



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Advanced Education

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Crista Carmichael, Assistant Deputy Minister, Postsecondary Policy and Strategy
Olin Lovely, Assistant Deputy Minister and Senior Financial Officer
Lora Pillipow, Deputy Minister

Ministry of Skilled Trades and Professions

Mike Fernandez, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations and Client Service Delivery

8 a.m.

Tuesday, December 6, 2022

[Ms Phillips in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Shannon Phillips. I'm the MLA for Lethbridge-West and the chair of this committee. As we begin this morning, I would invite members, guests, and LAO staff at table to introduce themselves, beginning with the deputy chair.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Good morning, everyone. Searle Turton, MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain and the deputy chair of this committee.

Mr. Smith: Good morning, everyone. Mark Smith, MLA, Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Yaseen: Good morning. Muhammad Yaseen, MLA, Calgary-North.

Mr. Hunter: Grant Hunter, Taber-Warner.

Mr. Singh: Good morning, everyone. Peter Singh, MLA, Calgary-East.

Mr. Stephan: Jason Stephan, Red Deer-South.

Ms Lovely: Good morning, everyone. Jackie Lovely, MLA for the Camrose constituency.

Mr. Toor: Good morning. Devinder Toor, MLA, Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Fernandez: Good morning. Mike Fernandez, ADM with the Ministry of Skilled Trades and Professions.

Mr. Lovely: Good morning. Olin Lovely, senior financial officer.

Ms Pillipow: Good morning. Lora Pillipow, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education.

Ms Baldwin-Dery: Good morning, everyone. Carmen Baldwin-Dery, ADM at Advanced Education.

Ms Carmichael: Good morning. Crista Carmichael, Advanced Education ADM.

Mr. Wylie: Good morning. Doug Wylie, Auditor General.

Mr. Driesen: Good morning. Rob Driesen, Assistant Auditor General.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Mr. Schmidt: Hon. Marlin Schmidt, MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Pancholi: Good morning, everyone. Rakhi Pancholi, MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Williamson: Good morning. Christina Williamson, research officer.

Ms Robert: Good morning. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

Mr. Roth: Good morning. Aaron Roth, committee clerk.

The Chair: I am not sure if we have anyone joining us online. No, we do not this morning. I think that's probably the first time in quite some time. I'll note for the record the following substitution: Mr. Smith for Mr. Panda.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Microphones are operated by *Hansard*. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and on Alberta Assembly TV. Audio- and videostreams and transcripts can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Please set your cellphones or other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting. Just one additional note for members. Under other business we will have a motion coming on the topic of enabling ASL interpretation for the community and social services meeting that is upcoming. So that will be under other business, friends.

We'll now move to approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the agenda at this time?

I'll ask that someone move to approve the draft agenda for today's meeting. Moved by Mr. Singh. Any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, all in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. That motion is carried.

We'll now move to our minutes. We have minutes from the May 24 meeting of the committee. Do members have any errors or omissions to note?

Seeing none, I'll ask that someone move that the minutes of the May 24, 2022, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed. Moved by Member Lovely. Any discussion on this motion? All in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. That motion is carried.

I will now welcome our guests from the Ministry of Advanced Education, who are here to address the ministry's annual report of '21-22. The ministry will provide opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes. Just for everyone's reminder, friends, we are in an ordinary two-hour meeting as we do not have a morning sitting.

With that, I will turn things over to officials who have graciously joined us on this cold morning. You have 10 minutes. Your time starts when you begin speaking.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you, Chair. Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about Advanced Education and our important work with the postsecondary institutions. I also want to thank everyone at the Auditor General's office. Your work helps ensure Alberta's adult learning system is efficient, accountable, and transparent. This is essential in order for our postsecondary system to realize its potential.

The fiscal year 2021-22, now that we're finally here, was a busy year for our ministry. We had a number of challenges and opportunities that arose as Alberta's economy began to bounce back. Reflecting back on the year, we're proud of the work that we've accomplished together. We made some major changes to existing legislation, and we continue to modernize Alberta's postsecondary institutions. I'd like to provide an overview of our departmental accomplishments as well, that are outlined in our '21-22 annual report. Advanced Education's consolidated ministry expense was \$5.97 billion. This is an increase of \$9 million from the prior year and \$107 million more than the budgeted amount. Postsecondary institutions made up the majority of these expenses, about 92 per cent, which is an increase of \$80 million from the previous year. This increase was primarily due to recovery and overall expenses following the effects of the pandemic.

Student aid, which is our largest category of spending, was \$228 million. This includes grants, scholarships, and awards. This is a \$71 million decrease from the prior year as there was a pause on the student grant payments as well as a lower loan default provision due to changes in how the costs were calculated. However, while overall

student aid spending was down, we continued to provide meaningful support to learners across the system. This included \$103 million in scholarships and awards to approximately 52,000 recipients, \$49.2 million in grants to approximately 18,000 low- and middle-income student loan borrowers, and \$743 million in Alberta student loans to approximately 105,000 borrowers.

We also continued to diversify our student aid offerings. One example of this is the introduction of the Alex Decoteau award of honour. It provides a one-time award of \$5,000 to up to 200 Albertans who served in designated military operations.

In addition to the department's financial support system, I'd also like to highlight some of the major program strides we've made in '21-22. By far the most significant undertaking at Advanced Education is the Alberta 2030: building skills for jobs strategy. Our intention was to set a bold, transformative, and compelling vision and strategic vision for Alberta's adult learning system for the decade ahead. After several months of extensive engagement and analysis we released Alberta 2030 on April 29, 2021. This strategy presents a transformative vision and a unified direction for Alberta's higher education system, with defined goals, objectives, and initiatives for the next decade.

Specifically, the strategy focuses on six goals: improving access and the student experience, developing skills for jobs, supporting innovation and commercialization, strengthening internationalization, improving sustainability and affordability, strengthening system governance. Each goal is underpinned by a set of objectives and flagship initiatives. This past year saw significant progress in implementing initiatives under Alberta 2030, and we're beginning to see the important transformation take place.

A major step in implementing Alberta 2030 was introducing Bill 74, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act. This bill amended the Post-secondary Learning Act and the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, which I'll refer to as STAEA, to align with Alberta 2030's strategy, reflect feedback from stakeholders, and simplify processes by removing red tape. Bill 74 made a number of key changes that have already come into force. This includes updating the preamble of the Post-secondary Learning Act to better reflect the vision of 2030. As well, we provided authority to establish the Minister's Council on Higher Education and Skills. We changed the term limits for postsecondary institution board members to improve continuity and transferred authority to set apprenticeship tuition from the Minister of Advanced Education to the board of governors of postsecondary institutions.

The overall changes brought forward by these amendments have set the foundation for a renewed and collaborative model of system governance for the postsecondary education system in Alberta. And while this is a major step forward in implementing Alberta 2030, it wasn't our only success. Other aspects of a strategy that we're implementing in the last fiscal year, in '21-22, are to expand the apprenticeship education model to new programs and developing new work-integrated learning opportunities and microcredential programs with industry associations to support Alberta's key economic sectors and give Albertans more options for gaining skills and growing their careers.

We also established the Research Commercialization Working Group to expand economic diversification and research opportunities. We streamlined program approval processes to cut red tape and give postsecondary institutions more flexibility to respond to the students and labour market needs. As you can see, 2030 was a major accomplishment.

Another focus of the department during this time was strengthening apprenticeship education and the skilled trades. This work is significant, and it's part of 2030, and it has its own origins from the

Skills for Jobs Task Force. The task force included members from industry, labour, community agencies, and educational leaders. A major recommendation was to modernize the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act. In April 2021 the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act was introduced. It represents a full legislative renewal of the skills and trades apprenticeship system in Alberta.

8:10

I'd like to now move to the recommendations from the Auditor General. In Advanced Education we strive to continuously improve outcomes for Albertans and ensure efficient and effective use of taxpayer dollars. That's why we appreciate the work of the Auditor General and the comprehensive review of the annual report.

I'm pleased to say that the '21 report only made one new recommendation to the department. It recommends Advanced Education improve its process to estimate the allowance for uncollectable student loans. The department has developed a new model that will be ready for an assessment implementation in '22-23.

There are also four department recommendations that are outstanding, and I'm pleased to say that two of these, related to the for-profit and cost recovery ventures, are ready for assessment. The remaining two, related to collaborative initiatives among postsecondary institutions, are being addressed through the Alberta 2030 strategy, and we're confident the work of Alberta 2030 will address the outstanding Auditor General recommendations to the department.

I'll now move on to the Auditor General's recommendations regarding specific institutions. Like last year, even though the challenges of the pandemic persisted, all postsecondary institutions prepared financial statements on time, and the Auditor General's assessment noted no changes in the timing and accuracy of each institution's preparation of financial statements from 2020.

A new recommendation was made to Lakeland College regarding promptly removing access credentials to its network for terminated employees. The department has worked with Lakeland College to address this recommendation, and I'm pleased to report that a response was sent last month indicating that the recommendation will be implemented and ready for assessment by April 2023.

Eight institutions currently have a total of 11 outstanding recommendations, including the new recommendation for Lakeland College. All of these are relatively new, with none being reported earlier than 2019. Of these outstanding recommendations, six institutions have been asked to improve testing and monitoring of the effectiveness of their internal controls. These institutions include the Alberta University of the Arts, Keyano College, Lakeland College, Medicine Hat College, Portage College, and Olds College. As noted in the Auditor General's report, the pandemic has created delays in these institutions' implementation efforts; however, we expect each of these institutions to complete an implementation plan in this calendar year.

The remaining outstanding recommendations that are not ready for assessment include those for Medicine Hat College and Olds College.

