Appearance of the Auditor General of Canada before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Accountability Iqaluit, Nunavut June 14, 2007

Members Present:

Hunter Tootoo (Chair) Keith Peterson (Co-chair) David Alagalak Levi Barnabas

Staff Members:

Alex Baldwin Nancy Tupik

Interpreters:

Mary Nashook Blandina Tulugarjuk

Witnesses:

Office of the Auditor General of Canada:

Sheila Fraser, Auditor General of Canada Andrew Lennox, Assistant Auditor General Martin Dinan, Audit Professional Julie Charron, Principal

Department of Education:

Jeff Chown, Director of Finance
Kathy Okpik, Deputy Minister of
Education
Joy Suluk, Director, Adult Learning and
Post Secondary Services
Irene Tanuyak, Assistant Deputy Minister

>>Committee commenced at 9:39

Chairman: Good morning, everybody. Welcome back. Before we get started I would like to again ask Mr. Alagalak if he could start us off with a prayer, please.

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Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Alagalak. I guess we can continue on with the chapter-by-chapter review of the Auditor General's Report on the FANS Program. Yesterday we were on section 2, paragraphs 28 to 44. Do members have any questions? Mr. Barnabas.

Mr. Barnabas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning. I would again like to welcome Sheila, her officials, and the government witnesses.

On paragraph 29 of the Auditor General's Report, it's mentioned that in the 2005-06 fiscal year, 430 of the 600 Nunavummiut who applied to the department for financial assistance were assessed as qualified and therefore received benefits.

Of those students, 331 were beneficiaries of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. The Auditor General's Report indicates that in 2005-06 out of those 430 that applied for financial assistance were assessed as qualified and received benefits, 77 percent of these students were Inuit. What were the figures for 2006-07, for 2007-08 to date? In general, on what grounds were applicants denied financial assistance and how can they appeal this? That's my question to the witnesses from the government. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) There are some numbers of reasons why students will be denied financial assistance.

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Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Any further questions, Mr. Barnabas?

Mr. Barnabas (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) The issue of whether students enrolled in an adult education program qualify for FANS is raised in the report. The Auditor General recommends that the department clearly define what constitutes post-secondary education for the purpose of the FANS Program.

The recently-released Nunavut Adult Learning Strategy recommends that a detailed review of FANS take place, including an evaluation of funding options for basic education programs. The strategy also recommends that the development of the Mature High School Graduation Diploma be tied to access programs of Nunavut Arctic College and that students are funded through FANS.

The department's response to the Auditor General's report indicates that it is undertaking the preparation of a Cabinet submission to seek approval on the appropriate definition of post-secondary education for Nunavut. At what stage is the submission and what is the department recommending? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you,

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Mr. Chairman. We have not identified exactly what the definition is. We will do a fact-finding meeting with other jurisdictions to find out what their definition means. We will have to review the other jurisdictions. After we review the definition from other jurisdictions then we will be able to write the definition. It'll be completed within three months. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Barnabas.

Mr. Barnabas (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A number of MLAs have heard from their constituents that a broader range of adult education programs should be considered post-secondary education for the purpose of eligibility under FANS.

What are the cost implications of expanding the range of programs for which the students are eligible for FANS funding? Would the GN be able to obtain increased federal funding? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Back in 2002 the living allowance was increased. Since then the funding has not been increased. Students going to college or university are able to apply for funding from FANS. The students that go to Adult Basic Education in the communities are not eligible for FANS because we only provide funding for diploma and certificate programs. Those are eligible under FANS.

For the Adult Learning Strategy we will be considering that and we will be reviewing

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the costs. I can tell you that regarding the mature graduation that you just mentioned earlier on, we are now reviewing it in detail. We're now reviewing the programs of Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and PEI, collecting all the information and looking at the adult basic training program.

We will consider the implementation after the committee has been struck to implement that Adult Learning Strategy with the members of Government of Nunavut and NTI. These groups will be making recommendations to implement them. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Barnabas.

Mr. Barnabas (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Information tabled by the government in 2002 indicated that as of February 1, 2002 there were 312 students receiving financial assistance from FANS. 92 of these students were enrolled in university-level degree programs and 220 were enrolled in certificate or diploma programs. What is the breakdown today? Will students enrolling in Government of Nunavut's planned cultural school and trades school be eligible for FANS? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The trades school is funded separately from FANS. That's outside the FANS Program.

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The trades school can receive benefits only if the student is under a diploma or certificate program and if the institution is recognized.

All others have various funding within the Department of Education. For example, the Labour Market Development Agreement, when they do apprenticeship programs, they can be provided benefits from that. We also have training-on-the-job funding. They would be paid \$7.50 per hour. That's the funding we make available for assistance.

For others under income support, if some applicants are going to take training through the Arctic College that's not a certificate or a diploma program, they are provided \$10 per day for assistance.

In regard to what you have asked, we will be considering the policy and regulations once we start reviewing that. Currently, Trades School students are not eligible for FANS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Barnabas.

Mr. Barnabas (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Auditor General's Report recommends that the department develop policies on how to take into account funding that students receive from other organizations in determining their eligible FANS benefits.

On paragraph 15, you said that if Kakivak provides funding for a student, they're not eligible for FANS. The students can apply for funding with that.

(interpretation ends) The Auditor General's Report recommends that the department develop policies on how to

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take into account funding that students receive from other organizations in determining their eligible FANS benefits in order to ensure that students do not receive the same benefits twice.

The department's responses indicate that they are examining the establishment of common approaches, including joint applications, to streamline the approval system for students and to avoid possible situations of duplicating funding arising.

At what stage is this review to date? When will changes be made? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have not started on that. We'll start on that not too long from now. We use computers and there is a place in the form for whether they had received funding from others, other than FANS. If they say yes, they have to identify where they receive additional funding outside of FANS.

Currently we have nothing set. For example, we do not request for the previous taxation receipts but right now we will have to negotiate with my staff on how we should be reviewing this aspect.

The only way we can know from students whether they receive additional funding is when they disclose it. If they don't disclose it we wouldn't know whether they receive additional funding outside of FANS. So we are going to look into ways of how we can find out more. For example, if the student receives benefits from FANS, through income support, and also through LMDA, we can look into it to

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make sure that they are not receiving additional funding internally. If they receive external funding, like from an organization, we wouldn't know.

So we will have to identify ways of how we can find out if the student is receiving additional funding outside of FANS, but I can tell you that we have an agreement. If they receive funding from another organization, like Kakivak Association, we will work with them. The student can also apply for funding through that program.

Also the funding application, if approved, is given to us and then we review how we can provide additional support. If they receive support from Kakivak Association for the cost of living and if they are approved for cost of living funding then we would approve the transportation costs, for books, and for tuition fees, which is \$2,500 annually.

So we don't provide the same funding all the time but we do provide funding for what is required. We have never come up with an actual agreement, but we're now working towards that agreement. We are working with the Kakivak Association to get an agreement.

Sometimes some students get more funding than the other students. If the students didn't receive additional funding then we can provide funding. So that's the only one that we recognize as others receiving from outside of FANS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik.

I just want to follow-up on a couple of things that my colleague asked. I know in May 2002 we were provided a program 4-L___)⁶/ς¹⁶(-⁶)⁶ 4⁶/6 (C)
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Does the department have anything more up-to-date than the 2002 listing? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Hopefully, within the next couple of weeks we will be able to provide the breakdowns for all the years past. We're just working on a couple of computer glitches to make sure that the numbers that we have in the database add up with the numbers on the table.

So we've just established an ability to provide reports from the database, and we're just working out some of the technical issues and some of the glitches. I'll give you an example.

For some reason, a while ago, our database was reporting everybody as female, so we're working out those technical issues with Community and Government Services, and we hope that within the next couple of weeks to have a total breakdown by fiscal year that shows the table by the number of bachelors, masters, Ph.D.s, and what not.

As soon as we can get that information, I commit to providing it to the members. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. So are you saying that you don't have any idea of what those numbers were since 2002? Is that something that you looked at? I would have thought that something like that is what you would want to look at on an

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annual basis just to get an idea of what our students are doing and where their needs are. Maybe I could get an explanation as to why that hasn't been done since 2002. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: I can't really answer why it hasn't been done after 2002. I know that currently, we did run the report and some of the numbers weren't adding up. We have to find out and go back to see why all of the data is not being captured in that specific report.

Previously to the crystal reporting, staff were requiring it on an Excel spreadsheet database to determine the numbers. So since we have discontinued using the database, we're using the crystal reports and the reports that we can generate from the database.

