions in this year's budget process.

Ms. Beck: — If they had been previously submitted, do they remain with SaskBuilds on a priority queue, or how does that work?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes.

Ms. Beck: — And how many major capital requests would be sitting in the queue with SaskBuilds from Advanced Education institutions?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — The primary project that is on the list at SaskBuilds right now is the Saskatoon Sask Poly campus project.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. So that's the main . . . Would there be other major capital requests sitting there with SaskBuilds?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — This is the one that's active.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. And, Minister, I believe that you quoted a capital investment of 621 million over the last decade. Is that correct? Are the PMR [preventative maintenance and renewal] allocations included in that number?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes.

Ms. Beck: — So with the PMR taken off, could you provide just a brief overview of the nature of the major capital investments over the last 10 years, the major projects?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So over the last decade the total is the 621-and-change figure. The major capital project portion of that over the last decade is 371.1 million, and in the last year there was no major capital.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you for that answer. I guess what I'm trying to get a sense of is where the major capital investments have been made in the province with regard to post-secondary capital investments.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Are you ready?

Ms. Beck: — I am ready.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — My assistant deputy minister is very pleased to provide me with paper because I have this thing about . . . Anyway, all right. At the U of S [University of

Saskatchewan]; health sciences, international vaccine centre, knowledge infrastructure program, collaborative science and research building. At the U of R [University of Regina] preventative maintenance and renewal, as you know, the nursing program renovations, student residence planning, and then the College Avenue campus and lab building upgrades.

Also on the U of R campus, I guess, Campion College's PMR, Luther College's PMR. St. Thomas More is listed here but that's on the U of S campus. Anyway you know that already. Briercrest same thing, and St. Peter's College. On the federateds, Sask Polys, the major capital projects for Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and Regina campuses. The Saskatoon campus renovations; Gabriel Dumont; a major project at La Loche expansion which you'll be familiar with; Carlton Trail, Humboldt campus; PMR at Cumberland; Nipawin campus also for Cumberland.

At the Great Plains College, the Swift Current campus expansion as well as PMR funding. At North West College, PMR funding but also the Meadow Lake welding lab. At Parkland College, PMR funding and also the Yorkton Trades and Technology Centre. At Southeast, PMR funding and also the Estevan campus, the Southeast College also at Weyburn campus. And then at Lakeland College, the child care and teaching lab. So there's been a number of them.

Ms. Beck: — Okay I appreciate that. The document that you're reading from, Minister, does it have amounts attached to it? Is that something that could be tabled?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I think so.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. And the role that the ministry plays in the federal Strategic Infrastructure Fund, could you describe the ministry's role in allocating those funds?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So the process is that institutions express their desire for a capital project. Our ministry will work with that institution on shaping their proposal, obviously working with them to make sure that their capital need is aligned with the priorities of the ministry, whatever that might be. And then they submit the proposal directly to the federal government. If that proposal is successful, then money flows back to the province to be disbursed to the institution for that capital requirement. And of course we provide oversight to that project.

[16:15]

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. And there's a matching portion of that program as well? Or those funds come from the university or from the ministry for matching funds?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — From both.

Ms. Beck: — Are there currently any projects under way using the federal infrastructure fund? And if so, is that exclusively university and federal money, or is there provincial money in those projects?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So there are currently eight projects that were completed by the original deadline of April 30th of 2018. Two projects have received extensions and were completed by November 30th of 2018.

Ms. Beck: — And of those projects, was there a portion that was matched by the ministry, or were they matched by the institution's funds?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Three of them.

Ms. Beck: — Three. Which three had . . .

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Parkland College, Carlton Trail College, and St. Thomas More.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Minister, I note that in the ministry's annual report, or the plan rather, for 2019-20, there's a notation around key actions. I'm on page 5, at the very bottom of the page: "Work with post-secondary institutions to develop and annually update capital plans to inform government investments in infrastructure." Do all of the post-secondary institutions have those plans? And if so, are they available publicly?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So when institutions submit their business plan, they have capital requests that go into those. But institutions vary on whether or not they publish those plans.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I'm going to move back into (AE01), looking specifically at the slight increase in executive management. If you could describe what is involved with that increase.

Mr. McLoughlin: — The only real sort of tangible difference is the Status of Women salary. The other pieces are reallocations within the context of the budget through Finance.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. So you're talking about the whole vote (AE01)?

Mr. McLoughlin: — Yes, correct.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. So there's one increase in the FTEs. Accommodation services, there is a slight decrease there. What's funded with that line under vote 1? And what has accounted for the reduction?

Mr. McLoughlin: — That's our charge on our lease for buildings and a reduction in lease costs year over year.

Ms. Beck: — That doesn't happen often.

Mr. McLoughlin: — I know.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. A reduction in lease costs. Okay, perfect. Central services, is that where we're seeing the FTEs? Is that allocated under the central services line? I'm working from page 24 in the Estimates document. There's about a half a million dollar increase there, or slightly under, for central services.

Mr. McLoughlin: — And then there's a decrease on the operational supports of 354,000.

Ms. Beck: — Right.

Mr. McLoughlin: — So the difference is the one position in Status of Women.

Ms. Beck: — Oh, okay. Thank you. So what is the total FTE within the Status of Women?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — It's two.

Ms. Beck: — Two. Two FTEs. And are there currently any vacancies?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — That's the full allocation.

Ms. Beck: — So it's certainly encouraging, the increase in the Status of Women allocation. There is the additional 119. That is exclusively salary, or is there an increase in funding for the work of the office?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — That's salary.