The two outstanding recommendations ready for assessment are those from Northwestern Polytechnic and NorQuest College.

Lastly, one postsecondary institution recommendation from Keyano College has been implemented. This was a recommendation going back to 2013, and it was made to all postsecondary institutions. Keyano College is the final institution to implement this recommendation, however.

In conclusion, these are just some of the highlights from our '21-22 annual report and the work the department has done and undertaken to build a strong, relevant, and sustainable postsecondary

system. I believe we had a very successful and a very busy year. In addition to the work I've outlined today, we continue to make headway on other initiatives such as red tape reduction, the international education strategy, and postsecondary funding and financial sustainability. This is all work that is done in the service of improving Alberta's postsecondary system.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy.

We will now move to the Auditor General for some opening remarks.

Mr. Wylie: Thank you, Chair. I was just going to summarize the outstanding recommendations relating to the ministry. I thank the deputy for doing my job for me, and I actually have nothing to supplement, so the time is back to the committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

We will now move on. Just to remind everyone, our first rotation is 15 minutes for the Official Opposition, and then we go to the government side.

With that, we will begin with the Official Opposition. Member Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much. My first set of questions has to deal with education affordability. Page 51 of the annual report states that tuition revenue increased by \$142 million over the previous year. According to the report the increase is due to both increases in tuition and increases in enrolment. Can the department break that down? How much of the revenue increase was due to an increase in tuition, and how much of the revenue increase was due to increases in enrolment?

Ms Pillipow: Sure. Thank you for the question, Chair. The breakdown of the revenue and the breakdown of the tuition will be – first, I just wanted to note that our revenue is generated through a three-year outline of tuition increases that we provide to the postsecondary institutions. My SFO is just providing me the breakdown. We have 70 per cent of that revenue that is from enrolment, Chair. As well, we have 30 per cent of that from tuition.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

How much have tuition and fees increased across the system since 2019?

Ms Pillipow: Is there a specific – that's referring to the same page, Chair? Just to confirm.

Mr. Schmidt: Yes, page 51 of the annual report.

Ms Pillipow: Okay. As you know, the tuition was marked to align with CPI, and I think that the breakdown of that tuition – I'm just going to ask my SFO to go through the numbers over the last three years.

After three years of the increases it was expected – first of all, I'm just going to go back to the increase that was related to Alberta 2030, when we started to look at the recommendations from the MacKinnon report. Those particular increases to tuition also looked at other jurisdictions when we gave those particular numbers to the postsecondary system. What we did was that we looked at the fee increases and set each at 7 per cent for the three years, really looking at that as a way to ensure that tuition is a way that students invest in their education and also making sure that Alberta was comparative to other jurisdictions. Essentially, we also looked at raising the cap

on tuition to ensure that we have flexibility for the institutions to make decisions that work best for them. Also, just bringing . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Sorry, Deputy.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you. Sorry, Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: I get the sense that you're expanding on the answer beyond the scope of the question that I asked. How much have tuition and fees increased since 2019 here across the system in Alberta? A simple question. Percentage amount, absolute dollar amount: that's all I'm looking for.

Ms Pillipow: I have the percentage amount breakdown, and I'm just looking to see if my financial area has the actual numbers over the last three years. I know that the average tuition in Alberta was just over \$6,690, so we would be able to – \$6,693; I didn't quite remember that three. If we were to calculate that over the last three years, I think we could estimate it if someone wants to do the math, but I think I've answered the question. The breakdown between the fees is 70 per cent and 30 per cent for the tuition, Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Well, we'll move on here on this point. Page 36 states that the minister approved 14 exceptional tuition increases during the year in question. Can the department table for the committee at a later date which programs those were for and how much those tuition increases were for each program?

Ms Pillipow: Minister Nicolaides looked at the exceptional tuition increase, Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: I'm just asking you if the department can commit to tabling that for the committee.

Ms Pillipow: Chair, may I just answer the question first, outline the process? It's relevant to the answer.

Mr. Schmidt: Oh, I have a bunch of questions about the process. We can get to that. My first question is whether or not you will be willing to table that for the committee.

Ms Pillipow: Minister Nicolaides took the exceptional tuition increase to cabinet for decision, so I would have to confer with the cabinet package that went before I can commit to the committee to table the documentation.

Mr. Schmidt: That's interesting because the report says that it's ministerial approval. I'm pretty sure that that's written in the legislation as well. Why is the minister going to cabinet for approval, seeking approval for something that he has the authority to approve himself?

Ms Pillipow: I think that, by nature, an exceptional tuition increase is an important decision. Mr. Nicolaides asked the institutions to go back into additional consultation, and he wanted to confer with cabinet on a decision which was as important as exceptional tuition increases. I will commit to the committee to confirm which part of the packages were related to the ministerial authority and get back to what can be tabled.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much for that answer.

With respect to exceptional tuition increases, the Alberta tuition framework states that the minister can approve those tuition increases if he's satisfied that the increase will improve the quality of the program. I'm wondering how the minister makes that determination. What kind of rubric, matrix does the ministry use to

determine that the exceptional tuition increase will actually improve quality? What's he looking for there?

8:20

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. That's a really important question as an exceptional tuition increase isn't just about increasing the dollars. A couple of things. This is also why it was really important for the minister to go back and ask for consultation. He did ask how the institutions were ensuring that the students were getting better quality, and part of the investment looked at hiring additional faculty; looked at the opportunity for expanded co-operatives, work-integrated learning opportunities for some of those programs, which is what we call experiential learning or work-integrated learning; technology increases specifically in the areas for engineering; also, adding additional classes and supports; and, also, supporting learners through their programs.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Schmidt: Is that a standardized process, or is it ad hoc? The minister takes it on a proposal-by-proposal basis and says, "Yup"? What is the definition of quality that the minister is looking for in these cases?

Ms Pillipow: Sure. Thank you for the question, Chair. That's an important question. We did a couple of things in providing advice and analysis both to the minister and to cabinet in considering the exceptional tuition increases. First of all, looking at the comparator programs in other jurisdictions, both from a cost and an outcomes perspective. We also looked at whether or not those particular learners would be going into programs that had labour market connections. As well, in looking at the comparator jurisdictions, just as an example, the minister had to consider whether or not it was a fair increase compared to other jurisdictions.

I'll just choose one. An engineering degree: the tuition is just over \$9,000 now with the exceptional tuition increase whereas at the University of Toronto it is just over \$14,000. So he had to look at comparator jurisdictions and institutions to ensure that there would be quality that would be on par with other institutions.

Then we broke that down by each program request, looking at both what the quality would be from the rubric that you're mentioning on the experiential, the staff, the quality of the staff instruction, how that is comparing to other jurisdictions. And then, as well, I mentioned the outcomes that we would be expecting for those learners to receive in the labour force.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

What kind of accountability measures does the department put in place to make sure that the institutions actually achieve the quality improvements that they're looking for?

Ms Pillipow: That's a really good question. Thank you for the question, Chair. One of the important measures that Minister Nicolaidis has put in place is through the investment management agreements, which are required through the Post-secondary Learning Act. What he did was that he actually put a work-integrated learning measure in place for these institutions.

Mr. Schmidt: Sorry. We're going off track here. I read the investment management agreement. They don't actually deal specifically with the exceptional tuition increases. I'm talking about only the exceptional tuition increases. What accountability measures does the Advanced Education department have to make sure that those specific programs that have been approved for exceptional tuition

increases actually achieve the quality improvements that they say they are going to do?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for that question. My team is just talking about that we do have reporting that's required on the tuition to ensure that they're achieving their outcomes.

Did you want to expand on that one, Carmen?

Ms Baldwin-Dery: Thank you, Deputy, and thank you, Chair, for the question. We do have an annual cycle of reporting on the tuition. So any program, for example, that is approved for an exceptional tuition increase: there's a team of data folks who actually review those submissions, and if we were to, for example, identify one of the institutions who was outside of the margin of what was approved, that would be a follow-up for us.

Mr. Schmidt: Sorry. When you're saying "outside of the margin," outside of the margin for what measures?

Ms Baldwin-Dery: Of the exceptional tuition increase that was approved. For example, if the minister had approved an exceptional tuition increase for an MBA program at the University of Alberta, the University of Alberta would be required to report on that. If they charged tuition that was beyond what had been approved, that would be identified.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. So you're only tracking the actual increase in the tuition.

Now, the deputy minister just said that they promised to hire additional faculty, create work-integrated learning, technology increases, additional support. Does the Advanced Education ministry actually hold those institutions accountable for providing the services and quality improvements that they say they will with the exceptional tuition increases?

Ms Pillipow: As I did mention – thank you for the question, Chair. While it is not directly related to the investment management agreement, we did put in place the work-integrated learning performance measure . . .

Mr. Schmidt: The work-integrated . . .

Ms Pillipow: . . . and then the institutions are all required to submit annual reports.

Mr. Hunter: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Sure. Yes.

Mr. Hunter: I believe we've had the deputy minister trying to answer the questions a few times and being interrupted by the hon. member, who's been at this for almost eight years. He knows the rules, and I'm not sure exactly why he continues to do this. He's asking the questions, but he's not listening to the answers. Now, I think that, you know, the . . .

The Chair: Hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: The point of order . . .

The Chair: Hon. member. Yeah. Is there a standing order?

