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THE PREMIER
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA
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Ms. Nancy M. Conrad, Senior Vice President, Policy
Halifax Chamber of Commerce
Via Email: Nancy@halifaxchamber.com

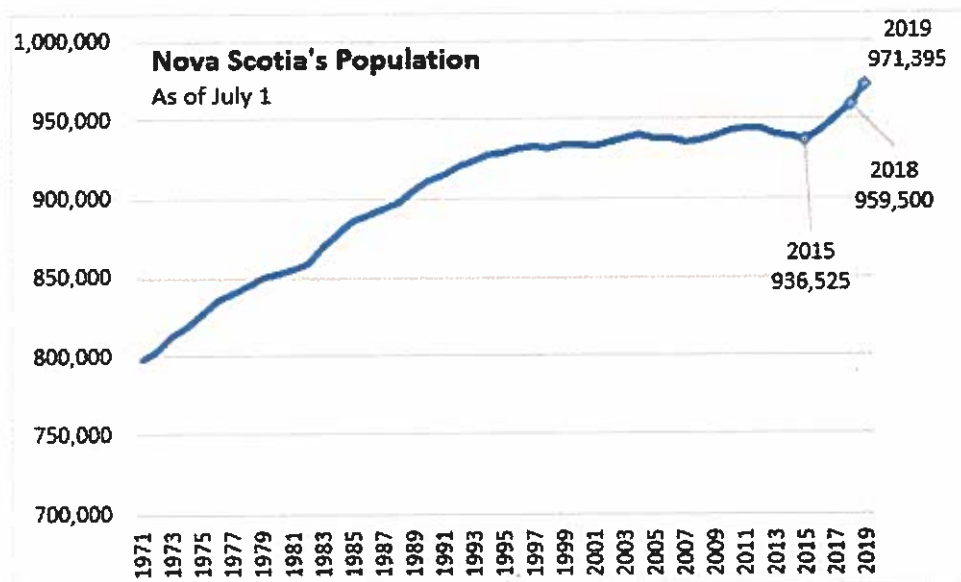
Ms. Kathleen MacEachern, Policy and Research Analyst
Halifax Chamber of Commerce
Via Email: Kathleen@halifaxchamber.com

Dear Ms. Conrad and Ms. MacEachern:

Thank you sincerely for your Provincial Issues Note dated October 23, 2019. The Halifax Chamber of Commerce has a long history of commitment to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the businesses that drive our economy. I recognize your vital work in creating marketplace conditions that enhance your members' prosperity and create opportunities for Nova Scotians, and I thank you for it.

Prosperity and wellness through inclusive economic growth and social wellbeing for all Nova Scotians is government's guiding commitment. Over the last several years, organizations like yours, working in tandem with like-minded groups and individuals, have helped achieve significant contributions to this goal.

I am pleased to say our population continues to reach all-time highs; 971,395 at the most recent count. Our population increase of 11,895 in 2018-2019 (July 1 to July 1) was the largest since 1972. In percentage terms, Nova Scotia's growth of 1.24 per cent was the fastest since 1973. That year was the most active annual period for immigration on record since comparable data begins after WWII. A total of 6,393 immigrants added to Nova Scotia's population. The latest quarter (April 1, 2019 to July 1, 2019) recorded the highest quarterly number of immigrants to Nova Scotia. In addition to immigrants, net changes in non-permanent residents added a further 4,121 to our population from July 1, 2018 to July 1, 2019.



In addition, 2018-2019 marked the fourth consecutive year of net interprovincial migration to Nova Scotia – the first time this has happened since the early 1970s. It is noteworthy that net positive interprovincial migration took place in almost all age cohorts. Youth interprovincial migration (ages 15-34), for example, was positive 703 over this period. More young people are choosing to stay in Nova Scotia than are leaving – and more are finding work.

Critically, population increases are happening in places beyond Halifax; ten of our eighteen counties are growing.

Supported by this rising tide of interprovincial and international migration, the size of our labour force, as well as employment, have likewise increased since 2016. Nova Scotia reported the third-fastest employment growth among provinces (after British Columbia and Ontario). According to the Labour Force Survey, our province also has the highest YTD (Jan-Sept) growth in employment in Atlantic Canada (2.4%). Faster employment growth pushed the unemployment rate down to historic lows (averaging 6.9 per cent over Jan-Sept 2019) and pushed EI usage down in 2019 (-4.5 per cent over Jan-Aug 2018).