Ms. Beck: — Is there a particular focus of the new FTE in terms of duties and work required of that position? If so, could you describe?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So first and foremost, it's a director's position, so it will have all of the duties of a director. But it's also primarily, at the moment at least, is really quite focused on the inter-ministerial committees on the recommendations coming out of the domestic violence death review panel, and coordinating a lot of that work.

Ms. Beck: — Is there support from the other ministries to support that work as well?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes. So it coordinates the inter-ministerial committee which also supports this work, which covers pretty much most of the human services ministries: Advanced Education, Education, Corrections, Justice, Health, and Social Services.

Ms. Beck: — Could you, and I know that you did, Minister, in your opening remarks, but if you could just go back to the mandate of the Status of Women office, and if there are specific goals for 2019 and 2020, any measureable goals that you will be working towards and reporting on in this year.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So there are some things coming that I can't announce just yet.

Ms. Beck: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — But I will speak to the ones that we can: obviously working with the internal and external stakeholders to ensure that gender-based considerations are integrated into some government decision making; certainly the research and reporting on equality indicators; identifying priority areas of concern; and really testing solutions for Saskatchewan women is an area of focus that we have; and of course, training and awareness activities in targeted areas.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Thank you. Couple of questions arising out of that. Providing gender-based considerations for other ministries or for decisions, could you provide an example or walk us through the process of what that would look like in terms of providing those considerations for decision making and for other ministries?

[16:30]

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So there are a couple that I can give to you as examples. One is monitoring the representation of women on government boards, including Crown boards. Another example that I can give to you would be monitoring of women in the post-secondary institutions, both as students but also graduation levels, and what programs they're graduating from.

Ms. Beck: — So there's a role in monitoring. Is there a role in proposing best practices or solutions in order to move those markers in the direction that we'd like to see?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So the answer to that is yes. It's more of an ongoing thing, I think I can say. If we look, for example, at the numbers of women who are going into the STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] fields, it's something that we're not only monitoring, but it's something that we are inserting into every conversation that we have with our institutions about those fields and how we would like to see those numbers increase.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. I'm going to read just an excerpt from the ministry website:

The Status of Women Office works through partnerships rather than client-based programs. The office adds capacity to government's policy and decision-making function by: conducting sex and gender-based analysis; developing and reporting on equality indicators; and leading work with government ministries, crown corporations, agencies and others to identify changes that will modify and shape programs and services to respond to the emerging priorities for women and their families.

So some detail about that. From the demographic and socio-economic profiles that were conducted in 2016 compared to the ones from 2009, were there any key learnings that stood out in comparing the status of women between these two snapshots in time, so from 2009 to 2016? And the second part of that, the sex and gender equality reports, are from 2010. And when is the next plan? Or is there a plan to update these reports?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So the second survey that you refer to from 2010 is not one that I'm familiar with.

Ms. Beck: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — But the former, in terms of the demographic and statistical profiles, we of course keep track of the graduation rates of women in post-secondary institutions. We keep track of, certainly in another ministry, but keep track of the employment rate and the average weekly earnings of women. One of the key learnings that we've had that I think is particularly great is that Indigenous women who graduate and attain a credential actually make more than non-Indigenous women with a credential, which is I think a very interesting statistic. So we do monitor most of these things.

Ms. Beck: — Referring now to the April 2017 report entitled *Women in the Saskatchewan Labour Market*, there is some indication that the employment rate has bounced back more readily for men in this province than for women. I cite as

evidence a quote from that report:

The recent economic growth in the province has resulted in a sharp increase in employment. Both men and women shared in the growth but employment increased more among men than among women. From 2007 to 2016, employment has increased on average 1.5% per year for men compared with 1.1% for women.

And subsequent to that:

The weakness in the labour market in 2015 and 2016 has increased the number of women who are unemployed . . . The 5.6% unemployment rate is the highest [for women that] it has been since the mid-1990s.

Just wondering if there have been actions taken as a result of these findings, any recommendations to the ministries, and were those recommendations accepted?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So I think a couple things here. First of all, you know, we do have . . . Most of the employment indicators for women in the province are positive and on an upward trend. The average hourly wage is up. Of course we have the second-highest employment rate for women in Canada, which is well above the national average. The average hourly wage is third highest amongst the provinces. And of course we have and actually welcome a high proportion of Indigenous women who are working full time in Saskatchewan, which is also above the provincial average; it's 76.6, almost 77 per cent above the national average of 75 per cent.

I would say that we have very strong relationship with Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan, among other partners, and have been working through Innovation Saskatchewan to pay attention to the trends, the global trends, and digitization. And to go back to the STEM conversation, that's an area that we have been pushing in our conversations with our institutions but also through Innovation Saskatchewan.

We've been spending a lot of time on encouraging entrepreneurship particularly in the tech space, which is going to be an area of rapid economic growth for this province, not just for our province but across the globe. And so Innovation Saskatchewan has been working hard on ladies and tech events, on ladies learning to code, incidentally also with Aboriginal students or Indigenous students on learning to code and robotics and those fields. So that's an area where we're seeing some growth.

There are about a third of the entrepreneurs in this province are women and are looking to entrepreneurship as a way of, I think, disrupting the labour force and the traditional workplace environments that exist.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. One of the things noted in reviewing a lot of the statistical information in the publications is that a lot of that statistical work had been completed by Doug Elliott. And of course we all miss Doug in this province — and I know, you know, his family; we express condolences for their loss as well — and it has left a big hole in terms of that statistical information in the province. And I'm just wondering if there is a plan or compensation for that statistical information, where you find that

type of information that *Sask Trends Monitor* was previously providing for the people of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So the Status of Women office is not going to take up the work of the *Sask Trends Monitor*. That work was largely — and with all due respect to Doug, who I also knew well — was a compilation of Stats Canada data that he pulled and repackaged for Saskatchewan consumption and news.

