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Chair

Mr. Ed Komarnicki

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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•(1615)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): I'll call the meeting to order.

Once again, we apologize for having you wait. There were some intervening bells and a vote, but hopefully that will be behind us now for the rest of the time that we have allotted to us.

My suggestion would be that we hear your presentation—I'll see if there's consent—and then if someone has particular questions I'll just allow the questions to be asked, rather than going back and forth, so that we can move to the next portion a little more quickly. Let's start with the presentation.

Mr. Gingras or Ms. Scott, are you presenting first?

Oh, it's Mr. Conrad. All right.

We'll start with you, Mr. Conrad, and then all of you can present. Then we'll open it up to some questions.

Mr. Alexis Conrad (Director General, Horizontal Management and Integration Directorate, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and distinguished members of the committee. On behalf of the department, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Alexis Conrad, and I am the director general of the horizontal management and integration directorate of the skills and employment branch. I have with me today Catherine Scott, from the labour market integration directorate, and Yves Gingras, from the economic policy directorate at the strategic policy and research branch.

HRSDC was pleased to appear at the beginning of your study on March 12. At that time, my colleagues provided details on HRSDC's programming and how it helps to address skill shortages, including those in high-demand occupations. I know that since then you have heard testimony from a wide variety of stakeholders and are currently completing your study. Hopefully, our presentation and the discussion following will help you finalize your work, and we look forward to seeing your report.

[Translation]

As you know, the Canadian economy is undergoing important structural changes. We are witnessing the growth and decline of various industries and sectors.

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Conrad. We are having some trouble with the interpretation. Just a moment, please.

Sorry about that, but I think we have it now.

Please continue from where you left off, Mr. Conrad.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Conrad: At the same time, the Canadian population is aging, which means that despite immigration, our labour force will grow more slowly than in the past.

•(1620)

[English]

Some parts of the country are already experiencing tight labour markets. Some sectors and regions have skill surpluses and high employment rates, while others are facing increasing scarcity of labour with the right skills. Addressing these challenges is critical to enabling individuals, employers, and governments to make key hiring and investment decisions.

HRSDC is taking a number of steps to help address these challenges, particularly through our investments in skills training and employability programming, and our efforts to enhance labour market flexibility, or the flow of workers between regions and sectors. Permit me to take a minute or two to address each in turn.

A significant component of HRSDC's labour market programming involves transfers to the provinces and territories. Each year the Government of Canada transfers almost \$2.5 billion under the labour market development agreements and labour market agreements, and over \$218 million to provinces through the labour market agreements for persons with disabilities. In addition, budget 2011 announced that the targeted initiative for older workers, a cost-shared program, would be extended by \$50 million over two years until March 31, 2014. Using these transfers, provinces and territories have the flexibility to respond to their own labour market needs and priorities.

The Government of Canada also has targeted initiatives for youth, older workers, aboriginal people, and people with disabilities. For example, as part of the economic action plan 2012, the Government of Canada is investing an additional \$50 million in the youth employment strategy, which helps young people gain the skills, abilities, and work experience they need to make a successful transition to the labour market.

Increasing the overall supply and mobility of skilled trade persons is a key priority, since we know that many future job vacancies will be in the trades. The government has a long history of working with provinces and territories and industry in the Red Seal program. This has resulted in common occupational standards and examinations for the 53 Red Seal trades.

To help increase the number of apprentices, the government has recently introduced a number of measures. The apprenticeship grants offer up to \$4,000 to support Red Seal apprentices. Over 330,000 grants have been issued so far. In order to help offset the costs associated with training, apprentices can also receive employment insurance benefits during their classroom training. In 2010-11, \$172 million in EI benefits was paid to apprentices.

To encourage employers to hire and train Red Seal apprentices, the government offers the apprenticeship job creation tax credit, and recently announced a one-year \$205-million extension of the temporary hiring credit for small businesses. Many provinces and territories have developed complementary programs for apprentices using federal transfers. For example, Ontario has launched a completion bonus in non-Red Seal trades.