Average weekly earnings in Nova Scotia are growing faster than anywhere in Canada — up 3.7 per cent on average in 2019 (Jan-Aug 2019 versus Jan-Aug 2018). Nova Scotians have more money in their pockets which helps our businesses. This is reflected in by increased retail spending of 2.4 per cent (Jan-Aug).

A variety of sectors are growing. In addition to tourism, fisheries, and aquaculture, digital technology firms in Atlantic Canada, for example, accounted for \$6.1 billion in revenue in 2017, up from \$5.2 billion in 2014. They contributed \$1.6 billion to exports and employed over 43-thousand people. A sharp increase in business investment in intellectual property products (+56.4%) is also noted. Sales increases are bolstered by export improvements of 6.2 per cent over the Jan-Sept 2019 period (compared to Jan-Sept 2018), while manufacturing shipments rose 5.2 per cent (Jan-Aug).

All of this bodes well for Nova Scotia’s continued growth in a changing economy.

Today, the majority of working-age Nova Scotians hold a post-secondary education. Initiatives like the Graduate to Opportunity program are connecting top talent with local businesses to help both parties prosper. Under the program, more than 1,000 new graduates were hired in their chosen fields by 585 employers since the 2015 launch. The program includes a 10 per cent diversity bonus for employers who provide permanent full-time jobs to graduates who identify as members of an under-represented group, including visible minorities, Mi’kmaq or Indigenous, or persons with a disability.

Nova Scotia businesses now have access to more capital. In 2018, the three-year venture capital average continued to increase to \$72.89 from the baseline of \$30.22 in 2013-2015.

After four years of balanced budgets, the Province is on stable financial footing - contributing to a secure and predictable environment in which to do business.

These are only some aspects of positive change in Nova Scotia’s business environment. Government will continue to do its part to contribute to conditions for growth that benefits businesses and Nova Scotians – particularly those who have far too often been excluded – in all their diversity.

Below, please find answers to the specific questions you pose.

1. Does the provincial government allot departmental funding based on the amount that was used in the year prior?

The goal of the annual budget process is the Province's continued fiscal sustainability while critical programs are delivered.

The prior year budget is initially considered to ensure departments have continued funding to support vital existing programming. However, government adjusts as various programs and services are phased in or out, or altered, depending on circumstances and priorities.

The annual budget process then reviews departmental spending requests to ensure alignment with government strategic direction and commitments within fiscal capacity (expenses and revenues).

2. What are the specific cost saving projects in place by departments to reduce their budgets each year?

Government and its departments continuously search for ways to reduce costs. As noted earlier, government has successfully delivered several years of balanced budgets aided in part by this work. It has also funded new programs, policies, and initiatives necessary for the wellbeing and prosperity of Nova Scotians and our province.

The Chamber is a collaborator in this work through the Office of Regulatory Affairs (detailed below in Question 7). Efficiency work is de rigueur in all government programs and services to create cost savings that results in improved delivery and results for Nova Scotians – and Nova Scotia businesses.

Some examples:

- Various Lean Six Sigma projects are underway to improve processes, system efficiencies, and outcomes for Nova Scotians. At times, these projects result in cost savings.
- At Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services, the introduction of direct deposit into program redesign, along with other changes, saved costs.
- A simple program redesign of the Spring Waste Haulers Application is saving an estimated 60 thousand dollars each year.
- Various improvements to the Heating Assistance Rebate Program (HARP) are resulting in multiple, back-end efficiencies and program cost savings.
- The digitalization of Nova Scotia Works, which helps businesses recruit, manage, and develop the talent they need to be more productive here at home and around the world, is improving services and reducing costs.
- The creation of Research Nova Scotia to develop a more robust research, development, and commercialization environment is maximizing the strategic use of provincial resources.
- A shared self-service system to manage apprentices is under development. It will build on the success of skilled apprentices across Canada. The system will modernize the current paper-based system to deliver improved services to employers and apprentices, offer better reporting capabilities to improve decision-making, remove any persistent barriers to mobility, and allow staff to focus on supporting clients. Changes will result in savings over time.

