



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY**

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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY**

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Mr. Buckley Belanger, Deputy Chair  
Athabasca

Mr. Jeremy Cockrill  
The Battlefords

Mr. Ken Francis  
Kindersley

Mr. Terry Jenson  
Martensville-Warman

Mr. Delbert Kirsch  
Batoche

Mr. Doug Steele  
Cypress Hills



[The committee met at 12:00.]

**The Chair:** — All right. Good afternoon and welcome, everyone, to the Standing Committee on the Economy. In for myself, Colleen Young, as Chair today for the committee, and other committee members joining us here today is Aleana Young in for Mr. Belanger. We have Mr. Jeremy Cockrill, Mr. Ken Francis, Mr. Terry Jenson, Mr. Delbert Kirsch, and Mr. Doug Steele in for committee as well.

Because we are still implementing measures to facilitate safety in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, if the minister needs to confer privately during proceedings, he may do so in the hallway or the vestibule at the front of the Chamber. And as a reminder, please don't touch the microphones. They are fragile and sensitive. A Hansard operator will turn your microphone on when you are speaking to the committee. Cleaning supplies are located at the tables by the side doors for members and officials to use if they require them. And if you have any questions about logistics or have documents to table, the committee requests that you contact the Clerk at [committees@legassembly.sk.ca](mailto:committees@legassembly.sk.ca). Contact information is provided on the witness table.

**General Revenue Fund  
Immigration and Career Training  
Vote 89**

**Subvote (IC01)**

**The Chair:** — So we will now begin our consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training, vote 89. Immigration and Career Training, central management and services, subvote (IC01). Minister Harrison is here with his officials today. Minister, please introduce your officials and begin with any opening remarks.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Sure. Well thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to committee members for being here today on a Saturday. It's appreciated for a variety of reasons, so I thank you.

With me today Clint Repski, deputy minister, who I think most know; chief of staff, Richard Davis, here as well. And we have a number of our officials, as you referenced, Madam Chair, that are joining virtually. We have a communications centre set up just behind the Chamber. For folks who are watching, if we, Deputy Minister Repski and I, leave the table, it's to go and consult with officials. And the reason that we only have one official, being Clint, here today is because of COVID protocols and our attempt to limit the number of individuals who are moving about and in the Chamber.

So I want to say thank you to you, Madam Chair. I want to thank as well the building staff and the LAS [Legislative Assembly Service] staff for being available on a weekend to be able to facilitate the meeting. So thanks to Hansard and the Clerks and also our security personnel here in the building for their presence and good work.

So I am pleased to be here today to discuss Immigration and Career Training's 2021-22 budget. Our budget is an important part of the government's plan to protect, build, and grow

Saskatchewan. Over the course of the last year, ICT has played a valuable role — and ICT is the abbreviation for Immigration and Career Training for folks watching — valuable role in supporting the Saskatchewan people and businesses through this pandemic. This is a role the ministry continues today as we navigate through our current challenges. This includes working directly with businesses and business associations through regular discussions to understand their challenges.

Last summer the responsibility of the business response team was transferred to Immigration and Career Training from Trade and Export Development. The BRT [business response team] continues to provide this service to businesses to help them understand the supports available and provide additional information as necessary. There's a toll-free number, email, and website available to businesses. This service continues to be an important one to businesses as we work to return this province to normal as quickly as we can.

In addition last May the ministry created a single toll-free number and email address to support job seekers. Approximately 27,000 people have received support through this service via phone or email. ICT also developed and introduced the Re-Open Saskatchewan training subsidy. The RSTS [Re-Open Saskatchewan training subsidy] was first launched on June 18th, 2020 and subsequently extended until March 31st, 2021. The program is a temporary training subsidy that provides businesses with financial support to train employees as they adjust to the impacts of the pandemic and safely align business activities with the Re-Open Saskatchewan plan.

The program reimburses eligible private sector employers 100 per cent of employee training costs up to a maximum of \$10,000. Employer response to the program has been positive. From program inception to the end of March 2021, more than 1,000 applications and \$4 million in training have been provided. Due to the success and program demand, we recently announced the extension of this program to June 30th, 2021.

The ICT budget provides record support to help build a strong labour force, as well as support the province's economic recovery and future growth. The budget includes record funding for workforce development of more than \$39 million. This includes \$17 million in one-time funding from the federal government. Workforce development programs and services provide participants with tools and skills for job readiness, career decision making, skills enhancement, job searching, job maintenance, and career growth.

Specific programs and services include vocational assessments, career counselling, job-readiness supports, academic upgrading, basic skills training, job coaching, and other individualized employment-related support.

We are also providing record funding of nearly \$18 million for employability assistance for people with disabilities. This increased funding will provide people with disabilities with the supports and skills required for participation in the labour market. It will also remove barriers that people with disabilities face when preparing for, obtaining, and maintaining employment, and assist employers who include persons with disabilities in their workforce.

Record funding of \$8.1 million is also being allocated for the Canada-Saskatchewan Job Grant. The job grant helps ensure employers have a skilled workforce with the competencies needed to remain productive and competitive. The program helps businesses and non-profit organizations train new or existing employees for available jobs and provides more opportunities for unemployed and underemployed workers to receive training. Demand for the job grant remains strong and continues to support employers' workforce needs as the economy recovers. More than 2,000 employees received training under the program in 2020-21.

We are also providing \$8.6 million for newcomer and settlement supports. This includes orientation and planning, language training, employment supports, pathways to foreign qualification recognition, and referrals to community services and supports. This program will ultimately help to increase and retain the number of skilled and entrepreneurial new Canadians in Saskatchewan. We have a strong track record of success with the program with retention and employment rates of over 70 per cent.

We are increasing our investments in settlement services as we grow the SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program] so that immigration can continue to play an important role in our future growth. The 5,022 nominations made in 2020 will result in over 11,000 new residents to the province over the next two years.

In addition the ICT budget also continues funding to support employers and individuals through several other key programs and services. These include funding for the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, adult basic education, and the provincial training allowance to name but a few.

In closing, this budget will help to grow Saskatchewan as we work through this economic recovery period. It will help employers develop, recruit, and train workers and help individuals prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment. Saskatchewan has shown incredible resilience throughout this pandemic, and we continue to be in an enviable economic position compared to other jurisdictions.

We will continue working with businesses in providing supports to individuals as we return to growth, return to normal, and build a strong Saskatchewan. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the time and looking forward to a productive discussion.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister. I'll now open the floor to questions from committee members. I recognize Ms. Young.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. And I too would extend my thanks to all in attendance today, whether in person or remotely, with special thanks to the building staff and legislative staff who permit this meeting to go forward with all of their hard work. And a special thanks to the members from Kindersley and Batoche who ensured I was able to get into the building this morning. I'm not sure everyone appreciates that but I do, so thank you.

I will begin — this being my first budgetary estimates in this role — with, I think, as is standard, some of the consistent questions that do get asked across ministries. And I would begin by just

asking if any of the external organizations supported by your ministry have seen their funding cut or have experienced reductions in the past year.

[12:15]

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to consult. The answer is no. And I'll turn it over to my deputy for a little further explanation.

**Mr. Repski:** — So thank you for the question. As the budget was developed this past year, you'll notice that there isn't a decline across the board. But to particularly indicate any one organization or another, because we do enter into annual agreements and contracts with some of our stakeholders and providers, it could be subject to change. But the quick answer, as the minister indicated, is no. But again as we enter into that annual process, you could see some tweaks from time to time. But sectors and perspectives, they should not be negatively impacted due to a budget reduction.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Wonderful. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Minister. And that would also include or cover off any type of — I hate to use the term "clawbacks" — but say clawbacks from dollars that would be underutilized due to COVID-19, for example? Later on I planned on asking a question specifically around some of the apprenticeship and trade certification processes, which I understand or I imagine would have been impacted by COVID-19 significantly. So there wouldn't be any underutilized dollars that would be then reverting back the ministry?

