



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 018**

Friday, June 12, 2020

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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey





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

Friday, June 12, 2020

• (1405)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 18 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Pursuant to the orders of reference of April 11 and May 26, 2020, the committee is resuming its study of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today's meeting is taking place by video conference and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, please click on the microphone icon to activate your mike.

Before we get started, I would like to remind everyone, especially the witnesses, to please use the language channel of the language they are speaking. If you are going to switch from English to French or French to English, be sure to change the channel before you change your language. It's a huge help for interpretation.

I thank the witnesses for joining us. With us today we have Emma Rose Bienvenu, appearing as an individual. From the University of Ottawa Students' Union, we have Babacar Faye, president, and Timothy Gulliver, advocacy commissioner.

Ms. Bienvenu, please proceed with your opening remarks.

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu (As an Individual):** Thank you.

I'd like to begin by thanking the committee for the invitation. I commend its members for wanting to hear from a wide cross-section of Canadian society, including younger Canadians like me.

My name is Emma Rose Bienvenu. I am a recent graduate of McGill law. I also hold a master's degree in economics and a master's degree in business law from Sciences Po, Paris, and the University of Pennsylvania.

My remarks today are going to focus on three topics. First, I'll say a few words about how I am thinking about this crisis, which will hopefully provide useful context for my later recommendations. Second, I'll discuss ways to retrain and upskill the Canadian workforce. Third, I'll turn to how government can better support students, in particular students with disabilities.

I want to start by discussing two assumptions and beliefs that guide my thinking about the crisis. The first is that, in my view, it's imperative that government make morbidity, not just mortality, a top-of-mind consideration in its policy decisions, particularly as it assesses acceptable risks of virus exposure in the interim economic reopening.

The outcome of coronavirus is often expressed as a binary. We focus on case fatality rates—so many survive and so many don't—and we judge the success or failure of government responses by how many citizens have died from the disease. The science, however, is increasingly clear that COVID-19 does not lead to binary—

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** There is no interpretation because of the poor sound quality. Can we solve this problem?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Please hold on one second, Ms. Bienvenu.

Madam Clerk, I think we have a problem with the interpretation.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-France Lafleur):** I'm being told that the sound is choppy. It seemed to be fine a few minutes ago, but something happened. Let me see.

**The Chair:** Do the IT folks want to chime in? Can anything can be done? If it makes a difference, we could hear from the students' union and see if we can resolve the problem while they're presenting their statement and then come back to Ms. Bienvenu.

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** Was the interpretation the only problem? Could the English speakers hear me?

**The Chair:** Yes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** That is not the case for francophone participants.

**The Chair:** It's the problem we want to solve.

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** If it can make things easier, I could let the other students speak first.

[English]

**The Clerk:** I am being asked to move on until we can see what the issue is.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Ms. Bienvenu, we'll go to the students' union, and then we'll come back to you. When we do, feel free to either pick up where you left off or start from the beginning. We won't dock your time.

Now we're going to the University of Ottawa Students' Union, for a total of 10 minutes.

Mr. Faye, please go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mr. Babacar Faye (President, University of Ottawa Students' Union):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, honourable members, good afternoon. Thank you for allowing us to appear before you.

My name is Babacar Faye and I am the president of the University of Ottawa Students' Union, UOSU. I am accompanied by my colleague, Tim Gulliver, the union's advocacy commissioner. I will present a brief profile of our student community and then talk about the conditions created by this crisis and how it affects students. I'll focus specifically on their financial situation.

I would like to begin by saying that we are very grateful to the government for its efforts to help Canadian students, as well as to Parliament and members of the opposition, who are always looking for solutions to help students overcome the challenges they face during this crisis. These actions have already alleviated many of the challenges faced by the thousands of undergraduate students represented by the UOSU.

The world has stood still during this pandemic, and the student community has been affected as well. We had to make the transition to distance learning, which created additional barriers. This is in addition to the challenges that students share with many Canadians, including loss of jobs and career opportunities, worrying about paying rent and bills, as well as the ability to buy food to put on the table.

When the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB, was announced, many students at the end of the semester were unemployed and unable to pay their rent for the following month. In fact, a few thousand of them had to leave their homes urgently.

The Canada emergency student benefit has certainly provided some relief. However, the cost of living is not much different for the student community than for the rest of the population, and we realize that even with the Canada emergency student benefit, the situation remains uncertain for many students.

At the same time, we see the spectre of fall tuition fees looming. In order to better understand the effects of this pandemic, between May 5 and May 28, we surveyed our student population on their experiences during the crisis and its academic, financial and psychological impact. The survey determined that this crisis had a serious effect on the ability of students to cover their basic expenses.

In the Ontario context, this follows significant across-the-board cuts to student financial assistance. According to the survey, 44% of our students responded that they are worried or very worried about not being able to pay their rent, and 60% are worried or very worried about their ability to pay their tuition in the fall. It should be noted that 80% think that fall tuition fees should be reduced if all their courses are given online. In fact, 95% of courses are given online at the University of Ottawa.

We are experiencing a crisis that affects all sectors, including education and students. Although students benefit from a number of support measures, tuition fees are still a major concern. The situation is even more difficult for international students, many of whom are still in Canada because of the conditions created by this pandemic. Just yesterday we received an email from an international student who could not go home and cannot work in Canada. The airline cancelled his plane ticket and new tickets would be too expensive for his parents, who have to pay the rent. They have to choose between paying their son's school fees or putting food in his mouth. This student's situation is unfortunately no exception, and many international students find themselves in particularly difficult situations.

The limit on the number of hours that international students could work was lifted, and we applaud the government's action. However, it is still not enough. Many international students are unable to apply for the Canada emergency response benefit, even if they suffer in the aftermath of this pandemic due to the previous limitations.

Without additional government assistance, given the border closures and the various circumstances created by this crisis, international students are likely to be in a fairly precarious situation in the fall. A lot of them already are.

It would be important to consider extending and applying certain measures to assist international students, including the Canada student service grant, a scholarship program for international students or their host institutions, and the Canada emergency response benefit itself.

This reality goes beyond the simple financial framework. Many students, especially international students, face a variety of challenges, which are likely to multiply in the fall when many universities will be offering distance education courses. These challenges raise a number of questions about access to affordable and universally accessible learning materials, which my colleague Mr. Gulliver will address in his presentation.

● (1410)

Thank you for your attention.

I will now yield the floor to my colleague Timothy Gulliver, advocacy commissioner of the University of Ottawa Students' Union.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Faye.

Mr. Gulliver, you have the floor.

[English]

**Mr. Timothy Gulliver (Advocacy Commissioner, University of Ottawa Students' Union):** Thank you, Babacar.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for having us today and for hearing the student perspective. It's very much appreciated.

As somebody who's had the opportunity to work on the Hill in the past year, I have a great appreciation for the work all of you do, and the role this chamber and committees play in Canadian democracy.

I want to echo the perspective raised by my colleague and would like also to bring to the attention of members of the committee some of the challenges students have been raising with us.

First, the transition to a fully online learning model has not necessarily been a smooth road. Though we appreciate the hard work our university and others have put in to make this work, it cannot ignore the class, racial and rural/urban disparities within the undergraduate student population, which has had a direct impact on the ability of some to access the tools required to learn online. Examples of these tools include laptops, microphones, webcams, a stable Wi-Fi connection and a quiet place to study and learn at home. Moreover, some programs may require students to purchase additional software or learning tools out of pocket, increasing the financial burden that students already face.

In short, being able to thrive in an online learning setting is a privilege; it is not the reality for all. In our survey, we found that students with disabilities and racialized students were more critical of their online learning experience this spring. This must be addressed. When all students are on campus, many of these challenges are reduced, and there is a more equal opportunity for all students to succeed. However, these unprecedented times and the reality of online learning have shed light on the disparities that exist within our community. We are hopeful the federal government may consider a policy measure like a one-time bursary to help students who could use some extra money to buy the learning tools they need to succeed in an online learning setting.

Second, we remain keenly aware of and concerned by the impact of this pandemic on students' mental health. As many of you may be aware, the University of Ottawa is among many post-secondary institutions facing a mental health crisis. Tragically we have lost six students to suicide on campus since April 2019. We recognize this is a systemic problem that has no easy solution, but our concern is that this pandemic is exacerbating this crisis. In our survey, we found that 63% of students reported that their mental health had worsened or significantly worsened. This is consistent with a survey conducted last month by StatsCan which found, "Almost two-thirds (64%) of those aged 15 to 24 reported a negative impact on their mental health...since physical distancing began." Students are feeling less productive and less motivated and are struggling due to the lack of social connection. A second wave of COVID-19 would certainly exacerbate these struggles.

Last, I would like to make an appeal, if I may, to all members of this committee. A 2018 report by RBC noted, "Since 1990, the gov-

ernment's share of university funding has fallen by nearly half and the cost of tuition at universities has risen 2.7 times in real terms".

I took the liberty of calculating the average age of members of this committee. I found that, on average, members would have been in university 30 years ago, in 1990. I would submit it is more expensive to go to university today than it was 30 years ago. In 1990, according to the RBC, it took around 300 hours of minimum wage work to pay tuition. Today it requires over 500. In 1990, in real terms, the average tuition was around \$2,400. Today, it is closer to \$6,500. In 1990, average full-time loan borrowing was under \$3,000 a year. Today, it is around \$6,000 a year. According to the RBC, "Over 20% of graduates with a bachelor's degree start out with more than \$25,000 in debt", a phenomenon that is exponentially worse for our colleagues in law and medicine.

In our view, it is essential that the federal government work to ensure this trend does not continue, and if not, the challenges already associated with being a post-secondary student in Canada will only worsen due to the current economic climate.