Our population growth, for example, is a boon and essential for the welfare of our Province and our businesses. It is, however, generating a new need for additional schools, new settlement services, more employment supports, and various other essential programs necessary for successful recruitment and retention. New technology and automation require our children to prepare for a future of work that looks remarkably different. We have invested heavily in curriculum redevelopment, pre-primary, coding in schools, and hands-on-learning. As innovation takes centre stage in business and economic growth, our government has directed funds toward the creation of an ecosystem that allows it to flourish. Investments here include maker spaces, accelerators, innovation hubs, and place such as Volta, COVE, and Ignite Labs. As our infrastructure ages and healthcare changes, we are making massive investments to keep pace for the health of all Nova Scotia (and our labour force), as well as to remain a place that attracts and retains people through vibrant and healthy communities.

These changes and critical investments took place as taxes fell by 100 million dollars through the enhancement of the Basic Personal Amount, and the small business tax threshold increased to \$500 thousand.

3. Does the provincial government evaluate salaries and benefits packages against the private sector?

It is critical for Nova Scotia's future and fiscal stability to remain within taxpayers' ability to pay public sector salaries – which account for over 50% of the entire provincial budget. Over the last several years, government has endeavoured to set a wage pattern that is sustainable and allows essential investments in public health and social welfare.

The Province considers private sector compensation when engaging in public sector bargaining if there are specific recruitment and retention issue to be addressed. Otherwise, general economic indicators, which includes wage levels outside government, are considered.

Pre-primary is an essential step toward inclusive economic and social growth. Research shows the life-long impact of early childhood education. Making it accessible to anyone through a universal pre-primary program is a necessary step toward a better future for individuals, businesses, the economy, and our Province as a whole.

Government doubled our investment in the childcare sector to \$78 million to support subsidies, wages, operations, and increase spaces for children. Of that amount, \$26 million helps childcare business owners increase wages for early childhood educators (ECEs). On average, salaries for ECEs have risen from approximately \$25,000 to \$38,000 over the last few years.

Our investment also helps keep the cost of childcare affordable. Government recently raised the eligibility for the maximum childcare subsidy from an annual income of \$20,880 to \$35,000. More families earning between \$35,000 and \$70,000 are also eligible for subsidy support.

Government provides a Quality Investment Grant (QIG) and Program Support Funding (PSF) to enable employers to pay at a minimum, or to exceed, a wage floor for trained ECEs. It is the responsibility of the employer to establish the actual salary. All Child Care Centres can use the QIG and PSF for extended benefit payments to staff, and many do.

More Nova Scotians are choosing a career in early childhood education. In response, government invested more than 1.3 million dollars in bursaries to support new and continuing education initiatives and increase the number of ECEs working in our Province.

4. Will the Province provide' ability to pay' legislation to municipalities?

The Province highly values the role local governments play and is always wants work with municipal partners. In each sitting of the legislature, we have demonstrated our commitment to modernizing the legislative framework that oversees municipal government in Nova Scotia.

We work closely and continuously with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) and the Nova Scotia Association of Municipal Administrators. The NSFM has not identified this issue as a priority in the resolution process. Such an amendment would require a detailed policy review.

5. What types of preventative programs are supported by the Department of Health and Wellness currently?

The Department of Health and Wellness (DHW) funds several preventative programs through the NSHA, IWK, and community grants. It also develops and implements strategies, legislation, and policies, often in collaboration with other departments, to promote wellness.

Public health is a crucial part of Nova Scotia's health system. What surrounds us, shapes us. Our neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces affect our daily lives and impact our health. Public Health Services identify and address public health issues. They promote health and healthier communities and ascertain community needs through 32 offices across the Province, Medical Officers of Health in the health zones, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and health promotion units within the department.

Public Health offers programs in Nova Scotia schools as part of the Healthy Promoting Schools initiative; which include the Fluoride Mouth Rinse Program, the Provincial Breakfast Program, Sexual Health Resources, and Youth Health Centres. In the central zone (which includes HRM), Community Health Teams offer a wide range of free programs focused on physical activity, nutrition, parenting, and emotional wellness.