**Mr. Repski:** — We're still finishing our year-end, and we're getting into a situation where a lot of our stakeholders have differing year-ends. Some are in June. Some are in July. And so as we're getting into our year-end, we're not there yet. We're still on our, what we call our cut-off period in government. But to date, no there is no intent to be clawing back if there happens to be a surplus due to COVID. But after talking with our organizations throughout the past year, we don't know if there's going to be a deficit because of it or a surplus. It's a little bit early to say.

So while some of the seats and the training seats that have been allocated weren't as full as they normally were over the past year for obvious reasons, they also had additional costs that went with trying to reach their students and their clientele virtually in a lot of cases. So as you can imagine, similar to what's in the House today, increased cleaning protocol. You've got virtual, you've got technology, you've got PPE [personal protective equipment]. You have a whole bunch of other different things. So we don't have an answer to that yet, of where they've landed on it. But no, there's no intent at this point to be doing a mass claw-back.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you. One last kind of higher level, funding-related question: certainly in some of the news releases and in the minister's introductory remarks there was recognition of some of that significant federal funding that is flowing. And I'm wondering if you could speak to the nature of this funding, whether it is one time, some of the intent in terms of the distribution, as well as maybe speaking to some of . . . whether or not, excluding this federal money, your ministry is seeing a year-over-year increase in funding?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Well thank you very much, Madam Chair. So with respect to the federal component of the budget, so last year, last fiscal year we entered into a agreement for a labour market development agreement transfer which is one of the LMTAs, labour market transfer agreements, that would see a \$42 million additional federal allocation through the labour market development agreement with, you know, essentially parameters that were going to be developed as we went forward.

Those parameters, I would say charitably, were slow in coming, which meant that we were not able to allocate all of that \$42 million in the previous fiscal year. And I think we entered into the agreement October 2nd or something like that. I remember I actually had to drive back down here from Meadow Lake to execute the agreement right immediately prior to the last election just for that explicit purpose. I think it was October 2nd we did it. Okay, it was; I remembered that. So what it meant though is we weren't able to actually allocate all those resources in year, Madam Chair.

So what we did was negotiated with the federal government a provision that would allow us to roll forward a portion of that LMDA [labour market development agreement] transfer into this fiscal. So \$25 million we rolled into this fiscal, which we allocated to two separate subvotes under the workforce development agreement and the employment assistance for persons with disabilities. I think 17 in the former, 8 in the latter.

[12:30]

So that's kind of the short answer or the shorter answer. The budget itself, if you were to remove the additional transfer, would still have been an increase of about 4 per cent, I believe. So with the additional transfer, though, it's nearly a 17 per cent annual increase.

But by way of background for folks who are interested in the way the labour market development agreement and the transfer agreements work in a more general context . . . And it's actually a really interesting thing that's been an evolving area of policy.

You know, when I first became minister responsible for employment services branch — seven, eight years ago, something like that — you know, we had at that time four different labour market transfer agreements. We had the LMDA, which was a very different LMDA than it is right now. We had the workforce development agreement. We had the LMDAPD we called it, which is labour market development agreement for persons with disabilities. And we had the targeted initiative for older workers, which was a very small transfer — I think there was about 400,000 or something like that — which was actually probably as challenging to administrate as it was worth the value of the transfer.

So what we did, we advocated . . . and this was back actually when Minister Kenney was in charge of the file. And you know, I worked with him very closely. I think it's a matter of record I know him pretty well and I have for a long time. We worked on how we could collapse these transfer agreements into a more manageable and rational system with additional flexibilities such that provinces would be able to allocate these in a more responsive way to our local labour markets.

So that process took time. And I want to actually give a degree of credit to the officials, and I actually want to give a degree of credit ultimately to the current federal government for being the ones that actually ended up initiating and . . . not initiating but completing the process of collapsing the transfer agreements into two, which is a lot more manageable.

And I would say that it's a direct reflection of the work that we had done over nearly a decade period of time, policy work we had done in moving that ball forward and working very closely with our counterparts in other provinces, in putting a framework in place that allows for more flexibility in how we use the LMDA, and also as to how that funding formula works.

Because there was a time 10 years ago and before that where the LMDA, you would find a number of provinces — us, British Columbia, others — that really felt strongly that the formula for the distribution of the global LMDA funding disadvantaged provinces with very strong labour markets. And there were a variety of reasons for that which, you know, federal officials could give good justification for, but we really felt that it was not a reasonable or fair allocation.

So you know, our proposal essentially was to provide a greater quantum of overall resource that would be allocated in such a way that it would minimize the disparities between different provinces. And that's ultimately what ended up happening actually. So that is kind of how we ended up. And you know, the history of this file, too, it's an evolving one given that there used to be, you know, really a massive duplication of effort in this area because the federal government ran and managed their own labour market development programs up until 1995.

And that's actually the budget, the famous Paul Martin budget where he then downloaded — I think would have been the characterization from provincial governments at that point — responsibility for labour market training to provincial governments with an allocation that went along with that that was nowhere near what was sufficient for actually doing the work. But we've ended up, because of that, with an evolution of the LMDA agreement.

So a bit of background on that, and I think I answered the question as well. But Clint, I think you wanted to add some as well.

**Mr. Repski:** — So around the 42 million, as the minister said, it was October 2nd. We did get confirmation that it was. And it was a negotiation back and forth within the existing agreement. And so working back and forth with the federal government about what's allowed, what's not allowed, that spent a fair bit of time before we were able to land on what the parameters were going to be.

But the priorities for the funding are: supporting the adaptation of new ways of operating and serving the public through virtual service and technologies; increasing labour market participation for under-represented groups; supporting impacted workers to transition to new jobs; upskilling and re-skilling; and supporting career decision-making for youth and impacted workers.

The issue that we have with the funding is, because it is one-time in nature, it wasn't something that would be put into regular

ongoing pieces. And so when we looked at what we could do for this previous fiscal we just came off, and moving forward, which is what the carry-over as the minister described is for, that 17 was expended in the previous year.

And so just to give you a bit of a highlight of some of the things that were done. And again, as we're into this whole lovely year-end piece — which us accounting folks love but not everybody does as much as I do — we got into virtual adaptations and technology for third parties to do their services. So that resulted in 65 new agreements with various providers, funding provided for new tech, PPE, and staff training; expanding virtual reality for career decision making to more providers in locations around the province. The tech is used to provide that hands-on experience for youth, new labour market entrants, and workers in transition to try out new occupations and improve career decision through the use of virtual technology. That resulted in some existing agreements with about 27 different providers amending some of the existing contracts.

Supporting Indigenous participation as workers, contractors, and business owners as part of the accelerated site-closure. Part of that was an agreement that we'd signed with the Sask Research Council to allocate funding to the First Nations Natural Resource Centre of Excellence. So that funding is going to be used to upgrade market and administer their export database to facilitate matching with Indigenous workers and businesses; additional skills training programs to support regional colleges in addressing reduced seat capacity as a result of COVID-19; and offsetting some of the costs associated with the strong recovery adaptation rebate.

Moving forward, part of my previous answer was as we enter into agreements — this hasn't been finalized yet because we're still in negotiations about prioritizing — so we'll be focusing on self-employment programming for persons with disabilities as part of that 8 million carry-over; digital literacy for job seekers and entrepreneurs; expansion of the training voucher program. That's an existing program that helps to make training more accessible for laid-off workers, and so it offsets things like cost of tuition and books and other things.