In addition to our skills programming, our department's efforts focus on enhancing labour market flexibility. Generally speaking, Canada has a flexible and responsive labour market; however, supply and demand are not always perfectly lined up. For example, demand for labour can rise suddenly when a new project is developed. Labour markets adjust in response to these changes. Wages rise. Employers change their hiring practices. Individuals acquire new skills or choose to move from one part of the country to another. In this regard, the government plays a key role in providing labour market information that helps individuals and employers make better employment choices.

HRSDC, in collaboration with Statistics Canada, delivers a large amount of learning and labour market information to individuals, businesses, educational institutions, and governments. We have a range of different tools to measure labour market tightness, and are continually refining our approaches to build a better picture of current and evolving labour market opportunities.

The Working in Canada website is the Government of Canada's single window, combining jobs and learning and labour market information such as wages, occupational forecasts, licensing and certification, skills requirements, and education and training. This information helps students and workers choose the right fields of study and find out where their particular skills may be in demand. It also helps educational institutions make decisions about curriculum development and admission levels based on anticipated demand in emerging or growing sectors. Over the past year a number of improvements have been made to the site to improve the quantity and quality of information that is available.

In July 2011 Minister Finley announced a new approach to addressing skill shortages, an approach that would gather critical information for job seekers and employers and make it more readily available to the Working in Canada portal.

The sectoral intelligence program will aim to support the development of sectoral labour market trends and gaps reports, along with occupational standards and certification programs to assist with workforce skills upgrading activities.

[*Translation*]

In addition, HRSDC and Statistics Canada have worked together to develop new aggregate job vacancy information at national, provincial and industry levels on a monthly basis. This improved labour market information will contribute to a better match between skills and labour market demands and will complement the information provided by the Canadian Occupational Projections System.

[*English*]

The Canadian occupational projection system provides projections of trends in occupational labour supply and labour demand over the medium term at the aggregate national level. While it is not the sole source of occupational projections, COPS does signal which occupations may face gap shortages or surpluses of workers into the medium term—over the next 10 years. For example, COPS projects that there will be a shortage of supervisors in mining, oil, and gas.

Let me conclude by thanking you for the opportunity to contribute once again to your study. Ensuring that we have the skilled workers to drive growth and competitiveness is crucial to Canada's continued prosperity. As I have discussed today, HRSDC works with a number of partners and stakeholders to address skills and labour market demands across the country, from measures that support skills development to those that improve the movement of workers between regions and sectors.

My colleagues and I would be happy to respond to any questions you have.

The Chair: Thank you for that presentation.

I guess that will be the only presentation from the three of you and then you'll be open to questions.

Just in a quick show of hands, how many are interested in posing questions from both sides? Okay, then, we'll go to our usual format.

Before we start, I have just a quick question. We were in Saskatchewan and heard from a witness with regard to the SaskJobs website that the Province of Saskatchewan has for southeastern Saskatchewan. It tracks all the employers that are looking to fill particular occupations. People do go to that site. Is that site connected somehow to HRSDC? Secondly, I read this morning that the Atlantic premiers are getting together to gather some labour market information in the Atlantic provinces. Are you tied into that process or to either process?

Can we have a quick response to that? Then we'll start with Ms. Charlton.

Mr. Alexis Conrad: In respect to your first question, unfortunately I don't know if we're tied into that specific website. The department has made a lot of efforts to link our Working in Canada portal with other sites offering labour market information and with job sites, but unfortunately I don't know if—

The Chair: Okay. SaskJobs is something that the Province of Saskatchewan has invested quite a lot in with respect to the local market, so it might something that we want to talk about. The other, you're not...?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: I haven't seen the announcement from the Atlantic premiers. We have an ongoing conversation with provinces around this issue, so I'm sure it's something that will come up in conversation.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Charlton, go ahead.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In the interests of letting everybody ask a question, is it okay if I don't take the whole five minutes? I don't know how formally you want to do this and whether I should be sharing my time or...?

The Chair: It seems like there's enough interest from everybody, so we'll just go round by round.

If you want to share your five minutes, go ahead.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Sure—I'll share my five minutes with whoever.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead.

Ms. Chris Charlton: I have two quick questions.