In conclusion, in the short term, our priorities as student leaders are: (a) calling for the inclusion of international students in the government's pandemic response; (b) supporting students who are disadvantaged by online learning; and (c) advocating for a holistic, nationwide mental health response.

In the long term, as we look forward to what a post-COVID Canada will look like, we firmly believe there must be change. We must build a post-COVID society where education is at least as affordable as it was 30 years ago and where every student can afford to help rebuild the Canadian economy, rather than remain saddled by student debt for years to come.

Once again, Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank members of the committee for their time today. We hope this is the beginning of continued consultation with student unions during these trying times.

We're happy to take any questions at the appropriate time. Thank you.

• (1415)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gulliver, and thank you for the reminder that I bring up the average age in this group.

We hope the technical problems have been resolved.

Ms. Bienvenu, you have the floor.

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** Thank you. I believe we have resolved things.

Once again, I thank the members of the committee for the invitation and I commend them on wanting to hear from a wide cross-section of Canadian society, including younger Canadians like me.

My remarks today are going to focus on three topics. First, I'll say a few words about how I am thinking about this crisis, which will hopefully provide useful context for my later recommendations. Second, I'll discuss ways to retrain and upskill the Canadian workforce. Third, I'll turn to how government can better support students, in particular students with disabilities.

I want to start by discussing two assumptions and beliefs that guide my thinking about the crisis.

The first is that, in my view, it is imperative that government make morbidity, and not just mortality, a top-of-mind consideration in all of its policy decisions, particularly in the interim economic reopening phase as it assesses acceptable risks of virus exposure.

The outcome of coronavirus is often expressed as a binary. We focus on case fatality rates—so many survive and so many do not—and we judge the success or failure of government responses by how many of its citizens die from the disease.

The science, however, is increasingly clear that COVID-19 does not lead to binary outcomes. Many who survive it, particularly the 10% to 15% who experience severe or acute symptoms requiring hospitalization, suffer permanent damage not only to their lungs, but also to their kidneys, liver, heart and even brain. These will require ongoing medical care and have lifelong consequences for their quality of life.

Accordingly, it's my view that even for those who are likely to survive COVID-19, the morbidity risks of exposure should be central to policy decisions and are sufficiently great to justify the most stringent measures to avoid exposure.

My second assumption about this crisis is that many of the changes that are brought about will not be undone, not by a vaccine, not by herd immunity. We do ourselves a disservice by assuming that they might.

The world record for vaccine development is held by the mumps vaccine, which took four years. Concurrent trials for coronavirus vaccine candidates will shorten the timeline, but it is extraordinarily optimistic to assume that we will develop tests and administer a vaccine in anything less than 24 months. Those two years or more will accelerate social and economic changes that would otherwise have taken decades to materialize. It will transform how we live, work and learn, and those changes will not be reversed when the virus threat is contained. A clear acknowledgement of this is, in my view, the best way to guarantee better policy outcomes and a stronger recovery.

With this in mind, I will turn to workforce interventions.

Some sectors will bounce back relatively unscathed, and they'll bounce back quickly. In these sectors, wage subsidy programs serve their purpose by avoiding disruption that would otherwise result in layoffs that would sever the employer-employee relationship.

In other sectors, labour demand has permanently shifted. Much of the job displacement that we've seen in recent months wasn't so

much caused by COVID-19 as it was accelerated by it. Many of the functions most affected by the pandemic were already under threat from tech and automation. What we've seen in the pandemic is that labour-replacing automation is even more cost-effective because of its resilience to virus-driven shocks. Put simply, this means that in many sectors, labour demand has permanently shifted and wage subsidies will mask these shifts for as long as they remain in place. They'll delay the associated layoffs, but they will not reverse those underlying changes.

This means that before the government begins to phase out income support programs, it needs to proactively identify where labour demand has shifted and where it has surged to reorient its focus on retraining and upskilling programs to help repair the Canadian workforce for their new post-coronavirus economy.

To re-skill at speed and scale, government should focus on two distinct interventions: first, rapid upskilling for short-term demand surges such as retail grocery and last-mile delivery; second, longer-term re-skilling that can help workers move into careers aligned with future skills trends, like health services, remote work and remote education.

To this end, I have four recommendations.

The first is that the format of retraining is ripe for innovation. In Canada, we've tended to focus on multi-year degrees, but in most sectors microcredit modules can provide workers with targeted training in the most advanced skills more quickly and at far lower costs. Microcredits would be most effective if developed in concert with employers or industry associations to ensure that workers are provided with targeted skills that most closely match the needs of the Canadian job market.

Second, as government prepares to phase out the CERB, it should consider offering displaced workers the option to continue receiving it for one or several additional months on the condition that they take that time to complete micro-credentialing modules, particularly if these modules are developed in concert with employers. This would help ease their transition back into the workforce.

• (1420)

Third, government should create an online talent exchange that helps match those who have completed microcredits to employers. This would increase job market transparency and reduce frictions in worker redeployment. This kind of exchange was recently designed in the U.S. in just six days by a group of food sector companies. It was launched in April and has been extraordinarily successful at matching jobseekers to food sector employers experiencing short-term demand surges related to the pandemic.

Fourth, government should consider subsidizing retraining initiatives specifically for micro-businesses and SMEs. In Germany, the recent Qualification Opportunities Act subsidizes companies' employee training costs up to 100% for micro-businesses and up to 50% for SMEs.

To reiterate, government should, first, replace multi-year training programs with microcredits developed in concert with employers; second, consider extending CERB payments for those who decide to complete these microcredit retraining programs; third, create an online talent exchange that helps match jobseekers with employers; and fourth, subsidize the retraining costs of microenterprises and SMEs.

Now I'll turn to students, which, as a recent graduate, I may be most equipped to discuss.

There are many ways government can support students in this crisis. Few are more pressing than ensuring universal access to high-quality Internet. CRTC data show that 11% of Canadian households still don't have access to Internet, and even those who have it face massive disparities in connection speed and reliability. In a remote work environment, the inequities this creates cannot be overstated.

The Ottawa Catholic School Board recently recommended to students who didn't have Internet access at home to hunker down in parking lots to listen to lectures and complete their assignments. In Manitoba, the Garden Hill First Nation was forced to cancel the school year outright, citing poor Internet connectivity as a key factor in the decision.

My recommendation is simple: You should provide every student that does not have Internet at home with a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot device. The long-term work of this committee is to wire all of Canada to ensure universal broadband Internet. That could take years, and we don't have years. Wi-Fi hotspot devices cost about \$10 a month, and they could immediately close the digital divide that remains a limiting factor for so many students.

Spectrum, the U.S. broadband provider, recently launched a program that provides one of these devices free of cost to any K-to-12 student who does not have Internet at home. The Canadian government should pressure Canadian carriers to follow suit and subsidize the cost of doing so if need be. As it becomes increasingly clear that social distancing measures will continue to limit in-school learning for one year or more, government needs to do everything in its power to ensure that all students have the Internet access that they need to succeed.

I'd like to say a note about disabled students. It's become almost trite to recognize that the pandemic has disproportionately burdened those least equipped to bear its weight, and students with disabilities are no exception. The additional support they've received through the CESB has helped them absorb the cost of purchasing ergonomic equipment and assistive technologies, but critical gaps remain in the delivery of online learning. Educational institutions in Canada have not historically prioritized the procurement of accessible technology. This means that the shift to remote learning has replicated, in their digital classrooms, the barriers disabled students already face in the physical world.

There are two cost-effective ways government can help. In the short term, government should pressure the companies that design the products, apps and schooling technologies currently in use to create a mandatory accessibility issue complaint mechanism with a prescribed timeline for remediation of reported issues. This would ease the immediate challenges of disabled students. Second, government should educate employers and universities on how to continue making remote work an option. This would broaden access to education and employment for students who might otherwise have been limited by their physical disabilities.

To conclude, the challenge before this committee is great, as these are difficult times, but great challenges can make great opportunities. No people are better positioned than the elected men and women of this committee to seize that opportunity, assert leadership and help Canadians build back better, ensuring we come out of this pandemic stronger, more resilient and more united.

• (1425)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bienvenu.

We're going to begin now with questions, starting with Mrs. Falk for six minutes.

Mrs. Falk, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Thank you so much, Chair.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for their comments.

As our committee evaluates the government's response to this health crisis, I would argue that it's very important we not only look at the immediate needs, but we also look at the long-term impact of this crisis. The economic fallout of this pandemic is, and we know will be, significant. It is changing the job market, and some of those changes may become permanent, as we know. This will certainly have a significant impact on students, graduates and young Canadians who are entering or near entering the job market.

In the previous Parliament, the HUMA committee studied experiential learning and how valuable it was in helping students integrate into the workforce. I want to make note that some of the government's responses for students were tied to work and to volunteer opportunities, but those programs have been slow to roll out. Unfortunately, the reality is that those opportunities to connect students to the workforce are largely just not there.

My first question is for Emma Biennu.

You wrote an article called "7 Predictions for a Post-Coronavirus World". In it you talked about a move towards automation, that a lot of companies will transition existing jobs to automated jobs and that those remotely capable jobs might leave the country. What impact do you think a move towards automation would have on the job market? In particular, how does this change the job market landscape for students and graduates?

• (1430)

**Ms. Emma Rose Biennu:** Thanks for the question. I'm glad you read the article. For those who haven't, the basic point I made was that, to survive any deep economic crisis, firms need to lay off their least productive workers, automate what can be automated, and in a pandemic, make everything else remote capable. Once companies figure out their remote work steps, they'll eventually realize that someone remote in Ottawa can be remote in Sri Lanka, and often at much lower cost. The basic point was that you would see a shift from in-person to remote and then from remote to remote overseas.