We want to look at expansion of employment supports through SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres]; expansion of employment supports for persons with autism — so we would likely have conversations with the ARC, the Autism Resource Centre.

We want to have supports for workers in transition, so that would be similar to sort of that coal experience that we're facing in the province. So that allocation's going to support the retraining needs of approximately 40 workers who'll be impacted by the coal phase-out through a suite of differing offerings, and that would look at things like career counselling, job matching, and self-employment training; and looking at learning supports for persons with disabilities, so making sure that those learners have the access to the things that they need to fulfill their courses.

Other areas of consideration for the upcoming year will be the Indigenous apprenticeship initiative, something called the tiny house project, working with Indigenous communities to build tiny houses on reserves; youth apprenticeship, we're looking at an interactive display potentially at the Sask Science Centre;

partnering with Sask Industry Education Council to look at practical and applied arts classes. We've been working with our partners over at Advanced Ed around rural and remote veterinary tech programs as well as a dental lab program, so supporting those initiatives.

So you can see there's actually a wealth of things that have been done and we're pursuing in the upcoming year along those themes of upskilling, re-skilling, adaptation. There's actually a wide range of things that we're going to be covering with this funding.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you. Adjusting to the new realities of these committees with COVID, what I may do is give you a bit of a heads-up of a couple of questions that I will have in one specific area, if that's easier for yourself and your officials. But if not, that is also acceptable.

But my next line of questions are going to focus on the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program. And I was reviewing *Hansards* of estimates past and refreshing myself on some of the information shared in past years. And I believe last year, Minister, you noted it was 70 per cent of immigration was coming through that stream in particular. So I'm interested in the current numbers as they relate to that program and also the retention numbers.

And it's something anecdotally I certainly hear from stakeholders in K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education and post-secondary as well in terms of folks potentially using Saskatchewan as a bit of a springboard to the rest of Canada. And I know within your ministry there have been very specific targets set around retention and with the specific goal, I think it's of 85 per cent by 2030. And so I'm interested as well if you can expand on whether it's fair to say that people are using this program to move to Saskatchewan but then we're not retaining them, and if yes, what some of the root causes are and what work is being done to address that.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So just as a note, appreciate the indulgence for consultation. It's a bit of a lag, so what people are actually seeing on TV right now happened two minutes ago, and that's the feed that the officials are working off of as well. So anyway we're working through it as best we can.

But as it relates to the question and the program in general, I think members of the committee who have, you know, heard me on this estimate, particular subvote, before know that we are very proud of the provincial nominee program, which has developed over the last 14 years from, you know, something that had constituted a pretty minimal part of our overall growth — and I think at that point we were under 1,000 nominees per year — to growing into what is a program that now, this year, is going to see over 5,000 nominations. Next year we expect there to be significantly more, given the challenges associated with COVID, that's responsible and will be responsible for over 11,000 people calling Saskatchewan their home every year.

And in a normal year we would likely see, you know, nearly 13, 14,000 people calling Saskatchewan their home every year because of the existence of this program, which we've worked very, very hard with partners to make as responsive as we



possibly can to labour market challenges that we have in the province, and also through successive federal governments as well, in making the program as best it can be. And I'm proud to say that many other jurisdictions around the country have copied this program and different elements of this program in precise detail because of the success that we've had and innovations that we've had in the program as well.

So speaking to the numbers referenced around retention, so we have about 71 per cent of newcomers through SINP who have stayed in Saskatchewan. The way we calculate this number is a five-year window, Madam Chair. So you know, obviously you'd see a much higher number year over year. And we could cite that number; it'd be closer to 90 per cent year over year. But what we point to is kind of the five-year number and that's over 70 per cent, which is a very, very high number nationally in a comparative context.

As far as the percentage of landings in the province that come through this program as opposed to federal streams or through GAR, government-assisted refugee, privately sponsored refugee streams, nearly 72 per cent of all of the landings in Saskatchewan are through SINP, which is one of the highest, if not the highest, very close to the highest in the entire country, showing how important this program is for our province.

So I said we work very closely with our partners and where we try and be very, very responsive to changes — requested, necessary — that make sense both from a perspective of newcomers, employers, and also the province. And I think Clint can maybe speak to a bit more detail.

**Mr. Repski:** — Yes. Thank you. So the investment in immigration has contributed to some fairly strong outcomes for the economy and for our newcomers. Employers have filled gaps in the labour force through the SINP. Currently over 3,300 employers are registered to be able to recruit workers internationally. And when we're looking at what are we doing to improve this and focus on it, as the minister indicated, we're actually doing a fairly good job of this, and we have been working with the different chambers across the province. And so recently we're having conversations with the chambers regarding entrepreneurs, as an example, and how do we make sure that they're able . . . Once they land are they able to have a successful business, and what supports are needed there?

So we are working quite closely with them to determine what those needs and those gaps are, be it any sort of business acumen or EAL, English as an additional language. That's something we've been working with that group on to make sure that our service providers are in the best position to have even greater success than we've seen so far. The other piece that we've been looking at is we do have \$8 million that we set aside every year to focus exactly on that, which is our settlement funding, newcomer and settlement funding. So we work with our third-party providers to do that — reach out, have the training, have the skills development for our newcomers coming in. And we're going to continue to do that. We're going to continue to make it even better than it is today.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you. And apologies if I missed . . . That specific current retention number is?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — I believe, Madam Chair, I referenced that in my remarks — 71 per cent over five years.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you. Moving on to that newcomer transition piece that was just referenced, I believe that settlement dollars from the national government are currently up this year, and I'm . . . I guess I will revert to my past tactic in terms of just highlighting the couple questions that I am going to be asking in this area of newcomer transition and settlement.

I believe last year the minister spoke about acknowledging systemic racism that does exist within the province and the challenges that this does present for newcomer communities, at least some of them. And I'm curious if some of the inter-ministerial work that was referenced last year could perhaps be spoken to. I think it was quite positive for Saskatchewan overall that this was discussed last year. And while recognizing the challenges of COVID, newcomers to Saskatchewan will certainly have touchpoints with this ministry but obviously will also interact with a variety of other ministries within the province. And I know the challenge of silos within government, but obviously there's significant inter-ministerial work to be done there, specifically on ensuring that people can thrive and kind of achieve their full potential as new residents here in Saskatchewan.

And last year, I believe it was also discussed as some of the third-party organizations — Deputy Minister, I believe you just referenced these — with which the ministry works . . . I'm wondering if there have been any shifts in the third-party organizations with which the ministry works, specifically to that newcomer settlement and transition piece?

And then lastly, you know, within the ministry, it's been cited that I believe 77 per cent of newcomers are employed, which is a very commendable and high level across the rest of Canada. And also within this ministry, you do cite other targets I believe in past years' annual reports, specific to ensuring that people are employed, have the right level of education for their employment. They're not overemployed; they're not underemployed. And I'm wondering what numbers are kept, and whether those could be put on the record if they do exist in terms of identifying whether newcomers themselves are over- or underemployed.

[13:00]

I think back to a small personal anecdote. The last time I think I had my nails done before COVID, the gentleman who was giving me a manicure was a newcomer from Vietnam, where he had worked as a physician and a professor of geriatric medicine. And I discovered this over the course of a manicure which, as I'm sure people can imagine, made me deeply uncomfortable and full of remorse for this fellow who was cheerful and happy and picking away at a nursing degree because, as he expressed to me, you know, his passion is working with the elderly. That is his calling in life, and he just wants to be able to get back to it. He was very aware that he needed to upgrade his language skills as that is an important part obviously of interacting with patients.