Public Health Services with the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) and DHW work with municipalities, elected officials, and decision-makers to inform legislation, bylaws, and guidelines that lead to healthier communities.

DHW also provides grants directly to numerous organizations focused on wellness in areas such as healthy eating, injury prevention, reducing health inequalities, and sexual health, as well as through Community Health Boards across the province.

The department continues to invest in preventative vaccine and screening programs. These, for instance, include:

- the introduction of the now publicly funded Rotavirus vaccine (announced this month) as part of our childhood immunization program;
- free flu vaccine for all Nova Scotians;

- free high-dose flu vaccine for people living in long-term and residential care facilities; and
- breast density results automatically incorporated into mammography screening.
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A wide range of services is also available for youth through the SchoolPlus program and Youth Health Centres, to give young people a healthy start in life. SchoolsPlus is a partnership between several departments, including DHW. The use of school facilities by students, families, and the community for health, mental health, recreation, social work, and justice services is encouraged. As is the co-location of Early Years, Family Resource, and Youth Health Centres in schools.

- 6. What initiatives is the department pursuing to bring new thinking to healthcare? For instance, the new hospice provides beds for a significantly reduced cost versus hospitals. Will there be any provincial investment in capital for these facilities?**

As in business, innovation is essential in modern government, and a culture of innovation is fostered and celebrated. Nova Scotia's Public Sector Innovation Garage is, for example, the first of its kind in Canada. New programs such as the Innovation Rebate Program for business, the Industry Driven Research and Innovation program for the agriculture/agri-food sector, the Atlantic Fisheries Fund support of innovative projects and new technologies, and the Nova Scotia Innovation Hub for the bioresource economy are contributing. Tourism Nova Scotia's World-Class Experience EXCELLerator Program, was recently recognized nationally for excellence and innovation, while the Minister's Entrepreneurship Award of Excellence helps innovative, forward-thinking students launch their ideas.

That spirit of innovation, and a drive to find new and better ways, is working to make healthcare in Nova Scotia better.

Regarding hospices, the Province provides a portion of operating funds. Loan support for capital construction costs may also be available through Housing Nova Scotia. In addition to the new hospice in Halifax, a hospice in the Annapolis Valley is nearing completion, while a third in Cape Breton recently launched its capital fundraising campaign.

As government makes historic investments in healthcare infrastructure over the next number of years, exciting new practices will allow health professionals to work together, support recruitment and retention, and bring communities together. For example, the Cape Breton Regional Municipality Health Care Redevelopment Project expands emergency and critical care departments and the cancer centre. It also includes an innovative community hub that consists of a new school, community health centre, and a sixty-bed long-term care home in New Waterford. Procurement and practices for the construction of new facilities will incorporate innovative methods to ensure communities benefit to a greater extent.

Government is listening to the experts and making targeted investments to improve access to mental health and addictions services for Nova Scotians. For example, we recently created ten healthcare positions to expand the mental health crisis and urgent care teams across the Province and at the IWK Health Centre. We enhanced the provincial Mental Health Crisis Line with system upgrades and hired more healthcare professionals. People who need these services now have faster access.

Government is introducing changes to bring immediate relief and more support to staff and residents in long-term-care homes across the Province. Nursing homes will now be able to hire retired or internationally educated nurses to work as continuing care assistants. A new long-term care assistant role has also been created to help with day-to-day activities at nursing homes temporarily. A 48-bed long term care home slated for Eskasoni is the first of its kind to support Mi'kmaw culture, language, and traditions.

Earlier this fall, government announced it would help low-income Nova Scotians, 19 years or older, with an acquired brain injury access a personal alert device. Nova Scotia recently became the first Province in Canada to use software that assesses breast density and automatically shares results with women. The adoption of these innovative technologies improves outcomes by connecting users to 911 with the push of a button and through earlier detection and treatment of breast cancer.

A new and innovative pilot program called QuickStart is supporting parents of toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The program provides one-on-one parent-coaching that uses play-based activities to help parents further develop their child's communication and social skills early in life. Autism resource centres also opened in 2017.