Obviously, this is a challenge for developed countries, but I think Canada is well positioned to succeed in that environment. We have an extraordinarily educated workforce, and the network effects of being domestic continue to be strong for industries that require certain qualifications from their employees. I think in other sectors it's going to be more difficult. That's why in my comments I try to emphasize that we need to recognize the changes that, at this point, are largely inevitable and focus on our retraining and scaling up so that the workforce can succeed in that environment.

Anything that can be automated, I think it's safe for the committee to assume, will be in a relatively short order and much more quickly because of the pandemic. This is true for two reasons: automation is often cost-effective and robots don't get coronavirus. Employees who perform a function are susceptible to getting the virus and being disrupted whereas labour-replacing automation makes a business more resilient.

The government in recognizing that should focus on identifying jobs that are susceptible to automation and look at the workers in those positions, develop a really granular profile of their skills and aptitudes, and then focus retraining programs on closing the skills gap with adjacent skills. People who do one thing may be really well positioned and need minimal training to be re-skilled for an adjacent skill in a different industry, for example.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** In your opinion, do you have any idea or suggestion which part of the economy might be moving towards automation?

**Ms. Emma Rose Biennu:** Yes. I think even before the virus, because of increasing wages, in certain manufacturing countries

like China, you had automated factories. That was already starting a trend where, in manufacturing, it was really difficult to keep overseas for different labour reasons. I think manufacturing is largely going to automate and come back to be reshored domestically to bring it closer to Canadian R and D centres.

I think food production has been super disrupted in this pandemic, because meat production, in particular, is very difficult. It's labour intensive and very difficult to do in a socially distanced way, so you're seeing huge investments by food production companies in how to automate and have much fewer workers. I know that's a big employer in B.C. and Alberta. I think focusing on how people who work in food production, and meat in particular, can transition into other industries should be a priority.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** In difficult economic landscapes, it is arguably more difficult for those entering the workforce to get jobs, as there are more applicants with fewer jobs available. Experience and skills will be all that more important.

What role do you see experiential learning playing in the job market moving forward? What role can the federal government play in facilitating experiential learning and skill development?

**Ms. Emma Rose Biennu:** I would say two things.

One point I tried to make in the retraining focus was that in Canada, for good reason, going to university is great, but we've tended to focus on these very long, multi-year, broad degrees that often don't very closely match the skills and demand in the labour market.

I think a combination, a very targeted retraining and experiential learning, is a really powerful blueprint for how to design retraining programs that will help upskill and prepare the Canadian workforce for automation and those kinds of structural changes. Having retraining programs that are much shorter, much more targeted and developed in concert with the enterprise that will eventually provide the experiential learning is a really cost-effective way of making sure that transition happens as smoothly as possible.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Biennu, and thank you, Ms. Falk.

Next we're going to Mr. Turnbull, please, for six minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of the witnesses today. I've learned a lot in a short period of time from all of you. I found the opening remarks to be thought-provoking, to say the least.



I have lots of questions. I prepared many for Mr. Faye, but I also have some for Ms. Bienvenu. Your comments really got me thinking.

I'm going to start with Ms. Bienvenu.

You talked about the transformative impact of COVID-19, and I'm going to call it this labour market mobility that's almost required or is going to be necessitated by the shifts in our markets.

I wonder if you could speak to whether there are any emerging industries or sectors that you think may not otherwise have existed, or may be new and emerging and that we could anticipate.

• (1435)

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** That's a really good question, and I can think of quite a few.

For every sector of the economy that is going to suffer in this crisis, there's often going to be a few that will bloom, right? I think any technology that enables remote work and remote learning is going to do really well. That includes everything from home office furniture to software that allows you to collaborate on presentations and have meetings in a way that is enticing.

I think virtual reality is going to explode. I think that touch first technology—when you go into a store, rather than opening the door, for example, sensors allow you to do the things you usually do in the physical world without touching them—in the coming years is going to really surge.

A fun kind of rule of thumb is that anyone who trafficks in bits and boxes—so bits, as in Internet technologies that allow you to do things remotely, and boxes, as in letting you buy things without having to interact with the business itself—is going to do really well.

With regard to logistics companies, particularly in a country like Canada that is so big and so spread out, I think you'll see clear winners emerging because of the complexity of our logistics.

Then I think companies like Shopify, which allow small enterprises to participate in that bits and boxes experiment, where you could interact with customers without having to physically have them come—

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, that's great. It sounds like you have lots of good ideas about what might be emerging.

Mr. Faye, our government has announced \$9 billion in support for students. Students' learning experiences and career pathways are a sign of success for all of society. I don't think there's anybody around who wouldn't say that we want students to be successful.

You mentioned that 44% of students were worried about paying their bills. Do you think our Canada emergency student benefit and the \$1,250 a month, with an added amount for students who have disabilities or have to provide care to a child, is relieving that anxiety and worry for the vast number of people? What's the impact of that investment?

**Mr. Babacar Faye:** I believe that the CESB is certainly a relief for students. When it came to the pandemic, a lot of students were not eligible for the CERB and found themselves choosing between

paying for their rent or paying for food. Some of us are unemployed and looking for opportunities for the summer. Considering the lack of those opportunities to really earn money during the summer, I believe that the CESB has played a role. It has played a really important role in alleviating the financial burden for students during the summer.

You have to keep in mind that a lot of students work in the summer to be able to afford to pay tuition.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** To go back to school, yes.

**Mr. Babacar Faye:** Yes.

When we look at the amount given per month and the wage per hour, and you compare that to the amount and the wage given for this year, which is supposed to be a living wage and a minimum wage for people and for students, having that same amount would play an important role in ensuring they're able to not only survive during the summer months but also look toward the fall to be able to put that money aside—put a little aside for the fall—for their tuition as well.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I'd like to ask you a follow-up question about that.

We also announced new eligibility criteria for the Canada student loans program and a doubling of the Canada student grant. Do you think that's going to have an impact on helping students go back, re-enrol and pay for that tuition in the fall?

• (1440)

**Mr. Babacar Faye:** Absolutely, I think that would have an important impact. We have to ensure that is available but also that there's an equivalent or [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] that the amount of government aid in student loans for Canadian students is sufficient.

There is a need, I believe, for more support when it comes to just the other factors that might surround it and that might apply but might not be considered when it comes to our students. We typically have a narrow field, to use those words, when it comes to students, and we usually have the perception that students only have tuition fees to worry about. We need to expand that to consider that a lot of students also have living standards to uphold. We need to be looking at the entire cost of living for students.

We could look at promoting and pushing for a more complete approach when it comes to providing, first of all, accessibility for learning materials and other tools that may aid students in learning, but also look at rent and the ability to find places to rent. We also need to be looking beyond domestic students to international students, who don't apply for that help and don't receive that aid, and who don't apply, for example—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Faye.

Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also thank the witnesses for being here.

My questions are for you, Ms. Bienvenu. First of all, I'd like to thank you for your testimony. You have indeed produced a very interesting article on several subjects.

Since time for questions is limited, I'll start with automation. We know that the whole issue of automation was already under consideration before the COVID-19 pandemic. I myself sat on the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail, in Quebec, which brings together the major labour organizations, employers and government departments. We considered automation to be part of the necessary adaptations, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

How will the pandemic accelerate automation? What has accelerated so far has been accelerated in an emergency situation. So I'm not convinced that this will continue, but I'd like to see it. Will that be enough to say that we'll go further on these issues?

There are advantages, but what are the disadvantages? Indeed, we're going to have to rely heavily on technology. By relying on technology in this way, how can we take into account its effects not only on the social level, but also on the knowledge level? When I speak of knowledge, I am of course speaking here of skills in the broadest sense, that is to say know-how as well as interpersonal or life skills.

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** Thank you, Ms. Chabot. This is a very important issue. As I too am from Quebec, it's a question that concerns me too from time to time.

To answer your question about the acceleration of automation in the manufacturing sector, I think that acceleration will be caused by the great difficulty of maintaining the same number of employees and letting them work close together during this interim period where we are living with the virus without, as yet, having a vaccine.

Acceleration will therefore be needed to allow the manufacturing sector to continue to produce during this interim period, i.e. the two or more years when the physical distancing and other measures currently in place will have to continue to be applied. Manufacturers will likely determine that automation is a preferred option since they will no longer be able to have as many employees on site at the same time.

Betting on technology is hard, because you win at some levels and you lose on others. It is very important to make huge investments in automation services and technology. I think the important thing is to anticipate changes before they happen. Indeed, if we only start to invest as we attempt to launch automation, it is too late. Even if it is not for this year or the next, it will be necessary to recognize that automation, accelerated or not, is an issue that will require a technological solution.

• (1445)

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** This will require a technological solution, but also a knowledge solution. Workers have expertise that must not be lost, so there are concerns around that. I'm interested in the broader labour market, where employees are part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Their knowledge has to be preserved and a certain balance must be sought.

My next question is on a subject you have not touched on as much, but which interests me a great deal: telework. You've done projections about this. Both in Quebec and in Canada, we have seen telework increase more and more because of the pandemic, in sectors and services where it was not happening before. However, only 13% of people here worked remotely before, for all sorts of good reasons; that is not a very high number.

Do you think that telework will become more widespread in sectors where it has been absent until now? If that is the case, it involves disadvantages with regard to the working conditions of employees, which must be taken into account.

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** You're absolutely right. As you read in the article, I think telework will become much more widespread in Canada and elsewhere.