Mr. Hunter: Yes. Let me just finish what the standing order is.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Hunter: The point of order is 23(j). The member opposite is treating the ministry official, particularly with the forced repetition

of questions – first of all, she’s trying to answer the questions. Then he continues to ask the question again. It’s going to obviously cause disorder in the committee, so I’m just wondering whether or not the chair will recognize that she’s trying to answer the question, that he needs to give them the time to do that.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think it’s pretty clear that the member is asking questions and follow-up questions related to the responses being given by the deputy minister. This is not a point of order. This is simply the member using their time effectively to try to get an answer to the question that’s being asked. I just don’t see a point of order on this situation.

The Chair: All right. I have heard both sides. The first thing that I’ll note is that when I ask for a reference to a standing order, I don’t expect to be snarked at. The second thing that I will note is that there has been some back and forth, so I’ll just remind the hon. member to ensure that he is speaking through the chair and allowing the deputy minister to finish her answers.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. My sense is that, because the department is, let’s say, working overtime to avoid directly answering my question, the answer is no, that there is no follow-up accountability process to make sure that the exceptional tuition increases actually achieve the particular quality improvements that they say they will do. Is that fair?

Ms Pillipow: Just to be clear, Chair. Are you asking me if there were or were not – sorry. I’m just confused on that question.

Mr. Schmidt: What accountability measures does the department have to make sure that the exceptional quality increases funded by these tuition increases actually happen?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I’ll reiterate that we do have two measures in place, where we looked at the work-integrated learning outcomes for those programs – and those are performance-based, work-integrated learning metrics – as well as that my colleague has also talked about the way that their reporting measures are done for tuition. And then in order, as well, we do have program approval processes. As you would know, Chair, those are important parts of the process, where we ensure that the outcomes from those programs are being met.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Deputy Minister. I think you’ve answered my question.

So there is no mechanism for clarifying whether or not these exceptional tuition increases – so the ministry can’t go back and say: you haven’t done what you said you would do; we are going to force you to roll back your tuition. Is there a process like that in place for dealing with these exceptional tuition increases?

Ms Pillipow: Actually, there is a really important metric that’s in place, which I’ve already mentioned. It’s through the investment management agreement. It is the work-integrated learning metric, which is a performance-based benchmark . . .

Mr. Schmidt: That answers my question, Deputy Minister.

I want to move on now. Page 55 references the so-called turn-off of the Alberta study grant to avoid going over budget, yet on page 74 the department left almost \$6 million in student aid grants unspent in this fiscal year. Why was the department afraid of going over budget when you actually underspent your budget?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. It’s an important question. Annual reports are an important part of accountability on

how our dollars are spent. I think that one of the things that we looked at when we implemented the new Alberta student grant program was ensuring that we had the right measures in place to have accountability for how those dollars are spent, Chair, and the member would recall that the first year the program was implemented, we were over budget. Because we were also implementing a new program in the middle of a second round of pandemic, we did an estimate based on the intakes that we had from the program and gave some advice based on data that we thought we could turn off the access to the program in September and still serve older learners. Many things changed during that reporting period. [interjection] Oh, Chair, I’m just not quite finished my answer.

8:30

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Deputy Minister. You’ve actually answered the question. I want to dig into that now. How many applications had the department received by the time it turned off the grant, how many grant applications were awarded, and how many were denied at that point?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. I don’t have that specific information in front of me right now, Chair. What I can say is that we did have a specific number of applicants that were approved, and, as I was mentioning in my previous answer, due to the pandemic we did have several students withdraw from study. As we went into the January term, we were also noticing students that were withdrawing because most of the courses were going online. So it did change our numbers. I can just look to the table to see if anybody has specific numbers that they would want to provide on that or if we can get back. I can confirm that we had 17,000 students, Chair, that accessed the Alberta student grant during that reporting period.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy.

We will now move over to the government side for a 15-minute rotation. I have Member Turton to begin.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Excellent. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much, Ms Pillipow and the rest of the team, for coming out here today. Obviously, postsecondary education is of great importance to Albertans and especially to my riding.

I have a couple of questions. I guess this first one – I just want to kind of ask my first question based upon some of your comments about the Alberta 2030 skills for jobs strategy. It’s mentioned on page 26 of the annual report under outcome 2, and, as you mentioned, it includes six ambitious goals which are concerning: improving access and student experience, developing skills for jobs, supporting innovation and commercialization, strengthening internationalization, improving sustainability and affordability, and strengthening system governance. Specifically, I was wondering if you can comment on the progress and the actions taken in 2021-2022 in support of the Alberta 2030 strategy and how it will improve the world-class postsecondary institutions that support many of my constituents specifically because, as many people in the room know, NAIT has a campus in my riding. It’s obviously of huge importance. I know the Augustana campus in Camrose is obviously of huge importance to the amazing member from that riding as well. If you can just kind of help answer that question, that’d be greatly appreciated.

Ms Pillipow: Okay. Thank you for the question, Chair. Just as I mentioned in my opening comments, Alberta 2030 was a very important accomplishment for the year. I’ll just go over a few accomplishments.

In spring 2021 we did release the strategy, as I mentioned, and it aims to ensure that the postsecondary graduates and adult learners

are equipped with some of those great skills that we talk about. This strategy: we looked at some implementation items. We invited the postsecondary institutions to give us some feedback, and one of the things that we looked at was expanding the apprenticeship model. We had 14 grants that were issued to nine institutions, valued at approximately \$6.4 million.

We also invested \$3.6 million to create the new work-integrated learning opportunities by partnering with several industry associations in key economic sectors to provide meaningful paid work placements for hundreds of students.

We also invested \$5.6 million for postsecondary institutions and industry to develop microcredential programs, aligned with Alberta's recovery plan, which will help Albertans build careers, especially when you're talking about areas like NAIT and colleges and looking at opportunities to go into the workforce and pivot into a career.

We streamlined the program approval process, which is an important red tape reduction measure. We also, as I mentioned, introduced the legislative changes to the Post-secondary Learning Act. We expanded inclusive postsecondary education and transitional vocational programs with a \$1.9 million investment from community and social services to help more Albertans with developmental disabilities reach their educational goals and prepare for the workforce. We were really excited because this funding will create at least 36 new spots for our students with developmental disabilities to attend postsecondary education.

Finally, we established the Research Commercialization Working Group, which brings together representatives both from industry, postsecondary education as well as the research fields, and that's really a big focus on economic diversification and growth.

Thank you.

Mr. Turton: Excellent. Well, thank you very much for that answer.

I guess my second question – I know this has been a burning one; I know the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is very excited about this one – has to deal with what's on page 27 under key objective 2.1. That has to do with red tape reduction. Obviously, this is a huge issue about making sure that our public services are done efficiently and effectively, so I'm very excited, obviously, that the ministry has exceeded the 2021-2022 targeted red tape reduction of 20 per cent, achieving a total of 26.5 per cent. I guess I was wondering if you can expand on the steps that your ministry has taken to lessen regulatory requirements and reduce the administrative burden for postsecondary providers, employers, and students.

Ms Phillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. This is an important initiative for government, and we took this exercise seriously. There are two major student aid initiatives that were documented for '21-22. We looked at a student aid paperless initiative, online full-time application removal, as well as the requirement to remove mandatory spouse or partner SIN numbers. That came into effect on August 1, 2021. By removing this mandatory SIN requirement, it also supports the student aid paperless initiative and reduced our time and effort and also being able to serve students faster.

We looked at the student aid regulatory count, and effective on August 1, 2021, we repealed four applications, for a requirement reduction of 97. And, really, just everything that we do is with priority in making postsecondary education easier to access. We also, as I mentioned before, have improved the approval process to eliminate unnecessary application requirements, enabling universities to undertake independent reviews and improve turnaround time for program approvals. As I might have mentioned as well in my opening comments, we transferred the authority to the board of

governors to set apprenticeship tuition, and this came out of the consultation from Alberta 2030.

We also replaced the annual mental health funding for students at postsecondary institutions with multiyear agreements. This really helps the institutions plan over those on a three-year period. Also, with the new Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act we reduced red tape for educators and industry, giving workplaces new tools to meet new challenges. And then we also are modernizing the governance of skilled trades by providing more flexibility and autonomy. We've done several other things in that area, and we're looking at streamlining as well the apprenticeship record book to eliminate any of the duplication and unnecessary requirements used in administering that program and also consolidating reporting under MyTradesecrets, a secure online service, which means that apprenticeship and industry training clients can view and update their program information any time.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Turton: Excellent. Thank you very much for the comprehensive answer.

At this point I'd like to hand it over to my good friend MLA Singh.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair, and, also, thank you, Deputy Chair. I would like to thank the office of the Auditor General for being with us today and also representatives and officials of the Advanced Education ministry.

My questions are about skills development and apprenticeships, and I do understand that trade and skills are important in all ridings in Alberta, including Camrose as well. Page 12 of the annual report delineates outcome 1: providing quality education and skills development to Albertans. Highly educated and skilled graduates are essential to our economic growth and prosperity. Key objective 1.2 on page 20 speaks to expanding the apprenticeship model to increase learning opportunities to meet labour demands. What has Advanced Education done to ensure postsecondary programs in Alberta foster the skill development and apprenticeship that reflects the labour market demands?

Thank you.

[Mr. Turton in the chair]

Ms Phillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. To ensure that postsecondary programs foster skill development and apprenticeship that reflects the labour market demands, Alberta Advanced Education has continued collaboration with industry to ensure apprenticeship programming provides training for skills that are required in the labour market. We've increased seat numbers for apprenticeship classroom instruction at postsecondary institutions for high-demand apprenticeship education programs. We've also developed a clear apprenticeship model of learning that can be applied to more careers.

Thank you for the question. That's my answer.

[Ms Phillips in the chair]

Mr. Singh: Thank you for the answer. If you please, can you elaborate on some of the additional actions and programs undertaken by Advanced Education during 2021-2022 to support the apprenticeship model of education?