A new Physician Immigration Stream is assisting Nova Scotia's public health authorities to hire general practitioners, family physicians, and specialist physicians. Nova Scotia medical students are getting hands-on training in Cape Breton through a new program designed to introduce future doctors to rural communities. For the first time, four Dalhousie University Medical School students are spending their entire third year in North Sydney and New Waterford. The program provides students with the chance to experience Cape Breton, and rural family medicine, early in their studies and interest them in eventually building a career there.

Government is also expanding the delivery of primary care beyond physicians to nurse practitioners, registered nurses, paramedics, and pharmacists. Work is underway on nurse and pharmacist prescribing, collaborative approaches to primary care that rely on nurse practitioners, and expansion of community paramedicine.

We are working collaboratively with sector organizations to identify novel solutions to complex issues. For example, the Continuing Care branch is working with the Health Association of Nova Scotia and its home care members to review the home support delivery model and find more flexible ways to support people in their homes. EHS, NSHA, and the DHW are finding ways to address wait times in emergency departments. For instance, in certain parts of the Province, EHS has original programs that support palliative care, long term care facilities, and transitions from emergency to home care.

Government and our partners in academia, the health system, and Research Nova Scotia are conducting studies to generate new ideas to drive improvements in health care.

DHW is working on a government-wide approach to improve population health by positively affecting the social determinants of health. For Nova Scotians to attain 'good health' we must think beyond the health care system and physical condition. Social and economic conditions are often even more important. Prevention considers the many contributing socio-economic factors that significantly affect wellbeing. Improving our social determinants of health creates a healthier, happier, more inclusive and prosperous province.

7. What savings, whether in time or money, has the government achieved from The Business Navigator and regulatory burden reduction, and will budgets be reduced by these savings?

(The response below assumes the question refers to any internal government savings accrued as a result of external savings to business-driven by regulatory reform.)

Government aims to drive external savings to business through regulatory reform and modernization. Much like the Chamber of Commerce, we view an efficient and effective regulatory environment as a primary component of a broader economic strategy to encourage and support business start-ups, operations, and expansion. We are appreciative of the Chamber's support of our work to improve Nova Scotia's regulatory environment for business.

Nova Scotia's Office of Regulatory Affairs and Service Effectiveness developed and implemented a program to reduce the overall regulatory burden on business and improve services to assist in regulatory compliance. The Chamber played an essential role in the program, from providing input to the Business Impact Assessment (BIA), to contributing ideas for ways to reduce regulatory burden, and by promoting the Business Navigation Service. Again, we are thankful for your engagement in this work.

Part of the program includes assessing, monitoring, and tracking individual regulatory proposals for their business impact, including in dollars. Through this work, we have reduced the overall regulatory burden to business by 34 million dollars (net) annually, exceeding our target of 25 million dollars. We published an account of all regulatory savings, as well as new regulatory costs for eighteen months. Nova Scotia was the first jurisdiction in Canada to do this.

A new target to reduce regulatory burden to business was recently set at an additional 10 million dollars (net) annually by the end of 2020. We will publish an interim and final report for this work. When achieved, Nova Scotia businesses will save nearly 45 million dollars annually through regulatory burden reduction.

To your question regarding internal savings to government, it is unfortunately an oversimplification to draw a direct line between work that reduces compliance costs for business and internal savings to government. In many areas, investments are required by government to make business operations easier. For example, government invests approximately \$300,000 annually in the Business Navigation Service; the service achieves annual savings to businesses of 3 million dollars. Government has also invested in a modern business registration system to make business registration easier, driving annual savings to industry of 8 million dollars. In other areas, government has assumed work previously the responsibility of business, such as conducting background police checks in certain areas.

While we cannot draw a direct, dollar-to-dollar line, we are keenly interested in better understanding the internal impacts of our regulatory modernization and improvement work. We recently committed to working with the Halifax Regional Municipality to estimate internal costs/savings to government from regulatory changes to businesses, by adapting the BIA for this purpose. The government plans to begin tracking this work broadly in 2020 to understand the relationship better.

8. What countries and/or regions is the Nova Scotia government currently exporting/importing to and what countries and/or regions are being actively investigated?

