



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS  
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Mr. Lon Borgerson, Deputy Chair  
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Mr. Kim Trew  
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[The committee met at 10:45.]

**Public Hearing: Public Service Commission**

**The Chair:** — Good morning, everyone. I declare the Public Accounts meeting under way. And we have one chapter to review from the 2004 report volume 3, and that's chapter 11, the Public Service Commission. It's not a long chapter. I don't think we should have any difficulty getting through the material in the hour that's been allotted to us.

We're pleased to have Clare Isman and other officials from the Public Service Commission with us. And after Judy Ferguson from the Provincial Auditor's office reviews chapter 11, we will give you a chance to introduce your colleagues and respond. And then we'll open up the meeting for any questions that committee members might have. I turn the floor over to Judy Ferguson.

**Ms. Ferguson:** — Thank you, Chair. Members and officials, this morning I am pleased to present chapter 11 of 2004 volume 3 report. The chapter actually starts at page 245. In this chapter we conclude, on page 248, that for the year ended March 31, 2004, the commission had adequate rules and procedures to safeguard public resources and comply with the law.

In addition, in this chapter we set out our plans of an audit of an area critical not only to the commission but to the government as a whole, and that is human resource planning. As previously discussed with this committee, the government faces significant human resource risks. These risks are due primarily to shifts in demographic, future availability of labour, and, in part, changing expectations of youth in workplaces. This makes good human resource planning important to ensure the government has the right people in the right place at the right time.

As described in this chapter, our office is examining the adequacy of the commission's processes to lead human resource planning across government departments. We think strong human resource planning processes will lead to strong human resource plans. We will report the results of this work in our next report. So this chapter actually doesn't contain any recommendations for the committee's consideration.

This concludes my comments, and we'd be pleased to respond to any questions or concerns of the committee.

**The Chair:** — All right. Thank you very much. And before, Clare Isman, we get a response from you, I failed to mention to the committee that Sandra Morin is substituted in for Glenn Hagel this morning. So welcome, Sandra, to the Public Accounts Committee. Ms. Isman, would you care to respond?

**Ms. Isman:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Let me first take the opportunity to introduce my colleagues. To my right is Rick McKillop, the executive director of employee relations from the Public Service Commission, and to my left is Lynn Jacobson, the director of corporate services for the Public Service Commission.

As already indicated by Ms. Ferguson, the chapter is a relatively short one and the PSC [Public Service Commission]

absolutely concurs with the conclusions that the Provincial Auditor has raised.

I very much appreciate the interest of the Provincial Auditor's office with regard to human resource planning and their feedback in the audit report. From our perspective, human resource planning is fundamental to the effective human resource management of government and therefore, as I indicate, I do appreciate their interest in this subject matter.

And as Judy did indicate as well, since this report has been released, they have finished the audit. And those results will be in the upcoming report from the Provincial Auditor's office.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Ms. Isman. We will open up the floor to any questions. Mr. Cheveldayoff.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. A couple of questions for Ms. Isman.

On page 247 of the auditor's report it talks about the government departments employing about 10,500 staff, based on full-time equivalents. And I'm looking at the '05-06 budget documents here on page 161 and where it lists full-time equivalents, staff complements across the government, and it has a total of 11,502. It seems to be a discrepancy of about 1,000 people, or 1,000 full-time equivalents. Can you address that?

**Ms. Isman:** — I'm just clarifying. The estimates that you're looking at is the '05-06, the current estimates?

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — The current estimates, but the estimates show for '04-05 . . . I'm sorry. And they show '05-06 as well but that number's 11,677. We can come back to the question and I can provide you with a copy of what I have here as far as . . .

**Ms. Isman:** — Yes. Looking at the documents you have, I'm not . . . If it is a restated number for '04-05, I'm wondering if it's a restated number as a result of Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation coming into executive government, and therefore the number has been restated to include Property Management that would have previously not been included. There's about 900 FTEs [full-time equivalent] approximately.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — That could account for 829, possibly. I don't have the, you know, the estimates for the year previous, or the breakdown of the 10,500.

**Ms. Isman:** — Okay. We certainly could do that reconciliation though and get back to you if . . . Without having the numbers in front of me, I'm not sure that I can give you from a department-by-department perspective what the differences might be.

**The Chair:** — Ms. Ferguson, did you have a comment in regards to this question?

**Ms. Ferguson:** — Just to recognize that the 10,500 is based on '03-04. So the numbers that you're comparing is two years later. So . . .

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Okay.

**Ms. Ferguson:** — So it would be from the '03-04 to '05 . . .

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — So there's 1,000 increase then from '03-04 to '04-05 and it's possibly . . .

**Ms. Ferguson:** — Yes, and '05-06 is actually what you're looking at, I think.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — I've got them both here: '04-05 is 11,502 and estimated '05-06 is 11,677. Well we can move on to further questions and just ask for clarification on that.