Immigration and Career Training does a lot of labour market analysis for the province of Saskatchewan which I use often, and I'm sure my colleagues do as well. And certainly the universities' enrolment data and credentialing data is material that we use to inform decision making as much as possible, and we'll continue to do that. We also of course get information from Social Services and Justice with respect to domestic violence rates and that sort of data which informs our decision making.

Ms. Beck: — Okay, thank you. So with regard to some of the advice or best practices that has been provided to other ministries, can you provide examples of tangible changes to programs or services that have resulted as a result of the support of the Status of Women's office?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So in addition to a number of other places, I think I would draw on two primarily. One is on the long list of legislative changes that have been made in the last number of years to things like the privacy law and revenge porn, Clare's Law, all of those things which have come from, you know, they've been sponsored obviously by the Ministry of Justice and the Attorney General, but they have been informed in large part by the work that the Status of Women office has been doing to coordinate across ministries on the importance of that work.

More specifically, you know when we introduced the . . . As we've been building the entrepreneurial ecosystem across the province — particularly in Regina and in Saskatoon, although we don't fund Cultivator in Regina — we do fund part of Co.Labs, and we have been in regular discussions with them about the number of female founders that are having their companies incubated and accelerated through Co.Labs.

That number is not equal yet, but there are some I think very strong women who are playing a leadership role there. I believe at last check — and I would have to confirm this number for you — but I believe there were nine founders, some of them who have secured very significant funding dollars and investment to their companies. Katherine Regnier comes to mind from Coconut calendar.

[16:45]

That is an area where we've had an impact in making sure that the access of women to those programs has been great. And as a result, they've had some ladies-only hackathons, women-who-code events, trying to encourage more women, to access their services to incubate and accelerate entrepreneurial activity.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, and it is important work. I bring it up by way of meaning to highlight it and to gauge the impact or how it's being received or taken up by other ministries. Are there

certain ministries that you work more frequently with or more closely with? I know you mentioned the Ministry of the Economy a number of times. And are there are ministries that you haven't worked with yet?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Highways is probably . . . The human services ministries in general are ones that this office coordinates with on a regular basis.

Ms. Beck: — I'm certainly sure there's something . . . [inaudible].

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — The human services ones are the ones that we work with on a regular basis.

Ms. Beck: — All right, thank you. Certainly at various times in the last number of years, we've heard a lot of public discussion about equal pay for equal work. No surprise that, on average, Canadian women have worked 3.5 months into 2019 to earn what men earned by the end of 2018. So that gap still exists. The gap is more — and I'm reading from the canadianwomen.org — is about more than gender because it's worse for women who are racialized, Indigenous, living with a disability, or newcomers to Canada.

Has the office done any work in examining whether women get equal pay for equal work within government? And is there any work planned in this area?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So this is a very long answer because there's lots to say in the matter.

First of all, I think our government worked through this process some time ago and have fully implemented pay equity across the public sector. It is not something that we are going to legislate in the private sector. But it is something that we are seeing a shift in: the number of women who are on boards, the number of women who lead chambers of commerce as either the CEOs [chief executive officer] or as the Chair of the chambers.

There is a case to be made, and it's a compelling one, that better diversity increases the profit line for companies. And I think a lot more companies, as I travel around the province, are seeing that. And certainly it would be something that WESK [Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan] would also echo as being viewed across the province. There's progress being made. It's maybe not as fast as we would like it to be made, but it is being made.

Ms. Beck: — Yes, I mean in terms of the wage gap, I have a 20-year-old daughter. When I was her age . . . it hasn't moved a whole lot since then. So you know, it remains persistent, that gap between earnings, average earnings.

According to StatsCan we know that women make up 65 per cent of the minimum wage earners in our province. Is the office doing anything about that, increasing the minimum wage, and the impact of those increases disproportionately on women in the province?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Well I can answer this question directly. The minimum wage is indexed in Saskatchewan. We passed that legislation some time ago, and that's not going to

change.

Ms. Beck: — So my point, I guess, there is just that women disproportionately make up those low-income and minimum wage earners. So any improvements to the minimum wage disproportionately impact in a positive way the wages of women in the province.

Just going to regroup my notes here. Looking at vote 2, under the allocations under operational support, there is a reduction year over year, about \$300,000. What is included in that line and what has been reduced in this year's budget?

Mr. McLoughlin: — It's that figure I touched upon earlier, where there was a differentiator where it was added in and then reduced below.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. I thought that was under vote 1. All right. The allocation included on the next line — universities, federated and affiliated colleges — could we break that down? The allocation for universities in this year's budget is, looking at the line item here, the 469 million.

Mr. McLoughlin: — The changes are reflective, MacKenzie Art Gallery is in a third year of a four-year \$100,000 reduction. There's approximately 447,000 reduced in respect to loan support payments. As the loan's reduced, the payments amount reduce for the institutions. And there is an increase of 160,000 to the vet college, Western College of Veterinary Medicine, which is part of the interprovincial agreement and Saskatchewan's obligation for an annual increase.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you for that.

Mr. McLoughlin: — Which equates to 2 per cent.

Ms. Beck: — So of that global amount that includes . . . Okay, so I've got it. The technical institutes, there's not much by way of overall changes, but are there any changes contained within that line in this year's budget over last year's?

Mr. McLoughlin: — Just the accommodation changes around central services, which is that lease rates drop that we talked about earlier.

Ms. Beck: — And with regard to regional colleges, there's a slight decrease this year. Any substantial changes within that allocation, within that line?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So we launched the regional college task force last year, and part of that task force was to ask the seven regional colleges that we have to work on efficiencies that could be pursued collectively amongst them.