Growing our exports is a priority for our Province and government. More companies must become exporters, and those that are already exporting must increase sales outside the Province for our economy to grow. For many companies, exports also offer the benefit of increased security through geographic diversity.

Nova Scotia exported 15.8 billion dollars in goods and services in 2017. During the previous five years, Nova Scotia goods and services exports increased by 4.8 per cent. The number of exporting establishments rose steadily over the past several years. In 2018, there were 1,017 Nova Scotia business establishments participating in international merchandise trade, up 87 from 930 establishments in 2012. Those exporters ship to 168 countries, 73 of which have shipments of over 1 million dollars.

Various government activities encourage export increases, including coordinating market activities to leverage existing relationships, building new ones, and facilitating inbound and outbound missions that highlight our competitive strengths and assets.

Over the last several years, Nova Scotia has diversified and increased its exports to offset the loss of export revenue from the oil and gas industry and even make some gains. Exports in seafood have doubled to more than 2 billion dollars. Nova Scotia blueberries are available in 32 countries with an export value of over 100 million dollars. Tire exports increased by 20 per cent over the past five years, while wood exports are up 75 per cent, and agricultural product exports are up 24 per cent.

Nova Scotia's top export markets – the US, China, and the EU – account for 86 per cent of our exports. Diversifying to new markets helps companies take advantage of changing trade patterns that offer new supply, production, and partnership opportunities, gain access to more substantial market potential, and increase competitiveness in response to innovative markets.

Nova Scotia has a focused, strategic approach to diversifying trade and growing exports. We collaborate across government and with key stakeholders to identify key markets, and we see results from these global partnerships. In its market diversification work with Nova Scotia's exporting companies, NSBI, for example, analyzes factors such as market access (e.g. Free Trade Agreements), transportation and infrastructure compatibility, ease of doing business, ex-pat networks, supply chains, and firm competitiveness factors. NSBI also has programs, tools, and expertise to support first-time exporters and export growth and staff work with companies from across Nova Scotia to expand export sales.

During the past five years exports doubled to South Korea, Mexico, and Australia, while exports to Japan increased by 16 per cent. There is significant growth in the number of firms exporting to, and the value of exports destined for, Asian markets. Exports to China, Japan, and South Korea show steady growth.

In 2018-2019, 21 per cent of NSBI clients reported export market diversification or an increase in the number of countries to which they exported. This exceeds NSBI's target of 10 per cent.

Recognizing the US, China, and the EU are primary trade partners, Nova Scotia implemented engagement strategies to build on our success. In addition to these markets, government persistently seeks opportunities in other countries. Global developments for new opportunities are monitored and opportunities provided by new Free Trade Agreements, such as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), leveraged.

In the past five years, I have led delegations to South Korea, Japan, Lebanon, and Israel; in addition to Europe and China. Government is bringing partners to Nova Scotia as well. Recently, Nova Scotia hosted three Chinese delegations and welcomed a cohort of European Union ambassadors. Government is investigating new markets in Asia such as Vietnam, Taiwan, and Singapore, and monitoring Africa and Eastern Europe — jurisdictions with the world's most rapidly developing economies. This year, an inbound trade mission from Nigeria is planned.

Concerning domestic markets, 53.7 per cent of Nova Scotia's total trade is within Canada. Other Canadian provinces recognize our talent in a variety of sectors, including computer system design, interactive media/video game development, database hosting and systems, and post-secondary education. Ontario (\$1.1 billion) and Quebec (\$709.6 million) are our largest domestic partners and government has undertaken missions to Toronto and other Canadian destinations. The Canadian Free Trade Agreement opened exports within our country, and we are exploring ways to encourage Nova Scotia businesses to develop these markets.

9. What is the number one reason Immigrants do not choose to remain in Nova Scotia/Halifax?

Increased immigration retention rates are a positive trend for Nova Scotia. Retention is a consideration in every part of Nova Scotia's immigration programming, from attracting newcomers to designing immigration streams, and to how and where settlement supports are provided. We commend the Chamber of Commerce on its work through the *Accessing a Skilled Workforce (ASW)* task force, aimed at fostering the conditions for talent creation, attraction, and retention.