Like I said, there's a glitch right now in being able to run the tables where the total number of assessments and the total number of people are in those tables. So, before, we would like to actually share tables, we want to make sure that all the numbers add up. We commit to bringing that to the members. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. You indicated that prior to having crystal, not so clear, reporting system, it was done up on an Excel spreadsheet. Does the department have those reports, or are they not using it anymore? Are those reports and those numbers gone? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Actually, we still have the numbers but what it would take is for a FANS officer or the supervisor to manually count and look at, manually, the number of students.

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So in order for us to be able to report correct information to the legislature and to the members, I would ask not to continue using the database and to use the reporting capability of the database that was implemented within the last three months. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Another thing I just want to follow up on. My colleague asked if students going into the trades school or the cultural school would be eligible for FANS. You answered, I think, in regard to students that would be going to the trades school.

What about for the cultural school? Is that something that's outside of the college? Will the students who want to attend that cultural school be eligible for FANS, or what stage is the department at looking at trying to address that issue that will be coming in the near future? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the example of the cultural school is a good example of new issues that emerge within Nunavut that are different from other jurisdictions across Canada. This is something, definitely, that we will have to take a look at.

I would say we are in pre-planning stages. We are in the process of having to fill our coordinator position for programming on the cultural school. Definitely, that will be one area where the one follow-up item will have to be determined. It will all depend again, according to our application, whether it is a certificate or diploma and if it is a recognized institute.

Those are all the things when they develop the definition for post-secondary. I can't commit to anything right now, with respect to the cultural school. We will

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have to definitely look at it to see if they'll be eligible for FANS, or not. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik.

My next question I'll ask to Ms. Fraser. In paragraph 37 and 38 it talks about, "They have found no formal policies or guidelines available to program officers and how to proceed where cases of additional funding is awarded." Then it goes on in paragraph 38 where it says, "To cases, students had not declared other funding from other sources."

Throughout your review of documents and things like that, is there a clear requirement for students to, in the documentation that they're provided, inform or declare income from other sources? Ms. Fraser.

Ms. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll ask Ms. Charron to respond to that question, please.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Fraser. Ms. Charron.

Ms. Charron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The form does not ask how much money students would receive from other external organizations and from which organization. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Charron.

Ms. Okpik, how has that been done if there's no requirement for the student to provide that information? How are they, I don't know if you can blame them for not declaring, if they're not informed that they have to declare. How has that been handled from the department in the past? Ms. Okpik.

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Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On the application form there is a line that asks if a student is receiving other funding. There is a 'no' section and a 'yes' section. If they answer 'yes', then they have to indicate from whom they received funding.

For additional information I will have to turn the question over to Joy Suluk. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Ms. Suluk.

Ms. Suluk (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In regard to the students who fill out the applications we ask them if they're going to be getting any funds from outside organizations. They have to identify if they're getting any external funds, or if they're not. We have to believe them if they say no. If they say that they're not getting any external funding then we have to take their word for it.

We ask them if they get any extra funds for disabilities, whether they're getting employment insurance, or if they have an income from any organization. That's how we do it. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Suluk. It says on paragraph 28 that there were three cases where that happened: two where students hadn't declared, and one case where a student was granted tuition and partial book benefits under FANS. It also indicates that there was information supporting the decision of the program officer that was not documented.

So maybe in cases like that, if I can get an explanation as to how that was handled and why there was no documentation on

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file for those decisions that were made. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I would refer the question to the Auditor General's staff as I don't know what instances they are referring to. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Ms. Fraser.

Ms. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I could just clarify on previous responses; the forms do ask the students to indicate if they're receiving outside funding and from what organization. They do not ask them to declare how much money they're actually receiving.

That is the point that we're saying that that needs to be clarified. There needs to be guidance given to the program officials as to how to treat that, depending on the sums of money received and from whom. They need better guidance so that they can make the appropriate decisions.

In this case, I believe it was going to be confirmed with the college. The college confirmed to us that some of these students were receiving funds from other sources. So the college was aware of it, even though the student had not actually declared it under the FANS Program. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Fraser. I guess Ms. Okpik, if you can explain if anything has been done, or what has been done for follow-up in cases, like those ones that have been brought to your attention that that was happening. What has happened since then with the rest of those cases? Ms. Okpik.

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Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Currently, we have to accept what the student tells us and we have to accept it on the face value that the information that they're providing is true.

Currently, there is no mechanism in place to determine if a student is receiving funding from other sources. That's something that we're going to have to look into; do we start asking for tax assessments a year after to determine if students have received other monies?

That's one way of approaching it but that will have to be another portion of the work plan that we will have to add to ensure that we know where to go to get information to find out if the students have been receiving monies other than the FANS Program. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. I can understand when you say you're taking it at face value that the student has given you the correct information. There are two cases where the student had not declared and the department is aware of now. I'm just wondering what actions, if any, has the department taken to correct discrepancies? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I'm not aware of the two instances. I would have to confer, possibly, with the college to see which students they are.

When we're determining information like that, we have to make sure that we're following ATIPP; you can't just cross share information with other organizations. There has to be proper following of ATIPP procedures.

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CLºdo%U JYPF;4UQ. TOPPO FCPP;4UQ. T.PPO T.PPO TOPPO TO So I guess that's one of the other components that we will have to look at is how can we share information across organizations, keeping within the access to privacy and information legislation, but certainly we'll undertake to find out what these two instances are, and to see if they'll be eligible for FANS, or whether it would be deemed an overpayment. We'll have to review each of those cases on a case by case basis. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. The next question to ask is does the department have any policies or procedures on how to handle cases like this, in which incorrect information was provided, and it is discovered after the fact. Is there any policy or procedures in place of how you would proceed in dealing with situations like that? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: In this instance, it would be, I guess, the first cases for us. Obviously what would have to be done is the review of the file. Looking at the payments that we have given and then taking into consideration any other payments that they have received. The determination would then be made if they eligible for FANS, or not. If they're not, then it would be constituted as an overpayment. That would be the recourse in this instance.

There are a lot of issues that come up on a case by case basis where we have to review files to determine eligibility and what the outcome will be. Most times the outcome will be an overpayment as a result of eligibility. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

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Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning to everyone.

I want to follow-up on some questions that my colleague, Mr. Barnabas, had asked earlier concerning the appropriate definition of post-secondary education for Nunavut. Ms. Okpik said that the department is going to consult with other jurisdictions across Canada.

My question for Ms. Okpik, you've had a lot of time to think about this already. In your mind, or internally, within the department, what is the department leaning towards in terms of a definition of a post-secondary education for Nunavut? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What we're going to be doing is a review of what each jurisdiction has in terms of its definition of post-secondary. I said earlier in one of the questions that some of our needs are different in Nunavut where we have a huge population that has not completed grade 12. So we certainly take that into consideration when we define post-secondary.

We also have different programs in our territory such as the certificate and diploma level, such as jewelry making, that most likely, we will include in our definition. But other than that I can't really comment on other parts of the definition without fully seeing and hearing from our staff as to the specific needs of Nunavummiut and then also how other jurisdictions define post-secondary education. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik.

Again to Ms. Okpik; the current year kids are graduating from high school. Only in the last couple of weeks we've heard a lot of public announcements about high school graduates. There will be some more graduates going on to school later this month, with graduation in the Kitikmeot.

Those individuals that are considering going on to post-secondary institutions are you going to continue to use the interpretations that you've been using for the last eight years? Would you continue in that vein to interpret grade 12 graduations according to... it's different than what the legal interpretation is, I guess.

Post-secondary, I guess, in Nunavut right now doesn't necessarily mean that you have to have grade 12. It means you're just not in high school, you're out of high school, and you got out of high school in grade nine, 10, 11, or 12, because that's the interpretation of the Department of Education and the FANS Program. Would that still be the case this year for people applying for FANS if they're going to Arctic College, or a tech school, or a university down south? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) We will continue with our past practice as current practice and financial assistance will be determined on eligibility of

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students: they have to be a Canadian citizen, they have to have 12 months or more of being a resident of Nunavut, and any institution that they're attending must be a certificate or a diploma level and it must be a recognized designated institution.

In the past, that is how we have been allocating FANS benefits and for this current fall session we will continue with what we are doing, but also recognizing the fact that at the same time I'll be starting to define the definition for post-secondary. We will start the work on the review of the *FANS Act* and the regulations.