But it's really stayed with me, just as a small example of the work that of course still needs to be done around credential recognition and ensuring people are . . . You know, I can't imagine where we

have a great deal of professors of geriatric medicine beating down the door to move to Saskatchewan to the extent that we're turning them away.

So in regards to that newcomer transition and settlement piece, I guess I'm curious whether those numbers around appropriate levels of employment are kept, specifically for new Canadians who do live here in Saskatchewan, and where those measures fall.

**Hon. Mr. Harrison:** — So thank you very much, Madam Chair, and we've got some good information as far as response for a number of the different elements to the query. I think I'll start with the foreign qualification recognition component which is, you know, a long-standing and, you know, well-considered challenge for a lot of newcomers and something that we well recognize as well and we . . . because of that last year, doubled, over doubled. I think a 128 per cent increase in our FQR [foreign qualification recognition] budget last budget cycle. This budget it's at \$578,000, and we work with our partner organizations in delivering those services, which include additional training and things of that nature for those who have foreign qualifications looking to upscale.

[13:15]

One thing I would note around this, you know, a lot of the standards that are in place are not provincial government standards. These are standards put in place by professional associations or organizations that have delegated authority to regulate and license the profession for which they are responsible, for example, the Law Society of Saskatchewan — which I am a member — or the College of Physicians and Surgeons or the dental college. And it goes much beyond that. Engineering is another profession where associations have that authority.

And I mean there's a reason for it, right? I mean, there is an expectation that there are going to be standards of service and competency that are going to be met by those who are performing or working in those particular fields with a designation. So it's one of those areas where there can be challenges in how we get there with some, you know, international medical graduates for example that, you know, have qualifications that would enable them to practise in the country from which they emigrated but are not to the same degree that would be of application or qualification under the physicians and surgeons here in Saskatchewan.

So you know, our objective is, how do we bridge that gap and how do we work with the newcomers with international designations to get them to the place where they can meet that standard for the professional association in the province? So that is the objective and that's why we doubled funding for foreign qualification recognition. And that goes directly towards training programs.

As far as the settlement organization, you know, I think I would characterize our relationship with our settlement organizations as being a very positive one and a very collaborative one. You know, this year we increased funding by \$600,000 for our settlement organization so that . . . are the 11 gateways. You know, people would know in this city, Regina, Regina Open

Door Society for example is our gateway for Regina. And Saskatoon, the Saskatoon Open Door Society being the gateway in that community.

And what those gateways are tasked with is providing settlement services, everything from career counselling to assistance in finding accommodation to language training and basically everything in between that newcomers may need assistance with in transitioning from the country from which they emigrated to living and making their home in Saskatchewan. We have 19 settlement advisors as well who provide services on an individualized basis with newcomers as well.

So you know, that kind of leads me to a further observation I would say, and something that I think we are working on and I'll get into it. But you know, I think this is one area where, like workforce development, you're going to see an evolution in how settlement resources are allocated because the federal government have a significant role in this space as well.

You know, we've made progress on making sure that our investments are aligned and that we're not duplicating services, but there still are elements that need to be better aligned. And I think what you're going to actually see is an evolutionary process in this where you're going to have more resources basically delegated, as with workforce development through a transfer agreement, for provincial governments to work in delivering these services in a way that makes the most sense for their province and for their local labour markets, you know, as specific as the municipality that they're in.

So this is a discussion I've had with Minister Mendicino, federal minister, who I just spoke to like two days ago. We had a very, very good discussion. It wasn't on this specifically; it was about some other stuff. But we've had this discussion in the past and I would say a productive discussion. I've talked with Minister Freeland about this on a number of occasions as well. You know, I think it's one of those things that actually, regardless of partisanship or party affiliation or anything like that, it actually just makes administrative sense. And it will improve outcomes for newcomers by having more alignment delivered through one single organization and point of contact — how that funding and contract relationship works — so you don't have different contract requirements which, for the organizations, can be a challenge when you're delivering even services that are separate but you have different elements of their contract requirements. It becomes administratively burdensome.

So I think this is one area where you are going to see continued progression and additional devolution of resources from the federal government through provinces to settlement organizations. So I just kind of offer that as an observation, but I know Clint wants to speak in some detail about other elements.

**Mr. Repski:** — Just a couple of additional points to what the minister had indicated. So one of the projects that we wanted to highlight was the foreign qualification recognition project with the international medical graduate support program. So that's been work done in Saskatoon — research into an assessment group and gap training program for internationally educated dietitians, gap training courses for dental therapists, virtual assessment modules for medical lab techs, and paramedical professionals. So that gets into that alignment piece. So working

with the professional associations that the minister had spoken to, this is an area where we are working with those professional organizations who ultimately have oversight over the FQR.

Maybe just an additional point on here was around when we look at our gateways and our service providers for the supports in our settlement services, is we have been working with them to make sure that there is an inclusion of Indigenous languages and culture as part of their — maybe I'm putting on my old hat here — curriculum for them to be working with so that our newcomers are familiar with that aspect of our province.

Another question that was asked was around sort of the over- and under-qualification piece of that. And no, we don't actually track that. We can't break that down.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Okay, thank you. So in regards to skills alignment and employment, that isn't a number that is tracked within the ministry for newcomers specifically?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — I can speak to that. I know Clint can get into it as well. I mean the data that we have is provincial data which comes through StatsCan who collect the data, and we use their information through the Labour Market Information Council. And they don't break it down beyond a provincial statistic.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Okay, thank you. And recognizing the unique situation that we do find ourselves in here with people being remotely, I had also asked about inter-ministerial work being done on eliminating some of those barriers that I believe you had both spoken to last year.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — I can maybe speak to that. I mean we have, you know, really taken on additional responsibility here within the ministry, particularly since we've been handed the business response team duties from Trade and Export, so my kind of role in that hasn't particularly changed, but it really has impacted our ability to maybe pursue some of the other discussions we were having.

I'd actually point to the immigration one as well where, you know, Minister Mendicino and I had been, I would say, making very good progress prior to March of last year. Actually I think that was . . . [inaudible] . . . I think that was actually the last in-person meeting that I had here. Marco was up in the office and we had a great chat about a bunch of things, including all of these details. And within three days of that, we were having very different discussions. So you know, we can kind of undertake to follow up I guess on additional information for the committee. But you know, I would say that . . . And Clint can maybe speak.

**Mr. Repski:** — Yes. Thank you for the question. And yes, the past year has certainly been interesting for us in ministry-land when we are looking at what have we done to support the COVID response across the province. The minister did mention the BRT but there's also redeployments happening, just a shuffling of work that's been happening to make sure that we're putting a priority where it needs to be on this.

And across government, what we did see was, as we were transitioning to work from home or rotational — and as you can imagine, it was a little disruptive — but I'm happy to say, I mean,

people pulled their weight and then some. Being able to transition into this working arrangement that we've got from all of our folks across the ministry, absolutely amazing work on this.

But it has been a lot of work to pay attention to the items that . . . [inaudible] . . . A quick example of that is our nominees. We had 5,200 nominees last year in a time when we did have to shuffle some resources around, so it's absolutely amazing work. But that being said, some things did get put on the back burner a little bit. And so some of that would be some of the inter-ministerial committees of what you've referenced. So a quick example of that would be our human services committee. So we as deputies, we've had some changes, myself being part of that. We have had some changes in the past, but we have started having those conversations again. I think we've had one or two since. This has been after Christmas so when we do talk about priorities, that is one that we do look at.

So the items which you referenced are certainly part of that agenda. So I suspect that's going to be more and more prominent as we work together, which again I'm really happy to say that over this past year — and through some of the comments and the minister's comments that have been made — the working relationship between ministries over this past year has just been dynamite, working with our colleagues in Advanced Ed for some of the items I'd referenced before: Social Services, Education, and others. We are excited to get back to work together and start focusing on these items.