Government invests in immigrant settlement services to support integration and ensure newcomers want to stay in Nova Scotia. We fund settlement service providers (including language training and employment support) who play a key role in welcoming and settling newcomers.

As mentioned earlier, the number of immigrants coming to Nova Scotia is increasing at considerable rates. Our province's retention rate is robust at 71 per cent - the highest in the region. Recently, the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration commissioned comprehensive, first of its kind in Canada research to investigate why immigrants choose our Province, and why some stay and others leave. This research will help government and its partners create the conditions for even more newcomers to stay.

Preliminary results show immigrants to Nova Scotia give high marks for our safe communities, quality of life, and employment opportunities. The most common reasons for leaving are to seek different employment opportunities or to be closer to family and friends.

Overall, research shows that immigrants to our Province are doing well. They have higher employment rates and higher average incomes when compared to the national average for immigrants.

10. How often is the Department of Business in contact with Nova Scotian SMEs to discuss what skills and training will be needed in our workforce?

Building the size of our workforce and its 21st-century skills and competencies is central to Nova Scotia's future success and the quality of life of all Nova Scotians. We are approaching our work in ways more conducive to cross-sector collaboration on the issues on which we all must work together.

Government is engaging departments and agencies on the future of work, as this issue has diverse connections and long-term impacts. The Department of Business (DoB), primarily through the Crown Corporations, is in consistent communication with SMEs and businesses, as are many other partners across government. Labour force expansion and access to a skilled workforce is a top issue for companies from numerous sectors.

Labour and Advanced Education (LAE), for example, plays a central role in this vital issue. It supports thirteen sector councils that collectively represent the interests of 32,000 SMEs and 370,000 workers and their families. Ongoing engagement with these sectors and employers allows for robust and timely input into planning for labour market needs, including attraction, retention, and training. Business Workforce Consultants collaborate with sectors and individual employers to support strategic human resource planning and coordinate initiatives for employers who are affected by workplace transition.

The Province funds the Centre for Employment Innovation (CEI) at St. FX University, which conducts research, fosters exemplary practices, and encourages collaboration in the development and delivery of employment services. As part of a systems-focused approach to service excellence, CEI conducts its activities in cooperation with the eighteen community-based Nova Scotia Works employment services providers, the Nova Scotia Career Development Association (NSCDA), and LAE. It also works with employers to determine their needs and strengths while providing support to create safe, welcoming, and inclusive workplaces.

Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency (NSAA) meets with industry regularly to discuss the evolving skills required for careers within the skilled trades. Through Trade Advisory Committees, Atlantic Trade Advisory Committees, and Sector Council meetings, the NSAA frequently receives input on a variety of topics including the need for skills development. Curriculum development work is happening at the national, Atlantic, and provincial levels to continuously refresh and update Occupational Standards and Curriculum Standards and examinations. The work led to updates in over half of Nova Scotia's seventy designated trades in the past five years.

In partnership with the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) (which is also flexible to the needs of employers) the NSAA meets with industry as part of a regular program review cycle that informs updates and changes to pre-apprenticeship program. In addition to these formal processes, the NSAA's fifteen field staff meet regularly with employers on emerging issues related to skills gaps and more precise investigations.

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Government also collaborates with Service Canada to evaluate occupations that show strong employment prospects now, and in the future, in the face of economic growth, retirement, trends, and attrition. Statistics Canada data releases (including employer surveys) and relevant studies are analyzed to understand and address current and emerging labour market pressures. This analysis includes gathering and sharing intelligence with stakeholders across all program areas to communicate employer needs and position Nova Scotians for success at work.

Nova Scotia is involved in the Labour Market Information Council (LMIC), which is undertaking several projects to increase understanding of the skills and training required for the future of work. These projects include regular engagement with employer organizations across Canada and defining and linking skills to occupations.

The Province's work with organizations such as Mitacs on internship placements, and the Halifax Partnership Connector Program linking post-secondary students with local businesses, also, for example, provide a window into labour market needs.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in the work of government. I hope I have provided insight into the areas of interest to the Chamber and its members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephen McNeil". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "M".

Honourable Stephen McNeil, M.L.A.
Premier