One is that I'm profoundly worried about losing a whole lot of detailed information on the labour market, particularly as a result of things like the cancellation of the sector councils and others. I wonder if you could speak a bit about your sources of labour market data and what we might be able to do to expand those sources and to make sure that data is reliable.

For the second question I have, the chair just twigged me to it. Yes, we did hear a lot about SaskJobs, and it sounds amazing, but one of the things we're doing, I think, is creating this overreliance on online tools, and for job seekers in particular. Literacy is a huge concern in some demographic sectors, and online literacy even more so. I wonder what you're doing to complement your portal and

online strategies to reach out in other non-technological ways, if you will.

Thanks.

• (1625)

Mr. Yves Gingras (Senior Director, Economic Policy Directorate, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): I can start with some elements of the answer, and maybe my colleague Alexis could follow up with some more information.

In the department we continuously look for ways to improve data. In fact, we have recently financed the development of a collection of information on job vacancies. This is something that Statistics Canada has been doing for us. It helps provide a better basis for us to understand the dynamics of the labour market.

We have also developed a relationship with some private sector businesses that bring us information about job vacancies. That is also available for us to expand our capacity to understand the dynamics of the labour market. It's another example of the things that have been accomplished lately in trying to improve the data. Sometimes we run into difficulties, but there's new data being put out there that the department has been actively promoting.

When it comes to servicing people with online tools, I would like to point out that my understanding is that Service Canada has some strategies to make sure that there are other ways to reach out to people and that the information flows to clients. There are strategies within Service Canada to make sure that our messages and our information are delivered and are reaching people who may not have online access or have limited access to our online products.

Mr. Alexis Conrad: With regard to your comment around the sector council program, I'm sure you know the minister has announced a successor program to that, the sectoral intelligence program, which is approximately \$30 million. Part of it will focus on sectoral-based LMI, to try to build that into the system, and eventually that will get morphed into Working in Canada tools and we'll make it available that way.

We expect later this year there will actually be a call for concepts. At that point, there will be a little more clarity in terms of what the department is looking for.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Am I right, then, that you don't know at this point how and how much of that information is going to be at our disposal and that we can rely on, pending that request for proposals?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Essentially we've been working with the sector councils and other people who have interest in the program to get a sense of what their priorities are and to make sure that our call for proposals is consistent with what's going on in the labour market at the moment. That's one of the ways we're trying to fill that in.

Also, as you know, the department did cut the core funding to the sector council program, but the sector councils do have other sources of revenue. We expect in some cases they will continue to do some of the work they're currently doing.

The Chair: You have a minute left.

Ms. Boutin-Sweet, one minute, so make your question short, if you could.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Conrad, you referred to programs for aboriginals. You said that the government is investing in a strategy targeting employment for youth. You also said that the objective was to help young people acquire the skills, abilities and work experience needed for a successful transition into the labour market.

However, up until last year, there was already such a program in existence, the Wapikoni Mobile program, which consisted of itinerant workshops and studios where videos and music could be created. The idea was to allow young people to acquire basic skills.

Many witnesses have told us that basic skills are essential and that they should be the starting point, before more specific job training is provided. I find it very strange that last year the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development abolished the half-million dollar subsidy for that program, when our study showed that it did a very good job of meeting the needs of young aboriginals who wanted to join the labour market.

Why was that decision taken?

• (1630)

[English]

The Chair: You certainly used up a full minute and then some, but if you want to have a short response, that would be fine.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: I'd like a long response, but....

The Chair: Does anyone wish to respond?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Yes, I will.

The Chair: Okay, a short response.

Mr. Alexis Conrad: In regard to the specific project you mentioned, I'm not familiar with the project, but I would note that the government has increased the youth employment strategy envelope by \$50 million. A number of our aboriginal programs, including the skills and partnership fund, which picks up a lot of the elements of previous programs, offer significant amounts of money to support youth.