Those included the following four areas: in human resources; in back office integration; in information technology, particularly student information system management; and in programming. And there has been a \$1 million reduction as a result of that work.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. What was the nature of . . . Where did they land on, of those areas that you mentioned, Minister, in terms of finding that \$1 million in reduction in costs?

Mr. Boehm: — David Boehm, assistant deputy minister. So the bulk of the savings was identified as part of the work of the task force during 2018-19 at \$362,000. But they also identified a number of other potential savings opportunities that would roll out during 2019-20, and so between those two groups of savings opportunities they will achieve a million dollar reduction.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Can you provide some examples in terms of where they found the reductions in savings? Which measures were undertaken?

Mr. Boehm: — So there was a number of areas that they looked at, mostly what I would call back-office or administrative-type activities. So for example sharing legal services amongst the seven colleges instead of each of the colleges having their own arrangements and contracts would be one example. In terms of some of their systems, for example payroll, some colleges may have their own payroll staff and pay their staff directly; other colleges may contract that out to a third party. And the concept here is that we want to see colleges working on a common approach because that will lead to savings across all seven colleges instead of each of them doing their own unique approach. So that would be a couple of examples, and there's a whole host of other administrative examples as well.

Ms. Beck: — Are there any plans for future measures between the colleges or between any of the other institutions?

[17:00]

Mr. Boehm: — Probably the area with the most significant opportunity for savings going forward is working with the seven colleges to develop a new student information system. Unfortunately like challenges in a number of organizations, they happen to have a system that's considered a legacy system developed in the 1990s, implemented in the 2000s, and the system provides a minimal level of function; it does the basics. But as you know, technology has advanced significantly over the last number of years, and they recognize that to serve students in the way they need to be serviced or provided services to using smartphones, other technologies that young people would be actively using, the system needs to be upgraded. And once that system is upgraded — there will be an initial cost — but it can also drive quite a number of savings in terms of the interaction with students moving say from mailing out materials to students to actually allowing them to establish a portal and self-serve in terms of the information requirements that they would have of the institution.

So there's many examples that we could list in terms of the possibilities that a new student information system would drive in terms of savings and, at the same time, making a real positive contribution to student experience. And again you know, we've experienced that within the ministry as well because we are part of the same system so we recognize a number of savings opportunities.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — And I will just add to that that the student management piece is important in terms of coordinating data to inform decision making. And right now they all collect data in a slightly different way and manage student data in a slightly different way which creates problems for the recognition of credentialing across the province, and we just need

to get that solved.

The Chair: — MLA Nicole Sarauer has now joined us, and I recognize Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. Thank you for that answer. Just so that I understand, the technological upgrades that you're mentioning for the student information systems, is that . . . You mentioned that there would be an additional upfront cost associated with that, with the hope that there would be savings in the future. That upfront cost, is that contemplated in this budget or will it be a future budget item?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — This is actually the first step of a multi-year plan.

The Chair: — I recognize Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you to Ms. Sarauer. Thank you, Chair. Which institutions will be involved in that upgrade and the sharing of information services, student information services?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So all of the regional colleges, and we will also reach out to Dumont, DTI, Dumont Technical Institute, and also SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies].

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I'm going to move on to vote 3, student supports. Noting under operational support a very slight increase here, I'm just wondering under that line item, under that allocation, if there are any major changes that we see this budget year over last year.

Mr. McLoughlin: — The slight change on the operational side is just a minor adjustment in salaries.

Ms. Beck: — And of course there's a significant increase in the Student Aid Fund. I'm wondering if you could describe what will be funded with that increase in terms of student support. How much of it will be repayable? How much will be the changes within that fund?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Okay, so what you're referencing there is basically the Student Aid Fund, which is the student loan fund which is reflective of the number of students accessing that, which is in line and correlates with the rise in enrolments. 16 per cent of that is non-repayable and 84 per cent of it is.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. So how many students do you expect to access the fund this budget year?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — About 18,000.

Ms. Beck: — And the number that accessed it last year?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — We're projecting it will be about the same as last year.

Ms. Beck: — Okay, so the same number of students this year over last year. Same split between the non-repayment portion and the repayment portion?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Correct.

Ms. Beck: — So the increased allocation, what does that go towards?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — There are two things that factor into that. One is the overlap of the loan years with the school years and the budget year, and the second is that we went to sup last year because we didn't originally budget the amount that we needed. We corrected that this year.

Ms. Beck: — And the supplemental activity last year was 12 million, was it?

Mr. Boehm: — The supplementary estimate amount for the 2018-19 fiscal year was four and a half million dollars.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Thank you. So just so I'm clear, this is a similar number of students and a similar level of support in this year over last year? Okay. When was the last time those amounts provided under the student loan program were adjusted for inflation?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So the expensable items under this program are adjusted every year in line with the CPI [consumer price index].

Ms. Beck: — What is the default rate or the rate of those in arrears with regard to repaying their student loans?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — The default rate?

Ms. Beck: — Mmm hmm.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — It's 90 per cent.

Ms. Beck: — And we're paying back 90 per cent?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes, and that has increased significantly over the last number of years.

Ms. Beck: — Has there been increased enforcement or increased any measures towards that increased level of repayment?

[17:15]

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — Good afternoon. Tammy Bloor Cavers. I'll speak to an aspect of the safety nets that are available.

We monitor repayment rate activity on an annual basis, and we also look at repayment rates by program. So that gives us a signal or an indication of how well graduates are attaching to the labour market. So we can have further discussions with schools to suggest whether that activity is, you know, trending downwards and is impacting students' ability to repay.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I would also add here that the debt repayment plan that we have . . . Back in I believe it was 2013 we tied the interest rates to prime, which allowed those repayment rates to go down. And in '17-18 we enfranchised more. We raised the income threshold level so that we enfranchised more students to be able to access the program.