The experience brought about by necessity proved that telework is a very interesting solution for people who had not thought about it. I am thinking in particular of people who previously had to travel to other cities for their jobs and who saw that they could have a much shorter work day if they stayed at home.

Obviously, people with children are going to need a lot of support during this transition, when they are forced to telework and cannot come to their offices.

The disadvantage of telework is that it can mask some of the inequities in the employee's living conditions at home that would otherwise be levelled out and go unnoticed in the office. I think we need to keep that in mind.

That said, employers today can offer reasonable accommodation to people facing certain constraints. Usually these limitations are physical, such as a person who has to use a wheelchair and has difficulty getting to the office. Allowing telework as a reasonable accommodation for people with physical limitations could be a positive development as it would provide opportunities for more people.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Bienvenu and Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Next, we have Ms. Kwan for six minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

First, Mr. Faye, you touched on the issue around the financial expenses for students. It was a first step for the government in coming with a CERB for students, but the amount was less than the regular CERB.

Can you comment on that and what your thoughts are with respect to the difference in the amount?

**Mr. Babacar Faye:** I believe the amount, when it comes to the expenses.... If you look at the minimum wage in the province of Ontario, which is \$15 per hour, compared to what CESB would give, which is about \$7 per hour, you see it's half the amount.

When it comes to a living wage and the expenses that students face on a daily basis, they face the same expenses that normal people would usually face. There is also the added burden of the tuition fees in the fall, and the tuition fees you may not have paid for the summer as well. These are added burdens, in addition to paying rent as well as considering the economic impact of the pandemic. A lot of students are not receiving support from their parents, who may have either lost their jobs or been laid off temporarily for that period as well, so there is no additional amount of support from those parents.

Lots of factors create problems when it comes to the equity of the amount given to students compared to the regular population.

• (1450)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Would it be fair to say that the government should in fact acknowledge the hardships that students experience? Their living expenses are the same as everyone else's. Therefore, the amount for the student CERB should be the same as the amount for the regular CERB. Could I get a quick yes or no from all of our witnesses?

We'll start with you, Mr. Faye.

**Mr. Babacar Faye:** Yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Ms. Bienvenu?

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** I think so, yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Gulliver?

**Mr. Timothy Gulliver:** Yes, I agree.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'd like to turn quickly to the issue of international students. They've been left out of any support, and there have been tremendous hardships for them. I've been hearing that from my own community as well. Could I get a quick comment from each of you on that? Do you think international students should also get emergency support from the government in this pandemic?

We'll start with you, Mr. Gulliver.

**Mr. Timothy Gulliver:** Yes, I absolutely agree, Ms. Kwan. We're very concerned about the situation of international students. We're currently waiting on the Canada student service grant eligibility criteria. We're very hopeful that, at the very minimum, they'll be eligible for that. We have lots of concerns on our end, absolutely, with regard to international students.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Ms. Bienvenu, go ahead, on the same question.

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** I agree. I would also say a word on the question of whether the student benefit should be the same as the CERB. In my experience, I think it was particularly frustrating for the students who were graduating into the pandemic. They had a job waiting for them that was then cancelled. They were denied the full CERB, because they had not lost a job that they were currently employed in; nonetheless, they did lose one.

I think that merits a second look. I understand the frustration.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Before we go to Mr. Faye on that last question, I'd like to bridge onto that. Many students are unpaid interns, and some had contracts lined up for prestigious internships. Those

contracts got cancelled as a result of COVID. Now they're completely out of luck. They would have been on an unpaid internship. Even though they get a stipend for various allowances and so on, that does not count as income, and therefore they do not qualify for CERB or the student CERB. This has created tremendous hardship.

On that, do you think the government should also rethink the impact on interns to ensure that they get support during this pandemic?

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** I do. The way it was designed structurally, as I understand it, was that it was for people who were working and who lost a job, whereas I think what was trying to be expressed was that it was for people if they lost a job. For many students, the way the job market works, particularly for law school, is that they have a job that they have not yet begun. With the timing of the pandemic being right as they were about to graduate into the labour market, often with huge amounts of debt, they lost their jobs but didn't qualify. School wasn't over when this pandemic started really impacting the economy.

There's a lot of frustration on that end, which I understand. I do think the intent was for people whose employment was impacted by COVID-19. They are no longer students, and have lost the jobs they thought they had, but they are still only eligible for the lower student amount.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Internships should be seen as jobs, and right now they are not.

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** Yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Turning to—

• (1455)

**The Chair:** Thanks, Ms. Kwan, and thank you, Ms. Bienvenu. We're out of time.

Mr. Vis, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for a great discussion this morning.

Really quickly, Ms. Bienvenu, with regard to your points about Internet access, do you believe Internet service is an essential service?

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** Absolutely. I believed it before the pandemic, and I believe it now.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Do you think it's equitable that first nations especially, and rural Canadians, have disproportionately worse Internet access than other Canadians?

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** I think it's a national embarrassment.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Would access to Internet help alleviate poverty in rural Canada?

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** Unquestionably.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** How do you think the Canadian economy would benefit overall if we provided stable and secure Internet to all Canadians?

**Ms. Emma Rose Bienvenu:** A huge portion of the workforce is being left out of the knowledge base but also economic productivity. That's a loss for everyone.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Faye and Mr. Gulliver, would you be able to function as productive members of society without access to the Internet?

**Mr. Babacar Faye:** I don't think I would be, especially considering my meetings every day. I wouldn't be able to do that.

**Mr. Timothy Gulliver:** Agreed. Absolutely not.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you. I'm just making those points known. I represent over 30 indigenous communities, and for many of the young people in those communities, that's the reality they face. To Ms. Bienvenu's earlier points about the labour market, that is all very relevant, but as an MP who represents a riding of 22,000 square kilometres with many rural communities that can only be accessed by forest service roads, I can say that they find themselves in a very challenging position, not only normally but especially now, given the COVID-19 pandemic, so thank you for answering my questions on that.

Mr. Faye or Mr. Gulliver, regarding experiential learning and connecting students to the workforce, do you think the federal government could have done a better job of connecting students with work by simply providing direct funding to them through the CESB? Do you think we, as parliamentarians and the government, could have done a better job of incentivizing job-matching programs through the pandemic to help students?

**Mr. Timothy Gulliver:** Certainly. I also think the reality is that there aren't many jobs in the market right now, so obviously it's extremely concerning.

It's always a challenge. It's actually quite systemic, and that will require a long time to address.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** In light of many educational institutions planning on offering virtual courses come September, how does the student union at the University of Ottawa feel about the prospect of online learning this fall?

**Mr. Timothy Gulliver:** It's quite challenging. Online learning has been thrust on us in a way that was completely unexpected. Obviously, the university is working overtime to make it work.

We are especially concerned about students who can't learn online, or as you correctly mentioned, don't have that Internet access. That's very worrisome, and we really want to ensure that there is additional tech support to allow these classes to run seamlessly, which they have not so far.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Gulliver, we've heard other witnesses speak about this, and perhaps you can answer this question as well. Generally speaking, a lot of Canadians have had their mental health impacted by the pandemic. What has been the experience of students at the University of Ottawa, anecdotally from what you've heard?

**Mr. Timothy Gulliver:** Both anecdotally and statistically, we are seeing the same trends among youth that Statistics Canada is reporting, which is a significant worsening in the mental health of

students. As you are well aware, mental health among students is one of the most important issues. It's a very important issue on campus, especially in the context of the mental health crisis that we find ourselves in. We are extremely concerned and worried by what the future will look like, and we have seen a quite substantial amount of students feel less motivated and less productive. That obviously takes a toll on them, and we are very concerned about that.

● (1500)

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Gulliver, moving forward, even today in our discussion we've heard a lot about the post-COVID-19 workforce and the labour force.

As a young person in university, what can you say about what we as parliamentarians do to equip young people with the skills that they need for the 21st century?

**The Chair:** Give a short answer, please, Mr. Gulliver.

**Mr. Timothy Gulliver:** That's a very broad question, but what I would say... Perhaps it's not a very direct answer, but the situation is changing very rapidly. I think it's important to keep students in the conversation, to keep unions in the conversation as we move forward because the challenges are definitely great, and to provide students with those work opportunities they might have lost this summer because of co-op opportunities that fell through or internships that fell through. That's very worrisome, and we want to see a more robust infrastructure in that regard in the future.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I think that's a very good point to end on.

Thank you so much for your testimony today.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Thank you, Mr. Gulliver.

Finally, we're going to go to Mr. Dong, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for coming today and answering all these great questions with very good answers.

I want to go to Mr. Faye first and talk about international students.

In my previous role, I was a provincial member and helped roll out the free tuition policy here in Ontario. Unfortunately, when the current government came in, that program was replaced by a commitment to reduce the tuition by 10%, no matter if it was a college or a university. They are all required to reduce their tuition by 10%. In a way, I see that this is going to put additional pressure on the tuition for international students.

Have you seen that effect taking place in Ontario?

**Mr. Babacar Faye:** Yes. In Ontario, when it comes to international students and that perception... I have been doing research looking into the trends in Ontario, and there is a trend of reduction, first of all, in the share of government investment in post-secondary education.

The reduction in the federal share is compounded by the provincial reduction of investment, which is forcing us to seek alternative funding. With that alternative funding they usually seek to raise fees to alleviate that funding burden for the budgets. International students receive the brunt of that raise. You can see that with the tuition fees, and also with the different costs they face.

Also, we can see that international students are severely impacted by the reductions of... They are used as cash cows—I hate to use these words, but these are the words that were used, I believe. When it comes to tuition fees, if you look at the differences, they usually pay tens of thousands more than domestic students in tuition fees. It's hard to discount that statement.