One of the things we do know, and I agree, is that where people lack the basic and essential skills, they will struggle to get into and stay in the labour market. Lots of our programming—both within the youth employment strategy envelope but also through our office of literacy and essential skills—is targeted at working with provinces and with employers to increase investment in those kinds of interventions, so that people can move up their literacy and essential skills, and actually move into the workforce more easily and stay in the workforce for longer.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, Mr. Shory, go ahead.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses.

I am from Calgary, Alberta, so I know that there is a huge shortage of skills and general labour in the energy sector. But during this study, I think we can all agree, we've found out that there are skills

and labour shortages in other sectors as well, not only in the energy sector. Of course during this study we are trying to identify and obtain some solutions or suggestions on how to fix this issue.

Our government is working with businesses to identify and try to fix the skill shortage and labour problem. Can you provide some information to us on how the federal government, specifically your department, HRSDC, is working with private industry in order to address the skills and labour shortage issues, if you are?

Mr. Yves Gingras: I will try to outline some elements.

Alexis, feel free to complement, if you wish.

When it comes to working with the private sector, I can give one good example of a recent accomplishment. We've been able to incorporate in our basis of information—when it comes to labour market information—job postings that are collected by the private sector to improve the type of information that we bring. We know that the market takes time to adjust and may not fully adjust, so helping with better information is one way that we think we can support adjustments in the labour market.

We have a labour market in Canada that's very dynamic. There are a lot of changes occurring. Jobs often are filled by people who are currently employed. They will switch from one job to another. When we look at those jobs that are vacant, using information from the private sector is, we think, up-to-date information; we have one provider who provides us with three updates a week. So we have very up-to-date information that helps us complement the national surveys that we have and the information that we get mainly from the surveys of Statistics Canada.

That's a good example of where we partner with the private sector and get information in a cost-effective manner.

Ms. Catherine Scott (Director, Trades and Apprenticeship Division, Labour Market Integration Directorate, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): I'll just add to that in terms of entry into the skilled trades. There has been a significant investment in both the apprenticeship incentive grants and the apprenticeship completion grants to encourage individuals to enter into the trades and to support them through their training. The apprenticeship job creation tax credit is another example of a support directly to employers to hire apprentices.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Thank you.

I have a question on the temporary foreign workers program. During this study we have found out one thing. On the one hand, we have so much unemployment in some areas, where people are looking for jobs; on the other hand, we have a shortage of workers and sometimes in the same industry, the same sector, the same businesses.

I have found out that LMOs are issued in some sectors where people are looking for jobs, where Canadians are looking for jobs. I'd like you to comment on the amount of temporary foreign worker applications that you are aware of and also if they are affecting our job vacancy statistics.

•(1635)

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Somewhere I have them, but I don't have in my hands the actual number of temporary foreign workers. We can certainly provide you with the information on the number of LMO applications.

I would say that, as you know, the temporary foreign worker program is designed to be kind of the last choice when we can't find Canadians to fill jobs. There are occasions where in the same sector you see temporary foreign workers and domestic workers. We go through a rigorous process to ensure that employers are only bringing in temporary foreign workers when there is no domestic supply available.

One of the other things that the minister has talked about recently is improving job alerts and providing more job opportunities to people who are unemployed and on EI, so they can actually get back to work more quickly. So they will receive frequent job alerts for jobs available in their field, in their area, that they can apply to, which hopefully should place them in any positions that they can actually work in.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Talking about this new program the minister announced, it is basically connecting the dots, I would say, for job seekers and the jobs. What resources are available to HRSDC in this regard?

The Chair: That will be your final question.

If you could do a short response, it would be appreciated. Go ahead.

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Thank you.

Certainly, one of the areas where the department has focused its attention recently is what we call the accelerated labour market opinion, which is largely in response to employer demands and is an effort to speed up the labour market opinion processing times to get applications down to about 10 days. Employers who are in good standing with the program can attest to what they've done in terms of advertising the job to speed up the process. It's a significant effort by the department to respond to employer demands and to the needs of the industry.

In response to your previous question, I would just say that in 2011 we put a total of 151,520 labour positions on positive labour market opinions. That has increased from 131,000 in 2009 and from 140,505 in 2010.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We will now move to the member from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): That's perfect.

[*Translation*]

I would like to raise three points and then listen to your replies.