I guess the other one is, I mean, working with our partners in Trade and Export Development about what does that look like, to make sure that that is being supported. So there's a lot of conversations happening. Not as many as we normally would have had in the previous year but we are getting back to, I'm going to say, more business as usual because we understand the important nature of these things. Immigration, culture, all of those wonderful things have such a broad impact on so many aspects of what we do. We're going to be back at the table. We do have meetings scheduled in the very near future where these things will be top of mind for sure.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you, Deputy Minister. And I do appreciate the — novelty is not quite the right word — but the unique situation yourself and your officials have found yourselves in over the past year. And I do want to respect the time of the committee and the officials with whom you're consulting on the phone, so I don't want to waste your resources or people's time asking questions about the past year if the answer is, like, essentially going to be verbatim from last year. So if there were, perhaps what I'm hearing broadly speaking is anything indicated — and I believe it would have been June last year — as kind of forward-looking has potentially been put on the back burner due to the pandemic. Is that a fair assessment?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — I'm not sure if the question is in a general sense. I mean we've, you know, obviously continued with the business of the ministry in a very optimistic way. I think we've made some great progress on job grant, for example. We've pivoted on the Re-Open Saskatchewan training subsidy which has been very, very successful. I actually look forward to talking about some of the changes we made to job grant as well this year, which are really quite interesting. It's one of my favourite programs and I think we made it even better than it had

been before.

So I mean, the ministry has been very much focused, though, on the broader response to COVID and that's where the priority is. And that's the direction I've given to officials. So any work that maybe hadn't been at the top of the list, that's not on them; that's on me for having given direction that we are focused like a laser beam on COVID response.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you for that. And believe it or not, that wasn't intended as thinly veiled criticism. I'm just noting almost some of the same language specifically around increasing autonomy for this ministry as it relates to the relationship with the federal government. Some of the language is almost verbatim and I don't want to waste people's time by rehashing what was said in June, because I do certainly have questions going forward about the COVID response and the business response team.

Before we get to that, I guess I'd like to touch briefly on the workforce development piece. As we look at the need to get people back to work and we look at the changing labour market needs, whether they're simply reactionary to the current pandemic within which we find ourselves or looking forward, I'm curious if you could offer, perhaps to begin, some broad comments on how the ministry may be changing tactics in terms of getting people back to work: how people do their work, how this is changing, and how you are adapting your tactics and techniques in terms of identifying those labour market needs and how you can help develop some of those skilled and educated workers. Because this is something, even within COVID-19, that I do hear from stakeholder groups, specifically in fields like science and tech.

[13:30]

And I know we've spoken previously about areas like micro-credentialing as it relates to the high-tech sector. But I guess in sum, how is the ministry in its current state, which I recognize is unique and in somewhat of a state of flux, how are you identifying the right sources of labour in measuring your successes and doing that at this time?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Thank you very much, Madam Chair. We have some good information for the committee and I want to thank officials who are working hard on digging up some data. And Clint and I will go through some of it.

You know, I think one of the kind of starting points that we would have as a government is that, you know, as far as creating jobs, opportunity, wealth creation, I mean the private sector is by far the best part of the economy to be creating those jobs. The reality is, government consumes wealth, government redistributes wealth, but government doesn't create wealth. That's our job . . . creators and innovators and risk takers that do that. And what we seek to do is provide mechanisms where those wealth creators and innovators, job creators can leverage elements and resources from government to increase their ability to do that.

So you know, this year we have increased our workforce development funding nearly 90 per cent, nearly 90-per-cent increase in our workforce development funding. You know, a significant component of that is the allocation through the LMDA transfer, but even without that we have increased our

funding for workforce development by a significant margin.

So where those resources have gone to, I'm going to highlight specifically. And I referenced it earlier, a program that I think has just been very, very, very successful over the years and one, you know, I was privileged to announce as minister about seven or eight years ago jointly with, at that point, I think it was actually, I think it was minister Kenney actually at that point, who we jointly announced that program on job grants.

And you know, the real value, and I think where we've seen the best outcomes from training, has been where we have a relationship between an employer, an employee or potential employee, and the government, and everybody has a stake in a positive outcome. And that really has allowed for I think in all of the areas it's been tried, you would find that you just had better outcomes from that because of all of those incentives from all three parties to an agreement.

[13:45]

And that's exactly what job grant is about, and it's also why we have increased funding for job grant almost every year since its inception seven, eight years ago, including a 10 per cent increase this year, which is something that we are proud of and that we have expanded into other areas with new streams of the program which, you know, I'll speak to.

One of which is what we call MELT, which is mandatory entry-level driver training. And we have changed the rules within the last couple of years on requirements for class 1A and the requirements for that mandatory entry-level training for those who will be operating commercial vehicles, meaning large trucks primarily.

And you know, employers who we have worked with in developing a program such that we could provide the resources for them that they would be able to train their employees to . . . or they would be able to provide funding for their employees to come up to the standard and the number of hours required under the new requirements. So we've put \$2 million into that sub-program within job grant this year.

And you know, what it will then do and what we're seeking to do is ensure employers for this in-demand occupation continue to be supported as they transition toward compliance with the mandated safety training without facing additional hardships as a result of increased costs associated with taking the entry-level training. So I think that is really an innovative example of how we work with employers and are going to facilitate employees taking training such that they'll be able to enter that labour market in a way that is commensurate with the standards we expect of those who would be driving large vehicles on the road.

So another area where we've increased funding is for under-represented groups within job grant. So this new funding option would increase funding reimbursement to 75 per cent of training costs for employers training individuals who are members of groups that are under-represented in the workforce, and that includes disabilities, Indigenous persons, newcomers, youth. And the existing job grant program policies and parameters would be used to support the stream with additional policies implemented to address the new parameters. So that is a

change we've made as a reaction as well.

Another million-dollar expansion for job grants around support for small-business owners, so folks who are employing 1 to 50 employees. And this would allow small-business owners with 50 or fewer employees who are not considered employees of the company to qualify as participants in the CSG [Canada student grant]-funded training.

A Government of Saskatchewan reimbursement ratio of 50 per cent of training costs would apply for these individuals and wage reimbursement would not be provided. And this development responds to feedback received from the employer community regarding training needs currently not being met for owners. This incremental step supports employers when they require the same training as their employees and ensures employers can reinforce the skills learned through training.

So again working closely with our business community and the feedback that we're getting — literally in real-time almost between Clint and I where we're talking to our business associations almost every day. And I think that's been a real hallmark of our ability to move and move quickly on different things. So I would just point to that job grant program as being an example. There are others and I'm going to turn it over to Clint, maybe to go through some.

**Mr. Repski:** — So just to comment around the question on here when you're talking about workforce development. For the budget increase we have the 17 million and we talked about that as part of the LMTA top-up. In addition to that there are other increases. It's going to be focussed on community-based organizations. As you know, they provide a flexible range of individual and group support programs and services that enable participants to become job-ready, attach or reattach to the labour market, and maintain employment. So this funding is going to be targeted to increase those existing and emerging demands to better support unemployed or underemployed individuals throughout the province.

The other areas . . . The COVID lockdown and the restriction pieces certainly have hampered the service delivery — reducing classroom training opportunities and restricting in-person programming. Despite those restrictions, we had over 5,400 unique participants placed in workforce development and services last year. With the increase, we certainly expect that number to be increased as a way of reaching those people. More than 40 per cent of those clients were still in the program at the end of the year.