So we will currently follow the Act and the regulations that we have right now that are in place. So it's a certificate or a diploma program offered by a recognized institution. The institution defines its entrance requirements. Institutions may accept mature students if they have grade 12 or not. So that's the basis of our acceptance for the eligibility for the FANS benefits. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that answer. I'm wondering, Ms. Okpik, when you review the FANS Program, would consideration be given to having a separate program where some mature students or students who don't necessarily have a grade nine, 10, 11, or 12, in other words, students who don't have a grade 12 graduation, would they have a separate program recognizing that they are not, under the legal definition or interpretation, grade 12 graduates?

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There may be some grade 12 students who want to go to post-secondary institutions that are designated but they need to upgrade their marks. They don't want to go back to high school, they want to go to a college, say Grant McEwen College, and receive some upgrading so they could get higher marks to get into a post-secondary institution.

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Would a separate program be something that would make sense for that and have the FANS just for the true post-secondary, under the legal definition, of being a grade 12 graduate? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

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Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) That is, I guess, something, certainly, that we can take a look at. Just to provide clarification, the Jewellery Making Program is eligible for FANS as it is a certificate level program, determined by the Nunavut Arctic College.

With respect to Adult Basic Education, currently, anybody taking Adult Basic Education in Nunavut, or students attending any type of upgrading outside of Nunavut is not eligible for FANS because it's not a certificate or diploma level program.

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I stated yesterday that the preliminary estimates would be about, possibly another \$5 million to support benefits for students attending Adult Basic Education.
Currently, one of the ways we provide support to some ABE students, if they're on income support, and they are taking ABE, then that is deemed a productive choice, so on top of it they would receive \$10 a day over their income support payment. I'm just using that as one example.

I don't know if they received sponsorship from other organizations. I know that ABE students would apply to different groups for funding, but currently ABE students are not eligible for FANS. It is certainly something that we can take a look at as part of our review and then provide a cost analysis. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that answer.

I understand what you're saying but it is confusing to me why you would help a person taking a jewelry or metal work program when they could have grade 8 or 9 education to qualify for a certificate so they can get FANS.

You could have a grade 12 student, who actually does have a grade 12 diploma, and they want to go to university to become an engineer or an accountant, but they have to get their marks up. You kind of discourage them from going to a post-secondary institution because they can't qualify for FANS because it is expensive to go to university.

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However, if they made a conscious decision in their mind that they can't get help to go to post-secondary to get upgrading so they get higher marks to get into a degree program, and they will look at the Nunavut Arctic College program and find out that they have those one year certificate programs as just a jewelry maker. Nothing against jewelry makers but suddenly they can qualify for FANS, or some of the other courses that Arctic College has.

What I'm trying to get at here is why not have a separate program, recognizing that not all people are going to be able to proceed at a normal pace. They are going to get out of grade 12. People are going to drop out at grade 9, 10, 11, or 12. At some point they are going to make a decision that we need further education.

So separate that. All those folks from FANS can have a separate program for them and make them eligible. Someone can get upgrading so they can get higher marks. If they have to attend Grant McEwan, or other programs down south, they can do that. They can get higher marks and get into a regular university or tech school. Folks that want to go to Nunavut Arctic College could qualify under the separate program for a certificate programs that ABE folks can qualify as well. And at some point if some of those students get their marks up to a certain level then they can go back and qualify for FANS for the university and tech schools type programs.

That's what I'm trying to get at. Just separate it all and have two separate programs and then the Government of Nunavut funds both. After all that's what the government wants to do. They want to educate people. We need skilled educated

workforce. We should be encouraging everybody. If they want to get the education, we should try to help them and not put obstacles in their way. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Our current legislation for the *Student Financial Assistance Act* and regulations prohibit us from funding ABE students. It also prohibits us from funding students that are not attending a certificate/diploma program in a recognized institution. So, therefore, the FANS Program is the only program that we have right now.

For students who need upgrading, who have just completed grade 12 and find that some of their marks are too low, they have the option of returning to the high school within their community for a semester to upgrade their marks. I guess, financially, that can be done within the community within the school setting. That's one of the options.

Currently, that would have to be something that I take back to the department for us to examine to do a cost analysis because, basically, you would look at an ABE class for every single community with possibly 20 students, and do a cost analysis based on those amounts.

We know, traditionally, students coming into our system are older students who have dependents. So there's a bigger cost implication to be able to run this program.

So what we have to do is a cost analysis, working with the college to look at past numbers of students coming into the ABE programs within the communities, and

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The other thing I mentioned earlier is part of the Adult Learning Strategy is we're undertaking work to have a mature graduation option so that students who wish not to pursue ABE can go through a mature graduation and the HRSDC's essential skills, so we start at where the student is and then go from the skill set that they need to obtain to get their grade 12.

So that's some of the work that we're working on right now. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that answer. So I hope the department does take a serious look and provide the cost analysis.

I think the MLAs will agree, too, that it's better to have people who are educated and productive in their communities with whatever they choose to do than sitting around being non-productive and be forced to apply for income support all the time.

I'm not sure what the numbers are but it's close to \$25 million to \$26 million in income support benefits, but if you put people to work, when they find jobs and they have an education, they will become productive and they will contribute to their communities. The government could then collect personal taxes off them and if you

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take them off the income support, there's more money in income support to redirect it to educational-type programs.

I'm not an expert in financial analysis and all things of that sort but I'm sure you have officials in your department that might.

Just one final question, Mr. Chairman, I wanted to ask Ms. Okpik to clarify: how many times can a person apply to the FANS Program and receive funding? Is it one-time only, or is it multiple times? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) We have students that apply multiple times. So if you go in, for example, for a bachelor's degree, then you can apply for FANS. Once you complete that, then you can go back and apply for a master's program, and then once you complete that, then you can go back and apply for a Ph.D.

I would like to clarify, though, that for people receiving loans, there is a cap. So for example, for Nunavummiut who are non-beneficiaries that have had three years of schooling, for every three years of schooling they receive one year of a basic grant, then they would be eligible for a primary loan. As long as the amount of their primary loan doesn't exceed \$26,000, they can continue to apply and receive benefits from FANS.

For non-beneficiaries, who have not gone through our school system, they can apply for a secondary loan. They can keep applying for the secondary loan as long as it does not exceed \$36,000. Those are the

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Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik.

On that you talked about caps for nonbeneficiaries. Are there caps for beneficiaries as well? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am not aware of any caps. The one cap that would be made is for beneficiaries receiving the FANS grants. Beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries can also apply for what we call the Needs Assessed Loan, where they would have to determine if there is a need.

There is a form that they have to fill out and the amounts can be up to \$165 extra a week under this Needs Assessed Loan, which is totally repayable back. So if you do receive a Needs Assessed Loan and you do receive the basic grant then, again, the cap would be \$26,000. So your Needs Assessed Loan would not go over the \$26,000 in the lifetime of your application with FANS.

Chairman: So there is a cap, this \$26,000. You say that you are not aware of a cap and then there is a cap of \$26,000. So I just want to get clarification on that. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Yes. I'm sorry. There is a cap on the loans portion, on the grants portion there is no cap. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik.

You mentioned earlier about people going on for degrees, and masters, and Ph.D.s. I

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think it was last year where someone was going on to get a doctorate degree and it was a beneficiary that wasn't getting any funding from FANS. Maybe I could just get an explanation why if there is no cap. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In this case I can't comment unless I get specifics on this issue. We can certainly discuss that after, if you wish. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: We won't have to give that information to you. Actually, your minister is probably very well aware of the situation as well. Mr. Barnabas.

Mr. Barnabas (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Auditor General's Report from 40 to 43, it identifies the number of applicants for FANS and appeals.

(interpretation ends) The Auditor General's Report recommends that the department review its appeal process. The issue of appeals was also raised in the department's own 2002 review of FANS. The recently released Nunavut Adult Learning Strategy recommends the establishment of a learning ombudsman to evaluate concerns and complaints about such programs as FANS.

At what stage are these reviews today? When will changes be made? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There is an appeals process in place with respect to the Adult Learning Strategy and the idea of an ombudsman. Currently, we

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are striking what we call an Implementation Panel and Management Committee with Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and Department of Education that will work on the implementation plans for the Adult Learning Strategy.

The idea of an ombudsman is one item within the implementation plan. We hope to convene our committee within the next month, or two, to start looking at the implementation of the recommendations of the Adult Learning Strategy.

So this is the update on that. I can commit to ensuring that the members are aware of any further work that happens with respect to the ombudsman. In the absence of that we do have an appeals process. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Barnabas.