There has been a lot of talk about Job Alert, an on-line system. I share my colleague's fears in that regard. Basic programs for community access computer centres will no longer be funded. In certain areas, where up to 40% of residents regularly look for work, particularly because of seasonal realities, those workers often have

some challenges in that they lack essential, basic skills. In many cases, they don't have access to computers. In addition, the community access computer centres have been eliminated, and these were used a great deal in certain towns.

Given those circumstances, on the one hand I wonder how such decisions can be made, and on the other, how anyone can think that Internet alerts will reach all of the Canadians who need that information. That was my first point.

When we toured the Canadian west, not one witness told us that Canadians were lazy, or were refusing to work. However, we heard a lot of testimony from industry representatives, chamber of commerce members, owners of Tim Hortons, according to which the social environment makes access to the labour market difficult for some.

For instance, in Fort McMurray, a very likeable gentleman told us that there were many young people who have the necessary skills to drive his trucks, but because of the prevalence of soft drugs or alcohol consumption, 70% of them do not pass the test after three months. The problem was not a shortage of candidates, but a substantive social problem. In Whitehorse, a chamber of commerce representative told us that the cost of living is so high that single mothers cannot have access to the labour market because they cannot afford the high cost of day care.

Was your department ever asked to examine those issues and determine how many people could have access to the labour market but are prevented from doing so by this type of environmental or social issue? Is this a part of the department's duties?

Furthermore, during the committee's hearings in the Canadian west, one witness suggested that an accelerated mechanism be put in place to process applications from those employers who have shown that they comply with the TFWP rules. It was pointed out that this worked better in Quebec than elsewhere.

Is there some way of facilitating awarding permanent resident status to workers who have been in the country for a long time, especially those the community says it needs, if they have been working here for three years, for instance?

•(1640)

Mr. Yves Gingras: I could answer the first two questions, the first having to do with access to information. You referred to the Job Alert program, that seeks to provide information to people, and to the fact that people sometimes have trouble accessing it. You spoke about the closure of centres where the information is available.

As I mentioned previously, I know that in its communication strategies, Service Canada takes into account the fact that some people have very limited access to information. They may not have access to computers, for instance, or are cut off from certain media. The strategies to reach those people take that reality into account. All of that is developed by the department as a complement to the basic strategies that are increasingly based on computers and access to the Internet. We know that people with low incomes, in particular, do not have access to that and that is taken into consideration by Service Canada when it develops its strategies.

Mr. François Lapointe: Are there already some preliminary solutions for these more specific groups who do not have access to information, or to very little of it, and whose basic skills are a problem?

Mr. Yves Gingras: I know that there are strategies directed at individuals who use libraries or centres where computers are available.

There are also centres in cities or in rural areas where people can have access to computers. If access to computers is a problem for people who have limited basic skills, Service Canada can take people to Service Canada centres to help them in other ways. There are ways of bringing people to the centre, and helping them with their needs so that they will understand the information.

Regarding your second question, you spoke about pools of potential workers. The issue is not necessarily that those workers do not have the skills, but they sometimes have problems integrating the labour market. They may have a drug dependency, such as in the example you gave. These are really issues we discuss with the provinces in the context of employability. In that case, we turn to social assistance programs, for instance, where we take into account the fact that the person may or may not be employable. Within the social assistance programs, the provinces have other targeted programs.

The answer is, thus, that we have data on socio-economic characteristics and the problems people face in integrating the labour market. A large part of the measures are taken through social assistance programs that fall under provincial jurisdiction.

I know that several provinces have adapted programs to the type of clientele they deal with, to help them when there are specific non-employability issues. For instance, if the issue is one of drug dependency, there are some very specific public health programs that are available. However, this is really a matter of provincial jurisdiction.

That said, these are labour-market-related issues. In our discussions, and when we do our analyses and our research, we share this type of thing with our provincial colleagues and public servants. Indeed, at the federal level, there is an interest in removing barriers and difficulties these people face. We share our information with our provincial colleagues so as to help them to intervene in an appropriate way, which will give us a better performance on the labour market.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Your time is up.