**Mr. Han Dong:** Yes, they support such a large portion of our economy. I think it's fair to say that it's unfair to a lot of international students. Respecting the difference in jurisdiction, we know that higher education is mainly under provincial jurisdiction, but the federal government has been quite supportive and moved very quickly during COVID-19. I remember the exemption for a valid student visa so they can still enter Canada, as well as the broadening of the 20-hour-per-week work limit for international students. If they are in essential services, they're allowed to work and earn income. I want to thank them for all the work they do.

As well, if someone cannot come to Canada due to—

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair—

[English]

**The Chair:** Just a second, Mr. Dong.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** There is a problem with the interpretation again.

• (1505)

**The Chair:** I don't know if the problem is related to interpretation, because there was also a lot of noise on the line. I think it might be a connection issue. I'll see if I can get it fixed.

[English]

**Mr. Han Dong:** May I continue, Mr. Chair?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Is it working, Ms. Chabot?

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Yes.

[English]

**The Chair:** Please go ahead, Mr. Dong. You have about one minute left.

**Mr. Han Dong:** I'll go very quickly.

We made a whole range of policy changes in support of international students, including those who cannot enter Canada. They are allowed to study up to 50% of their coursework abroad.

What's your comment on that? What do you hear from your membership and the people around you, especially the international students? Are these policies working and benefiting them?

**Mr. Babacar Faye:** I think these policies bring a certain benefit, but when it comes to the job limits and job hours, it's hard for international students to see the benefits, because of the lack of offers and the lack of jobs that are available right now in general because of the effects of the pandemic.

I believe that more could be done to directly support international students to relieve their burdens. I think that often they're not able to reach these resources, and they don't usually have the resources—

**Mr. Han Dong:** I don't have much time.

What kind of direct support—

**The Chair:** Actually, you don't have any.

Thank you, Mr. Dong, and—

**Mr. Han Dong:** Mr. Chair, I was interrupted and it took a few minutes. Could we allow Mr. Faye to answer that question?

**The Chair:** Please do it very briefly, Mr. Faye.

**Mr. Han Dong:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Babacar Faye:** Essentially, the resources that international students need are more information and more access to the information they need. I'm thinking about international students who want to come to Canada and have to apply for a visa.

Also, if they're coming to Canada, they should know what the expectations are: whether or not they're going to receive government aid, what they should expect when it comes to a national crisis like COVID-19 and what the Government of Canada expects from them. They should know how to prepare in the future, should an event like this reappear, and where they can find jobs or opportunities as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dong.

Thank you, Mr. Faye, Mr. Gulliver and Madame Bienvenu, for your very thorough and thought-provoking presentations today. They will serve a great benefit to our work. We very much appreciate the work that you put into them and the thought that you have put into answering our questions.

We're going to suspend for three minutes while we get ready for the next panel of witnesses. It will give you a chance to unplug.

We are now suspended.

• (1505)

(Pause)

• (1510)

**The Chair:** We are now back in session, with our second panel of witnesses for the day. We thank them all for being here.

From the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, we have Bryn de Chastelain, board chair. From the Quebec Student Union, we have Jade Marcil, president. From the University Students' Council at Western University, we have Matt Reesor, president, and Mackenzy Metcalfe, vice-president of external affairs.

Mr. de Chastelain and Ms. Marcil are appearing together, so they will share their 10 minutes. We'll start with them and then move to Western.

Mr. de Chastelain and Ms. Marcil, go ahead for 10 minutes.

**Mr. Bryn de Chastelain (Board Chair, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, esteemed committee members and fellow witnesses. I would like to begin my statement by acknowledging that I speak to you today from Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

My name is Bryn de Chastelain. I am the chair of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, or CASA. I am also president of the Saint Mary's University Students' Association and a fourth-year student pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in political science and economics.

CASA is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that represents over 275,000 students at colleges, polytechnics and universities from coast to coast. Through a formal partnership with the Union étudiante du Québec, with which I will be sharing time today, we are a trusted national student voice.

CASA has been at the forefront of student advocacy efforts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We've been clear that students, like other Canadians, have been hit hard by the pandemic's economic and social impacts. At a uniquely vulnerable point in their lives, students have been blindsided by lost income, online classes, a summer of isolation and bleak job prospects following graduation.

Thankfully, on April 22, the federal government responded to our calls for support with a generous and significant student aid package. As a student leader, I would like to express my gratitude for this immediate and considerable support, which was extraordinarily necessary in these unprecedented times. Many students are now seeing immediate support from either the Canada emergency response benefit or the Canada emergency student benefit, which together are providing an irreplaceable stopgap for students. These benefits are helping students to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads, and we thank you for that.

I would also like to highlight the generous additions to both the Canada student grants and the Canada student loans, which were also announced on April 22. These improvements will help ensure that many students in Canada can continue to access and afford their education despite COVID-19-related hardship. These supports are welcomed by students across Canada, but not everybody has access to them.

I would particularly like to highlight the lack of support available for international students during this quarantine period. Let's not forget that international students in Canada contribute an estimated \$21.6 billion to Canada's GDP and support almost 170,000 jobs.

On top of that, many international students in Canada plan to stay and contribute to our economy once they have graduated. According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education, 60% of international students in Canada plan to apply for permanent residency once they graduate from school. Many also continue to live and work in Canada over the summer between semesters, and the COVID-19 pandemic has robbed them of their opportunity to support themselves.

These international students are stuck in Canada with no job prospects, with groceries and rent to pay for, and with little financial support from the federal government. As it stands, international students are ineligible for the Canada emergency student benefit, meaning that those who have made less than \$5,000 in the past year are left without access to desperately needed assistance. The Canada emergency response benefit is available to international students, but the Canada emergency student benefit is not, and we see that as fundamentally unfair. Many international students cannot work while in school and have lost the opportunity to do so over the summer. They need support, and we're asking the federal government to leave no student in Canada behind.

Now, despite this gap surrounding international students, CASA is strongly supportive of the federal government's overall student aid efforts thus far. Looking forward, however, we at CASA are hearing that students are still very worried about their finances and their health, as well as the quality and accessibility of the upcoming digital semester. According to a recent poll that we at CASA commissioned, 77% of students in Canada report being considerably stressed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We're stressed about what the pandemic means for our future, about the health of our loved ones and about finding employment after graduation.

Students are reporting significant financial hardship despite the relief provided by the CERB and the CESB. Close to 70% of students in Canada say their summer employment plans have been negatively affected by COVID-19. Of that 70%, four in 10 say they've lost all of their regular summer income due to the pandemic, while 43% say they will be relying more on government loans to pay for the upcoming school year, and 59% say they are just as worried about covering their living expenses in January as they are today.

Students are seeing real financial hardship on the horizon, and that's why CASA is calling on the government to consider additional support for students beyond September 2020. Specifically, we are asking the government to extend the six-month interest-free moratorium on federal student loan payments past September 30, 2020.

Now, beyond financial concerns, CASA is also hearing that many students are second-guessing whether school in the fall is even worth it, given the less-than-ideal digital environment. Our data tells us that 39% of students have considered deferring or have already deferred their fall semester. Along with this, 31% have also considered switching or have already switched from full-time to part-time studies.

• (1515)

Students are rightly worried about the quality and accessibility of their classes in the fall, and we think the federal government can do more to ensure that our next semester is a success.

According to the CRTC, only 64% of rural residents have access to broadband Internet fast enough to sustainably access the kind of video conferencing applications used for online learning, compared to 100% of urban residents. The OECD also ranks Canada in the top 10 of the most expensive countries for broadband Internet access when adjusted for cost of living.

In the 2019 election, the Liberals promised to ensure that every Canadian would have access to high-speed Internet by 2030. CASA urges the federal government to accelerate this timeline and move forward with immediate steps to ensure that all post-secondary students have adequate access to reliable and high-speed Internet in time for school this fall.

Finally, we know that success in a digital classroom hinges on having the suitable technology to succeed. Digital learning, while necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic, will place the burden of possessing sufficient technology, like computers, on post-secondary students. According to our polling, almost 50% of students in Canada highlighted having the technology they need as a primary concern entering next semester.

That's why we're also calling on the federal government to ensure that all students have sufficient access to digital technology. Specifically, we're asking the government to commit additional funding to provide appropriate digital technology to any low-income student who needs it.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the committee once again for the invitation to come and testify and represent the voice of Canadian students.

I will now turn the floor over to my colleague Jade Marcil of the Quebec Student Union, and I look forward to answering your questions.

**The Chair:** Ms. Marcil, you have the floor for three and a half minutes.

**Ms. Jade Marcil (President, Quebec Student Union):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by saying that I'm currently on territory that has been shared by many indigenous nations over the years, a land of sharing. I'm currently in the greater Montreal area.

Thank you for having me here today. I'm pleased to be with you.

I also want to thank my colleague, Bryn de Chastelain, for his presentation. The Quebec Student Union agrees with what he said.

My name is Jade Marcil. I'm the president of the Quebec Student Union. We're a group of university student associations that represents 91,000 students from many parts of Quebec.

I want to address two main topics. Since Quebec couldn't directly receive the financial assistance tied to Canada's loans and bursaries

measures, but is receiving a transfer, we find it difficult to comment. However, we're very pleased with the assistance provided to students to encourage them to continue their studies. We sincerely hope that this assistance will be invested in the same way in Quebec.

Obviously, I want to talk about the Canada emergency student benefit, or CESB. This assistance came at just the right time to support students in the summer, when jobs are always harder to find. Of course, there are differences between the regions. However, given the very high unemployment rate, we know that summer job opportunities have decreased significantly. The CESB is really helping our students. Many requests have already been made. We're pleased to know that this measure really supports our students.