Mr. Barnabas (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Auditor General's Report indicates that the FANS officials have reported that only a few appeals are made each year.

Is this because most FANS decisions are made correctly, or is it because there is not a clear system in which to make appeals? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is correct. We only do receive maybe one, two, maybe three appeals a year. We find that most students choose to contact their Member of the Legislative Assembly to bring their concerns directly to the MLAs and each is then investigated and reported on correctly. (interpretation) Thank you,

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Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Barnabas.

Mr. Barnabas (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) During its public hearings last year on the Nunavut Arctic College, the Standing Committee on Health and Education heard a number of concerns and suggestions from students about the FANS Program.

These concerns included issues such as problems with timely payments of students' benefits and issues facing adult students with children to have to travel to a regional Nunavut Arctic College campus before the start of its academic year in order to register their children in school. How does the department respond to such concerns when they are raised by the students? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am happy to say that Office of the Auditor General has indicated that our application forms were processed on a timely basis and that payments were on time and accurate. That is a good news item.

With respect to students wanting to come earlier, we look at that on a case by case basis. We have instances where if housing is provided with the college then we can look at that on a case by case basis for families to come earlier to register students for school. That is at the usual request of the student.

We try to be flexible, in addition, to ensure that there is not a burden to the college for housing. So we take those things into Δ 67 Φ \dot{C} 66.

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Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Before I go over to Mr. Peterson, I just want to ask Ms. Fraser, or her officials that are with her, in paragraph 40, 41, and 42 talks about this whole appeal process.

Does she expect that the department has a reasonable process in place to ensure that financial systems is only issued to eligible persons expected to find the appeal process. They also expected that the status of these appeals be tracked.

I think that you are not able to assess whether the appeal system is functioning effectively. Maybe I'll just get you to elaborate a little bit on the concerns in this area of these findings. Ms. Fraser.

Ms. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The main issue that we raise in here is the information on appeals is not kept centrally but rather is kept in each file of the student or the applicant.

So it was difficult to get that summary information about the appeals. That can be very useful information to any manager to understand what is being appealed; what were the decisions; were the decisions upholding the process or the determination by staff, or was there a change in that; is there a pattern, are there certain areas. It could be an indication, for example, if a lot of appeals are successful, then perhaps staff doesn't understand a certain area of the program well.

So it's important to keep that kind of information centrally to track and analyze it to see if there are changes that are required, even better information to applicants.

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So an appeals process in any program is a really important source of information. That's one of the reasons why we're saying that this area should be centralized, and a better understanding of what is causing the appeals and how they are resolved. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Fraser. Given that, then Ms. Okpik, I know in the department's response to the recommendations here, it says, "... examining the current appeals process and work has already begun to clearly define and document a more consistent approach in light of the recommendations." And also, "... this process will include the establishment of a central registry of appeals." If you can give us an overview of exactly the plans; what, specifically, are you looking at addressing these concerns? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Like I said, there is, currently, a student appeals process. The first level is the student appeals to the supervisor of FANS, the second stage is to the director of adult learning and post-secondary services, and then the third level is to the Minister of Education.

The guideline for the appeals is they must be made within 30 days of the notification of the decision for the student. The appeal should contain the exact reason why the client believes that the decision was incorrect. Appeals can be received in writing by fax or by email. Every person has their own right to appeal the decision of the FANS office.

We have a procedure in terms of how appeals should be logged. We are in agreement that we need to centralize the CΔºd4 ac4DΔ°a% Λcn²tNP< Δb4σ

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appeals. All the appeals are contained in the student files. So we've started a central log of all appeals received. Like I said, we only receive one to three appeals per year. I've been in this position now for 12 months. I've seen one appeal come in. And as I previously stated, students go directly to their Members of the Legislative Assembly because it's a quicker timeline. I guess 30 days is a bit long for the students.

In my past experience in seeing the concerns coming in from the members, it has to do with "I haven't received a cheque yet" and in the Auditor General's Report it does state we provide accurate and timely payments.

I think one of the changes that we've made since we've received the FANS Program is that in previous years prior to 1999, students had to make their application for assistance by July 15, and after that it was too late. We request students to provide their applications 30 days before the start of a program. If they choose to do it 15 days before, we still accept applications but we have a process that we have to follow, and that's why we say 30 days.

So if someone sends their application within five to 15 days before their program starts, then we can't be realistically expected to process, approve, provide travel, and then issue the payments for living allowance all within a five, a ten day, or a 15-day timeframe. That's why we provide a 30-day timeframe.

We are centralizing the appeals. Also anything by email will be printed off and centrally located so that there'll be a duplicate copy in the student file, and then also a copy in the centralized file. In past practice, we've also had it electronically.

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Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Another thing I just want to follow up on in response to Mr. Barnabas. You had indicated that you review things, different things, and a lot of things on a case-by-case basis. I can understand that every time someone comes you can't just say yes, no, whatever, there are always different circumstances.

What specific policies or guidelines do you use when you do look at it? Are there procedures and policies in place when you do look at it on a case-by-case basis for whatever the request is? That, "Okay, these things are acceptable. These things are not." Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll give you some examples of things we review on a case-by-case basis. One of them may be, let's say for example, a single student is flown from one community to another community to attend either Nunavut Arctic College, or post-secondary, because we do provide Christmas travel for single students. Sometimes a request may be made to fly to a community other than their home community.

Those are things that we review on a caseby-case basis. We determine what the cost is. If the cost is less than what the current cost of flying them to their original community then we entertain such requests.

Sometimes we have families that make different requests. Let's say for example, a spouse chooses to fly ahead of the family, L°α ΠΠς%CÞ′b′C′σ
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we allow in instances like that to happen, and then the family will follow afterwards.

Those are requests that we look on a caseby-case basis and we look at costs. It can't be more than the cost of what they're eligible for.

Maybe I can pass the question on to Joy Suluk to give other instances of specific examples of case-by-case basis. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Ms. Suluk.

Ms. Suluk (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are others that make requests when we deal with things case-by-case. Even though the students may live in Nunavut, but are in one of the provinces furthering their education and if their relatives were from other communities they usually request for assistance to send the student to another community other than his or her hometown.

Before we approve it we have to consider the price; whether it's going to be higher or cheaper, if it's going to be cheaper than their travel cost, then we approve the request to a student. We cannot approve beyond the amount of the transportation cost to their hometown.

We provide support, provided that they don't go beyond. If the costs go beyond that, the student is responsible for paying that him or herself.

That's the procedure we follow on paper in our office. It's put in their file.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Suluk. I guess there's really no set policies or guidelines

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that are there, say if Ms. Suluk is not there, or someone else is thrown into a situation where they have to look at something on a...

A lot of times things like this come up at the last minute and everybody always needs an answer yesterday. Is there anything in place that an individual working in the FANS office would be able to grab a binder, or a procedures manual, or something that would explain these are the things that are acceptable and these aren't? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) We have the FANS supervisor that's there.

The case-by-case basis has actually become, I guess, a bit more common I think because of the corporate knowledge that's there. A lot of those questions can be answered with respect to the travel, as long as they're within the travel guidelines. I'm not aware of any other ones but I believe FANS staff bring it to the attention of Joy and also the assistant deputy minister.

What we'll have to start doing is start identifying what these case-by-case basis are, making sure that they're in a central location as well, and establish a process that if questions come forward similar to questions on interpretation of the Act and the regulations, what is the process for staff to come forward to confirm decisions. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. I think that's important. The one thing is it's important that we try and ensure that everyone is treated fairly and equally. Whether rightly or wrongly, if this person

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was approved for this and you're not approving me, why? And this way you have something there to issue the guidelines and everybody's treated fairly and it could be more than just the optics of that not happening. It usually does lead to problems. I think that we could look forward to having that set up in place.

Maybe before I go to Mr. Peterson maybe we'll take a 15-minute break. I know Ms. Fraser has another meeting to attend to and she's going to be leaving this afternoon. So let's take this opportunity to again thank her for being here and very much look forward to having you back in the fall. If you have any parting comments that you would like to make, Ms. Fraser, go ahead.

Ms. Fraser: Mr. Chairman, I would just like to thank you and the committee for your interest in our report. It is always a pleasure to come to Nunavut.

I would also like to thank the department as well for their cooperation during their audit. I think we had excellent cooperation from the staff and I'm very pleased to see, as well, that they have been so responsive to the recommendations that we have made and have already started working on an action plan.