When we look at who we're talking about as a demographic, workforce development participants: 47 per cent female; 54 per cent were 18 to 34; 61 per cent self-identify as First Nations, 12 per cent Métis; 7 per cent identify as having a disability; 6 per cent, recent immigrant; 29 per cent haven't completed high school; and 37 per cent had high school as their highest level of education.

When we look at what we've been doing during the pandemic to support these measures, while we did talk about the RSTS, which the minister has spoken to, which again along with Canada-Sask Job Grant, provides the funding to ensure employers have a skilled workforce with the competencies needed to remain

productive and competitive as the economy reopens.

The uptake of that program has been immense. Right now it's scheduled to go till June of '21. Right now we know that we're 5 million into it and I expect that number to be increased. The response from the community has been absolutely outstanding and it seemed to have really fit a need that the business community has been looking for, especially during the pandemic.

We did talk about the transfer of the BRT. Obviously that has let us have a tremendous amount of insight into what employers in the business community are dealing with, within the confines of the restrictions of which they've been working. A number of interim measures from the SINP, and we have spoken about that. Nominees were provided with 12 months — or six if you're outside of Canada — to obtain new and eligible employment. So some laxing of the usual provisions that go there.

When we look at the PTA [provincial training allowance], it continued to be available even though students may not have been there in person. A flat one-time benefit was provided. We've been working with our third-party service providers to make sure that they're able to support the clients as well as they can using adaptations, using a variety of new tech tools, communications, a live-hosted contact centre established with one centralized phone number. So that has made life easier for everybody to access our existing programming. Webinars, that's something I wanted to mention is initial outreach. We hit 80 industry associations and 22 chambers during this past year. We're going to continue those relationships.

The other thing that was an interesting development for us was something that we did, was 10 webinars or town halls, if you were. And that was done in collaboration with our partner ministries, including our federal counterparts. And that was a specific purpose, just to make sure that all the business community knew what provincial and federal programs were available to them. Again we got a very, very good response and folks really appreciated us helping to clarify what has been available. It's really been a lot to take on for businesses over the past year.

Again, employer outreach, that has been prioritized this year, rapid response services. So that's the outreach when we reach out to businesses who may be considering laying off employees. We walk them through what options are available to them. It's certainly a huge benefit to small- and medium-sized businesses who may not know all of the options that are available to them.

Sorry, you just have to bear with me with the technology. We've got a bit of a lag on here. Looking at a job-matching tool that was developed. So it's a current and comprehensive list of occupations aligned with the Government of Saskatchewan's critical public services to address COVID and allowable business services. In addition, an intelligence tool, which we've shared with a lot of different groups across the province, looking at alignment between the approach of the labour market with what do we have available, what do we have for gaps. So it presents opportunities for us to look at skills training allocation, labour market adjustments.

And the minister has spoken about the job grant, which is going to be a focus. The other thing I'd identify is saskjobs.ca and the

national job bank. That has been continued. We capture more than half of all the job postings in Saskatchewan. According to all of our stats, the labour demand and job vacancies are improving. A job-matching tool is helpful in this priority, so when we're working with our clients specifically or our service providers are, we know where the demand is highest.

Looking at the direct delivery of career and employment services that we have, it has continued to increase demand even through the pandemic. We work directly with service-delivery partners to adopt their programs and services in response to the pandemic and trying to ensure minimal disruption. Yes, I think that's where I'll stop.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you, Deputy Minister. Just out of curiosity, who are the other officials with whom you're conferring via telecon at this moment?

**Mr. Repski:** — Waiting for us virtually, we have CFO [chief financial officer] Denise Haas; ADMs [assistant deputy minister] Darcy Smynciuk — I don't know why I can't remember that — Christa Ross; my EA [executive assistant], Shane Garritty; and Jeff Ritter from the SATCC [Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission].

**Ms. A. Young:** — I would extend my thanks to them as well, though I do want to note I had asked specifically about existing and emerging demands within the labour market and alignment between government and the private sector. And you know, it was cited that they're consulting with over 80 industry associations and 22 chambers. And I don't want to dwell on this point, as obviously the question wasn't answered, but I am disappointed that it wasn't identified which specific fields and institutions and areas are seeing those peak demands, as I think it is important information for this committee to have.

But recognizing that the clock is being run out relatively quickly here, I'll move on to the business response team where I'll have some very specific questions and hopefully can get some very specific numbers and answers. I'm wondering if, because I believe this will be the first committee meeting since the BRT has really fully hit the ground . . . No? No. Seeing head shakes. Okay, incorrect. Second committee then.

So I'm curious if you could speak to, at a high level, indications around reporting any aggregate information you have on calls, subject-matter question areas, concerns, complaints, opportunities of course for assistance. And then you had cited earlier, second question, that I believe it was 27,000 people had been supported by the ICT phone line. Of those 27,000, how many have found and maintained employment?

As you look at the business response team and some of the COVID supports that have been put in place — specifically the Re-Open Saskatchewan dollars, I believe — I believe it was cited earlier that there were around 1,000 applications for that funding of \$10,000 each. I'm curious if you can speak to how many unique employers those funds are going to, where those funds are being spent, if it's tracked, which institutions or service providers those are going to, as well as if there is a, say a largest employer accessing those funds.

You know, for example if widget business X has sent 300

employees through that program, I would be interested not necessarily in the name of that business but in the highest numbers of employees per unique applicant.

[14:00]

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. I think we have some good information to provide to the committee regarding the different elements of the query. So I'm going to speak to Re-Open Saskatchewan training subsidy and maybe some high-level on the number of contacts at career services branch and the direct service delivery component to that. And Deputy Minister Repski is going to speak to the details on BRT. And noted as well, we'd forgot Ken Dueck is actually part of the consultation group as well, who runs the BRT, and Ken's done a great job there.

I just want to start though, before we get into all of it, in thanking our staff that have been working with such diligence and at all hours, literally, on the business response team and a part of the ROSK [Re-Open Saskatchewan] committee. You know, we've had dozens of officials who have been involved directly in this, between Trade and Export and now we have 14 full-time staff committed to the business response team right now, three part-time staff as well.

And these officials have done a remarkable job. And I want to publicly put on the record, Madam Chair, my gratitude to them — and I know the public's gratitude to them — for, you know, trying to find solutions. I mean there are some very real challenges out there. And we've really worked and our officials have very much endeavoured to be, you know, very responsive and communicative with our public out there. So I want to say thank you, thank you to our officials at BRT.

[14:15]

With regard to the specific question around the Re-Open Saskatchewan training subsidy, I have kind of the details here that I'm able to present to committee. So we have had just shy of 1,300 trainees who have completed training, and that's as of February 28. So we don't have the data for March as of right now. Obviously that data would be happily provided at the point at which it's collected, but we've had 1,295, to be specific, trainees that have completed training under the RSTS as of the end of February from 677 separate employers. So that's an average of about two employees per employer.

And I would note that the program caps expenditure per employer at \$10,000, so that acts as, you know, a check. And I'm not sure, you know, whether the implication was that a small number of employees were monopolizing the resources, but the fact that we've designed the program such that there is a cap per employer at 10,000, you know, has the effect of limiting the number of employees per employer. So I would point to that particular item. And I know Clint has in front of him all of the details on the number of contacts and communications on BRT.

But I did — sorry — just want to speak to, quickly, the direct service delivery number from our career services branch at ICT. And this is since May of 2020, we've had approximately 12,000 clients served through the toll-free number, and this is from individuals; approximately 15,000 client emails responded to;

11,500 individual client appointments booked for career services, and that would be through our labour market offices located around the province; over 9,000 individual career action plans developed; and approximately 40 per cent of clients with action plans have found employment as of the date of this particular note.