Just a couple of general questions, I guess, about the relationship of the Public Service Commission, with the post-secondary education department in Saskatchewan. I just wanted your general comments on that. Do the two departments work together and is there a long-term strategy to address the needs of post-secondary education graduates in Saskatchewan, how they develop careers in the public service in Saskatchewan?

**Ms. Isman:** — Yes. I would say actually we have a very positive working relationship with numerous post-secondary education institutions, particularly the two universities and the SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] faculties.

It's generally very dependent on the occupation group within which we're working. So in some faculties clearly where we have a stronger demand for employment in a certain area . . . So we will often focus the relationship built either between the Public Service Commission, or at times, specifically with the department in those specific occupation areas. We work very co-operatively with the co-op offices, for example, in terms of the ability to hire co-op students in the program.

One of the things in our most recent report that you'll see is that we've just established a new internship program for the master's of public administration graduates at the University of Regina, where we will be bringing in interns now to work in an eight-month internship program past their post-secondary studies in the master's program.

And those kinds of initiatives are coming out of the relationships we've built with the institutions.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Okay. Thank you for that answer. Could you just generally outline to me how a graduate would apply for work with the Government of Saskatchewan, with the public service? Would they send a resumé to you and would you have a data bank that then you could send that on to specific departments that are looking for those skills? Do you provide that type of service to Saskatchewan graduates?

**Ms. Isman:** — Absolutely. There's probably two different streams in terms of gaining employment into the public service. One would be with regard to permanent, full-time opportunities. Those we advertise always on our career centre website, which is on the Public Service Commission website. And those are posted on a regular basis when a vacancy occurs and identifies the nature of the job, the competencies that we're looking for.

We often advertise generally through the newspapers and on other websites so that when students go looking for us that's actually where they're going to get to — so that they can very regularly get to the website to look for those occupation groups.

As well we have what we call a push feature. And we've got — I'm not sure that I can quote the number — it's well into the many thousands of people who receive the bulletin on a weekly basis in their email box. So every week when we post new positions, they go out. Students find that very effective because that way they don't have to come to our system. We actually go to theirs. Those students then apply directly for that permanent opportunity into a competitive process, and on they go.

For students who are looking for more general employment, we also do have what we call a career profiler. That allows the students to come in, either students while they're still in school or when they're finishing. They enter a profile into our database which currently holds about 25,000 profiles, many of which are students in the province.

And that's the database we search when we're looking for employees to fill term opportunities, permanent, part-time opportunities for the departments. We then do a search of that database on the competencies in the areas that people are interested in, then we refer those out to the hiring departments and then do follow-up with them post-hiring.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Do you advertise at the post-secondary institutions so they're aware of this service?

**Ms. Isman:** — Absolutely. We've got posters in all of the schools. As well, we've got posters that we redid a couple of years ago just for that purpose called Career Click. So if you're walking around some of the campuses or the employment offices, you see these bright green posters with our website posted on them.

As well as we often, in the career section, we'll put in small ads that simply direct people to the website so that they don't necessarily have to be looking for a specific job. They'll just see, the Government of Saskatchewan has a career website; that's where I should look.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Very good. Mr. Chair, that's all I have at this time.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Elhard.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the auditor's office: the opinion that you have rendered on the operations of the Public Service Commission are probably as high as you're going to recommend for anybody. It's seems like high marks are in order here and I appreciate that.

One of the things I noticed in the summary of your findings is that you felt that there was a substantial or significant element of risk associated with the Public Service Commission's ability to meet the employment requirements of the government. And while I read through the chapter, I understand or I recognize that you have outlined what you would suggest are important elements for the commission to undertake in order to just sort of maintain the status quo.

But if I understand it correctly, and I stand to be corrected if I'm wrong, the aging population that currently makes up the civil service — the baby boomers that are approaching retirement, the people who've put 25 to 30 years of service in already — is a significant part of the employment quotient. And with the prospect of retirement looming for many of these people, there's quite an urgency to move forward with aggressive employment strategies. The last figure I heard was that within the next 10 years we could lose 4,000 people from the civil service in Saskatchewan. If that's the case, then is the status quo strategies going to be sufficient to meet the needs of the public service and the Government of Saskatchewan?

**Mr. Wendel:** — One of our risks that we say is so important for the government to manage is this very thing that you're talking about. And it's been in our strategic plan for about two or three years now, trying to make sure that each and every department has a good human resource plan to make sure that they're covering off this very thing that you're talking about. There's going to be a shortage of workers as we move along.

So one of the ways we wanted to do this is address it at each and every department, but start with essential agencies that are responsible to coordinate this whole activity across the piece. And that's where the human . . . or the Public Service Commission comes in. And these are the criteria we've put out to assess human resource plans. And we'd like to put out the criteria ahead of time to give other agencies that have to prepare human resource plans or supervise the preparation in other agencies, a chance to see how we're going to be evaluating them and to move this forward.

So what you've got before you is a plan to move that forward, and what we're doing, just finishing up, is the audit of the Public Service Commission's coordination of trying to get departments to get better plans. And that report will be coming out in the spring. So yes, it's an important issue, and we've been pushing it along for a while.