We'll move to Mr. McColeman.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Thank you for coming and describing really effectively the things that are in place, which, in some ways, strike me—and I just want verification on this—as being new inventive ways of doing things a little better than we have done with other programming. Is it correct to make that observation based on what you've said to us today?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Yes.

We have a lot of experience with a lot of these programs. We've adapted as we've gone along. Through some of our new programming, we've taken positive experiences from the previous programs or interventions that we know work, based on our assessments and evaluations, and tried to improve the program going forward, and I think we're seeing some really positive results.

Mr. Phil McColeman: My sense of your efforts, and the efforts of the ministry in general, is that this is a constantly moving target. Adjustments need to be made constantly, and you constantly need to challenge yourself, day in and day out, by asking whether there is a more effective way to do things. Is that something that's part of the culture of your job?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: I think absolutely it is, yes.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I want to relate a quick example of one of the programs that has worked quite effectively for a constituent I just met. He's a young fella—well, not really that young. He's in his mid to late thirties. He'd worked in the food service industry as a cook and almost had the skill set of a chef but had never been able to get the Red Seal. His company went bankrupt, and he lost his job and was on employment insurance benefits. Now he's enrolled in the Red Seal program and will get his Red Seal, I think, in less than two years, because of the fast track that it's enabled him to go on. A lot of his hours in the industry will count towards that Red Seal.

It's situations like that where I compliment the ministry on recognizing that there are people out there, in that capacity, who through no fault of their own lose their jobs. They may want to upgrade and may want to get to that certification level they haven't had in the past.

Are there any other examples like that, which you're aware of and that you might share with the committee? Any of you?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Certainly one of the department's focuses has been on working with provinces on exactly those kinds of issues. We are transferring almost \$2.5 billion a year to provinces both for EI clients, through the labour market development agreements, and for non-EI clients through labour market agreements for those exact kinds of interventions, in addition to the funding we provide through our own targeted programs.

Mr. Phil McColeman: This is my last question, Mr. Chair. I'm just curious, what does “horizontal management” mean?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: That may be the most difficult question of all to answer.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I used to know a guy named “Horizontal Forbes” because he slept in the back of the bus on the way to hockey games. What does horizontal management mean?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Essentially, I deal with a lot of the program policy files that cross different areas of our branch or department. It's a very bureaucratic term for working well with others and coordinating.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move now to Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thanks very much. Thank you for being here today.

There are 250,000 unfilled jobs in Canada right now. With regard to the recent changes to the EI, how many jobs do you feel will be filled as a result of these changes? Would you have done an analysis prior to motivate the changes?

• (1650)

Mr. Yves Gingras: No, I don't think we have a number to offer to you.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Okay, so you haven't done an analysis there.

Mr. Yves Gingras: We have done lots of analysis on the proposed changes. I don't think we could offer you a specific number. The changes that are made are going in the direction of supporting adjustments, reducing unemployment spells, and making sure people go back to work more quickly. I don't think we have quantified the impact in that manner.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Thank you.

The study that you undertook about mobility, moving people from Atlantic Canada and Quebec to job openings in the west, where would that have been initiated? Where would the impetus for that study have been initiated?

Mr. Yves Gingras: I'm not aware of the study you're referring to. I would be surprised that.... I'm not aware of that study.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You're not aware of that study.

There are about 130,000 unemployed Canadians in Alberta and Saskatchewan, more than in the Atlantic provinces combined. Is there any kind of study that's ongoing now as to how we can train Albertans and Saskatchewanians to take those jobs, as opposed to movement? Is there anything ongoing now?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Certainly a lot of our focus has been on where we transfer money to provinces to allow them to invest in their own local labour market priorities to retrain and to upskill people who have either suffered job loss or are not firmly attached to the labour market, so that they can move into areas and jobs where there are actually vacancies.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: There's no current, real, major study going on as to how to move that group of people, those 130,000, toward.... Would that be an ongoing thing, or not really?

You're not involved in that, anyway. Would that be more provincial? Okay.

There's just one case in point, and it's as much cautionary as anything. In the backgrounder that was provided with regard to the recent EI changes, the department came forward with a number of examples.