8:40

Ms Phillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The ministry, in order to enhance and support the apprenticeship model of education, passed, as noted earlier, the new Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship

Education Act to modernize and increase efficiency in the legislative framework and apprenticeship programming.

We also created the postsecondary credentials to be awarded upon successful completion of an apprenticeship education program, which newly recognizes the education of tradespeople and provides greater opportunity to ladder into other academic programs.

Thank you.

Mr. Singh: Again thank you for the answer. I'm very much interested in one of the strategies outlined on page 21 of the annual report to support high school apprenticeship for aspiring tradesmen and -women. This includes the high school apprenticeship scholarship program, introduced by this government. How has this program supported high school students aspiring to become skilled trades workers in Alberta?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The high school apprenticeship scholarship program recognizes the accomplishments of Alberta high school students completing the registered apprenticeship program, known as RAP, or the career and technology studies pathway. This program has been in place since 2013 but was renamed, as noted, in 2019.

There are two awards that fall under this program. The standard award recipients are given \$1,000. Those awarded the bright future award also can be eligible to receive a total of \$2,000. RAP allows an Alberta high school student to register as an apprentice and begin learning and developing skills and competencies on the job. As they work, they will earn wages and a high school credit and on-the-job apprenticeship hours for a head start towards a journey person certificate after high school.

The career and technology studies program pathway to apprenticeship also provides an opportunity for Alberta high school students so that they can earn a credit towards Alberta apprenticeship for classroom instruction in 23 different programs. This important program allows Alberta education high school apprenticeship-related students to be able to be part of their career studies, and this is also a provincially authorized curriculum for those students.

Thank you for the question. That's my answer.

Mr. Singh: Thanks for the answer. I see on page 21 that the program has awarded 2,622 scholarships to students as they graduate from high school. What were the eligibility requirements to apply, and how were these scholarships awarded?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. To qualify for the high school apprenticeship scholarships, applicants must be a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident or a protected person. Visa students are not eligible. They may be an Alberta resident as defined by the address on file in MyTradesecrets. They must complete the requirements for a high school diploma in June of their graduating year. They must be registered as an apprentice in the registered apprenticeship program or have successfully completed a career and technology studies apprenticeship pathway through an Alberta high school. Finally, they must not be a previous recipient of RAP or the career and technology studies scholarship.

Thank you for the question. That's my answer.

Mr. Singh: Thank you for answering my questions, and I appreciate the hard work done to support the skills development and apprenticeship program in our province.

Now I'll cede the remainder of my time to Member Smith. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Smith: Thank you.

Madam Chair, how much more time do we have?

The Chair: Two minutes.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Thank you very much.

Thank you for allowing me to ask a few questions of you today. As a former high school social studies teacher advanced education has always been something of a natural bent for me looking forward and moving forward as I saw my kids moving through the post-secondary situation. As we all know – I don't know; I think I can speak for all of the MLAs here – we got a lot of feedback over the last couple or two and a half years from parents as they and their students and their kids struggled to make their way through advanced education in a COVID era. As we all know, the pandemic posed specific challenges to postsecondary students and to their mental health. Page 28 of the annual report mentions that the ministry replaced annual mental health funding for students at postsecondary institutions with multiyear agreements. I'm pleased to see that our government is supporting students' mental health in the long term. Could you please further elaborate on what these agreements look like and the benefits of having them as a multiyear agreement rather than just as an annual agreement that may change every year, from year to year?

Thank you.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. As noted, these new grant agreements are three years in length rather than just one. It was one of our red tape reduction initiatives as well as an effort to be able to provide some consistent funding year over year. They are issued and reports are due annually in order for the department to be able to monitor spending and progress of the initiatives. The 16-page grant application template that the postsecondary institutions have to fill out is only filled out once every three years now, so it allows them to be able to be more efficient in their distribution. The funding has remained a consistent priority. Also, being able to provide this level of funding has been able to provide certain supports within the postsecondary institutions. It's increased access to counsellors. It's developed campus mental health strategies.

The Chair: All right. Now we'll move on to our 10-minute rotations. This is the second rotation.

We'll begin with the Official Opposition at 10 minutes. I am seeing Member Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I want to go back to page 55 and the Alberta study grants. When the deputy minister left off, she said that 17,000 students had accessed the grant before the program was paused. How many applications were denied or were in the works, I guess, when the program was paused?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. That's a fairly detailed program question. I'm going to have to get back to the member about that specific issue unless there's someone at the table that can give that detailed information.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much for tabling the information.

Other scholarship awards that Advanced Education administers don't have a fixed budget. I'm thinking of the Rutherford scholarship, for example. You meet the criteria, you submit your application, you get your money, and it doesn't matter how much is budgeted. The department pays each recipient who meets the eligibility criteria. It's the same for the Jason Lang scholarship and other scholarships that the Advanced Education program administers. In theory, from the outside looking in, the Alberta study grant is set up the same way. If you meet the criteria for eligibility, you should get your grant. What were people who were denied the grant told when

the program was paused? Presumably they were eligible. What were they told when it was paused?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I can't speak to exactly what recipients were told, but I can talk about the number of students who received the grant. I also want to talk, though – I think the member would be aware that there are a suite of programs that we provide students and that we do have a budget that we have to work towards. This particular program was developed by combining previous grant programs to target low-income learners. We know that we did serve, as I mentioned in my opening comments, 17,965 students. Those who were unable to access the Alberta study grant funding for the balance of the year: we did encourage them to apply for the next year. As the member knows, we also have federal and provincial student loans. We have other grants and numerous scholarships and awards that are offered to students as a measure of them being able to provide for their education options.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

You set up a program that clearly highlights eligibility requirements, then you arbitrarily cut it off at some point when you think you're going over budget even though you end up not going over budget over the year. What did the Ministry of Advanced Education learn from this – I would characterize it as a blunder – to make sure that people who are eligible for the Alberta study grant in upcoming years will not be denied a program that they can fairly expect to receive when they meet the eligibility requirements?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I appreciate that when officials give ministers advice, we may, as the quote is, blunder from time to time. We do use the data that we have at the time to provide advice. As noted earlier, that was the second year of implementing that program, and we had to manage varying registration numbers coming in from postsecondary institutions during COVID and provide our best advice. Because it is a finite budget, we did look at the recipients and those who were coming into the program. We also knew that we had over \$103 million in that reporting year for scholarships and awards and also additional dollars, that we provided \$743 million in student loans, which help . . .

8:50

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much to the deputy minister. She's going beyond the scope of the question.

Are you looking at changing the eligibility requirement, then, for the Alberta student grant?

Ms Pillipow: Is that a question that's related to something in the annual report?

Mr. Turton: Point of order.

Mr. Schmidt: So I . . .

The Chair: Sorry, hon. member. I have a point of order on the floor.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much. Under 23(b), speaking to matters other than the question at hand. Really, the purpose of PAC is to talk about, you know, the previous business statements, Auditor General statements. I mean, what the hon. member is talking about is really forward-facing policy statements. I would probably assume that most of those questions would be better suited for question period, coming up here in a couple of hours, versus the actual business that we're supposed to be addressing here.

Thank you.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will restate my question.

The Chair: Yeah. I'll just rule. Yes, could you please restate that question because it was outside the bounds. Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much. Recognizing that the Alberta study grant could have possibly gone over budget in this fiscal year, did the ministry make any eligibility changes in this fiscal year for applying for the study grant in order to reopen it?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. I'm actually wondering if my ADM Mike Fernandez wants to talk about the intricacies of shutting off a program and the criteria.

Mr. Fernandez: Happy to. Sorry. Just to go directly to the question, we would look forward to speaking to that at PAC next year, when we share with you the '22-23 results, but would you like me to elaborate on the intricacies of program cessation in mid-year? I was accountable for it at the time and was involved in making the decision.

Mr. Schmidt: No, that's fine. We'll move on.

On page 74 of the annual report, again, no, the ministry shows that \$3 million in scholarships and awards was unspent in this fiscal year. This follows up on fiscal 2020-2021, in which over a million dollars from the same line item was unspent. Why can't the ministry spend the money it allocates to scholarships and awards?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. Are you referring to the Alex Decoteau? Which one are you referring to?

Mr. Schmidt: There is a shocking lack of transparency in the budget. All it says is line 4.2, scholarships and awards: \$3 million unspent. So I don't know which awards were underspent here.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Actually, as the member noted, scholarship programs are demand programs, so when scholarship programs are unspent, there are dollars that are unused, it's just simply because we did not have sufficient applicants for those programs.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

This is money that could very well be put to very good use by students who are in serious financial aid. What is the department doing to increase applications to make sure that you're actually spending the money that you allot for this every year?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Are you referring to a specific program with the question?

Mr. Schmidt: Again, I don't have the same information that the deputy minister does. I'm referring to line 4.2 in the lapse and encumbrance on page 74 of the budget. The deputy minister just said that you're not getting enough applications to spend all of the money that you're allocating. What are you doing to promote? There are presumably more students out there who could use this money and might meet the eligibility requirements. What is the department doing to promote that to make sure that there are enough applicants in the system to spend the money that you want to spend on scholarships and awards?

Ms Pillipow: As part of the program requirements the scholarships and awards do have an intake period. I'm just wondering, like, are the – could you give me the intake dates, please? I know you're familiar with them, and I'm not.

Mr. Fernandez: Intake date is usually June 1.

Ms Pillipow: June 1.

Mr. Fernandez: First two weeks of June is when things open.