**Ms. Ferguson:** — If I could just add a little bit. The criteria that are set out here are not status quo, but rather the criteria are reflective of good practices for human resource planning that are really set by the human resource industry, you know. And so they don't reflect necessarily a status quo at Public Service Commission. And that's the whole aspect of the audit, is to compare what Public Service Commission is doing to practices that they should be following, you know, and so that they can take corrective action or make improvements in areas where improvements are necessary. With the whole philosophy that, you know, they're the central agency. They're the lead on this. And if they . . . you know, so they have to show leadership in the human resource planning.

And the reality is, is that they need those human resource planning and plans in place, and good plans in place, so that they can react on a timely basis to the issues that you articulated earlier.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I guess the reason I want to focus in on this particular area is that I don't know of any industry players in the private sector or otherwise that are anticipating a 40 per cent turnover in their employment opportunities and positions.

So it seems to me like this challenge is particularly significant for the provincial government now, and maybe other provincial governments across the country, which when you combine that with the information that says there's going to be dramatically increased competition for qualified people in all areas — some of which we're already seeing — that makes the challenge significantly greater, I think, for the Public Service Commission and the provincial government.

So I guess what I'm anxious to know is, have we adequately addressed the necessary mechanisms and techniques and recruitment efforts to achieve that particular problem that we're facing?

**Ms. Isman:** — Thank you. I think your articulation of the challenges that we face are absolutely the challenges that we identified that led us down the path to establish a much more robust and strategic thinking to human resource planning. I would say through the '90s, particularly through the '80s and then into the '90s, the workplace was relatively stable. And most employers were of the view that the system was going to take care of itself; it would manage itself. There weren't significant pressures being put upon, and one's ability to employ and retain, there weren't identified significant risks.

Having said that, through the latter part of the '90s and into the 2000s . . . and I think this is where the concept of very proactive human resource planning actually started to come to the forefront. And I think one of the things that we're most proud of is that we're probably one of the leaders in the public sector, both across the country but as well in the province, to really start to address this proactively by putting a corporate human resource plan in place. And we started that process in 2000-2001, took a corporate human resource plan into cabinet in 2002, which then became the foundation to drive the strategic agenda for human resource management across government.

So that initiative in itself was one way to start to address the future challenges that we knew we were facing. What that planning process allows us to do is manifold. I'd say on the first end, it provides us with very good information upon which to make our decisions so that we really start to understand what those challenges are. We were able to really start to look at the demographic profile of the labour supply.

We also went internally and over the last several years have looked very closely at our demands — identification of high-risk occupation groups where we know and we would actually track. And the benefits of having a good human resource system in place was our ability to know where the potential risks were by occupation group. And then we can put actions in place to actually identify them because we know where the problem areas are potentially going to be. So that's in terms of identifying supply and demand.

Parts of the questions were, we knew that we hadn't needed to be on the radar screen in terms of employment for quite a long time. Our turnover was very low; we hadn't needed to recruit for a long time. By the beginning of this decade we knew we needed to be back out into the marketplace. And it comes back to the earlier question of being out talking to university students, secondary school students about a career in the public service because we knew that when we looked at awareness of a

career in the public sector, it wasn't as high as it needed to be in order to meet the future needs towards the end of this decade. So we've already started on that track.

The effective human resource planning process led us there, so HR [human resources] planning in and of itself became a very strong tool. It also allows us to articulate where the key priority areas are for all of government. So when you look at the corporate human resource plan now, you see three strategic goals with identifiable objectives and key actions underneath it.

The third piece that I would then identify in terms of planning is performance measures linked to that. In the past we weren't necessarily going back and reviewing our success against performance measures that were published, articulated, not only to guide ourselves but also in terms of our accountability back outside. So HR planning has allowed us to do that as well.

So not only now are we planning better, we're putting actions in place that are directly linked to where our key strategic needs are. We're also then monitoring it and making changes to the plan in order to meet the performance targets that are outlined. So I think that's the benefit of HR planning, to address the challenges and needs that you identified.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Have you come up with a plan by which to deal with the perception that, compared to private sector employment, public sector employment is just not nearly as exciting or, remuneration-wise, not nearly as profitable?

**Ms. Isman:** — I think there's multiple actions specifically in the plan to sort of think about those kinds of things. And I guess there are a couple of examples that I would give you.

In terms of the awareness with students and the perception, you know, as I mentioned, one of the things was we weren't on the radar screen in terms of a career. So by creating awareness, we found that that's really starting to help because people don't know what they don't know. So by providing more information to students and being out talking to people, being more present at career fairs, being in the classrooms and talking about careers in the public sector, that certainly is creating a level of awareness that wasn't there before. Whether or not you can ever address all perceptions, I'm not sure. However I think we are probably the strongest advocates, and that's the terrific employees that we have, being out talking to people about a career in the public sector, the value that that brings.