There was one example that struck me—the one about the unemployed nannies collecting EI in Ontario. The number of nannies collecting EI was about the same as the number of temporary workers who are currently doing that job. But with the changes to the EI, you guys wouldn't be able to get a fix as to whether or not those nannies live within a one-hour radius or anything like that...?

Here's the concern. What struck me was that the information and the examples coming out of the department were somewhat misleading. They would paint the picture that there are 700 nannies sort of sitting around while 700 temporary foreign workers assume those jobs. Do you see the concern I would have with trying to paint that picture?

The Chair: I'm not sure if you would be comfortable answering that or not, but if you wish to answer it, go ahead. I think we're straying a bit from the object of our study—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Well—

The Chair: —but I'll leave it to you as to whether you wish to answer it or not.

Mr. Alexis Conrad: To be honest, I haven't seen the exact example you're referring to, so it would be difficult—

The Chair: So it's a hypothetical—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: With those examples—

Mr. Alexis Conrad: It would be difficult to comment—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You haven't seen those examples? They were part of the announcement of the EI changes—

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...the study—

The Chair: Just a moment.

Go ahead.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): There are specific assistant and associate deputy ministers who are responsible for employment insurance. If we do end up going down that path at some point in time, I would encourage the member to ask these questions of that individual as opposed to these individuals here, who are here with respect to the specific study.

The Chair: Yes, I've considered that.

My view is that you're going to a place where I don't think it's fair for these witnesses to answer, so I would rule it out of order.

If you want to reframe that, go ahead, but—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Chair, with absolute respect, we know the minister has said that because of the “unprecedented skills shortages, it will be critical to better connect Canadians with available jobs” and has announced “improvements to EI that will help Canadians who want to get work, get back to work”. So—

The Chair: If you want to ask how that might be—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: That's a quote from—

The Chair: —you're certainly welcome, but to suggest that somehow there is a misrepresentation wouldn't be correct.

Mr. Gingras, if you wish to address the last question...?

Mr. Yves Gingras: Maybe not fully, but what I can bring to it is that on the additional information we are collecting on job vacancies, we are making efforts to bring it to EI clients so they know there are jobs available. This is going in the right direction in the sense that we are trying to help people identify where the jobs are. The objective of this is to reduce the unemployment spells and make sure the jobs that are vacant are filled by Canadians. That's certainly an objective that we're pursuing.

•(1655)

The Chair: Okay. I think that's fair.

Your time is up on that.

Mr. Daniel, you have a few questions. Go ahead.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): My questions relate to the national occupation classifications. We've had a number of witnesses come in and talk about that.

Part of the concerns that they've raised is the fact that the granularity of these codes may not be as good as it could be in terms of identifying the specific skills that are lacking in some of the professions. Can you comment on that?

Mr. Yves Gingras: The projections that are produced at our department use the national occupation classifications, so we don't use a specific set. We use what's used by others. We don't have our own. We use the standard that most people would use in Canada. The projections are done for 140 occupations. If we were to go beyond that, we would go to another level of granularity, bringing us to considering 500 occupations.

When we look at smaller occupations, at smaller regions, we often run into statistical difficulties because we don't have enough information. Going to the next level represents substantial difficulties for us in producing high-quality information. It limits our capacity to go down to other levels. That said, our staff is looking at ways to produce some of that information, but there are certainly some challenges because of the nature of the data that we get. There is only so far you can go in disaggregating that information.

Mr. Joe Daniel: So in terms of this data-gathering and this information we're basing a lot of the decisions on, can you actually give me your sense of the reliability of the information being obtained from the provincial and regional offices of HRSDC?

Mr. Yves Gingras: The information we collect and post on our Working in Canada website is from credible sources. We ensure that the right methodologies are applied and that the information is validated before we use it. So we have full confidence in the information that we use.

Sometimes it is true that it's difficult to reconcile one type of information with another, and it may take some time, but we are putting information there with a view that it's complementary and it could meet the various types of needs of our clients. The information we use is always from credible sources.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Can you confirm, in terms of identifying the actual skills...because I think in a lot of cases you're looking at the jobs and the job gap. How do we go about identifying the skills that are missing?