So I think we're all in this together to try to improve processes in government and I hope that our audits do serve you and the government in that way. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, very much, Ms. Fraser. I think we will reconvene then at 11:10.

>>Committee recessed at 10:59 and resumed at 11:24

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Chairman: Welcome back, everybody. Next on my list we have Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A question for Ms. Okpik, I noted in paragraph 29, for the year 2005-06, where it's mentioned that there's 430 of 600 Nunavummiut who applied to the department for financial assistance were assessed as qualified and therefore received benefits. I noted in paragraph 43, under the appeals section, it's reported they see only a few appeals were made each year.

So if you have, in that year anyway, you had 130 unsuccessful applicants, then it seems to me that there would be more appeals. I'm just wondering if you can give us an idea of what types of, out of these 130 applications that were unsuccessful, what was the basis for their rejections. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can only provide examples of what some of the reasons might be. Probably one of the biggest reasons is that they're applying to an institution that is not a recognized institution. It might not be a diploma or certificate program that they're applying to. In other instance it may be students that have been suspended or have withdrawn from the FANS Program in previous years.

Those are the some of the reasons why students are not accepted. The other thing is reasons for students not being accepted by the actual institution because a lot of times we'll have student application forms and then we'll wait for a letter of acceptance from the institution.

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So those are several reasons why students might not be eligible for FANS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that information.

Are you saying then that every student who applies, and who qualifies, and meets all the criteria will be approved for FANS? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Yes there is. For the ones that has been accepted; they meet all the requirements. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik.

Have you ever had to reject a student who was actually enrolled in Nunavut Arctic College, or a post-secondary; they have the acceptance and they're going on. Have you ever had the occasion where you had to reject, or have rejected a student? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I'm not aware of any instances where any rejections were made. I'd have to get specifics to be able to provide a concrete

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answer. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It was an interesting comment that Ms. Okpik made earlier about the appeals process where students would go to their MLA. I don't think that a program like this should be a political appeal process. MLAs can certainly help their constituents but I don't think it's necessarily the appropriate way. There should be a clearly defined process so that they don't have to go to their MLA after they've exhausted every other avenue.

You seem to be saying that people who are rejected don't go to the Department of Education but they go to their MLA. Can you explain to me why you think that is the case? Why would they go directly to their MLA for help rather than go through a defined appeal process with the Department of Education? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We do have a clearly defined appeal process. When students receive letters where it states that they're not eligible for FANS, there is a statement in there that advise them that there is an appeal process, and that they must appeal within 30 days and to who they appeal to. That's clearly stated.

In my past experiences in dealing with issues that have been brought forward by MLAs, I haven't seen a case where a

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In most cases that come forward is how come they haven't received their cheque or is the amount correct. That's the majority of the issues that have come forward, and I would say in 90 to 95 percent of the cases, the reasons have been that we're waiting for a piece of documentation. It might be the enrolment form, it might be the acceptance letter from the institution, or it might be the banking information that we're waiting for from the student.

Our staff follows up with students to advise them of missing documentation. Prior to 1999, when students provided their applications, there was no follow-up. With our FANS Program that we have now, there is follow-up with students to advise them of missing information.

With respect to why do they go to their MLAs, I suspect that one of the reasons why is the 30-day appeal process. There is a set 30-day appeals process. Maybe they feel that they get a quicker response by going to their MLA, but we do advise the students of the appeals process. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that answer. Do the students get a quicker response if they didn't go to their MLAs to appeal if they're having problems with the program? Is it faster than the 30 days?

I'm just curious because if the government has rules and procedures, then I know as MLAs, we are told not to interfere with ΔΔ° ΔΥΪΔΟΠΡΕΘ Φ°Γ°CΡΘ°Γ<< Θαργωρισ Δράγαρινασωρισου.

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So if an individual came in to my office, I would probably first ask them, "Did you go in to talk to the supervisor or director of FANS? Did you follow the process? Did you write a letter? Did you talk to them?" that kind of stuff. Is that something that an MLA should be doing; asking those questions and then directing the students to either write, or help in their appeal process?

And second bit of questioning on that, should your 30 days perhaps be shortened to 15 days? That would be three work weeks, so 30 days, I'm assuming it's work days we're talking about, so I'm just wondering if you could comment on that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) The student has 30 days to bring their concern forward. So that's the time that they have. For most cases, once an appeal is received, I believe it's processed in a timely manner. It doesn't take us 30 days to go through the appeals process.

Like I said, it's done at the first level with the supervisor. The supervisor informs the person; it might be through fax or by email, and then they're advised at the second level. There's a second level of appealing and they're given time. We have to give them time to be able to put their appeal together, so there's a time limit. And then the third level of appeal is to the minister. Again, they have to have time to prepare their appeal to bring it to the LCUGCOS LCP966 L

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minister, as well. I don't think, on that part, we take too long in providing responses.

With respect to constituents going to their MLAs, I think that's their prerogative to go to their Member of the Legislative Assembly. I can't speak on behalf of MLAs of whether it's a good avenue for students to go directly to their MLA. Other than the fact, if they do have an appeal process and we have anywhere between one and three that decide to go through the process.

You asked whether or not there's a quicker response from the time that we receive the information where our staff were asked to follow up on it. We usually provide a response within a five-day time frame because we have to go back and bring it to the Arviat staff.

There has to a final review, so we have to get the chronology of events. We have to determine; was there a piece of information missing that led to them not being accepted right away, or did they not provide their banking information.

So we have to determine what information was missing. We have to determine dates so we go to our logged files in terms of what date was the application received? Did it contain all the information? What date did the FANS officer communicate with the individual to advise them of the missing information?

So there is a very detailed chronology of events that takes place. And then at the end we'll state what the reason is; either for a delay in the application, or if they're not eligible; why they're not eligible. We usually try to have a turnaround time of five days. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that information.

It certainly seems like it's fast; five turnaround days. The Auditor General is indicating here that it could probably be faster. It's five days under the current process where the information on appeals is not centralized. It says in section 42, if you review the current appeal process and then clearly define it and speed that up.

Can you give us an idea of what type of timeline that you're looking towards, in terms of completing the review of the appeal process? What type of turnaround time would you target; would you try to shoot for? It's five days now for the turnaround for appeals. Could you try and lower it to two or three days? Is that something you're targeting? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The five day turnaround, we don't deem it as an appeal because it's an issue that is brought forward. It is a constituency issue so we don't deem it as an appeal. Usually it's more a request for information, or a status of somebody; what's somebody's status is.

Part of what's identified in the work plan is to review the Act and the regulations, and the appeal process is part of the Act and the regulations. That is one component of the work that we will be undertaking. Obviously, what we'd like to do is move it from a three step process to a two step

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process. In the review we'll be looking at timelines, and then, possibly, other avenues of communication with staff to ensure that staff are advised in a very timely manner.

We have to follow the current appeals process until any regulations are changed because it is legislation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that clarification.

I guess in a perfect world people wouldn't have to go to their MLAs for help. That's what I'm trying to encourage here that hopefully it will eventually become that way. If people are concerned with the program or they are rejected, they appeal, or if they have problems with the program, in terms of the administrative problems, that they shouldn't have to go to their Members of the Legislative Assembly. They should go to the department and have it dealt with in a quick, fair, and efficient manner so MLAs; we're politicians, when you have politicians get involved in things, things can escalate.

We all know we would be standing up in the Legislative Assembly during Question Period, and banging on desks, and in this kind of program I don't think that's necessarily in the best interest of educating our young people and mature adults.

So I hope that if you can refine the appeal process and the administrative process that doesn't require MLAs to get involved as often as you seem to suggest. You only get three appeals during the normal process but it sounds like a lot of people go to their

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That's a comment, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. That was just a comment. Are there any other questions on this section? Maybe we can move on to section four, it's the Financial and Management Controls, from paragraph 45 to 62. I'll start off with maybe just a question for Ms. Charron from the Auditor General's Office.

Paragraph 51 indicates that of the 73 files that you reviewed, you have 48 where travel benefits were received. Of those, 23 percent contained errors. Can you generally outline, for the 11 outside of Nunavut, who received travel expenses to destinations to other gateway cities, and kind of generally indicate some of the other errors that you identified? Do you have that information as to exactly those seven audit files of how many and what types of errors were found? Ms. Charron.

Ms. Charron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the seven audit files, we have one file where change fees were paid, two files where accommodations were paid and were not eligible, one case where damage to hotel fees were paid, one trip where the trip was paid twice, one where there was no receipt, and in one case there was one ineligible trip, i.e., one trip in excess of what the regulations specify. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Charron. Then maybe to Ms. Okpik, the auditors indicate that they found no documentation in the files to support any of the decisions that were made to issue those payments.