We monitor our compensation packages on a very regular basis to ensure that we are competitive with the market that we need to draw from. So I think we do have the tools in place and the practices in place to make sure that where we see potential risks like that, we can address them. I think the way we're reaching out in terms of the Internet marketing is certainly a new way for us to do business and that is because of the demographics of the labour supply. Certainly much more active with regard to the Aboriginal community, for example, in terms of our presence there.

So I think that, you know, as I say, the planning is allowing us to address where those issues are, and then working with the line departments to actually put in place some real key actions to address them. And I think we are seeing progress.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Does the auditor's office express an opinion on where the Public Service Commission in Saskatchewan is vis-à-vis other public service commissions that are operating in the country? Have you ever done a comparison, how favourably do we rate with other public service commissions?

**Mr. Wendel:** — We've not done a comparison like that.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Okay. And I understand from your report that you're reasonably satisfied with the level of interaction and activity between the Public Service Commission and individual departments and their human resource activities. Are there some weaknesses, though, at the departmental level that you think need to be addressed, and could you tell us what those weaknesses might be and what you would recommend?

**Mr. Wendel:** — What we've decided to do with respect to departments is to begin with the central agency, which is the Public Service Commission, and make sure that they've got good practices to lead the departments towards good human resource plans. So we've started with the Public Service Commission. We've put out some criteria here in this particular chapter. We're assessing the Public Service Commission's practices right now. We're just finishing up, and we'll be preparing a report on that for this spring as to what recommendations might have to improve their practices. From there we'll be moving on to the departments, and working with them to make sure that they improve their practices and bring their human resources in line with the strategic plan for the government. That's where we'll be going with it.

Now we're also working with individual agencies that don't work with the Public Service Commission, that are not subject to the Public Service Commission, and we'll be working through that with them, too, like the major Crown corporations, universities, etc.

**Mr. Elhard:** — So if I understand you correctly, you wouldn't have a comment or you wouldn't be able to identify problem areas in the departments right now in terms of their human resource capacity or capability?

**Mr. Wendel:** — Not at the moment. I don't . . . We haven't been at any particular ones.

**Ms. Ferguson:** — We haven't done a direct examination of all the government departments. We have looked, started to look at them in a smaller way. If you recall, we've done a report on the Department of Highways. We've done a . . . did a smaller piece on their planning, and mainly succession planning in that regard. Basically this is really to a large extent the starting point for the work in the departmental side. And as Fred just indicated, we'll be pushing it out to the Crowns.

From a departmental perspective too, we also recognize that there's certain departments that really are . . . in essence become a central agency for human resource planning for their sector — for example, Health. A number of employees that fall within their sector aren't part of the public service; for example, those that are in regional health authorities, you know. So our office has been talking to Department of Health and I understand that they have some preliminary plans under way to do their sectoral plan for human resources.

Learning should be another one example again where, you know, a number of people that fall within that sector, there's human resource challenges within that sector that aren't part . . . those employees are not part of the public service proper and really aren't part of the Public Service Commission's purview.

So I guess our strategy on this one from an office point of view is start with the central agency that, you know, and make sure that they are showing strong leadership. You know, and really as an office almost providing some leverage on that so if they can get departments going on the right road to good human resource planning, that departments, they in turn can have good human resource planning to lead their particular sector over which they have a responsibility to. So it's that domino aspect.

So we're not, unfortunately we're not at the stage, I think, to respond to questions that you're posing today. Hopefully we'll get there, you know.

Because really the next step, as Clare already indicated, is that, great, have good plans in place, but the next question we'll be asking is how well are you doing in terms of achieving those plans and making sure that you're tracking your achievements and reporting back and making the necessary adjustments, so that you are responding on a timely basis to the risks that are being identified. You know, so that we're just, as a government we're not sitting on our laurels and missing opportunities for those recruitment and retention strategies that we need to undertake.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Chairman, may I ask or direct that same question then to the Public Service Commission because . . . And I'm not trying to, you know, put you on the spot or asking you to embarrass any department, but are there weaknesses? From your perspective, are there weaknesses in individual departments that you feel offer a bigger and more significant challenge than others?

**Ms. Isman:** — I would suggest that the departments are very much at various levels in terms of the development of their plans and their capacity to actually implement the actions. The benefit we have of working together, though, is where we believe there to be high risks . . . And I would say that those are the areas where they have the most sufficient resources to deal with them. In areas where there potentially is less capacity, that's where we can supplement the efforts of the central agency to help those departments. So, for example, a small department that may not have a lot of human resource management capacity in terms of professional advisory capacity to help line management, then we can supplement them through the Public Service Commission by offering our services to guide.

As well, the establishment of the human resource planner position at the Public Service Commission, which takes the lead on this, also then provides that opportunity that we're helping to develop their skills and abilities to address the gaps and the weaknesses as well. So working in partnership, I think we're finding the right balance in terms of getting there, and I think our ability to monitor the plans on the ongoing basis will mitigate the risks that potentially will exist as we move forward.