Do you understand what I mean?

Mr. Yves Gingras: Yes. You're pointing to our work about occupations, and I would say that's one type of indicator of the needs of the labour market. That is one indicator that is complemented by other information. We use information from national surveys, from Statistics Canada, about people's training, their education levels, and certification of their credentials. So I would say that these indicators are all complementary.

It may not be possible to come up with a synthetic indicator. I would say people need to judge using various indicators and come up with an expert judgment of what skills the market requires. We do not attempt to synthesize one indicator based on all of these complementary indicators we produce or collect.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Thank you.

Mr. Conrad, earlier you spoke about the amount of money that was being transferred to the provinces for apprenticeship programs, etc. Do you have any numbers in terms of how many apprentices are actually out there, how many are actually finishing, how many are successful at finishing, etc.?

•(1700)

Ms. Catherine Scott: I can speak to that.

There are about 330 registered apprentices across the country, and about 80% of those are in the Red Seal trades. With regard to completions and the completion rate, one of the issues we've been looking at is that the completion rates have been flat over the past two decades or so, but we have seen an increase in the number of completions over the past three years, and that is even despite the recession. So that is a positive outcome.

Since we launched the apprenticeship incentive grant and the apprenticeship completion grant in 2006 and 2009, respectively, the provinces and territories have stepped up and put in place a number of other complementary measures to support apprentices. We think that is also having an effect in helping apprentices to get through the system and complete their apprenticeships.

Mr. Joe Daniel: I have a supplementary question to that.

Some of the complaints I have received in my riding are that there aren't enough private sector companies offering apprenticeships. Are there any incentive programs for companies to offer these programs, so that they can actually train people and improve their skill sets?

The Chair: That will be the end of your time allotment, so you can complete the response.

Ms. Catherine Scott: I think, obviously, employers are key to apprenticeships. It is demand driven, and an apprentice cannot begin a program unless they are hired by an employer. At the federal level, there is the federal tax credit for employers. Provinces have also undertaken a number of initiatives. For example, in Ontario, Alberta, and B.C., they have similar measures to encourage employers to participate in apprenticeships. I know, in particular in Alberta, the provincial government has done a lot of work in the oil and gas sector to encourage employers to take on more apprentices, and they've seen some positive results there as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'd certainly like to take this opportunity to thank the department officials for appearing before us and sharing their thoughts and answering the questions.

Thank you very much. We'll suspend so that you have an opportunity to leave. Then we'll go in camera.

Go ahead, Mr. Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Chairman, this is probably the last time we are all together, given what is going on. I would like to have my motion put on the agenda. You are probably already aware of it, since I notified the committee last week. I would simply like to have my motion put on our agenda, before we sit in camera after the break. I am referring to my motion on employment insurance and the possible follow-up study .

[*English*]

The Chair: Just a moment.

We're going to conclude that part, and suspend that part of the...

Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Sorry, Mr. Chair; I would like to make a motion that we go in camera.

The Chair: With respect to the motion.

Mr. Phil McColeman: With respect to the motion; to discuss this motion.

The Chair: My plan was to go in camera with respect to the report.

He has raised a motion. You want to go in camera.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I'd like to go in camera.

The Chair: We will ask the witnesses to leave. We are going to deal with some committee business. Thank you for attending.

We have a motion to deal with that motion in camera. We will have a vote on Mr. McColeman's motion.

Mr. François Lapointe: Can I react to the vote, or...?

The Chair: No, I think we'll have a vote, and then you can react.

An hon. member: It's non-debatable.

The Chair: Well, we'll take the vote now; I'll call the question.

All those in favour of going in camera?

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Yes. He has asked to move the motion, and Mr. McColeman has asked that we go in camera.

So we're voting on the motion to go in camera, and that's what we'll vote on with respect to that motion.

Ms. Chris Charlton: I'll have a recorded vote, please.

The Chair: Okay. We'll have a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

● (1705)

The Chair: So we will go in camera. When you let me know that has happened, we will deal with the motion.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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