Ms Pillipow: Chair, I think that what we would say with respect to the question on scholarships and awards is that there is a period of time where we have intake and then we assess those applications and then, as you would manage your budget through quarterly reporting, we would also provide advice to the minister on dollars that were unspent in certain programs. When you have an in-flight unspent amount of money, then you have to assess that within your quarterly reporting options. Also, what we do ask – as my colleague here also noted, we also require that the postsecondary institutions promote on their websites and ensure that students are aware of all the student finance options for them. There's a full suite of options here that are available to students.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much for the answer.

This is a problem that has existed for at least two years. Like I said, in 2020-2021 you underspent the budget by \$1.6 million; this past year you underspent it by \$3 million. The amount of money that you're not spending has actually increased significantly, but it doesn't sound like the department has changed any of its processes, promotional work to make sure that that money goes out the door. Is that fair to say?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. I think the question is referring to section 4.1, so I'm not sure how it relates to promotional. I think what we would say is that we have a constant reporting of our student finance options on our website.

I also want to note, as I look at the FLE counts from 2018-19, '19-20, that we had seen in some institutions a slow increase whereas in others we have seen a decrease. I think that – not to say that COVID is responsible for everything, but it does become challenging to manage enrolments and withdrawals from students when their postsecondary experience was going from online to in person, which does impact our ability to be able to process programs per our existing requirements that we have during the reporting year that you would be referring to in the annual report.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Schmidt: Did the department consider making any changes to make sure that more of that money was spent this past fiscal year?

The Chair: All right. We'll move on to the second rotation, government side; 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to Ms Pillipow. I was happy to read on page 32 that Advanced Education, co-ordinating with the associate minister of status of women, announced a \$2.5 million investment in the postsecondary system to combat gender-based violence. How has this funding addressed gender-based violence on Alberta's campuses?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Postsecondary institutions are using this funding in a variety of ways to address gender-based violence, and we, too, were very happy to partner with our colleagues in Status of Women. Approved activities identified through the grant agreements are as follows: you could use it for updating postsecondary institution gender-based violence policies to align with national best practices, and that is something Minister Nicolaides has asked the institutions to look at; enhancing capacities through the delivery of gender-based awareness and

prevention training to students, staff, and faculty; development and promotion of campaigns that are focused on education, awareness, and prevention; and then, lastly, implementing a province-wide survey to assess the prevalence of gender-based violence on campus along with perceptions of the campus climate and supports that are available.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Smith: Thank you.

I'll cede my time to MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you. Through you, Madam Chair, to the hon. members here, I see on page 43 that the percentage of provincial grants the Alberta government provides to postsecondary institutions represents 48 per cent of the total revenue among Alberta's publicly funded universities and degree-granting colleges, which is significantly higher than British Columbia's 35 per cent and Ontario's 26 per cent. I can see also that these numbers have remained relatively stable since 2015, between 46 to 48 per cent. How has the significant funding from the Alberta government worked to ensure that our postsecondary students are among the most well supported and funded in the country?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Alberta has always focused on the importance of adult learning in Alberta, and in the '21-22 fiscal year this was the second year of the planned three-year process to better align Alberta's postsecondary institutions with other jurisdictions in a steady and sustainable manner. Advanced Education did look at other jurisdictional funding, as recommended by the MacKinnon panel, and reduced government funding and allocated funding differentially to Alberta's publicly funded postsecondary institutions, which saved over \$106 million in the reporting period for '21-22.

9:00

This helped promote the sustainability of the postsecondary system and ensured that funding was distributed in a more equitable fashion as opposed to the across-the-board approach that was used in previous years. The province continues to show a downward trend in terms of provincial funding on a per-student basis, which is aligned better to the crossjurisdictional comparisons. We're also positioned for strategic investment that can have a better impact on the postsecondary system and the Alberta economy.

In addition, Minister Nicolaides had also introduced the investment management agreements, which I referred to earlier, which are important accountability measures and which are essentially contracts between the publicly funded postsecondary institutions and the Minister of Education as required by the Postsecondary Learning Act. These IMAs, as we refer to them, are the primary accountability instrument of a performance-based funding model, and they incentivize institutions to work collaboratively to also implement the goals outlined in Alberta 2030.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you for the answer, Deputy Minister.

I can also see that over the past year many sectors of our economy began to face labour shortages due to the lack of skilled workers, and on page 14 it mentions microcredentials and strategies to support people to reskill or upskill, as it says. Can the ministry expand on the different programs and opportunities that your department offered to adult learners to quickly reskill and access other employment?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'll talk about two programs in response to the question. The work-integrated learning

industry voucher program and microcredentials, WIL, as we call it. This was a voucher pilot program that began in March 2021. Advanced Education invested \$3.6 million over a three-year period. We worked with three industry associations to support over 650 WIL opportunities under the program. These partners were the Alberta Construction Association, Technology Alberta, and BioAlberta, who were chosen for their alignment to key economic sectors as part of Alberta's recovery plan.

These three pilot associations have ended their annual progress report on May 31, 2022, which is outside the reporting periods, so I won't refer to the actual results. We also see that the ACA has also launched their program, and in the first year we saw 80 students that surpassed the goals of the program. BioAlberta began recruiting as well with the WIL voucher program in August 2021. We also see that the KPIs for this program saw that the number of students and the number of employers involved was lower than the previous year 1 as the program was newly promoted, so we're looking at some growth there. We do, however, see that the association is beginning to go on track as we're looking into future years. We also note that Technology Alberta, who was part of the WIL voucher program through two separate cohorts, was meeting their placement targets as well.

A very important initiative under 2030 is the microcredential program. In partnership with industry employers and PSIs we had over \$5.6 million that was invested in a pilot program to develop and implement these new microcredentials. So this program is creating dozens of new microcredential opportunities in priority sectors and high-demand emerging industries.

I'll just talk a little bit about some of those. The ministry approved 56 programs under the microcredential from 19 institutions for the pilot, and the participating postsecondary institutions submitted their annual report on progress in the last fiscal year. Of the funded programs, 61 per cent were in the delivery phase and 38 per cent were still developing.

We also note that higher rates of registration in these microcredential programs were observed in programs that offered WIL components, so the combination of the two was really important. We also noted that the ability of rural colleges to find and involve industry is something that hadn't been completely taken up, and we'll be looking at that in coming years and how we can support those colleges in rural Alberta.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

I'd like to cede my time to the hon. Muhammad Yaseen.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Deputy Minister. My first question is with regard to key objective 2.3. Outcome 2 of the annual report was making Alberta's adult learning system "efficient, financially sustainable and globally competitive." Key objective 2.3 mentions that the previous government "spent more money per student [than] similar provinces, but did not necessarily get better post-secondary results." It also states that this "previous spending was not sustainable and a more equitable approach was required." Can you comment on the steps your department has taken to transition to a more sustainable funding model that aligns more with other jurisdictions in our country?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. After reviewing the findings of the MacKinnon panel report, the department under the leadership of Mr. Nicolaidis set out on a three-year process to better align Alberta's postsecondary institutions with other jurisdictions. Advanced Education reduced funding through the government and allocated funding differentially to the Alberta publicly funded

postsecondary institutions, saving over \$106 million in '21-22. This helped promote the sustainability of the postsecondary system and ensured that the funding was distributed in a more equitable fashion as opposed to the across-the-board approach that was used in previous years. We also look at being better positioned, as I mentioned earlier, for strategic investment to have the biggest impact on the postsecondary system in coming years because of these reductions.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you.

How has the ministry ensured that Alberta's students and postsecondary institutions are still best supported?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Goal 3 of this year's process – the goal of this three-year process was to ensure that the Alberta postsecondary system, as I mentioned, was funded in a more sustainable manner, so the way that this funding is distributed also helps postsecondary institutions plan over those three years. In addition . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy.

We'll go on to the third rotation. Official Opposition, 10 minutes. I see Member Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much. I want to return to page 74 of the annual report. There is more unspent money but this time in the line 5, foundational learning supports, more than \$14 million unspent in foundational learning assistance. The annual report suggested that this is due to lower-than-expected enrolment. What was the expected number of students enrolled in programs eligible for this assistance, and what was the actual enrolment?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'm just asking my SFO to pull the expected numbers. I will note that when we did our analysis of the variance explanations on this program, part of our numbers – we're really looking at how we could manage the influx of that program through COVID. We expected 10,500 learners; our actual numbers were 8,200, Member.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. So presumably, again, like Alberta student grants, there is a significant amount of financial need out there that is being unmet because the department is not spending the money that's allocated in the budget. Now, the money for foundational learning assistance – I need to remind everybody on the committee – is going to support low-income Albertans for completing high school education and in some cases even completing the education that they need to complete a high school education. These are people who are at risk of being trapped in low-income positions if they aren't able to finish their foundational learning programs and go on to higher education. In my view, I think it's critically important that the ministry is doing everything it can to make sure that Albertans who are eligible for the program know that it exists and can take advantage of the opportunity. What initiatives did the department have in place in the fiscal year under consideration to encourage enrolment in foundational learning programs so that you're spending the budget that you allocate for this?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Obviously, the foundational learning support program is an extremely important program for low-income Albertans, and we would agree with you on that. I know my ADM Mike Fernandez can talk a little bit more about the specifics. I think I would say that we work very closely with our partners who deliver these foundational learning support

programs. I don't have the exact number, but I think the member and Chair would probably remember that during this reporting period we had almost a 10 per cent unemployment rate in Alberta, so we also have qualified applicants that were looking for this program that – there was just a lower uptake. We work with our partners, and we advertise the availability of these programs.

9:10

I'm wondering: Mike, do you want to talk a little bit about this year? I know you love this program so much.

Mr. Fernandez: I'd love to. I do love this program, Lora, so thank you for the opportunity and for the question.