**Mr. Elhard:** — What would the average department employ in terms of human resource specific employees?

**Ms. Isman:** — Of people working in human resources? It varies widely. Some departments have none and they rely on other departments, like a cluster model, to actually support them. Some small departments have one professional HR person. I'm not sure if off the top of my head I can tell you the most. Somewhere in the order of, potentially, 10 to 15 in the very large departments.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Okay. And would the number normally reflect sort of the challenges of recruitment in that particular department? Is that the justification generally for a larger HR component?

**Ms. Isman:** — Generally not. The recruitment often is done through line management with some support from the departments, and often done through the central agency because we're actively involved in all permanent, full-time staffing actions in the department. Often it would be the rest of the complexities, depending on the nature of the organization as to what their human resource demands potentially are.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Wherever possible, does the Public Service Commission demand or expect a public . . . or an HR professional designation? There are professional human resource individuals who have a designation as such. Is that a general requirement to attain senior positions in HR activity in the departments?

**Ms. Isman:** — It actually isn't a requirement. And in a more broad response to your question, we use a competency model for all staffing within executive government. So unless required by law for a credential, we will not require a credential.

With regard to staffing, however, when we establish the competency base and the knowledge base for the professionals, it will often come through that kind of experiential base. On the HR side, the other thing that I would add, it's a relatively new designation for many people working in the human resource field, so many of our employees have gone back and received the designation. But no, it's not a requirement of the job.

**Mr. Elhard:** — How many people work for the Public Service Commission directly?

**Ms. Isman:** — About 110.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you. I'll let somebody else have a chance.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Krawetz.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a couple of areas I'd like to explore and both with Ms. Ferguson and with Ms. Isman.

On the bottom of page 249 you've indicated, and there have been comments made by Mr. Wendel and my colleagues regarding the number of employees that are contained within the Public Service Commission. And we've identified, I think, that that 10,500 number has expanded to about 11,600 because of transfers of some Crowns and maybe some departments. And it indicates then that the Public Service Commission is not responsible for Crown corporations, commissions, and

agencies. Could you, Ms. Ferguson, could you identify what number of people would be employed in Crowns, commissions, and agencies in the province, more or less?

**Ms. Ferguson:** — I can give you an about . . .

**Mr. Krawetz:** — But I think I used the term more or less.

**Ms. Ferguson:** — I think it's around 50,000 full-time equivalents, you know. So that wouldn't be bodies, you know. Like some of the areas like the health area — for example, the health authorities — I don't have the number off the top of my head.

But I know there's a large difference between the actual number of individuals and full-time equivalents because of the number of part-time people that work or, you know, are casual, etc. So really what the message is is that they don't have the lion's share. I think the Public Service Commission is not responsible for the lion's share in terms of the people at work.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Would you be able to tell me how employees then, more specifically, of that 50,000 are in Crowns?

**Ms. Ferguson:** — It depends. No, I don't have those numbers off the top. We probably could get them for you, though. The personnel policy secretariat which resides in the Department of Finance, I think is probably a great source of that information. So perhaps, if I could turn the question over to Terry, he might be probably the more suitable person to provide the response to that. Sorry, Terry, but . . . but it is . . .

**The Chair:** — Mr. Paton, you're on the spot. Would you care to comment?

**Mr. Paton:** — The only comment I can make is I don't have those numbers either.

**The Chair:** — Is it possible though to get those numbers, and could they be provided to the committee?

**Mr. Paton:** — I can check with the personnel policy secretariat and see if they have them, yes.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — The reason for my questions, Mr. Chair, is as we're talking about a human resource planning and a process that Public Service Commission is going through regarding, you know, coordinating it on behalf of departments. And I believe, Mr. Wendel, you made the comment about that we check with what's going on in some of the other corporations, commissions, and agencies. Are there simultaneous human resource planning . . . is it going on in all of those other departments, and who is coordinating that?

**Ms. Ferguson:** — Can I respond? Sorry. There is some . . . Crown Investments Corporation is actually providing some leadership to the CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] Crowns in the area of HR.

They're taking a little bit of a different approach than the Public Service Commission, and I think in part because their responsibilities are different. But there is again, when they're going through their business planning and their balanced

scorecard approach, they are in essence including in that an HR component. And that, it's been under way for probably maybe about the last couple of years. I don't have the exact number and time frames.

So Crown Investments Corporation is probably an area that you could, you know, direct some questions to in this area. And it is just for the CIC component on that.

Other than that, we're not aware of sort of central agency type of stuff that are under way other than at the Department of Health. They have an initiative under way to do a sectoral health human resource plan. And so they are taking leadership for their particular sector.

So it does vary a little bit across the piece. Some of the Crowns, we know from working with them. For example, SIAST, they have an HR plan. But there is a bit of variation from organization to organization.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — As we've seen in the budget document, we have 830 full-time equivalents that have been moved from a Crown, SPMC [Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation], into now the Public Service Commission's responsibility. And the point I'm wondering about is, if a human resource plan and a process is not being followed or hasn't been followed for the last couple of years at SPMC, now we have Public Service Commission responsible for 830 employees and you're bringing them into your strategic plan for human resource.