Ms. Beck: — Sorry, what year was the threshold increased?

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — '17-18.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — '17-18.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. And that amount remains static this year. Is that correct?

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — Correct.

Ms. Beck: — Correct. Okay. How many more students have . . . What was, percentage-wise or in raw numbers, that . . . Increasing the threshold. How many more students did that allow to access the program?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So we will have to further explore that question and answer for you, and we will endeavour to get you that response.

Ms. Beck: — Sure, thank you. The amount was increased from which number to which number in 2017-18?

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — The income threshold, the adjustment that was made in '17-18 moved from \$20,000 for a combined family income to \$25,000. For a family size of one, pardon me. And that's a change that's aligned with the Canada student loan program as well.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. In terms of defining when a loan has gone into default — or I'm not sure if I'm using the right word — but when it's considered within that 10 per cent rate that you've noted, how is that defined? How long without payment, or what criteria would a loan have to meet in order to be moved into that category?

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — So default rates, the definition around default rates are fairly standard across the banking industries and essentially our integrated program follows suit. So sort of the technical definition of a loan in default is 90 days. So any payments that have not been made prior to that, it's considered to be in delinquency, and then beyond the 90 days it's no longer considered to be in good standing.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. And do you keep numbers on the delinquency rates in the province with regard to the student loans?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes, we do track delinquency rates. They have been relatively static over the last number of years at about 7 per cent.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. You noted that there was also tracking of repayment by program. So this would be information where, if you have an increased number of students who are unable to make their loan payments for example, that that would trigger another process. Looking at that program, could you describe that program, or what the threshold is? If you're seeing a program that is having a higher-than-usual default rate, what are the next steps?

Mr. Wosminity: — Kirk Wosminity, executive director, student services, program development. So we do a number of things around repayment rates and particularly at the program level, so we share with institutions every year what their repayment rate

is and we do work at the program level. So if an institution is experiencing difficulty or having particular programs with low repayment rates, we ask them to do an improvement plan. And we'll work directly with those institutions to develop an improvement plan, and we'll monitor the repayment rates over the course of the next few years.

Part of the things that we'll ask them to do is, you know, better communications with their students in terms of what's available for safety nets after they've left school. We'll ask them to do better, maybe do better at entrance requirements. We'll ask them to see sort of what opportunities they have for work-integrated learning, whether or not local industry is in need of those programs. And finally we'll ask the institution whether those particular programs are in fact meeting labour market needs because the data or statistics would suggest otherwise.

So we've seen tremendous increase in repayment rates amongst institutions within Saskatchewan since we've been doing this for the last 15 years, 10 years.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, that is helpful. When you mentioned that, I have to admit I was thinking of groups such as early childhood educators where the demand is high but the wages are very, very low and there's a significant influence in terms of that wage. The government sets that wage to a large degree or influences it with grants. I'm wondering what happens in an instance like that where there's concern about the number of early childhood educators, the turnover, but something where the need is high but the compensation remains, against market rules, stubbornly low. What happens in an instance like that?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So we are not seeing programs that have defaulting loans in particular programs.

Ms. Beck: — I'm not sure I understand the answer.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — How do I explain it better than that? We haven't seen early childhood education programs as being one of those that defaults on their loans.

Ms. Beck: — Extraordinary. Okay. Thank you. Do you track the average student debt loads from someone in the province receiving financial aid at the end of their program? Do we keep statistics on that?

[17:30]

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — So there's a number of things. I thought maybe I'd just walk through a few things in terms of what we do to support and monitor, to keep that . . . monitor activity around debt levels to make sure that we have the appropriate supports in place. So I'll just walk through a few items and comparators to give you a sense of where things are at.

So just to start off with, I would suggest that debt levels essentially have kept pace with inflation since 2007. From 2007 to 2017, average combined — so this is combined federal and provincial government student loan debt — rose by approximately \$3,000 per student, from 17,000 to 20,000.

The average 2017 government student loan debt by program, just to give you a flavour of differences — averages are always a bad

estimation, in my mind — so just to give you a flavour though, for a certificate/diploma, \$12,000; an undergraduate degree, \$24,000; and a graduate degree at 32,000. And so that's based on an average from 2017 of students entering consolidation or entering that activity to begin repayment.

So as a bit of a comparator, we do periodic graduate outcomes reporting on activity. So we ask a number of different questions relative to employment activity following graduation and the types of earnings that they're engaged in. So total debt based on that 2014 outcomes study reported activity averaged at 10,700 for a certificate-level program; 17,800 for a diploma program, so that gives you a sense of the average between the two; 33,400 for a bachelor degree; 17,100 for a master's; and last, 33,800 for a doctorate. So that gives you a sense of the range and that point in time.

So as I mentioned, our activity around monitoring debt levels, we receive debt . . . like to consider it around repayment rate activity annually. And we do comparisons right across the country in terms of how well we're doing to our sister jurisdictions. So we look at that based on Canada student loan data, and that also is a good indicator in terms of how well people are doing.

So along with that, we've done a number of things around increasing improvements to the program. We're looking at different things like some of the improvements we introduced the last two loan years, last two fiscal years. And that's around providing upfront grants to students in a more predictable and manageable way so students have a better ability and understanding of what kinds of assistance they will have available to them. They'll have a better sense of what kind of employment activity they'll need to be engaged in, or whether it's registered education savings plan program money that they can tap into if they benefited from that, if their parents and/or family members had contributed to that for them as a child.

And again talking about our safety net programs, again our repayment assistance plan has been in place for a number of years. Prior to that we had a program called interest relief. So there's always been a mechanism to catch people in the event they're having difficulty repaying.