The foundational learning program is a partnership between the Alberta government and 45 partners. Those partners include not-for-profit entities, a handful of my postsecondary institutions, or PSIs, several of my First Nations colleges that I work with. We work with them on an annual basis to make sure they are allocating the right dollars, the right programs in community. We undertake some pretty aggressive – marketing is the wrong word – sort of advocacy to make sure that potential participants are aware across the province, all demographics. The biggest reason that there was a significant underspend in 2021-22 on FLS was COVID.

We look at the demographic of learners of the foundational learning community. They are your least likely to attend post-secondary education because they've got different barriers that most of us don't face in terms of access to technology, access to Internet, the confidence to come into a facility. COVID just compounded all of that, and I mean this was a trend that was seen across the entire postsecondary education system where enrolment was down, but in FLS it was compounded.

Mr. Schmidt: I appreciate the explanation.

This was the second year of COVID. I note that in 2020-2021 this program was also significantly underspent. What did the department learn from the first year of COVID to try to avoid this happening again? Because it looks like you weren't successful in helping people overcome the extra barrier that COVID put on people.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I will refer the question to ADM Fernandez.

Mr. Fernandez: So COVID, for the purpose of the committee today, did span two fiscal years, two academic years. In year 1 we did see a reduced enrolment, and to respond to that, we worked with our 45 partners to try and analyze why and what happened. Predominantly in year 2 we encouraged them to make greater access of computer hardware and Internet connectivity available to potential participants. I actually believe that we were quite successful in the enrolment in year 2. I personally believe it would have been diminished significantly more had our partners not made computer access and hardware access available to learners.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much for that answer.

My next block of questions deals with institutional funding. According to the briefing provided by the Legislative Assembly Office, operating grants to postsecondary institutions have decreased by over \$400 million since the 2018-19 fiscal year. Now, how much of that shortfall – some of that was covered by skyrocketing tuition that this government has approved – in base operating grants resulted in budget reductions at postsecondary institutions?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I think I'm just referring back to one comment that I made in the opening around

the reductions that we had to the base operating grant in '21-22, which was \$106 million in savings, if I'm correct? Okay. That was the reduction, to specifically answer the question, Chair, thank you. I think also, as the member knows, Chair, that we did look at how Alberta compared to other jurisdictions, both for tuition and for the funding per institution when those decisions . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Deputy Minister. I appreciate the answer.

Since 2018-19 how many full-time equivalent positions have been lost at postsecondary institutions because of this shortfall in base operating grants?

Ms Pillipow: I'm just going to go back to my enrolment numbers, so just one sec; I have to stop to find my page. I didn't remember all 26 of the . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Sorry; just to be clear, the deputy minister was not asked about enrolment, but it was full-time equivalent positions at postsecondary institutions.

Ms Pillipow: I don't actually know if I have that information. I'm just looking to the table to see if we have that information.

I apologize, Chair; we'd have to get back to you on that.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much. I know that that's a number that's presented in the budget every year. I look forward to that being tabled to the committee at the next time.

Is the ministry keeping track of any programs that have been eliminated because of these budget cuts since 2019?

Ms Pillipow: The program approval process that we go through approves the programs that are offered by the institutions, and then we look at the cost per FLE.

I'm just going to ask Carmen. Your area does the program approvals. Do you also get reporting on our annual reporting basis on programs that are removed?

And thank you for the question, Chair. My apologies.

Ms Baldwin-Dery: Thank you, Deputy. Thank you to the chair. The institutions do not report to us in a consolidated role that piece, so we would not receive a report from NAIT that says: we suspended or terminated this many. However, as a result of each individual proposal that they put in to suspend, terminate, whatever it is they want to do, we would be able to compile that report internally. So in other words, they do not provide it to us as a whole, but we would be able to do that.

Mr. Schmidt: Can the department, then, table that report to show which programs have been lost since 2018-19?

Ms Pillipow: I think that that is something that I have to first confer and look and see what the data looks like as well. We can commit to looking into an option to answering that question, Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: We can see what the data looks like. You just need to provide it to us if you're willing to do that.

Ms Pillipow: We'll commit to looking at what data we have, Chair. Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Not much of a commitment at all, actually. I would like the deputy minister to say definitively whether she can provide the committee with that data.

Ms Pillipow: I'm committing to looking at the data that I have and then providing it to the committee. I have not seen the data myself,

Chair, so I just want to make sure that I'm providing the adequate answer to the question.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

Yeah. I guess a lead-in question to the next block. Government ended the practice of changing the base operating grants evenly across the board and now makes them on a school-by-school basis. The University of Alberta, for example, gets much bigger cuts than other institutions. What criteria does the ministry have for determining how much the amount of the base operating grant will change for each institution from year to year?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. As I noted earlier, the institutional changes that were made in the budget 2019-20 put in place a three-year plan for reductions.

The Chair: Very good. We'll now move on to government side, 10 minutes in the third rotation. Member Yaseen.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Chair. Deputy Minister, you were in the middle of answering my second question, which was: how has the ministry ensured that Alberta students and postsecondary institutions are still best supported? You can continue with your answer.

Ms Pillipow: Just one second. Sorry. I'm just looking at my papers. I'm losing track of my ability to count. I'm sorry, Chair. Just one second. Thank you.

The second part of your question, the answer – thank you for the question, Chair. When we look at the goal of this three-year process, it was to ensure that the postsecondary institutions were able to align with other jurisdictions. We also put in place investment management agreements, as I was mentioning earlier, which is an accountability instrument of a performance-based funding model, which are used to incentivize institutions through Alberta 2030.

I also have some additional information that I can provide on the student aid changes, but I just want to confirm, Chair, that this is the question that the member would like me to elaborate on.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you. We'll go on to my next question. Top institutions such as the University of Calgary, SAIT play a crucial role in attracting and training our workforce for the jobs of tomorrow. Now, your key objective 2.4 on page 36 was to “strengthen post-secondary research commercialization and investment attraction, and attract qualified international students who remain in Alberta and contribute to the economy.” With the labour shortage affecting many sectors of our economy, a skilled and adaptable workforce is becoming more important than ever before to ensure our economy's continual growth and stability. Can the ministry talk about the international education strategy mentioned on page 36 and how this strategy will help alleviate the labour shortage in our province?

9:20

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. As noted, the department under Minister Nicolaides' leadership did release an international education strategy. The strategy focuses on three key priority areas: global talent attraction, smart and sustainable growth, and international skills needed to succeed. Prior to the pandemic we did actually host over 35,000 international students between the postsecondary and the K to 12 system, and those students contributed more than \$1.1 billion to Alberta's economy and also supported over 13,400 jobs in communities across the province.

The international education strategy would confirm that international students play a critical role in addressing labour shortages, and the ministry is working with partnering ministries to align talent

attraction and support Alberta's labour market needs and our research and innovation priorities.

I also want to note that the minister established the Research Commercialization Working Group, which is an important working group to get advice from both industry and the postsecondary system to be able to enhance some of our research and attraction opportunities with international students.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you very much for that answer, and I will pass on to my colleague MLA Toor.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Deputy Minister, and I just wanted to start by saying thank you for all the work you do. Advanced Education, I think, is very important for Albertans, especially the postgraduates who get their education.

I just want to put my question, related to performance indicator 1(a), which measures the percentage of employers who report the recent postsecondary graduates that they supervise are prepared for employment. I do understand that that's important because the students who are going to get some work experience during their education: I think there's more chance they are going to get a job before the other students. So the question is: what did Advanced Education do to help students gain work experience during their studies?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The research on the Alberta system has indicated that postsecondary students who are given an opportunity for work experience while they learn tend to get a job sooner. Minister Nicolaides has worked to introduce the work-integrated learning program, which I spoke about earlier. This program builds key skills that employers are looking for, including professionalism, team communication, and emotional intelligence.

We've also taken direct action to expand student opportunities for work-integrated learning. As I noted earlier, the WIL industry voucher pilot program is an important program and an investment, and also just noting again that we worked with three really important sectors in Alberta to support that program: the Alberta Construction Association, BioAlberta, and Technology Alberta. Just to note, we have some really good feedback from students through our student surveys about those experiences as well.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Deputy Minister. Well, I'm glad to see on page 34 that \$11.2 million was allocated to provide services, support, and accommodation for students with disabilities at, I think, all 26 publicly funded institutions. This work continues the ministry's long-term strategy for helping students receive the accommodation and support they need. My question is: can you provide specific details on how this funding has helped these students meet their education needs?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The number of students with disabilities seeking accommodation and services from the 26 publicly funded postsecondary institutions grew by over 100 per cent, from 9,565 to 19,219 students over the 10-year period 2011-12 to '21-22. Often these students require multiple services. This funding ensures that students with disabilities accessing the supports and services may seamlessly and successfully participate fully in their programs of study. This is an important part of being in the postsecondary system from an inclusive lens.

The goal of accommodating students with disabilities is to ensure full participation in all aspects of their education experience. The program looks at supporting students with accessible facilities, flexible course delivery formats, individual services, assistive

technologies, flexible formats for exams, and other methods for student evaluation, which are really important for the learning environment. This funding also supports student appointments for intake, documentation review, determination of disability-related services and supports that are needed, and it allows PSIs to accommodate students with disabilities by giving them their own accommodation policies within the institution.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Toor: Thank you for your answer.

I still have two minutes, so I'll pass my time to MLA Stephan.