A proposal has been made concerning the CESB and the amount granted. We're very pleased to report that the inclusion of people who have special needs, who are living with a disability or who have a dependant was well received. We must also support people who are facing very different challenges.

The CESB amount is \$1,250 a month. The amount is fully withdrawn if the student earns over \$1,000 a month. The Bloc Québécois submitted a proposal in the House. We understand that this proposal wasn't adopted, given how quickly the government needed to act. We consider that the assistance may need to be increased based on needs in the fall. We know that the measure had to be implemented quickly. However, we're pleased that the measure was implemented because it supports our students.

I also want to talk about research funding in Quebec. We think that research funding is very important. Quebec established the Fonds de recherche du Québec. In Canada, there are federal granting agencies. We want to point out that the extension for student research projects is very good, since many projects were delayed or even suspended as a result of closures in certain areas. I'm thinking in particular of all the education research, since schools were closed.

We want to stress the importance of ongoing support for research in the coming months. The four-month extension could be made longer. The assistance will be needed for the continuation of research and student projects in the fall and winter, depending on the economic recovery and the easing of the lockdown.

We're quite satisfied with the Government of Canada's response. We're very pleased that students were taken into consideration and that financial measures were implemented quickly and effectively. We hope that students will remain a focus for support measures in the coming weeks and months.

Thank you again for having us here today.

• (1525)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Marcil.

[*English*]

Next we have the University Students' Council of Western University.

Mr. Reesor, you have the floor for 10 minutes

**Mr. Matt Reesor (President, University Students' Council, Western University):** Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, distinguished members and fellow witnesses. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Matt Reesor. I am the president of the University Students' Council at Western University. Alongside me here today is our vice-president of external affairs, Mackenzy Metcalfe.

I represent the interests of 30,000 undergraduate students on our university campus. Personally, I would like to thank the Government of Canada for the action that has already been taken to support post-secondary students. The aid package has provided much-needed financial support for many of us. We greatly appreciate your consultation with post-secondary students on the government's response to COVID-19, and are excited to see it continue throughout the rebuilding process.

As I'm sure many, if not all of you, have experienced, COVID-19 has transformed our lives as we know it. This March as our university classes moved online, Western students experienced a shared sentiment of uncertainty. As we attempt to understand the new normal that we are living in, concerns about the state of our academic and co-curricular experiences, the quality and accessibility of post-secondary education, and our ability to maintain social connectedness continue to stress the vast majority of students.

Looking back and reflecting on the early days of the COVID-19 response, many of us had no idea where our society would be in one week, let alone three months.

As we sit here today in London, local restrictions have been lifted and we are starting down the path towards the new normal. We are only certain of one thing: our lives will change forever as a result of this pandemic. It is my opinion that we are still unsure of what the change will be, and I think we need to take time to reflect before setting a course forward.

With that in mind, I will be focusing the rest of my time to speak on what I know for sure, and that is how students are dealing with COVID-19 right now.

Throughout this time, our biggest priority has been supporting our students. The USC is continually engaging with students through candid conversations and formalized feedback, and we would like to take this time to share their stories.

A few weeks ago, I spoke with a second-year social science student at Western University who was living away from their hometown. The student expressed immense gratitude for the financial support provided by the Canada emergency student benefit, which

has helped mitigate their financial concerns for this summer. In the same conversation, however, the student expressed anxieties about the looming expenses of heading back to school this fall. Like many students, this individual works throughout the summers and nearly all evenings to fund their tuition, school supplies, rent, food and personal necessities.

Over the past several years, the student has not had much trouble finding jobs at home or in London. But this year as COVID-19 hit, this process has become much more difficult. This student has already signed a twelve-month lease they're now responsible for. Their parents have not been able to provide financial support for the past couple of years. This individual currently has enough money to pay for the first two months of rent on a new lease, but will rely on summer employment to pay for anything past that. The student is not sure how they will be able to afford rent in a few months, not to mention another year of tuition and the other list of expenses.

We appreciate the action the government has already taken to support students financially for the 2020-21 academic year. We request that the doubling of the Canada students grant and the removal of expected students and spouses contributions be extended to the 2021-22 academic year.

We've also heard concerns from many of our international students, some of whom have been unable to head home due to travel restrictions. Our international students pay considerable tuition fees and remain unable to access the CESB. We request that the government expand a pre-existing program or develop a new program to address financial concerns for these international students.

As a recent graduate, I can attest to the uncertainty of the job market. A recent survey by StatsCan has shown that almost one-third of students who had secure jobs prior to March 2020 have now lost them. The students of today are the workforce of tomorrow, and I know that the vast majority of students would take advantage of opportunities to engage in meaningful, skills-based work experience this summer and beyond.

As things continue to evolve in the coming months, we hope that the Government of Canada will continue to consult regularly with post-secondary students across the country to hear out their concerns and engage with their perspectives.

I think I speak for all student leaders when I say that we have the energy, the passion and the expertise required to inform your response to COVID-19 moving forward.

Mackenzy and I look forward to taking your questions.

Thank you.

• (1530)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Reesor.

We are going to begin now with questions, starting with Ms. Dancho for six minutes, please.



**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us today. I really appreciated your opening remarks.

I'm going to ask about a range of things that impact students.

What do you think universities should be doing now to prepare in the event that you have virtual learning again in the fall? How can we adequately prepare for this, given that you had a crash course this March, as you mentioned, Mr. Reesor? What can your university be doing to prepare for the fall?

**Mr. Matt Reesor:** That's an extremely important question, one that we've been attempting to answer as we go. I would like to defer it to Mackenzy Metcalfe, our vice-president of external affairs, as I think it is better suited to her.

**Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe (Vice-President, External Affairs, University Students' Council, Western University):** I think when it comes to preparing for fall online classes, universities are already taking measures to figure out what it's going to look like. Many universities in Ontario and across Canada have already made commitments to being either 100% online or offering a portion of courses in person. I think it's really university specific as to how many of the courses will be online, but I also think it's important that universities take steps to prepare students to be able to learn online, because it is a fundamentally different learning environment from the in-class, lecture-based courses they might be used to from high school or even prior university courses.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you for that.

My second question concerns financial aid for students. Many students are, of course, supported by their parents in university, but also, in addition to that, they access government student loans, which, if my memory serves me correctly, depend on the parents' earnings from the year prior. Of course, as was mentioned, many parents have taken a serious hit to their income this year. If the students weren't eligible last year because of their parents' income, it may not be the same this year going into the fall semester.

Do you anticipate there will be a significant impact on fall enrolment because of the lack of parental support or the lack of eligibility for student loans?

**Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe:** I do expect that many students will very seriously reconsider attending post-secondary education because of the costs. That is one of the reasons we are asking for students' expected income and spouses' contributions to also be waived in the 2021-22 academic year. When you apply for programs like OSAP in Ontario, you have to declare your parents' income, and those are for tax years that would not have been impacted by COVID-19.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Over to CASA, I know that you represent, I think, 300,000 students. Do you have any idea what the impacts will be on enrolment if students can't access government student loans or perhaps direct support from their parents? Do you have any idea how many students will be impacted by that?

Mr. de Chastelain, could you respond to that?

**Mr. Bryn de Chastelain:** That's an important question that we need to be asking when considering the next steps.

We're already seeing a significant chunk of students, nearly 40%, already thinking about deferring their fall semester and potentially looking to come back at a time when university education is going to look a little more typical. In that regard, right now a lot of students are really thinking about how their university education is going to change as we continue to see universities across the country begin to shift to a hybrid form of delivery or, in some cases, completely remote or digital delivery.

It's definitely something that's going to continue over the next few months as students make up their minds, but we're already seeing a significant portion of students rethinking their enrolment in the fall.

• (1535)

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Yes, 40% is significant. That's a lot of people who might not be returning. It's something for public policy-makers to consider, for sure.

I'd also like to talk about mental health. This was discussed in the last hour and was also mentioned in your opening remarks.

Can we qualify the mental health impacts a little bit? What have been the causes of the mental health strain? I know these are very obvious to students, but just for parents who are watching, for example, can we qualify that a bit? Why are students feeling considerable mental strain? A list of the things would be great to hear.

**Mr. Bryn de Chastelain:** That's a very important question. Thank you for raising it.

Based on our recent survey data, nearly 80% of students in Canada are reporting being considerably stressed at this time, and 60% of those students are saying this is a direct result of COVID-19.

There are a number of things to consider here. I would first draw your attention to health and wellness. A number of students are worried about the health and well-being of their family members, and potentially of their peers and their colleagues. It also goes to their future prospects, whether that comes to what university education is going to look like or stress about whether they'll be able to find employment after graduation as well. This is definitely a period of unprecedented uncertainty for students, and it's creating a number of challenges for how we view the next stage of our lives.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** I can understand that for sure, as uncertainty is very challenging. I remember coming out of university that trying to find a job was stressful enough, let alone in a COVID-19 economy.

I'd love to hear a little elaboration on those mental health impacts from the other panellists as well, given that 60% of students are being significantly impacted by their mental health. What are you hearing from your students?

**Mr. Matt Reesor:** I would love to speak to that, because it's a large priority that relates to what I spoke to in my opening remarks regarding connectedness and uncertainty—two words that come to mind whenever I've been speaking to any students at our campus.

I think the main thing people are missing is the aspects of university that aren't within the classroom; things that aren't necessarily tangible, but the in-between conversations and interactions that can mean a lot. We've definitely felt that absence, especially for many of us with the feeling of fatigue that comes with numerous calls on Zoom, or whatever platform it may be. We're definitely working on that and trying to find any way possible to increase those human interactions in a manner that's still safe and controlled, given that Western is utilizing a blended model.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Dancho, and thank you Mr. Reesor.