We also ensure things like a maximum amortization period for any student loan borrower, for any student loan borrower that has a permanent disability or is pursuing a program of a longer duration. So that is 10 years for a disabled borrower. So that helps to put a ceiling, if you will, in terms of what the maximum impact could be.

We introduced a reduction to interest rates to prime back in 2010-11, which the federal government just recently tagged along with that in the 2019 federal budget. So that too adds up in terms of savings.

We have, and for many, many years we've had no interest that's calculated while students are in school. So there's a number of things that we're doing to try and prevent or limit the level of debt that students are experiencing, looking at things like borrowers can still claim student loan interest payments on their income tax annually. So that's another, you know, bit of a savings back to borrowers.

Again, looking at the level of non-repayable activity and providing it in the most predictable way is to the greatest benefit for students. So being able to plan is always beneficial, particularly for students that are in high school that can have a look at what they need to do over the course of high school to prepare for engagement in the post-secondary sector. So I'll maybe just stop there.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. That was certainly a thorough answer. And I understand the need for predictability. One of the places that there has been perhaps less predictability is around tuition in recent years. Going back a number of years, we've seen increases at both the U of S and the U of R. Saskatchewan students pay the highest tuition in Western Canada, third highest in Canada.

So I have a few questions. I'm looking at a Global article from this year, March 21st, 2019. The quote is that the province believes that the 469 million committed to universities in this budget should be enough to leave tuition as it is. Some comments about funding our institutions very well and some, an assertion attributed to you, Minister: "I think that there are some efficiencies to be found." We are certainly hearing about potential tuition increases again at the university.

I'm just wondering if you can speak to where you think those efficiencies can be found at the university and what's contributing to that tuition increase that we're seeing year over year at the university level.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So, I think there's three parts to your question. The first one is around tuition. And this is not to be glib but it is, in fact, an important fact that the universities are governed under the universities Act and have the autonomy to set tuition rates as well as the autonomy to govern their institution. And I think, I'm fairly confident that neither of those institutions would want that to change at any time soon.

I can tell you that I have travelled across the province and met with all of our institutions and have asked for tuition to be kept in line, preferably with the consumer price index. I think some predictability around that is the case. We do have some of the highest rates of tuition except for the University of Saskatchewan's recent move has put it in the median line for the U15s, and it also has the lowest student fees for any of its sister U15 institutions.

I would also say that we have some of the highest provincially funded taxpayer institutions in the country, and so we have both high tuition rates and highly taxpayer-supported institutions. So I think that's clear evidence that there are some areas where we can find some efficiencies, and I would certainly encourage our institutions to continue to diversify their funding pool, which I've said both publicly and privately in our meetings. And to be frank, I think that's just good financial stewardship. I don't think anybody that's investing money wants to invest it in any singular funding pool. And given that we have a resource-based economy, I think it's prudent to have a diversified revenue source.

Ms. Beck: — Are there some particular areas that you would look to in terms of encouraging diversification of the funding pool?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — A couple of quick examples

would be joint offerings between institutions where those synergies makes sense. Another example obviously for revenue generation is alumni pools. What did I miss? . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Capital campaigns, campaigns, and research dollars.

Ms. Beck: — Can you expand a little bit on the research dollars in terms of a diversified revenue source which . . . What would be promising in terms of pursuing that as a revenue source?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So one example would be the College of Medicine which is only attracting about 10 per cent of tri-council funding, where its peer institutions are attracting more like 50 per cent of tri-council funding.

Ms. Beck: — And to your knowledge are there barriers, particular barriers at the U of S to pursuing that, or it's just something that hasn't been done to this point?

[17:45]

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So as you probably know, the last couple of years, the College of Medicine has struggled with accreditation issues. And the attraction of research dollars is a key part of that. That situation has been stabilized. Of course we've stabilized our funding as well.

It is a little bit of a chicken-and-egg question because one of the reasons they were having accreditation problems was the lack of research. And so certainly the stability of the funding pool that we have provided this year should facilitate some acceleration in that area.

Ms. Beck: — Which leads to a follow-up question. Thank you for that. What role does or can the ministry play in terms of bolstering the research dollars available? Is there a role for the ministry? And part of the reason that I ask, looking both at the College of Medicine but also in meeting with the grad students at the U of S, one of the concerns that they noted was their lack of research dollars, the lack of availability of research dollars.

So I'm just wondering if there's a role to play or a plan with the ministry to help bolster the availability of those research dollars.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So I think there's a number of ways to answer this question, and so I'll try to be as broad-based as I can. We certainly advocate, when we are familiar with some projects, to our federal counterparts who have a disproportionate level of influence over some of the tri-councils and the big councils that provide, whether it's NSERC [Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada] or SSHRC [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada] or some of those others. We certainly have played a role in advocating on behalf of projects that are important to the province of Saskatchewan in terms of research.

Internationally I think you'll find that we have played a very significant role. In this particular budget we've provided funding for Mitacs once again. And Mitacs is a research partnership program that actually has the ability to leverage really significant other dollars from both industry and from the federal government. That has been very successful and has been a very important player in the innovation and research space.

And I would also say that when we do educational, particularly post-educational international missions, one of the things that we are doing is not just signing agreements for students both to reciprocate in both places but also faculty opportunities for collaborative research.

One example would be when we were in Mexico there were a number of agreements signed with the intercultural institute there that were focused on Indigenous people, and we of course in Saskatchewan, I think, have some very exciting researchers in the Indigenous space and that cross-fertilization between those institutions, I think, is really important. We've signed a number of agreements in that respect. So that also enables the leverage of some of those opportunities.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, minister. And you've mentioned a couple of times now, and I'm not sure that I'm hearing you correctly, is it Mitacs? How are you spelling it?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — M-i-t-a-c-s. Mitacs.