Mr. Stephan: Sure. Thank you very much, and I appreciate the work you do. I have a question about performance indicator 1(a) in your annual report, which is a really important performance indicator. It measures the percentage of postsecondary graduates who reported being employed two years after graduation. We note that in 2020 graduates from the majority of fields of study had employment rates higher than 90 per cent. The most updated annual information will be available in the next annual report, as I understand, but for 2020 how does this rate compare to postsecondary graduates in other provinces?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. This is an important part of the investment of taxpayer dollars in the post-secondary system as we do conduct the graduate outcome survey. Alberta's postgraduate employment rates are comparable with other Canadian jurisdictions, including British Columbia and Ontario. When we look at British Columbia and Ontario's latest employment rates, in 2021 they were at 93 per cent compared to Alberta's, which were at 95 per cent and 93 per cent comparably between 2021 and 2020.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you for the answer.

I know we'll run out of time here, but the next question I'd like you to think about when we get time back is: how did our outcomes and employment in terms of technical and trades education such as at Red Deer Polytechnic compare to universities? If you could just kind of think about that in terms of our focus on supporting the trades in terms of market demand.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We'll now move to the fourth rotation, Official Opposition, 10 minutes. Member Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much. I just want to go back to the question that I left before I ran out of time. What criteria does the ministry have for determining how much the amount of the base operating grant will change for each institution from year to year?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. As I noted, all institutions were given the three-year agreement, if you will, for their base operating grant reductions, and the criteria that was used to assess the base operating grant – actually, I'm just going to double-check with Olin because I don't have that criteria in front of me.

What we did have was an assessment of base population demand – I know that that was used in prior years as well – and then looking at the distribution of funding between cost per FLE and comparing that between different institutions.

That is the information that I have at this time, Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: All right. I'll move on, then.

Investment management agreements have been signed with each institution, and the IMA with MacEwan University, for example,

states that 15 per cent of its base operating grant is at risk in the '22-23 year, and that increases to 40 per cent by '24-25. What's the rationale for increasing the amount of at-risk funding so quickly?

Ms Pillipow: Sorry. Are you referring to an IMA that's reported in '21-22 annual report or outside of the reporting period, Chair?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, I mean, the annual report talks about signing investment management agreements. I'm referring to a specific investment management agreement that was signed with MacEwan University during the fiscal year. It states that the base operating grant at-risk funding rapidly increases to 40 per cent. Why is it the case?

Ms Pillipow: I'm just confirming, Chair, that I'm going to answer the question as it relates to the fiscal year 2021-22 in the annual report where Grant MacEwan would have signed an investment management agreement as required by the Post-secondary Learning Act for 5 per cent performance-based funding related to the work-integrated learning targets that were set.

9:30

Mr. Schmidt: What happens to the base operating grant if an institution fails to meet a target?

Ms Pillipow: The investment management agreements are set up with a series of baseline measurements. When Minister Nicolaides put the pause on the performance-based funding during COVID, the second year they looked at a work-integrated component. It was used as a measure to – I'm just looking at the targets. Just one second. Sorry. It was intended to increase the proportion of programs that were under the work-integrated learning target. What the ministry does is that they work with each institution on what we refer to as a tolerance band that is applied to that target, and then those institutions are required to report on the outcomes of the target that's set within the investment management agreement. The target and the tolerance band are both approved by the board of governors and the minister, and the minister's ultimate goal is that all the programs would contain the WIL component.

I'm also very happy to report that all the institutions did meet those targets in the reporting year for '21-22. If one of those institutions did not meet that target, then the minister would look to see if there was any room within the tolerance band for that target that could be met.

SFO, is there anything that you want to add with respect to funding?

Mr. Lovely: Thank you. If the institution did not meet their target in '21-22, the assessment occurs in '22-23, and then the reduction would occur to the base operating grant in the year following, so '23-24.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. So the reduction in the base operating grant does happen if they don't meet the target. Thank you very much.

What happens if they exceed a target? Is there any reward set up, a financial reward available to them through the base operating grant if they exceed their targets?

Ms Pillipow: The investment management agreements as they're set out right now are meant to achieve the target themselves. They are not meant to reward anything outside of the target that's set.

Thanks for the question.

Mr. Schmidt: It's just sticks, no carrots.

What happens to the money that is reduced, then, to the base operating grant of one institution when they fail to meet a target? It

sounds like you're budgeting for that money to be spent because you anticipate every institution to meet a target. If they don't, where does that money go?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. As noted, we do work on the targets with the institution. I just have the one target that was reported on in this reporting year for the work-integrated learning.

I'm just going to ask Olin Lovely, our SFO: do you have anything else that you'd want to add with respect to where the funding would go if there was?

This is a hypothetical situation, Chair. As the member knows, I've indicated that all institutions did meet their targets for the work-integrated learning.

Mr. Lovely: Thank you, Deputy. If the target wasn't achieved, the reduction would occur to the institution, and then there's sufficient time within our budget to be able to reallocate that internally as part of the next year's budget. As we're going through this process right now, we know that no work-integrated learning targets were missed, but if they were, then we would be going back to Treasury Board and indicating that we didn't need as much funding for that fiscal year.

Mr. Schmidt: So you're essentially clawing back the funding and turning it back to Treasury Board if they don't meet a target is what I heard.

Now I want to go back to the MacEwan investment management agreement. I recognize the deputy minister is a little bit reluctant to talk about this, but the metric that was set up in the '22-23 IMA that was signed includes a metric that is ultimately outside of the postsecondary institution's control, and that's employment outcomes. Systemic reviews of these performance-based funding schemes have conclusively . . .

Mr. Turton: Point of order.

The Chair: Sorry. Hon. member, I have a point of order on the floor.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Under 23(b). While I appreciate the enthusiasm for the hon. member to ask that question, he is specifically referencing 2022 to 2023, which is outside of the scope of PAC. Our time period that we're supposed to be looking at is 2021 to 2022, so I would just ask the hon. member to stick to the time period that we're talking about here today.

The Chair: If the hon. member would like to rephrase, he can go right ahead.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Obviously, these investment management agreements were in the works in the fiscal year under consideration, so I want to understand the ministry's thinking in developing these things.

The Chair: Okay. Ask it that way, then.

Mr. Schmidt: Yes. Thank you very much. I'm not going to restate my question to the chair again, but systemic reviews of performance-based funding schemes have conclusively demonstrated that when given employment outcomes, postsecondary institutions start to admit students who are more likely to get a job right after graduating, meaning that racialized students, who face more barriers to admission than before, find it even harder to get into those institutions. Now, this is well documented. I can speak that this information was provided to me when I was minister of this department. You guys know that this is happening. What safeguards

are in place to ensure that racialized students aren't denied access to higher education because these employment metrics are now being imposed on postsecondary institutions?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. Just to be clear, you're referring to the section in the annual report around the investment management agreements, Chair?

Mr. Schmidt: Yes.

Ms Pillipow: When we look at the parameters that are put in place for any postsecondary institution and the investment management agreement, as I mentioned, we set the performance-based indicator with the institution. They also have an option of determining the percentage that's allocated within that IMA to certain one of those measures. There are a couple of things that we don't have control of at the ministry, which is why we work in collaboration with the postsecondary institution and why the board of governors has to sign it off.

We don't have access to the postsecondary institution admission standards. Those are their standards that they look at. What we do do – as we do fund, as I mentioned, work-integrated learning opportunities, we have approved programs that focus on employment within those work-integrated learning programs. I think that I have no control over the admissions of a registrar for a university, but what we are doing is supporting the institutions to be able to have intakes for programs that meet the outcomes of accessibility through the identified goals in the Alberta 2030 strategy.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Schmidt: We know that this clause in an investment management agreement does create disadvantages for racialized students. Did the department consider collecting any data based on admissions just so that they can track over time how successful racialized students are at being admitted into postsecondaries by institutions to understand if this is a problem that needs to be addressed? We know that it's a problem in other jurisdictions that pursue this kind of funding agreement.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'm not familiar with the data that you're referring to, Member, so if there's anything that we have at the table that I'm not aware of, that's really helpful.

I think one of the things that I also want to note, since the member is asking questions about investment management agreements, is that Minister Nicolaides has also really placed a lot of emphasis on the importance of implementing all aspects of Alberta 2030 and the investment management agreements, which includes the international education strategy and, as I mentioned, work-integrated learning. That is an important aspect for us to be able to look at, bringing in students that are in need of supporting the labour force as well as meeting the outcomes that we've identified in our international education strategy.

The Chair: All righty, then. Government side, 10 minutes for our fourth rotation, please.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you very much. Just to restate the question that I had asked in terms of employment of graduates in the trades, could you please share with us the trend and what that looks like in the trades vis-à-vis other options for education?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you very much for the question, Chair. I'm going to give a base-level answer, and then I'm wondering if my colleague Mike Fernandez wants to give a bit of data. A couple of things. We do use the graduate employment outcomes survey,

which I mentioned to the previous question – and that’s measured biannually – and we look at the apprenticeship education survey as well. So we do pay attention to graduate outcomes for both trades and postsecondary degree programs.

The employment rates of graduates in publicly funded postsecondary institutions, so it doesn’t include apprenticeship, has been very stable over time. We look at about 95 per cent of the graduates from the class of ’19-20 were employed approximately two years after graduation. The employment rates for the graduates vary slightly by demographic group, but generally an increase is based on credential level. We also look at the survey from 2020-2021 for apprenticeship graduates, and we see that 92 per cent of those reported being employed following their schooling, which is comparable to the results from the survey that was taken in 2018-2019.

Do you have anything you want to add?