So that would be I think a degree of response on that particular point, because BRT doesn't really do individual career training. BRT is responsive to, you know, business response, which is why it's called what it is. But Clint, I'll turn that over to you.

**Mr. Repski:** — Thanks, Minister. So we've been doing the BRT work since the summer of 2020. And a great deal of thanks, again as the minister said, a lot of effort goes into managing this. Originally it was set up in Trade and Export Development. Thanks to them. We do work with them for advice as we work through some of the issues that have been presented.

So a big part of the role . . . As the minister indicated, we don't work individually with career training, but what we do is work with individual businesses, associations, and sector groups to help them safely reopen businesses while adhering to the public health orders and the Re-Open Saskatchewan guidelines. We have regular outreach with impacted industry and business groups and sector associations and hear concerns related to ROSK. Also throughout the past year, it also is getting ideas of ways that we can support businesses and activities even better.

The Minister of Health and the chief medical health officer establish the public health orders and the guidelines. We consult and we provide interpretation of those guidelines. The work that we do — and Minister Harrison had identified the number of employees we have — this is done in conjunction with SPSA, Sask Public Safety Agency. They do the tier 1 calls for us. So what we did in the fall was not have two or three or four lines coming in, but to have one source of contact. So the 1-888 number was set up and all of the lines go in to that group. So they're our front line; they're certainly a huge part of our team. They directly report up into us. They handle the tier 1 calls, the tiers 2 and 3, and the employee outreach. That's done within the ICT staff.

And in terms of the number of calls that we get, it does vary and it has varied throughout the year. But I'm going to say it's fairly consistent, probably 200 calls and 200 emails a day. It's very, very busy. As you can imagine, if there's any changes that need to be done, the volume goes up. If it's fairly consistent for a duration, they come down a bit. But I would say that would be the average. To date, the number of BRT clients and calls were just under 30,000. This was as of the 15th of April, just over 29,000 clients. And in terms of calls and emails, the breakdown around that is about 18,000 calls and just under 10,000 emails that have been responded to by that group.

You had asked around themes, and it does change throughout the year depending on what season we happen to be in. It has varied throughout. So as you can imagine, in the summertime people are going to be wanting to know about summer activities — splash parks, sports, that sort of thing. Actually in all honesty, sports has been a very consistent theme throughout as it happens all year long.

Just a quick oversight of the themes. In the beginning of April, lot of questions around vaccines that we answer, so age clarification; what does “underlying health conditions” mean; helping people understand how to book appointments. I understand these are health questions but we get them all.

People have a lot of questions about how to access business financial relief programs. They want to know about quarantining durations. People want clarification on Regina restrictions. Another one is gathering restrictions, public versus private, what goes into what. Outdoor activities was an area of focus — trade shows, weddings, dog shows. In March, before that, a lot of vaccine questions. We get a lot of wedding questions — venues, capacities — and those types of events.

Camps, day camps, overnight camping, home-based businesses. So throughout the year it's varied and again depending on what we're dealing with, it does change based on what the changes were to the reopen. So those were some of the highlights that we've addressed throughout the year.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you. And I'm not sure what document you are referencing, but if it's possible for that to be tabled, that would be wonderful. I'd appreciate it.

One quick follow-up question on that piece: I appreciate the volume and velocity at which some of these contacts must come and the hard work of the, I believe you said 14 FTEs [full-time equivalent] and three part-time staff working on this team.

But one of the things that you said that I found interesting was that the BRT really acts to provide consultation and also to provide interpretation. I'm wondering if you could speak to the relationship — and perhaps kind of from a governance perspective — between public health and between the BRT.

The intent of my question is when I've received outreach from a business owner or someone in the community whose had some frustrations, it's largely been around what they perceive to have as inconsistent advice. For example, you know, music venue 1 being told X, Y, and Z, and music venue 2 directly next door being told A, B, C. So while I appreciate again the fluidity of the situation and that people are certainly trying their best, I'm wondering if you could maybe clarify for the committee that relationship between public health, the BRT, and speak to some of the inconsistencies that may be being communicated to the broader business community.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Yes, thanks Madam Chair. We are going to go and quickly consult with our assistant deputy minister responsible for the BRT. But you know, I just want to say again, I mean the folks who are working and serving in that capacity, basically who have been taken off of what would be their normal duties to work in this unit, are doing a great job and they're doing the absolute best that they can. So I want to reiterate and underline that in an emphatic way.

You know we have a great public service in this province, and I say that coming from a public service family. My father was a senior official in government, and you know, I just have the utmost respect for the work that these folks do. But we're going to go have a quick consult with ADM [assistant deputy minister] Dueck, and we will return.

[14:30]

**Mr. Repski:** — Okay. Sorry, this is a new world for me. So going back to the process of the BRT and the groups that we work with, as I indicated, the role of the BRT is we do provide some of the interpretation and input. So the way that the process works, we work very closely with Health, especially their COVID unit within the ministry. And when we're looking at restrictions that are being considered or implemented, sometimes we will do some of the drafting, sometimes they will do some of the drafting, and we send that back and forth and it becomes a conversation.

So a primary focus of the BRT is to take a lens of what's the business interpretation of this? What's the individual's piece? Because we're dealing in a regulatory environment, it's really easy to have an intent and, being around government for as long as I have, trying to capture what the spirit is. It's a very detailed skill. And so when we're looking at what the guidelines are, we will look at the language and then we'll have a conversation of what the intent has been all along to say, this is an indoor guideline restriction; this is an outdoor. And some of the things that we would comment on is okay, but what about this, I'm going to say, real-world situation?

So a quick example of that would be, in the wintertime we knew that household gathering restrictions were down. You weren't allowed to intermingle amongst households. So part of our discussion would be okay, so how do you define a household? Like, as silly as that is sometimes, that's the level of detail we have to get into. Another one would be, and it's actually a pretty good example, you can meet outdoor for 10 people as long as you're physically distanced and masked and that sort of thing, but you can't do indoor. So the question would come, okay, what do we do for ice fishers? Is it a tent? Is it an indoor building? Is it not?

And we actually go back and forth and spend time on what the interpretation is. At the end of the day, the jurisdiction of this very much does lie with the chief medical health officer and the direction from there. But when we are looking at providing the guidance and the interpretation, that's the sort of relationship that we have.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Okay, thank you. So in regards to situations in which there may be inconsistent information going out, again appreciating the learning environment in which, I'm sure, all officials find themselves, is it fair to say that information is then captured within the BRT and standardized on a go-forward basis to ensure that, like, businesses in the same city or even different parts of the province are being given the same information, and we're not seeing an inconsistent application of these rules?

**Mr. Repski:** — So what we do in that case because, as I've said, we get a tremendous amount of inquiries and that is a big job of our SPSA partners to provide that consistency of information, but it can happen. I mean we have a number of different groups who are working in this environment right now, be it the BRT or you have connection points with, I'm going to say your regular ministry oversight groups, so your Parks and Sport, you're dealing with Health, you're dealing with the ministry, you have SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority].

So what we do is when we do get issues — and we spend a great deal of time talking about any interpretive gaps that might be in there — what we do is we do take those back and as we work again very closely with Health and the COVID unit, we bring those forward and they do likewise. If they're aware of something that says oh, we need to nail this down a little bit, we will address it in there.

One of the things that we do, as I said, on a regular basis is we do have conversations with the associations, with the chamber of the business communities, industry, the business council, that sort of thing. And sometimes we'll get input from there, but we bring that information back to our conversations with Health. And it'll be sometimes, well we need to get a better message out, or it might be we might have to tweak the wording. And so there's a different response to it but yes, we do collect some of that and we try to work our way through each of those issues.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you. It really sounds like all hands on deck in terms of calls going to public health, calls about public health going to the BRT. And I appreciate that the officials and the people working there are having to provide answers on everything from business to public health and that's significant.