Ms. Beck: — And can you describe that program in a little more detail please?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So Mitacs used to be called the mathematics, information technology, and complex systems, because we love really long names, and it formally just changed its name to Mitacs back in 2011. We essentially get, I believe it's \$3 for every dollar that we put in, roughly, and there's two primary programs.

One is the Accelerate program, which provides graduate student internships with Saskatchewan industry, so it's a work-integrated learning experience, really, but it also . . . for graduate students. And the second is the Globalink program, which is more about international research opportunities for both Saskatchewan students and also for incoming international students.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you for that. One of the things, Minister, I believe that you noted was the percentage or the portion of provincially funded or taxpayer-funded . . . the portion that is paid for by the taxpayer to the post-secondary institutions in the province.

I'm just wondering if there are particular drivers, be they demographic or geography in the province, that lend themselves to us having a higher per-capita cost to delivering education. Or is that something about the way that we — this is a fairly big question, I suppose — the way that we structure our post-secondary institutions?

Is there low-hanging fruit there in terms of things that we could do to just be more efficient? And/or is this partially a demographics and a geography issue with regard to the cost within the sector?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So a couple of things here. One, we have, for the size of the population in Saskatchewan, we have a U15 institution with very high-cost programs; we have a comprehensive institution; we have a polytechnic, a large polytechnic; and then a number of Indigenous institutions on top of that. In total we have almost 69 institutions offering some kind of post-secondary opportunity across the province of

Saskatchewan for our population size, which is fairly significant.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you for that. So certainly in terms of the structure I would guess per capita that's a large number of institutions. With regard . . . Are there cost drivers with regard to, you know, just the geography and scarcity of population in the province as well? Does that lend itself to that increased cost?

[18:00]

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — So there's a couple of things I would like to mention and certainly the minister can add on to that. I think there's a couple of things that we attempt to look at and try to balance. So I would characterize our system to be extremely efficient and unique from a number of different perspectives. So we have . . . The minister talked about the number of institutions, both public and private, that provide program delivery to the residents of Saskatchewan as well as out-of-province students that might be encouraged to come here as well.

But the balancing act is really the extent to which we invest in our public post-secondary institutions to offer local programming to keep our kids at home, for lack of a better way to describe it. And in many cases, our regional colleges do an excellent job of offering both university-level and technical training. University level, in some cases one- and two-year programming, so students can remain at home for that period of time before advancing to on campus whether it's Regina or Saskatoon or to Sask Poly's one of four campuses in the major urban centres. So that requires a certain degree of investment to support that kind of activity.

The other element of the balancing act is around the diversity of programming that's provided. So the minister referenced, you know, the U15 as well as the comprehensive university here in Regina. Again, a significant array of programming. We augment those decisions around programs that are offered within those institutions, within our provincial agreements for other, what we would characterize as high-cost, primarily health-related programming, so things like sonography, programs like occupational therapy, a number of program possibilities that could be offered locally. But you do have to balance out the cost benefit and the value proposition about what collectively we can afford to offer domestically.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Thank you. Of course there are a lot of places in government where it would be helpful to have a crystal ball. But when you're looking at forecasting, you know, the demographics going forward and the job needs, the market needs for the province, you know, when you've got degree programs or apprenticeship programs where there's four to five years out, you know, if we started today in terms of getting people into those programs, can you describe, not in a great level of detail, but just how that forecasting is done in terms of places where we'd like to direct more students, or programs of priority?

And then, you know, if there's writing on the wall or there are, you know, indications that it's an area where we'll need fewer people trained in the future, how does that forecasting work its way into the budgeting process and the work of the ministry to make sure that, you know, as much as we can, we get that balance right?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So there are a number of levers,

and I would say that we're getting better at this all the time. So with respect to the two universities, we have limited ability to, I would say, dictate programs. But I would say that we have had very great conversations about areas of future growth and trying to align accordingly, very productive and constructive conversations about that to align with labour market needs, and I'm very grateful for that. I would say particularly around computer science would be one area that we've talked about, but nursing programs have been another that certainly we've had some growth in.

With respect to poly, Sask Poly is in a bit of a different boat. Sask Poly has regular industry association feedback into the programs that it provides. Their industry partners regularly help them with curriculum revisit. They regularly create or collapse programs in response to labour market needs. So that is a process that is really ongoing with Sask Polytech, and I would say it's an area of strength for them as well.

One of the areas that we've seen a lot of growth with is, and Tammy you might have to speak to the . . . But we've been doing a lot of work with the Health ministry in the last number of years to make sure that the health needs of the province are aligned with the training needs of the province as well. And I forget what the name of the council is that you referenced earlier. Health Human Resources Council.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Thank you, Minister. With regard to Sask Poly, after the budget there was notification of . . . It's reported as 18 and 19 positions in different . . . but reduction of 18 positions within Sask Poly. It was indicated that these were due to program changes.

Could you describe that and what some of the pressures there might have been that caused those program reductions, those positions?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So this is a regular course of business with Sask Polytech. They do this every spring roughly. I have the numbers for the previous years. This number is slightly down from previous years. Every spring they re-evaluate their programs and they adjust accordingly. There has been a loss of 20 positions for '19-20, and the number of new hires they project will be 151.

And with respect to poly, because these are subject matter experts, it's not a matter of moving employees necessarily from one faculty, one teaching position to another as might be the case in other institutions. This is the . . . You know, one program may no longer have the enrolments to support it, and so they need to hire additional supports in other areas. And we can't just move people from one area to the next.