We're going now to Ms. Young. You have six minutes, please.

**Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses. Of course, I'm most interested in talking to Mr. Reesor and Ms. Metcalfe from London, because that's where I'm from—London West. I appreciate your being on this Zoom call.

I wanted to pick up on the mental health issues because I'm very concerned that in another six months we're going to be hearing some tragic stories from post-secondary education. I wonder what advice you might have for some of the students who are going to Western or another university in the fall, and some of the challenges they may face.

**Mr. Matt Reesor:** I've asked myself that question every day since taking my post. The main aspect of Western's community involves the orientation program. Various things we operate offer that connectedness and the bonds that form as a result of many of the programs we're offering.

To directly answer your question on advice, I've been attempting to do this myself as I've been working in this new Zoom paradigm and that is to take time for myself. There need to be opportunities for rest and for people to get away from looking at their screens for 10-plus hours a day.

My advice to students would still be to reach out in any way possible to their loved ones and their friends, especially as they're coming onto our campus. A big task on our plate—and we're working with our vice-president of student support and programming on this—is to work toward online programming that can create these connections and relationships that last your entire university experience.

My advice is that we take care of ourselves and our loved ones.

• (1540)

**Ms. Kate Young:** Ms. Metcalfe, would you like to comment on that?

**Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe:** Yes. I would like to emphasize the added stress that often comes when students have to work part-time during university, especially when we talk about going to a full or

blended model of online learning. You have to do what you have to do to get your degree and go to classes, along with possibly being immunocompromised and dealing with the added anxieties of COVID-19. You have to work a part-time job and go into a society that isn't really safe because we can only stand six feet away from each other. A lot of these things are on the minds of students, and I think not having those community supports is going to be a lot more stressful, as Matt iterated as well.

**Ms. Kate Young:** While summer jobs may be hard to come by, what you're saying is that even if the students were offered a job, they might be hesitant to take it.

**Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe:** Yes. A lot of students who were offered summer jobs had them cancelled. A Stats Canada survey said that 67% of students were extremely concerned about having no job prospects in the future because of the way our economy has changed. That really impacts their ability to be able to provide for themselves and work full-time over the summer, or even part-time during the school year. They wouldn't have the income they're used to, to support themselves and pay for their tuition, rent and other associated living expenses.

**Ms. Kate Young:** Thank you very much.

Mr. de Chastelain, I'd just like to go over what you mentioned. I think it's worth repeating. You said that this is a “uniquely vulnerable” time in your lives. I don't think that can be overstated.

I know that as a government we've put many programs forward, and I feel confident that will help students, but can you speak to some of the challenges that students will still face in the fall?

**Mr. Bryn de Chastelain:** It's extremely important for us to consider the situation that students find themselves in right now. We've gone through a period of having to rapidly shift from an in-person to an online learning environment, back in mid-March for most schools, and for a lot of students life has not gone back to normal since then.

In terms of some of the vulnerabilities we're facing, so many students are struggling to find work at this time, or trying as well to ensure that they're able to find safe work conditions, and they're also trying to prepare themselves for the fall and a learning environment they're not familiar with, as again we go back to some form of hybrid or remote delivery.

In that regard, I would say that a number of students have been able to benefit from the programs put forward by the federal government. We were fortunate to hear from the Prime Minister on June 8 that roughly 25% of the student population in Canada is already accessing the emergency student benefit, and that's in addition to the number of students who are already accessing the emergency response benefit.

That said, these are programs that are getting students through the summer. For the time being, it's taking away some of the immediate stress of buying groceries and paying rent, but the financial stress of the fall and the years to come is still very much present for students and is something that's in the back of our minds at all times.

**Ms. Kate Young:** How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 14 seconds.

**Ms. Kate Young:** Okay. I'll pass it on to my next colleague.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Young.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, welcome to the committee. You have the floor.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us.

I'll start by speaking to Ms. Marcil.

Ms. Marcil, congratulations on your new position. It's always a pleasure to work with you.

We agree that the current situation is quite unusual, and even outrageous, for employers and also for businesses, students and workers.

The government has implemented a number of measures. I was pleased that the Quebec Student Union agreed with our proposal, which unfortunately wasn't adopted. We thought that implementing a system similar to employment insurance, in which the income wouldn't be entirely cut off if it exceeded the \$1,000 benefit, could create an incentive to work.

I want to hear your opinion on the transparency of all these measures. Did the government clearly explain how it implemented the measures for students?

• (1545)

**Ms. Jade Marcil:** Thank you for your question, Ms. Michaud.

First, the announcement was made on April 22. The student community then had to wait for some time to obtain the eligibility criteria for the Canada emergency student benefit, or CESB, which caused a bit of anxiety for students.

When the criteria were announced, the criterion regarding the \$1,000 a month in employment income in particular raised some concerns for us. I understand that these measures were introduced very quickly. However, the Canada Revenue Agency or CRA website provides very little explanation for the \$1,000 income criterion. Students had trouble obtaining clarification on their own. That said, the Quebec Student Union members have contacts, and they can find the information—sometimes by being insistent—and then pass it on to the students.

The main issue is that the \$1,000 must be employment income and that loans and bursaries aren't included. In addition to the Canadian or Quebec loans and bursaries program, there are several other types of loans and bursaries for students. Take, for example, indirect research grants, such as the grants provided to a research assistant or teaching assistant. The criterion in question has led to confusion with respect to this component, primarily among graduate students. The CRA website should clarify these details. I know that many improvements have been made in recent weeks. However,

things can always be done better. It would be good to improve the frequently asked questions, for example.

We're trying to inform the students. However, the government is in the best position to answer questions and clarify the programs that it introduced so quickly.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Ms. Marcil.

There was some discussion earlier about the continuation of virtual courses and how this will be implemented.

Moreover, there will be a gradual return to activities in certain economic sectors. Students usually choose some of these sectors to find work while in school. These sectors include retail and the restaurant and hotel industries. Not too long ago, I worked in the restaurant business while in school. However, the situation has really changed in the current context.

How could the government better support students so that the return to activities proceeds as smoothly as possible?

**Ms. Jade Marcil:** We know that the recovery is important. Several announcements have been made regarding the promotion of youth employment. We're very grateful for this. However, these jobs are sometimes available in very specific areas. For example, there are many students in the Montreal area, where employment opportunities are limited as a result of the lockdown. As you know, the situation isn't easy in Quebec, particularly in Montreal.

However, I know that the Canada student service grant will be promoted soon. This will help to promote, to some extent, inclusion in society and community work. This grant is mainly intended to help the people most in need.

We know that this will happen in the summer. However, the investments to assist young people in finding employment will help them a great deal. When CEGEP classes end, jobs will be available. That's reassuring. The lockdown just needs to be eased, based on public health standards, of course. In the meantime, the CESB is useful, since it's being provided in the most difficult months.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Ms. Marcil.

Indeed, the CESB was welcomed by students who couldn't find employment.

You spoke about the fact that the funding from the federal granting agencies has been extended. You also talked about research. Specific projects could be delayed.

Can you elaborate on this?

**Ms. Jade Marcil:** Things are very difficult in some research areas.

I have a bachelor's degree in education and I've started a master's degree in the same field. I was supposed to carry out my research project in the classroom, with other students.

Administration or social science research is generally carried out in companies. This research has also been delayed. The same is true for health science research. Right now, the health care community is so overwhelmed that research has been set aside.

It must be possible to extend student funding, or indirect funding through projects initiated by faculty members, beyond the four-month period. Relaunching a project already involves a great deal of money for students and for academic institutions that are still trying to support the student population. The closure of the facilities is making research more difficult.

In some cases, projects must be delayed for at least a year before they can proceed. We think that the federal granting agencies must recognize the needs of students and that research projects must be taken into account. Innovation must continue across Canada.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Marcil and Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

Next we have Ms. Kwan, please, for six minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. As well, I'd like to thank all the witnesses for their presentations.

Before I begin, I wonder if this is possible, Mr. Chair, and that is for us to invite the Canadian Federation of Students to come to committee, as they represent some 64 student unions across the country. I thought it was very informative to hear from the various student representations here today, but there are some that are missing. It would be I think beneficial for the committee to hear from them. I just want to put that out there, Mr. Chair.

On the issue of support for students, the impacts of COVID-19 and the stresses—the financial stresses, the uncertainty into the future and so on—and given that the Canadian emergency support for students is limited, we heard earlier from panellists and witnesses that the ongoing pressures on students and the substantive financial pressure on them are not really any different from those on anyone else, whether they're a student or otherwise, so the differential in the amounts paid to students in this emergency support is a concern to them. They were asking for the government to reconsider this.

As well, they were also asking for the government to reconsider some of the eligibility components. Some of the students may be in a situation where, after this school year, they are without a job, where some of the contracts or job opportunities have been cancelled. As a result of that, they are not eligible for support from the government. A case in point would be interns, actually. Many interns have contacted me and have said that their contracts have been cancelled. As a result, they would not be eligible for any financial support from the government. As well, because the internship is an unpaid internship, they also don't qualify even at this time.

I just want to ask our witnesses, in addressing those issues that were brought up, what their thoughts are and whether or not the

government should be making adjustments in this regard. We can just rotate through. How about if we start with Mr. Reesor?

**Mr. Matt Reesor:** Again, it's an extremely important question, but I would like to defer it to our specialist within our team for these kinds of external affairs. If Mackenzy Metcalfe would be open to answering that, I'd greatly appreciate it.

**Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe:** Yes. Thank you, Matt.

I would agree that students are very thankful for the CESB and the \$1,200 that is provided. However, it only covers rent and groceries in our current times, and many students have to look forward to tuition for the coming year and how they are going to afford the next eight months when they're in school. I would agree that we would call on the government to increase the CESB to be the \$2,000 that the CERB is.

Also, international students being left out of the CESB can be really harmful. In Ontario, international students pay 460% more in tuition, according to Statistics Canada. Though that is regulated provincially, it is really important that we take into consideration the diverse needs of our international students so they are also supported, because they contribute really meaningfully to Canada's economy as well.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Ms. Metcalfe.

How about the issue of the recognizing unpaid interns whose jobs are not recognized as jobs because they are unpaid and therefore do not qualify for CERB? For some of them, even though they've landed a prestigious internship, their contract has been cancelled following the completion of their internship, because of COVID. What are your thoughts on that and providing support for them?

• (1555)

**Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe:** I completely agree that we need to support our interns, especially the unpaid interns here in Canada, and that they should also receive supports just like any other working Canadian.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** So qualifying them for CERB, then?

**Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe:** Yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

All right. I'd like to turn to Ms. Marcil, if I may, on the same questions.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Jade Marcil:** We find the situation for interns very worrying. Far fewer internships will be offered. Some companies will be able to take on interns, while others won't be able to do so. Remote internships are much more difficult. In addition, in Quebec, many internships are unpaid. It should be noted that students work but don't earn a salary. It's very important to ensure that they're eligible for this assistance.

I know that Quebec doesn't participate in Canada's loans and bursaries program and that the Quebec program sometimes supports interns. If interns were at least eligible for a program such as the CESB for internships, it would be very good. This would encourage students to pursue unpaid internships, which would enable them to learn, rather than just work.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much.

I'll turn to Mr. Chastelain, please.

**Mr. Bryn de Chastelain:** I would add to this that we are seeing a lot of confusion among students on their eligibility for either the emergency student benefit or the emergency response benefit. I would go beyond looking at unpaid interns on their own and think about a lot of the students who are finding themselves confused as to their eligibility for these programs. In our recent polling, we found that only 47% of students were 100% sure that they were eligible for the emergency student benefit, and in fact we're seeing more than a quarter of students who aren't even sure if they're eligible for any programs. I think there needs to be more work done here to ensure that students are aware of which programs they're eligible for and especially what to do when they may be eligible for both the CERB and the CESB.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Thank you, Mr. Chastelain.

Next we'll go to Mr. Albas for five minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the Quebec Student Union representative.

I've heard members from across the country speak about the many issues with the Canada summer jobs program. I can confirm that, in my own constituency, fewer jobs will be supported this year than the year before.

Ms. Marcil, do you think that there will be fewer student jobs across the country this year?

In areas where needs are greater, is this an issue?

**Ms. Jade Marcil:** Thank you for your question.

I think that there will be fewer job opportunities. Many businesses can't reopen, particularly in the tourism and leisure sector in general. These sectors usually provide a great deal of employment for students in the summer.

Although the Canada summer jobs program may provide a supplement to some businesses and non-profit organizations, or NPOs, the previous employment rate won't be reached. It's really important to maintain financial measures such as the CESB and the additional amounts to help people with special needs.

Obviously, we know that these jobs won't be available, mainly because of public health measures. We respect this. We must comply with the pace of the reopening.

However, the financial assistance measures must be maintained, at least until the end of August, and perhaps even a little longer, since some seasonal jobs end between August and October. I'm specifically referring to jobs related to outdoor activities.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Thank you.

In your opinion, should the government have increased the budget of the Canada summer jobs program rather than simply supporting fewer jobs, as it has chosen to do?

• (1600)

**Ms. Jade Marcil:** Nonetheless, a number of projects have been supported. Of course, more projects could have been supported. This also depended on the number of applications, which was high. There was also a delay in the intake of applications under the Canada summer jobs program.

Support for more jobs would certainly be welcome, where possible and in certain areas, of course.

[English]

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Next I will go to the University Students' Council at Western University.

Very simply, Conservatives proposed a program to the government to pair students looking for work with available agricultural jobs. Do you think that program would have been helpful for students?

**Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe:** Through the chair, I think students are thankful for any support they are getting from the Government of Canada. However, I think it is important to note that students are pursuing higher education to gain experience in their industries and that students are really interested in gaining meaningful work opportunities so that they can use the degree they are pursuing at post-secondary education.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Lastly, I'd like to go to CASA.

On April 22, the government announced a variety of student programs. One of these was a volunteer incentive called the Canada student service grant. It is now almost two months later. There's no program available for students, and we are already into the summer break. Do you feel the significant delay in rolling out the program is a problem and will it negatively impact students who were waiting to access it?

**Mr. Bryn de Chastelain:** As you mentioned, there were a number of programs announced on April 22 that positively benefited students. I know that a number of us have been eagerly waiting to see how the Canada student service grant will take shape and what opportunities it will provide students if they are able to receive funding for activities and experience opportunities throughout the summer.

I think it's fair to say that students are looking for work in whatever capacity they can get it right now, and looking for opportunities to gain experience that might be relevant to their field or relevant to their lives moving forward. In that regard, I'm looking forward to seeing a little bit more information on the Canada student service grant and what that will bring for students, what opportunities it will bring and potentially how many students will be able to access it moving forward.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** So on this program—

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Albas.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. de Chastelain.

If I may, we're going to go to Mr. Kusmierczyk for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair. I'll be splitting my time with MP Vaughan.

Congratulations, first and foremost, Bryn, on your election to the position of chair of CASA. I really enjoyed meeting CASA in February when they were up on Parliament Hill for their advocacy week. I really enjoyed listening to your views.

In April, when the pandemic was still unfolding, CASA published a document entitled "Safeguarding the Future by Protecting Students: CASA's Advocacy Priorities During COVID-19". The report listed five priority recommendations, including, for example, creating a CERB student stream and increasing Canada student grants by 40%. I just want to get your feedback. How did our government do in terms of those five priorities listed in that report?

**Mr. Bryn de Chastelain:** Thank you. It was an honour for students to be able to meet with members such as you in February.

CASA was very happy to see a number of the programs that were implemented on April 22. Most notably, the emergency student benefit has gone on to support a very large number of students already. It's definitely something that's bringing students a lot more comfort through the summer as they continue to need to pay rent on the first of each month and pay their bills as they prepare, hopefully, to go back to school in the fall.

There are definitely some gaps that we still see with these programs. Notably, for the emergency student benefit, we're hoping the federal government will commit to not leaving any student in Canada behind. In that regard, we're hoping to see the emergency student benefit extended to international students to allow them to mitigate some of the challenges they're facing through the summer.

With that, we're hopeful that policy-makers will continue to be aware of some of these gaps that have been created, and hopefully fill some of them to allow more students to be able to have some of their concerns addressed through the summer.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Thank you very much for that answer.

I'm glad that my colleague raised the question of meaningful work experiences for young people. I can tell you work-integrated

learning is really critical for students who are looking to get real-world job experience.

We know how critical it is for young people to enter the job market. Since 2015 this government has spent \$1.1 billion on work-integrated learning and job experiences for young people. That includes 20,000 spaces this year through the student work placement program, an additional 10,000 placements through the Business + Higher Education Roundtable that we're rolling out, but we also learned from a StatsCan report recently that about one-third of those WILs were cancelled or postponed because of COVID.

I just want to ask you to provide maybe some suggestions or ideas as to how those WILs could be adapted moving forward so they can be carried out.

• (1605)

**Mr. Bryn de Chastelain:** First and foremost, work-integrated learning is becoming a more important part of university education. Students are continuing to look for meaningful experience within their field and how they can integrate that into their university or post-secondary degrees more broadly. In that regard, students are continuing to look for work throughout this period. Regardless of whether students have been able to access the emergency student benefit, the emergency response benefit or other programs, they are continuing to look for employment and experience.

I think as we head back in the fall, looking to expand co-op programs and looking to provide additional opportunities for students to make money during their degree will be important and hopefully allow students to feel comfortable coming back to campus and entering an environment where they will be able to make a little bit of money on top of attending classes and completing their degree requirements.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Thank you very much.

Chair, I will yield the remainder of my time.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.):** Thanks very much.

To Mr. de Chastelain, just to be clear about this, you're aware that international students can qualify for CERB if they have, for example, taken advantage of the 20 hours a week they're allowed to work or may work as part of co-op placements and university courses. Are you aware that international students have been made eligible to apply for CERB if they have earned \$5,000 in the last year and have lost employment?

**Mr. Bryn de Chastelain:** Yes, we are aware of that, and one of the challenges we've identified is that a number of international students are restrained by the requirements and their study visas, based on the number of hours they can work.

It can definitely be challenging for international students in particular to find employment during the school year, and so we are hearing about those challenges from a number of our members.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** You're also aware that we've lifted that 20-hour limitation in key sectors, which were declared essential: transportation, food services and a series of other things related to COVID, especially for medical students?

**Mr. Bryn de Chastelain:** We're aware of that, and we think it continues to be important to allow international students to be able to work during the year and receive funding for that so they can use it towards their education.

That said, we still identify a gap for students who have not made over \$5,000 in the last year. In most cases they are international students who are staying in Canada in the hope of being able to contribute to our communities and to the campuses they study at, as we go back in the fall.

We're hoping to see similar funding applied to those international students to allow them to feel comfortable coming back to campus in September.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vaughan and Mr. de Chastelain.

Thanks to all of the witnesses for being with us today. Your insights are greatly appreciated and valued in our work.

We've reached the appointed hour. I wish you all a very good weekend.

The meeting is adjourned.

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