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I would assume, for one, you have known exactly what those are. I'm just wondering if we could get an explanation as to why those decisions were made and those expenses paid for, and why there was no documentation justifying why. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) With respect to the documentation, previous to this, files were kept in separate binders. For example, all of the enrolment forms were in an enrolment binder; all of the acceptance letters and whatnot in separate locations.

One of the biggest things that we're working on right now is the organization of the student files so that all of the information will be contained in the student file up to and including emails.

We find that we have a lot of emails in our staff inboxes or stored in folders that haven't been printed off and put in folders. Our number one undertaking is to change our filing system to ensure that the documentation is there.

I can't provide a concrete update with respect to each one of these right now unless I go back into our files to look at them.

I can advise that in past instances, for example, for change fees and some of the accommodations being paid, hotel damages, we've had instances in the past where hotels have gone ahead and charged to our ghost Visa, what you call a ghost card. As soon as those charges come up, a letter is written to the hotel to advise them that they have no authority whatsoever to make any charges on the Visa to what was not previously authorized.

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In some of those instances when the charges have taken place, what we do is we would deem that as an overpayment for the student so that it would be noted on the student's file that this is an amount that they have to pay back.

With respect to the trip paid twice, the one with no receipt, and the one trip outside the scope of the regulations, I would specifically have to go back to each of those files to see if we've determined if the documentation has been provided or not. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. I'd be interested to see that. I'm sure the officials in the Auditor General's Office would be interested to see that documentation as long as they indicated that they were not able to find any documentation to support those decisions. I would appreciate you looking into it and letting us know.

I guess the other thing as I mentioned is it indicates four of the 11 students who attended school outside of Nunavut receive travel expenses to destinations other than gateway cities, which were identified in the program, and those are Ottawa, Montreal, Winnipeg, and Edmonton. I'm sure that those four aren't the only ones attending post-secondary education in the south, outside of the gateway cities.

How could that have been approved for someone to get travel paid to something other than those gateway cities? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to travel, we will have to get a legal opinion on the Act and the regulations to determine gateway cities, as

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opposed to the clarification on what is a unique program.

When we do travel benefits we take into consideration the gateway cities that you stated as Edmonton, Winnipeg, Montreal, or Ottawa. In other instances if the program is a unique, one of a kind program in Canada, then we will fly the students directly to that institution. For example, the Nunavut Sivuniksavut is a unique program, so we fly the students to Ottawa to attend the program.

One other instance has been to the Cornwall Aviation training, and it's affiliated with Canadore College. In that instance, because it is a unique program, we flew the individual to that program.

I'd like to comment by saying that we will be reviewing our travel policy; the application. It will address the issue of exception. We will publish the revised policy to ensure that there's transparency. Again we have to get a legal opinion of the Act and the regulations if it does in fact allow us to provide travel to unique institutions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. I noticed from what I've heard is that it's something that the Act and the regulations are silent on. That there isn't anything there; otherwise it probably would have been noted in the audit.

Is it fair for someone to apply for a course, it shouldn't matter where it is, the policy and the guideline is clear; that it's only through those gateways cities. "We'll give it to you because you're a special case." Are you telling these students that regardless of what program they want to take the only way that they'll get funding to beyond a gateway city if it's a unique

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program?

If it's a program where, say, someone wants to go to Red Deer College, or Brandon, or something like that, or somewhere like UBC, or any other place, or Toronto, or anywhere, you're saying, "Oh, I'm sorry. We'll help you out only if you take that course in one of the gateway cities." What if they weren't accepted? There's one; they might not be interested in taking a course at one of the institutions in those gateway cities, two; they might not have been accepted to one of those.

So is it then are we unfairly penalizing those individuals, or the way the policy outlines, or telling our students, "You're only going to get assistance to travel to whatever course you want to take if it's in one of those four places only. Other than that, you're on your own." And if that's the case, for whatever reason, then that should be the case for everybody, regardless of what they want, or if they need a course not necessarily in Ottawa, that's one of the gateway cities where people get flown to, but it just seems inconsistent.

I know, for example, in Las Vegas they have a dealer's college, if someone wants to go and work in a casino and take a course like that, then would that be considered a unique course and they could argue that you should have to pay their flight down to Las Vegas to take the course? I mean that's a little bit off, I don't know of anyone who would ever do that, but that could be a possibility, given the scenario that you have outlined on how things have been handled.

So I think that really needs to be clarified but it appears that now it depends on what we think, and you could be eligible or you

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could not. There doesn't seem to be a fair and consistent approach for audit for students. So I'm just wondering if you could comment on that. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Point taken. We've committed to reviewing the travel policy and its application, and we will address this before the start of this coming fall, before the next intake of students. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. I guess the other thing, again, on paragraph 51, where it says the auditors indicated that they found no documentation in the files to support the decisions made to issue the payments.

I'm just wondering if you could indicate; you said they have different files all over, but like you said, you looked everywhere and you still couldn't find anything. I'm just wondering why a decision like that could be made without any documentation. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) As I previously stated, I'm hoping that when the student files are centralized and that all the documentation is located that we can be able to answer these issues.

I can't speak for why decisions were made where there was no documentation, but as I've stated, staff haven't been advised that every decision has to be documented with a written record and that is being implemented immediately. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Are there any other questions here? Mr.

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Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A question for Ms. Okpik and it's good to see that the Auditor General is confirming that the processing of cheques is timely now.

It's mentioned in paragraph 47 that direct deposits and benefits to students' bank accounts were made. Do all students have bank accounts, or are you required to set up a bank account when you apply to FANS? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you. (interpretation ends) Yes, all students are required to have a bank account so that we can provide payment in a very timely manner to the students. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik. That's good to know.

I'm aware that not all communities have bank accounts. Cambridge Bay has a branch, there's a branch in Iqaluit and Rankin Inlet, but I'm not sure if all of the communities have it. If it is a requirement then they can make it work. That's good for them.

I'll follow-up on my colleague's question about travel benefits. I had an individual from another community approach me in Cambridge Bay a year, or so ago. He was one of those students who came in to take an Arctic College course, and he had his entire family with him. He attempted to go

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home at Christmas; he couldn't pay for it himself, he thought that FANS should pay his way in. His family was feeling kind of lonely. They were missing their friends, and relatives in the other community.

He was telling me that he was thinking about dropping out of the program at the end of the year; it was a two year program. He would complete the year in Cambridge Bay and then not return for the second year. I was trying to encourage him not to do that because, obviously, education is important. I don't know what happened to that individual. I never heard from him again in that concern.

Is that something that the department will be looking at? Obviously, you don't want students going to another community with their entire family and then at the end of the year drop out. They may be successful in their first year; you'd want them to start their second year. You wouldn't want them to drop out because they couldn't get home for some time during that year.

Is that something that you're looking at; finding a way for those students and their family members to get home at Christmastime to be with their loved ones so that it would encourage them to continue school the following year? I note that single students are allowed two trips but students with families are only allowed one trip. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is something that we're not looking at right now. I think that travel costs for us are a big portion of our FANS budget. If you look at specific instances where we have travel within the territory, and I'll use

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an example, yesterday from Arviat to Cambridge Bay to fly the full family was \$15,000. If we look at flying the family back at Christmastime then we're looking at a \$30,000 travel budget.

When we look at a single student, we have to take into consideration is the single student is going by themselves, so there's no family support when they attend where their learning institution is. With the family going that's family support; their network.

We also expect that people who wish to pursue post-secondary, or any type of learning opportunity, it's a personal commitment you make to yourself. That is, I believe, one of the sacrifices that you make. You're provided travel to your institution at the beginning of the year with your family, and then you're provided travel at the end of the year. I think it's a great benefit to be able to have.

So the department is not looking at Christmas travel for families. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that information.

I agree with you. It's expensive. An example you used, if it's a two year program and if the student from Arviat with his family is \$15,000 one way, and then another \$15,000 to go home, and then return so over two years that'll be \$60,000. It is a significant investment in the students.

What I guess I'm getting at here is we have to encourage those folks to continue.

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Is that something the Department of Education provides? Do all campuses have a student counsellor, a guidance counsellor, or someone who can sit down with all students, not just students with families, to help them adjust to life away from arctic communities, continue to do well in school, to return after they complete year one, and then return to complete year two?