So I think there's a tremendous need for interaction between the levels that are going to be responsible for human resource planning at the Crowns and commissions and agencies, and at the Public Service Commission as well. Because we don't know what other changes may happen over the next two years, where the Public Service Commission may suddenly receive a significant number of employees from an agency, a commission, whatever the case may be. And I'm wondering if that's something that you contemplated when 830 employees became your responsibility Ms. Isman.

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, yes we did actually. And one of the benefits of having the planning process in place was when the initial discussions started happening with Property Management about coming back into executive government, they immediately came to the table, joined our group of human resource planners. So even prior to them coming into executive government on April 1, we were working directly with them with regard to our processes, and they've already started the development and implementation of a department human resource plan that just simply integrates into the corporate plan.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — And as a result of that, you know, early intervention and discussions, obviously then you don't see any problem with the SPMC becoming a department and now in fitting into your human resource process and plan.

**Ms. Isman:** — None at all.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you. The other that I would like some comment on is on page 248. There is a significant budget figure for Aboriginal internship and management development



program. Could you explain what that is and who, you know, what number of people are involved and the process that is followed to get into this program?

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chairman, first of all just generally to talk about the Aboriginal internship and management development program. It started a number of years ago as an outcome of our view that we needed to engage more Aboriginal people in the workforce to prepare them for management and professional jobs in the public service.

And our view was that an internship program whereby we would recruit new graduates, Aboriginal graduates that had been out of school for up to five years, to come work in internship jobs that we established in order to prepare them then to bid and compete on permanent jobs in the management and professional fields.

As a result of doing that, it did several things. Number one, it gave exposure for Aboriginal people to come work in government so that they could then gain experience that they potentially otherwise wouldn't have. We also know from best practice that interns, student employment opportunities, are one of the best way to attract and retain people who otherwise wouldn't consider you as being an employer of choice. Because it allows individuals to come in, basically to check you out, see if they like the environment. And then potentially it's a good way from a retention strategy; generally people that come in with that experience will then stay.

So we went out and what we did was we secured funding for the internship program which is funded out of the Public Service Commission. We recruit Aboriginal people and then we put them into three eight-month internships in the line departments. Sometimes the interns might stay for longer than one eight-month, depending on the nature of their background and their experience level. But in general what we were trying to do was give them exposure in multiple areas — sometimes within central agencies in a program management area, often within a policy area — the kinds of jobs that they necessarily wouldn't be able to look to in anything other than executive government.

We have found over the years that it's been a very well received program, both on the part of the departments as well on the part of the Aboriginal community, in terms of signalling to the general public, number one, our interest in terms of hiring Aboriginal people to come work in executive government, and our willingness to invest in their learning and development to prepare them for an ongoing career in the public sector.

The differences in the numbers are predominantly due to timing. Once the budget is approved, because the interns are coming for two-year periods of time in eight-month interns, we haven't necessarily been able to hire them all exactly on the first of the fiscal year of the year we're starting so that there was from the very beginning of the program a time lag of when they started. So often the actuals don't line up with the estimates because of recruitment timing.

The other is that we have also found that individuals within the internship program, within the two years, have secured permanent employment and therefore left the internship

program. And we haven't gone back and filled those positions. We have waited until the next cycle to hire them, so sometimes we get a link there.

As well, we've also found we've hired a number of interns, often many of whom, you will appreciate, are young women. And as a result we've had a number of interns go off on maternity leave partway through the internship program. And as a result there have been financial savings from those. So I'd say those are the three primary reasons why there's a discrepancy between the actual and the estimates.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — At a given day — today — what number of people would be in the internship program? Do you have an estimate?

**Ms. Isman:** — I think we have six. It could be five or six currently at the present point in time.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — When you made the comment that you said you look for graduates, Aboriginal graduates, were you referring to secondary school graduates or with post-secondary?

**Ms. Isman:** — University graduates.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — So they must be university graduates.

**Ms. Isman:** — Yes.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Okay. Is this broadening into a mentorship program as well at that level?

**Ms. Isman:** — There is a mentorship component to it. Each of the interns is actually assigned a coach for the time that they are in the internship program, so there is mentoring going on directly with the coach that they have. We have a manager at the Public Service Commission as well, who also mentors and coaches the interns so that they have support from the central agency as well as from their department.

As well, we've established a network for the Aboriginal interns so that they come together as a collegial group on a regular basis, both in terms of networking as well as learning and development opportunities, through the two-year internship program as well. And then, we've given them access, for example, where we've brought in speakers, senior other officials from across government to come and talk to them about careers in the public service, to also expand the network which also provides other kinds of mentorship opportunities for them.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you. By your comments, I think that you can see that this is a positive program and it's moving forward. And I'm glad to hear that that is what is in place, and continued success with it.