Ms. Beck: — Right, that makes sense. Can you provide some indication of where the losses of positions are, which programs, and where the increase in positions would be found?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So the best way to respond to this is to say that because there are some, there's a lot of nuance to this. So in some cases we're talking about half-time positions or full-time positions. So the best way to articulate this is, I would say about a third of those positions are teaching faculty, and approximately two-thirds is non-teaching faculty. And some

among the non-teaching faculty, some of those are being repurposed.

Ms. Beck: — What would be an example of a classification under non-teaching that would be repurposed?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Bookstore support.

Ms. Beck: — So they would be moving to a different classification?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes, I would assume so.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. And with regard to the increase. I can't remember the number that you mentioned. It was over 100.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — 151.

Ms. Beck: — Where are we seeing that growth?

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — So thank you for the question. So with respect to that, Sask Poly submits a multi-year business plan on an annual basis. So any of the shifts that we're talking about here, they would be more specific about where the new hires and the new program areas would be. So we'll see some more of that detail. The submission date is for the end of April.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Thank you. One of my colleagues photocopied an article from Friday the 12th from *The Globe and Mail* and it's an opinion piece about Alberta. That, coupled with a couple of other things, leads me to a question. This is an article, or an opinion piece by Gary Mason, as I noted, in *The Globe*, looking at post-secondary participation rates in Alberta being rather below the national average. And it then talks about some of the challenges of an economy that has been largely resource based or has been a high percentage of resource-based jobs that didn't require post-secondary education. And then the, I suppose, the new or the current reality in Alberta and loss of a number of those jobs. That coupled with a piece that I heard on the radio that of course Calgary's unemployment rate is high, but they have need . . . I think there were 2,000 tech vacancies at the same time, and that coupled with Alberta's program to sort of transition coal workers into other training.

So all of that to ask this question: how well we're poised to ensure that those who might be displaced — be it in a resource-based economy or in other places where we're seeing a contraction of those jobs — how we're positioning ourselves to be prepared for those challenges. Are there supports available, for example, for coal workers once the federal regulations come in to support them in retraining?

I know that's a very long question, but I see you nodding your head. I think you understand what I'm asking.

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — I'll maybe start. And I won't comment to a huge degree on this, but this is a big part of — this would be a good question for Immigration and Career Training — so this is a big part of the work, the good work that they have under way through the labour market transfer agreement.

But certainly a lot of work that our institutions are engaged in, in focusing on workplace essential skills, broadly speaking about

the importance of having those employability skills, to some degree, certainly through the work of ICT [Immigration and Career Training], they provide a number of different supports that they would be better positioned than I to speak to. But certainly that's a big part of the work that they do.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I'm going to add to this because Innovation Saskatchewan does some work in this area. Before I do though, I would say that our situation is different than Alberta's. Instead of a low enrolment, we're seeing very high enrolment and a trending-upwards enrolment, and we're also seeing a positive employment rate. You know, we've just posted in the last quarter some of our best employment numbers since 2015. And so those things are all, I think, factoring into the mix here.

I would also add that Innovation Saskatchewan does a lot of the work in this area on retooling people in the workforce to upskill. And a good example of that is something called ComIT. In June of last year we hosted our first course in Saskatoon, which Innovation Saskatchewan supported. Thirty students started the course; 26 completed the entire program. And as a result of that, about 20 students are working in the IT [information technology] field today who were previously underemployed or unemployed.

And I think that's just a really great example of retooling individuals who would otherwise find themselves out of the labour market.

Ms. Beck: — So would those be, those 30 people in the program, would they be from particular industries? Or what's the application process or the criteria for that?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — You know, I think I would have to get that information to you because that comes out of Innovation Saskatchewan and I don't have an official here to speak to the application process. But we can certainly endeavour to get that to you.

Ms. Beck: — Perfect. I think the number of questions I have in reserve here are going to exceed the five minutes that we have left. So I'm going to go and just have you — I think these will be fairly quick — talk to or speak to some of the performance measures that are indicated in the plan for 2019-20. And if you had those performance measures in the previous year, just an update on where we're at.

The first of them would be around the first performance measure, enrolment. The annual student head count in credential programs, what are the assumptions for this year for the student head count for those credential programs?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Can I just ask you which performance . . . Your head count in the credential program, are you looking for all of those within that?

Ms. Beck: — Yes. So there are targets for both Indigenous and international students.

[18:30]

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Okay. So our tracking is from slightly different dates, so I think we may have to correct that.

But from 2007, there's been a 34 per cent increase in the number of Indigenous students enrolled at our post-secondary institutions. And in terms of our international enrolment from 2012-2013 — and this only goes to the '17-18 year — there's been a 40 per cent, roughly, just shy of 40 per cent increase in the number of international students across our institutions.

The Chair: — We have now gained the time of adjournment. So we will adjourn our considerations on vote 37, Advanced Education; vote 169, Advanced Education; and the supplementary estimates — no. 2 for vote 37, Advanced Education. Ms. Beck would you like to have any final statements? Short.

Ms. Beck: — Quickly. Just wanted to say thank you to you, Minister, and to your officials for being here this afternoon and for answering my questions so thoroughly. And I guess if there's anything left that I have left to ask, I'll send it over in written questions.

The Chair: — Madam Minister, do you have any closing remarks? Short as well.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Well first I'd like to thank the members of the committee for being here and for coming at short notice to an earlier time. That was great. As well as to you, Mr. Chair, for accommodating that and the Hansard staff. Obviously to yourself, Carla, and most importantly to my team of officials for the professionalism and the thoroughness with which they provide information on a regular basis.

The Chair: — Okay. Thank you, Madam Minister, and thank you to your officials. Thank you for the MLAs for being orderly. Would someone like to move the adjournment, please? Ms. Wilson. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until 6 p.m. tomorrow night.

[The committee adjourned at 18:32.]