Do you have those types of individuals who can work with students? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) The FANS Program is a financial program that provides benefits to students. It does not provide any type of counselling service for students.

I can't speak on behalf of the college as to what type of support services they provide within the campuses, but I can inquire and provide a response back to the members if they wish. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that answer.

I recall when I was attending school in the south, under the GNWT program, they did have, especially down in Edmonton, they Δc°σ4%Λciσ, Δc′bb%)σ)4%°°)%.
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So it was very helpful. Not everybody had to see a counsellor but those services were available through the Government of the Northwest Territories program at the time. I think that if the government is making a significant investment, and you're talking \$6 million a year here, that it can't just be simply a funding program.

There has to be a way that we can help the kids and all of the students succeed in school and not just, "Here's your cheque. Good luck and work hard." Somewhere during that time you get the cheque for your first, or second, or third year, there should be an avenue for FANS or the Department of Education to monitor and see how they're doing.

I know we're talking about FANS here but you're also the Deputy Minister of Education. You have the responsibility for FANS and the overall programs and services that Education offers. So I wonder if that's something that you think your department should be considering providing counselling services to students who are on the FANS Program, whether it's in Nunavut or in the south? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Currently, we have one program that we provide funding for. I believe it's \$15,000 that we provide to the Northern Student Education Initiative. This is a partnership

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between industries and governments. I believe the GNWT also participates.

It's located in Edmonton where people going to post-secondary and also apprentices that are going to NAIT or SAIT can access these services. They include anything from assistance in locating an apartment, learning bus routes, those different types of things.

That's currently the only one that we support right now, but certainly I can take that back as an item that would need to be eventually addressed, probably more towards the end because we do have a very comprehensive work plan and we have some areas where we really need to focus a lot of our work on currently.

But I will commit to putting that on the list to be addressed, but it would be a longer term initiative that we would look at. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. I have a question on, I think it's the next section, starting off on paragraph 57 and 58. I'll ask Ms. Charron. You indicated that it is difficult to find information; those documents with information that are stored in a decentralized and *ad hoc* manner in various places, these were piled up in stacks somewhere else.

I am just wondering if you could give us an idea of difficulties they are having and some of the examples of how things were being stored and being able to complete the work that you were doing. Ms. Charron.

Ms. Charron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. While doing our audit we did have difficulty finding the supporting documentation. We believe that the

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department should identify exactly what needs to be kept on file, what kind of information should be there. Also establish a rigorous filing process, where if either file alphabetically, or by student file number. All files and that all supporting documentation be put in the file. If there needs to be a separate filing system for the appeal process, maybe there needs to be duplicate information, or reference to a file somewhere.

When doing our audit we found it challenging to get supporting documentation. We did have numerous requests, and numerous follow-ups to get the information that we were looking for. It took a while. In some cases information was stored in boxes. In other cases, it was located outside of the premises in an external house that was locked outside. There was no proper filing system in place. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Charron. Maybe then to Ms. Okpik, if she can indicate why the auditor would identify, or just wasn't sure that there was no proper filing system set up. Why that hasn't happened if it's a program that has been administered over there since 2001. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) The OAG staff is correct in stating that files were all over the place. As I stated earlier, there were enrolment forms in different binders. For example, when we do the visa reconciliation, all the travel documentation, rather being put in the student file, was being put with the visa reconciliation file. Since then we've advised staff that they'd have to make duplicate copies so that when they do reconcile the Visa, one set of information

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goes to that file, and another set to go into the student file.

We're reviewing every FANS file, since its inception, to make sure that the files are complete, and to make sure that the information is available. We've reviewed and instituted a revised checklist procedure to ensure that files are complete and centrally located. I'd also like to say that we've flown staff to the Northwest Territories to look at their filing system, and basically, have one file set up so that all the FANS staff in Arviat will look at the file to ensure that it mirrors all the student files.

Again, we have one of the FANS officers who are aggressively working on this as well: a casual, with the intent to hire a summer student to get all the files centralized and all the documents together.

We're also making sure that we in Arviat look at our floor plan to look at securing a better place and how we do our filing. We've gone ahead and ordered all the storage compartments and whatnot so that when it comes on sealift, it's all there. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. My next question is dealing with paragraph 58, and again, I'll ask Ms. Charron. It indicates that in some cases the decisions were not documented. I'm just wondering if you can give me an indication of how many of those 'some cases.' Ms. Charron.

Ms. Charron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As indicated in the report, we looked at over 73 files of students. We did have a formal follow-up on more than 38 of them where, after the first review, complete information was not found. So there was a formal follow-up where we did send

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emails and provided a list of information missing.

That does not take into account the questions that we might have asked when we were on site to do the file review, and that where additional information has been provided while our staff was doing to audit. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Charron. Further on in that paragraph where it says a lack of documentation made it a challenge to assess whether benefits to students received were appropriate or justified; I guess throughout your audit, was the information received so that you could determine or assess whether the benefits paid to students were appropriate or justified? Ms. Charron.

Ms. Charron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, for the cases where additional information was provided, we had exchanged information and we had conversation with the department staff, and we have been able to assess whether benefits were supported. And we're satisfied with the information they provided.

In some cases that we report in our report, information was not provided or we didn't find enough supporting documentations of those files were assessed as incomplete or had errors. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Charron. So those would be some of the 38, I guess, you were saying that you did find the follow-up documentation after. How many of those files would be where you didn't find the information would be deemed incomplete, as you had indicated? Ms. Charron.

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We don't have this information readily accessible whether those 11 files were somewhere. We had to follow up and if they were within the 38 formal ones that we had to follow up.

Also, we do point out in other places in the report, for example, on paragraph 34, 15 cases of the students... that doesn't apply, sorry. Basically, that's just an example but it's not the statistics that we would have compiled for the report. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Charron. Maybe just to Ms. Okpik, in all the cases where that information had not been found, has your department continued to look for or find the information to be able to provide that information to complete those files? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) We will make every effort to look for the files. I'm hoping that once all the files are centralized and all the student files have been compiled, and all the pieces of information that may be in boxes are put in files, then hopefully, we can answer some of those questions.

I guess my most pressing priority would be to ensure that we deal with the files of the students that we currently have in the system that are active files, and then the non-active files would be ones that we would be continually following up on. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Going

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down to paragraph 61, it indicates that there was no audit of student files that had been conducted by the department. I'm just wondering. Maybe I'll ask Ms. Charron; through the policies, or the Act, or the regulations is there a requirement, from what you've found, of the department to conduct those audits? Ms. Charron.

Ms. Charron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There is no such requirement *per se* in the Act, or the regulations. However the FANS procedure manual does call for that. It is also a good financial and management control to do a post payment audit. Although the Act and regulations do not call for such a review, it is a good control to have in place. We would have expected that it would've been carried out. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Charron. Ms. Okpik, if it's outlined in the manual that that audit be done, if she could indicate why no audits have been done. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We do have a procedure in place for audits. I cannot comment on why audits have not been taking place. As I stated yesterday, we've committed to, with respect to casuals, do site audits to ensure that casuals are processing and determining eligibility in a correct manner.

We'll have to review our process and revise and implement a procedure accordingly. We acknowledge and accept that audits do need to take place. I'm also in discussion with the Department of Finance with respects to audits to see how we could do, possibly, joint audits, but that's something that we need to explore more in terms of who will be doing the audits and how will the audits be

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conducted. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. I think that concludes that section. I don't have any other names on my list.

The next section is section five, paragraph 63 to 69. Maybe at this time if you wish we'll take a lunch break for one hour. I don't think we're going to get done. Maybe just return back here for 1:15 p.m. I know that some members that are traveling so if we can make sure we're here and ready to go at 1:15 p.m. sharp. We can hopefully get things wrapped up prior to people having to depart. Thank you.

>>Committee recessed at 12:17 and resumed at 13:21

Chairman: Thank you. Welcome back everybody. We finished off section four. We're now on section five, the Information Management Systems for Program Management. It covers paragraphs 63 to 69.

Do the members have any questions on that area? Mr. Barnabas.

Mr. Barnabas (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a question for the Office of the Auditor General witnesses.

Your report reveals that employees administering the FANS program have to use four distinct information management systems. It appears that the systems do not always work well with each other. You also note that different employees in Iqaluit and Arviat do not have access to the same information.

These problems sound similar to those that

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had been identified with the management of the Nunavut Government's Income Support program. How can the department address these issues and what benefits would improvements in this area have on the overall management of the FANS program? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Mr. Lennox.