**Ms. Isman:** — Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Krawetz. Just a couple of questions. Does the Public Service Commission analyze the public service to see how the fit is in Saskatchewan, say, compared to other provinces, to other jurisdictions? And are there similarities? Are there unique things about the

Saskatchewan public service where we're quite different? I'm thinking, you know, looking at this from the human resources aspect, say in qualifications, also in numbers in relationship to the population of the province.

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chairman, I think there's a couple of things in your question. In terms of the size, what we found is it's quite difficult to actually compare the size of the public service relative to any of the provinces because very often what's included in the public service and particularly in executive government varies quite significantly. So we actually don't have . . . I mean, we have relative comparisons, but it would be very difficult to say that we're exactly comparing apples to apples on a regular basis.

With regard to human resource practices, the public service commissioners from across the country do get together on an annual basis. And we do often talk about the general areas of opportunity and challenges that exist within the public sector and as well with the federal government.

Generally what we find, and certainly what the literature tells us as well from the studies that we do, is that we generally are all facing the same kinds of opportunities and challenges in the public sector, regardless of really where you're talking about in general. Our practices also tend to be very similar. Although, you know, there may be different . . . things that we do differently in different provinces. But generally against best practices and human resource management, I'd say that they tend to be very similar in most areas. We tend to rely on interjurisdictional comparisons a lot.

The last area that I would also comment on is with regard to employee surveys. It is becoming one tool within the public sector that employers are relying on — is feedback from their employees on a regular basis. And the one area that the public service commissioners have identified as being an area that we'd like to look at is our ability to compare ourselves based on that kind of feedback from employees. And up until this point, it really has not ever been done collaboratively across the public sector. So that's an area that we're looking at that would allow us to actually better benchmark from one jurisdiction to another into the future.

**The Chair:** — When you have these meetings with the representatives of other public service commissions across the country, is there a common theme or a common challenge that seems to be the highest priority now, and would the human resources challenge be the greatest challenge?

**Ms. Isman:** — I think the demographic profile across the country would probably be the most common challenge facing every jurisdiction.

**The Chair:** — Okay. You mentioned a push system and talked about potential employees of the government accessing this system. Can anyone access it? How does this system work?

**Ms. Isman:** — If you go on to our career website, there's a question that asks you if you would like to receive the career bulletin on a weekly basis. If you click yes, it immediately logs you in. You put in your details of your email address and then the bulletin is sent to you automatically every week once it's

posted.

**The Chair:** — And it doesn't matter who you are in Saskatchewan or anywhere in the world, you can access that?

**Ms. Isman:** — Absolutely.

**The Chair:** — Okay, very good.

And just one last area, and forgive me for delving into this but I'm curious as to how the Public Service Commission would handle this. I would expect that you're involved in the placement of employees to try to meet the needs. How many positions would be filled that sort of bypasses the Public Service Commission but yet are in the area, you know, the departments that you serve? I'm just trying to think . . . Let's suppose, let's suppose there are 1,000 people hired over a period of a certain time. How many of those people would have been employed through the work that your department does and how many would have found employment totally bypassing the services of the Public Service Commission and working directly with departments or whoever?

**Ms. Isman:** — The Public Service Commission is involved in all permanent, full-time staffing actions based on the Act, so I would respond that there aren't any. If you are being staffed into a permanent, full-time position in executive government, the Public Service Commission is involved in all of those actions.

With regard to permanent part-time and term staffing across, that has been delegated to departments and the Public Service Commission audits all of those activities in the departments.

**The Chair:** — But wouldn't there . . . Maybe I didn't phrase the question clearly enough. Wouldn't there be some potential employees who are successful who would approach the Public Service Commission, say through the push system or some other service that you offer? And others would, say, go directly to a department, let's say the Department of Highways, and they would apply and then you would find out about it and maybe do some processing, but you would not be involved in the actual placement. It would have occurred outside of your jurisdiction. You would be notified of it that this person has come on. How does that work?

**Ms. Isman:** — For term staffing in the Department of Highways, that absolutely could happen. There is not a requirement at this point in time that for term staffing that the departments have to come through the Public Service Commission in order to be able to hire someone. So an individual could go to the Department of Highways, bid on a term or opportunity there, the department could hire them, have the file, and then we would review the process through the audit process post that. And that is currently an acceptable process with regard to term staffing in executive government based on our current practices and processes.

**The Chair:** — And what would be the process? Suppose, say we're looking at the Department of Justice; they need another legal expert in their department. Could a senior person in Justice go out and recruit a person with the expertise they need, agree to employ that person, and then notify the Public Service

Commission that this decision had been made? Or would it have to follow some . . . would you have to do the search, find the person, and say to Justice, this is the person whom we have decided meets the requirements you've proposed to us?

**Ms. Isman:** — For permanent, full-time staffing it would be through the Public Service Commission. For not permanent employment they could hire someone individually for a term appointment of limited duration and then we would audit the file post that.