9:40

Mr. Fernandez: No. That was great, Lora. Thank you.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Stephan: Sure. I just have a supplemental question. In terms of graduate employment what impact, if any, were you able to observe as a result of the COVID environment which students were trying to work and make a living under shortly after graduation? Did you have any findings from that when you were speaking to students and finding if they were able to find work? Certainly, I’m sure a number of government policies and actions did impact employment opportunities. Could you share some information about that?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The best indicator that we have on employment postgraduation is the data that I referenced from the graduate outcomes survey, which we also use – it’s a lagging indicator, so the data that I had mentioned from here would be that we’d seen 95 per cent of students from that ’19-20 range were indicating that they were employed. As I noted earlier, though, obviously in 2021-2022 we saw a much higher unemployment rate across Alberta. I don’t have specific information on whether or not we worked with the students past the graduate outcomes survey, though.

We also had difficulty getting some data outside of our graduate outcomes survey because some of the businesses that we worked with under WIL were not operating during COVID, so we did have a little bit of a lagging indicator number. Aside from the outcome survey that – Carmen, can you confirm if we have any other data?

Ms Baldwin-Dery: Thank you, Deputy. I would need to probably go back to the data team on that, but one thing – and I’m expanding a wee bit on your question here, but you’re speaking to employment postgraduation. Certainly, one thing we observed is that through the efforts to expand the work-integrated learning pieces, so whether that’s somebody who’s in a diploma or certificate program who just needs a two-, three-, four-, five-, six-week experience versus somebody who’s doing a whole-term co-op type of experience – because many of the businesses and employers were struggling, it was harder to find those experiential opportunities for students when they were in their program. We know that those experiential opportunities often lead to employment post.

Mr. Stephan: Sure. Maybe if there’s any information that you could provide to the committee, specific information on how the job market for graduates was impacted during the COVID, that would be helpful for us to learn from and I’m sure for your department and this government.

Thanks.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. We’ll look at the data that we have from the graduate outcomes survey, that we can provide to the committee, and then, as I mentioned before, I’ll see if there is data that I haven’t seen, and we can also assess whether it would answer the question that’s been asked by the committee.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you.

With that, I’ll end my questions. Thanks.

Ms Lovely: Madam Chair, through you to the deputy and the team, I just wanted to say that my colleagues have made reference to Camrose, and it’s because I speak very dearly of the activity that happens there, including Augustana campus. They have a number of international students that are registered there and were registered during COVID. I’m interested in the international education strategy outlined on page 36 and the strategies used to ensure that Alberta’s postsecondary system retained the current number of international students and was able to keep attracting and enrolling new ones despite the challenges with international travel for students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Can you outline how effective these strategies were at retaining international students? How many international students did Alberta have before the pandemic and how many during the 2021-22 year?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. This is definitely an issue that’s affected many postsecondary institutions, including Camrose. Thank you. We do see that the international students did continue to travel to Alberta during the pandemic and to study at institutions that had completed a pandemic response plan. Those plans were fairly comprehensive. I won’t go into too much detail, but they did require a 14-day quarantine period.

We also facilitated adoption of any temporary changes to the postgraduate work permit program. All students who were enrolled in that program as of March 2020 and then started a program as of the spring of 2020 weren’t required to complete 50 per cent of their programs of study in Canada. That helped to increase the number of international students that were able to come. Then up to 100 per cent of their program could be completed online, so we provided more opportunities for those international students to be able to practise those studies if they couldn’t come to Canada during the pandemic.

We did see, though, in the number per our data that we have on international students a small decline in 2020 and 2021, but we are starting to see some recovery. For example, in the number of international students over the last four years: 2018-19 we had 25,230 international students; in 2019-20, 28,245; and then we did see a dip in 2020-2021 to 27,228. Then we’re starting to see an uptick in the last reporting year to 29,990.

Thank you.

Ms Lovely: Thank you for the answer. On page 16 of the annual report it explains how the community adult learning program ensures that adult learners can access part-time, nonformal literacy and foundational learning opportunities. Can you elaborate on how this program supports adult literacy among Albertans?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. This is referring to an important program that member asked about earlier, the community adult learning program. This program provides \$16 million in annual funding to support foundational learning opportunities and approximately \$2 million in annual funding to professional development to increase their capacity to deliver quality foundational learning programs. This would include anything from part-time, nonformal literacy and foundational literacy opportunities.

CALP, as we call it, is a really important program as well because it supports rural, remote, and urban communities across Alberta, which is a really important access outcome. They are working to meet those foundational needs, and often those are the only community-based providers that can deliver that face-to-face program in some of those smaller communities.

To ensure access, we funded over 80 unique organizations to serve all those urban, rural, and remote communities, and this includes Indigenous communities as well. Specifically, we looked at literacy and foundational learning, that are funded under CALP, so that would focus on adult literacy, numeracy, skills for learning, basic digital, English language learning.

As well, community capacity building was a really important part of the outreach portion, looking at general equivalency and diploma support; mental health; substance abuse; family violence awareness; Indigenous, French, and local language cultures; diversity and inclusion; and parenting skills.

As well, these programs provide family literacy programs and, importantly as well, looking at those learner support services so that they can have job search and résumé support as well as any sort of exam supports for them during the process.

Thank you very much for the question. That's the end of my answer.

Ms Lovely: Thank you. What has been done to address recommendation 6 from the Auditor General?

The Chair: Okay. Well, we're now on to the fifth rotation. We have three minutes for the Official Opposition and three minutes for the government to read any questions into the record that we then ask the department to follow up on within 30 days in writing to the committee clerk.

With that, I will turn things over to the Official Opposition.

Mr. Schmidt: No additional questions, Madam Chair.

The Chair: All right.

Over here? Sure.

Ms Lovely: If I could have the answer for: what has been done to address recommendation 6 from the Auditor General, and also what has been done by the ministry to address recommendation 7 from the Auditor General's office?

The Chair: Deputy, that was just for written follow-up. There's no need to follow up at this time. In writing is fine.

I would like to thank officials from the Ministry of Advanced Education and the OAG for attending and responding to committee members' questions. We ask that responses to any outstanding questions be provided in writing.

Sorry, folks. Just making sure that there were no other written questions? Oh, there was. I'm sorry, Member Stephan. That was my fault.

Mr. Stephan: Sure. I'd like to ask for a written response of any information that you have on student satisfaction with their postsecondary experience, how that was impacted in the COVID environment, with many institutions going online and having other access restrictions into their physical facilities and sports.

Thanks.

9:50

The Chair: A couple minutes left, but it looks like the government side is finished with that, then. I will not interrupt you again. Thank you.

Now we're on to other business, friends. We do have a possible motion that has come through some conversation between myself and the deputy chair based on past practice of when the community and social services ministry comes to visit us, based on their old name and their old lines of work. We have had American sign language interpretation for that department to come, so we have a possible motion to invite ASL interpretation for the December 20 meeting as well. I believe there is a possible motion if we have one up there on the screens for members to have a look at. If I could ask for a mover.

Mr. Turton: Yeah. I move that motion, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay. The deputy chair has moved it. Is there any discussion on this motion? Sure. Member Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Sorry. Just a question about why we wouldn't have ASL at every meeting. I'm just curious more about: is it a cost issue? I appreciate there will be particular interest in the December 20 meeting, but certainly access is important.

The Chair: Yeah. There's some additional context from the table here.

Ms Robert: Thanks, Madam Chair. You know, that is a committee decision. If the committee would like to request that ASL be sought for the other meetings as well, that's totally up to the committee to do. Of course, the considerations in the short term are availability. In anticipation of this motion coming forward, we have reached out to the interpreter company that we use to provide interpretation for the daily Routine every day, and we're hopeful that they've got someone available or a pair of people available for the meeting on the 20th. We're just awaiting a response.

The Chair: Go ahead, Member Turton.

Mr. Turton: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just wanted to say again how much in support of this particular motion I am, I think especially given just the nature of the information that will be presented and the discussion. I think it would just be wonderful to be as inclusive as possible so that the maximum number of residents can pay attention to the proceedings of that PAC meeting on the 20th. Thank you.

The Chair: Member Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Thank you for that, Chair. I think that I just want to echo some of what MLA Pancholi just said about, you know, looking into – perhaps we don't have enough time to bring in American sign language for next week but that, going forward, we have ASL at all meetings. I think that's just an outstanding suggestion.

Thank you.

The Chair: I think what I'm hearing is that if, just to propose a way forward, we were to move ahead with this particular motion for the December 20 meeting, then the committee – and I don't know if we need to pass a specific motion to this effect to direct the chair and the deputy chair to examine the options for future meetings during the spring sitting. Do we consider ourselves so directed? Yes? Okay. I think that is reasonable, and we will undertake and we'll ask folks to discuss that with the company that the LAO hires for these things.

This motion is moved, then, by Mr. Turton. I'm not sure if I got a seconder, though, so that was on me. I've got one over here. Member Renaud. Good. Do we have any further discussion on the

motion? I'll read it into the record, then. It's moved by Member Turton that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts direct the Legislative Assembly Office to seek to have American sign language interpretation at its meeting on December 20, 2022.

Looking to the floor for any further discussion.

Seeing none, all in favour? Any opposed? Thank you.

That motion is carried.

I'll also just note for the record, hon. members, that written responses were received over the summer since our last meeting on May 24. These were the ministry names prior to the cabinet renaming and shuffle in October. We had Infrastructure; Municipal Affairs; Executive Council; Indigenous Relations; Culture and Status of

Women; Jobs, Economy and Innovation. All of the written responses are posted for the committee members as they were received, and those documents will be made publicly available shortly.

Now we will move on to the date of our next meeting, which is next Tuesday, December 13, 2022, at 8 a.m., with the Ministry of Children's Services.

I'll now call for a motion to adjourn. Would a member move that the meeting be adjourned? Member Pancholi. All in favour? Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:55 a.m.]