Recognizing we're running short on time, I did have a number of what I would call miscellaneous questions related to the ministry more broadly speaking. The federal government has recently, I believe last March, launched an agri-food pilot looking at targeting and providing support for provinces to access workers. And I'm curious if Saskatchewan is participating in this. I believe there were around 2,500 spots allocated federally and I'm curious — pardon me 2,750 annually from Canada broadly speaking — and I'm curious if Saskatchewan is participating in that specifically.

And then as it relates to temporary foreign workers in the province, I understand we may not have as high numbers as some other provinces may, specifically in the field of seasonal agricultural workers. I'm thinking of course of provinces like Ontario and British Columbia, but I do know traditionally we have some. And I'm curious if you can speak to what, if any, efforts in COVID supports have been put in place for these people going forward. As I understand it, it is the responsibility of the province to provide those for those employees as we are now moving into a second summer here.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Thanks, Madam Chair. We're going to have a discussion with Christa Ross who is our ADM responsible for immigration branch. And I would note as well, which was pointed out to myself when we were talking with Ken Dueck, I promoted him. He's an executive director. I referred to him as an assistant deputy minister. We shall return. Thank you, Madam Chair.

So thank you, Madam Chair. I believe we've been able to collect the information for the committee. So I can speak to the detailed high-level numbers, and Clint's going to have an opportunity to go into a bit more depth as far as the query.

So as far as the federal Agri-Food pilot, I mean this is basically a category of the temporary foreign worker program that the national government operates. So provinces don't really opt in or opt out; I mean, it's being managed by the federal government.



And the data that we get from the federal government doesn't go into the degree of detail to be able to provide an answer as to how many of those spots have been allocated to Saskatchewan. So that's kind of the answer on that pilot program.

With regard to the temporary foreign worker program, last year there were significantly fewer TFWs [temporary foreign worker] than we had had the previous year. And I think there are obvious reasons for that, given the pandemic. So where we were in 2019 was 930 temporary foreign workers over the course of the year. In 2020 that was down to 605 workers, of whom 280 were through the seasonal agricultural worker program. So those would be the numbers on that. But Clint, you can go into more detail.

**Mr. Repski:** — Yes, thank you for the numbers on that, Minister. The temporary foreign worker response, a number of interim measures were implemented to support immigrants and temporary residents, including TFWs impacted by changes to the labour market and obviously the COVID situation. So that included increase the nomination extension from three months to six months to accommodate delays for permanent residency. Nominees were provided with 12 months if you're in the province, or six months if you're outside, to obtain new eligible employment if the job offer associated with the original application no longer exists.

In the farm category, that's a bit more general. But applicants are able to submit an application prior to completing a mandatory exploratory visit. So that allowed applicants to engage the services of a professional third-party financial service provider. Approved applicants could earn a conditional nomination pending the completion of the mandatory exploratory visit when travel restrictions are lifted.

So that's a bit of a long way of saying that we really tried to make things as flexible as possible for our nominees over the past year, for the TFWs and folks in general. Just the quick summary of this is we added a lot of flexibility. Historically there was more, there was, I guess, more stringent guidelines that pertain to this. So what we allowed was, if you were in a situation, you wouldn't be jeopardized if you needed to change employers or your position wouldn't be jeopardized if you had to change jobs. And we're allowing folks to continue with their SINP nomination throughout.

I guess the other thing that I would mention is through the federal government. Again working with them, the feds were really focusing on expediting the permanent residency. So what the focus of it was, we know that international travel was certainly going to be an issue for us in the past year obviously, so instead of focusing all of our efforts about recruitment abroad and getting the folks landed, there was a tremendous amount of effort put into let's expedite the permanent residencies for people who are already in the province. So this was a group who was impacted by that.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thanks for that, Clint. I guess we're running short on time. And while I recognize that you're having to confer with people remotely, I would like to note for the record that I am not going to get through all the questions that I had hoped to get through for this committee, and that I believe we have spent about an hour and eight minutes out of the room conferring for

committee, which I'm sure is typical but is worsened by, I think, the remote nature that is going on.

For my last question, my question was specifically around COVID safety and provisions being made for temporary foreign workers, which I don't believe was addressed in the answer. But I would like to, I guess, with perhaps my last opportunity to ask a question here, focus instead on, it was mentioned earlier in terms of coal transition and those impacted workers. I believe previously it was indicated that this was being housed in Government Relations. So I'm, I guess, maybe looking for a nod if that is still the case. That is. And then you spoke specifically to a program for, I believe it was 40 workers currently. So everything else related to folks impacted by the coal transition would be housed in Government Relations now, not this ministry. Correct?

**Mr. Repski:** — That is correct. Yes. The amount of . . . [inaudible] . . . budget is with GR [Government Relations].

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you. And then since that was much more efficient than I anticipated . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No, that's great. Would that that happened every time.

Last year I believe it was noted that there were a number of outstanding agreements with the federal government that were still being worked through, some of which I think hadn't been updated since, I think 2005 specifically, to immigration. And I'm just wondering if there is any update that can be provided for the committee on those agreements in particular. And broadly speaking, I'm curious if Saskatchewan has ever been non-compliant or missed any of the performance measures indicated in some of these agreements that we do have with our national government, through the workforce development agreement.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Yes. Thanks, Madam Chair. Sorry, I'm just looking for clarification as to the agreements, whether they were . . . I thought specific to immigration is being asked, or whether those are on the LMTAs. There are different. I guess I'm just looking for a specific question there.

**Ms. A. Young:** — Sure. Then let's focus on the last one.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Seeing how we only have a couple of minutes here, you know, I could undertake to provide some information for the committee, Madam Chair, on that particular item. I think I would say, off the top of my head, I can't think of a circumstance where there has been any non-compliance. We work closely with the federal government, and you know, I think I went in to some degree of depth earlier in the meeting, talking about the way that we got to the new, you know, two separate LMTA agreements and the path to get there, which we worked very collaboratively with other provinces and with the national government on. So we can undertake to provide a response to that.

But seeing as how we are near the conclusion, I'm happy to turn the Chair back to you, Madam Chair, if you wish to take it. And also before we conclude, I would like just an opportunity to thank committee for attending, and want to thank Deputy Minister Repski very much, who's just done a great job and who I really appreciate working with. And also our team and senior officials

from Immigration and Career Training, and also Jeff from SATCC, who we've had a chance to work with for a long time. A couple of our senior officials I've had the chance to work with for 15 years, and I really appreciate them and appreciate their professionalism and the great work that they do. And I know other members of the committee do as well. So thanks for that, folks, and turn over to you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister.

Would you have any closing remarks you'd like to make?

[15:00]

**Ms. A. Young:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. Just briefly, my interest in specifically that workforce development agreement for the committee's understanding is, as the minister has spoken extensively about the changing nature and push for greater autonomy for provinces on this file, I believe it's of interest to the committee and to the people of Saskatchewan to understand some of these real opportunities.

And there are extensive reporting requirements noted in all of these agreements and opportunities to evaluate our successes and how we can be doing better. And yes, speaking as someone in opposition, this is such a valuable opportunity to have access to our hard-working civil servants. So some of the information that could be provided on that would certainly be appreciated.

And I would echo the thanks to everybody working here on a Saturday. Clint, thanks to your team, and thank you to you as well, Madam Chair, and all the staff in the building.

**The Chair:** — Thanks again, everyone. So having reached our agreed-upon time for the consideration of today's business, I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Jenson so moves. All agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair. Thank you, everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 15:01.]