**The Chair:** — Does the department ever do the homework and say, this is the person we want, now will you process it for us, process this person for us? Or do you always take the . . . are they totally in the dark, say Justice, totally in the dark until you say, this is the person that we have hired on your behalf? Let's put it that way.

**Ms. Isman:** — No. The process with regard to permanent employment is participation by both the Public Service Commission and the department. So we don't do permanent, full-time staffing and tell them, this is who you're doing. We do that jointly with the hiring manager in the department.

But the Public Service Commission does the release and identifies that the individual is qualified for the job and therefore releases them to then be offered employment.

**The Chair:** — But the department could take the lead in the process. And you would just do the final approval, check the qualification, make the final approval, but not be the leader in the process? Let's put it that way.

**Ms. Isman:** — No. We would also, on a permanent competition, we would always be leading the process and be actively involved in the assessment of the individuals in the competition.

**The Chair:** — Okay. And just a final area. Does the Public Service Commission have any policy regarding nepotism and cronyism in the public service? Is, you know . . . I don't know. I'm just asking out of curiosity. How does the Public Service Commission deal with those two issues?

**Ms. Isman:** — I think our processes, by virtue of the fact that the commission is involved in the staffing process of all permanent hiring, is the means by which that is done, that there is a thorough assessment process based on a set of job competencies that have been identified for the job.

We go through an assessment process working in partnership with the line department. We assess whether or not an individual is qualified for the job. We deem them qualified. We release them so the department can then offer employment.

**The Chair:** — And so, you can assure the Public Accounts Committee that merit is the key qualifier and that merit is not bypassed in Saskatchewan in the Public Service Commission because of who you know or what, you know . . . I guess who you know primarily. You can assure us of that?

**Ms. Isman:** — For out-of-scope employees, it is a merit-based system. With regard to in-scope employees in our collective

bargaining agreement, it is a senior qualified system that we use in terms of employment. Yes.

**The Chair:** — Very good. Thank you very much. Are there other questions of any of the other committee members? Mr. Elhard.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Yes. Ms. Isman, can you tell us, does the Public Service Commission have a vision statement or a mission statement by which it operates? And if so, what is it?

**Ms. Isman:** — The vision and mission statement . . . And actually, we don't have a mission statement per se and I would suggest that through the Act and the regs, it's clearly identified — the role of the central agency. So we chose not to be repetitive. But the corporate human resource plan, and prior to the corporate human resource plan when I came to the commission, there always was an established vision statement.

We are driven though by the vision for the Saskatchewan public service. So when we articulate this vision, it is not only the vision for the Public Service Commission as a commission itself, but for the public service. And if I could read you what the vision statement says:

. . . the Saskatchewan public service is recognized as a leader in public sector management and policy and dedicated to providing excellent programs and services valued by the people of Saskatchewan.

So that's the vision statement that guides our work, as well as that guides the work at the department as relates to human resource management within executive government.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you. To the auditor's office, I notice on page 251 a statement that you may or may not want to comment on. But under the guide human resource planning title, there's a sentence in the first paragraph that says:

Department human resource plans must align with the Government's strategic direction.

Do you know what that direction is?

**Ms. Ferguson:** — For the purposes of this audit, what we'll be looking for is the directions set out by the Public Service Commission, so their corporate human resource plan. So there's an expectation that the departments would align themselves with the corporate human resource plan.

**Mr. Elhard:** — May I ask Ms. Isman then, is there anything that was omitted here in the discussions today that would fulfill the description of the government's strategic direction? Have we not asked you something that we ought to, to clarify that?

**Ms. Isman:** — I don't think so.

**The Chair:** — Do you care to respond, Ms. Isman?

**Ms. Isman:** — I'm not sure I completely understand the question.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I want to know if you can identify for the

committee the government's strategic direction.

**Ms. Isman:** — What I would suggest is that when we look to take our lead, our strategic direction would be led by the expectations articulated in the department human resource plans. So the strategic plans and the operational plans identified by the departments would form the foundation of what we're looking for in terms of, then, human resource management needs to address them.

So when we talk with departments, we look generally to the strategic plans that are the published plans that form the basis of the Estimates book, the mandate of the departments that then drive the program needs, the policy needs of departments, and therefore as a result the human resources that need to follow them. So that would be the government's strategic direction that we would take our lead from.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Chairman, I think that particular answer would open up a whole new area of discussion for me and I'm not sure that we're going to have the time to do that today. But thank you very much.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Elhard. And I hear from the auditor's office that there will be another chapter in a soon-to-be-released report on the Public Service Commission. So perhaps we will get that opportunity again in the not too distant future.

Are there no more questions? I didn't see any before when I asked, other than Mr. Elhard. All right, very good.

I would like to thank you, Ms. Isman, and your officials, for appearing before the Public Accounts Committee. I would like to thank committee members for their questions and attendance at this meeting and also the officials from the Provincial Comptroller's office and the Provincial Auditor's office. Again we've, I think, done a fairly thorough job of reviewing, in this case, chapter 11 of the 2004 report volume 3.

I now declare this meeting adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:43.]