Mr. Lennox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the two key areas that we highlight is the non-integration of the systems, meaning that they don't electronically speak to each other, so it requires data to be re-inputted manually into each system. That increases the chances of errors occurring, with data being in one system but not in the other, and therefore, reconciliation issues with respect to both systems have the right and complete data.

So that's one point. The other point is dealing with access to information, and whether everybody has proper access to all the systems. That's get back into those people that need information for proper decision-making in running the program. Do they have all the information they need in order to make those decisions? Without all the people having the full access to the systems then they're forced to either delay that decision, or to make decisions in the absence of complete information.

So we comment on both of those that would benefit. Having more integrated systems would increase the accuracy of the data and ensure that the data is complete and accurate in all systems. And also it would help to ensure better decisions if the needed information is readily available to those that need it.

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lennox. Mr. Barnabas.

Mr. Barnabas (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This question is for the Government of Nunavut witnesses.

The recent federal budget announced that the Government of Nunavut will receive a total of \$23 million over the next few years to support its efforts to strengthen financial management practices and systems.

The Auditor General's Report on FANS reveals problems with the department's information management systems. Will the department be able to use any of this new federal funding to make improvement to its information management systems? When will improvements take place? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As identified in our work plan, we have begun. Staff has reviewed the current electronic system, with the assistance of the Department of Finance and Justice, looking at how these issues might be dealt with. Staff has also met with our colleagues in the NWT, who use the same system, the Student Loan Managers system, to identify what issues they have had and what corrective measures have been put in place. The ideal thing is to have a completely online system that would only allow for data to be entered only once, from which real time reporting could proceed.

We're looking at supports for information

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I'd like to say that with respect to the Excel database; this step is no longer necessary as we have the reporting capabilities now that was incorporated into the FANS database. As I stated earlier, our Iqaluit office has access read-only to the data in Arviat. We're hoping to further improve this by implementing a nightly replication to education service for better performance so that we have continuous updated information.

Also, we're hoping that with the GN review of financial systems, the lack of automatic exchange between the FANS database, the Student Loans Manager Program, and Freebalance, that through CGS and their information analyst will undertake what's called the visual mapping of the process flow at the program level, in conjunction with financial systems review so that we ensure we capture what all the gaps are, both in the systems and the program flow. Once we've identified the gaps then we can address those issues so that we can have some cohesion between the systems. It's again, a work in progress. We are working with Department of Community and Government Services on this. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Barnabas.

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Mr. Barnabas (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What challenges exist with respect to the location of the FANS Office in a decentralized community and how is the department meeting these challenges? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Barnabas. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you. (interpretation ends) The FANS server is a stand-alone in Arviat and it's operating efficiently. This is for the FANS database. As noted in the OAG's Report, payments are on a timely manner. We process and generate payments from Arviat. So that's not an issue.

The issue is how the student loan manager application, the free balance, and the FANS database, how they can interact with each other. So that's the component that we're looking at to see how there can be cohesion between the systems. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to follow-up on my colleague's questions to Ms. Okpik. It all sounds very optimistic and I'm just sitting here wondering why, after eight years, we don't have all this stuff in place and now, suddenly, reading through your work plan, it looks like it's going to be done and most of it's going to be in a short to mediumterm. I guess we're hopeful that it is.

But on this particular section where reports need to be generated, I just want to get an idea from the Department of Education of the type of reports that they're going to generate once the system

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is in place and up and running properly. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) With respect to the FANS database, we have a reporting capability on overpayments, case worker assignments, warrant reports, needs detailed reports, needs summary reporting, and overpayment organizational reports.

The student loans manager can generate trial balances, payments, active loans, and non-active loans. The issue is reconciliation between the student loans manager system and the free balance system.

We also can now do reporting on a number of assessments, beneficiary and non-beneficiary students attending institutions in the north, students attending institutions in the south, we also can provide information by region, and those are some of the reporting capabilities, also what level of education as to how many are taking bachelors, masters, for example, but we're still working out some of the glitches. We can report by male and female.

As our review takes place and as we start to look at what type of annual report we will generate for the legislature, we may also have to look at other reporting requirements. For example, one area that we will need to work on to determine a process is if we want to report on completion and people that have accessed FANS and have either completed different areas, then we have to identify how we're going to capture that information before

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it's inputted into the application.

So those are our reporting capabilities right now, and as I said, as we get more into the work plan we will identify more reporting capabilities, which we will have to work with the Department of Community and Government Services on the I.T. aspect of it. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that information. It certainly sounds like capabilities that generate a lot of reports, but then again, there's a danger of over-reporting that they have so many reports that they don't know what they will be used for.

So I'm wondering if your department has a client group or client groups that you generate reports for. For example, you mentioned the Legislative Assembly. We would certainly like to see that information but who else would benefit from receiving the type of reports and information that you're going to compile? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Currently, we do not generate reports for any other organization, other than to the Legislature. No doubt, the different businesses and organizations would be interested in receiving the information so they can get an idea of the pool of candidates that are coming out with post-secondary education. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Ms. Okpik for that information.

I'm sure there will be in the private sector, and perhaps the schools, and counselors. Perhaps even the students, themselves, would like some of that information.

You mentioned that you're working closely with Community and Government Services, are you also working closely with the Department of Finance on any systems that you're talking about? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) We are working with the Department of Finance. One specific area that we're working very closely with them is when all the loan files have been reviewed; we're trying to introduce capability for students to be able to make direct payments through an automated system. Currently, any student wanting to make a payment, or if they make a payment, is done through either a money order, or cheque.

With the work that we're doing with Finance, hopefully, within the next three to six months we'll be able to put in a system where automated payments can come from students for their loan payments. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik.

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I have a question for the officials from Auditor General's Office. In paragraph 66 you state that you expect that these transactions would be reconciled on a regular basis. First, in your review of the information going into the audit, is there anywhere in there a requirement that these reconciliations should be taking place. Where you say you expected to be done on a regular basis, how often, from what you've looked at, where they've reconciled? Mr. Lennox.

Mr. Lennox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll begin by answering the first question, and then I'll ask my colleague, Ms. Charron, to answer the second.

With respect to reconciliations in general, no, there is no particular requirement to do reconciliations on a periodic basis. As you start using multiple systems and want to ensure the integrity of those systems; that the information in each of the systems is complete and accurate, you need a process to ensure that the information is indeed being captured by all the systems. Reconciliations are the one method that is used to ensure that's the case when the systems don't automatically, electronically speak to each other, *per se*.

So reconciliations are very important to ensure the integrity and completeness of data and exactly how often they're being done in the process. I'll ask Ms. Charron to explain that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lennox. Ms. Charron.

Ms. Charron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've noted that the reconciliation that has taken place, often took place after year end, i.e., many months after the payments have been issued. There are two

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/Þናº (ጋጎትበJና): የdታ°ฉ广[®], Δ[®]/የÞĊ[©]. CΔ[®]dd ÞαÞታ[®]ጋʔበልታ[©], d[©]dJ[©] ÞαÞታ፫ሲ°αÞ[©] d[©]d Δረ፫ርÞ[®]በ[©]JJ bLቦታÞ[©]CdCΔ°αἐ[™]ULC reconciliations that are taking place. The first one is the reconciliation of the payments that have been issued by the FANS system with the financial system of the GN; Freebalance. There is another one for the loan, as well, that is taking place.

In both cases, reconciliations were being performed, but many months after the month-end, or sometimes year-end. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Charron. Maybe just to Ms. Okpik; if you could give us an indication of why those reconciliations are happening in that manner, and if they're done on a more regular timely basis. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) One of the biggest reasons was we didn't have the capability to look at the databases from headquarters, so what was happening was we had to fly staff into Arviat to do that work.

Now that we have the capability to view both of the programs here at headquarters, there is no doubt reconciliations will be taking place in a more timely matter.

But what we have to do is we have to develop what the complete list of reconciliations will be required, and we have to identify the process for the implementation, for example, who will be doing the reconciliations and how will that process be done in conjunction with the staff in Arviat. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Maybe I'll just ask one question to the Auditor General's staff.

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Ms. Charron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As indicated in paragraph 68, we would have expected to find, for example, the number of students that have received benefits, the rates on the loan they filed, the number of students that have graduated from the program, have they found a job; things like that.

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Without this information available, it is very difficult for the officials of the department to assess whether the program is achieving its objectives. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Charron. I'll just go back to paragraph 67 where you had indicated you found one case where a student loan repayment had not been captured and the loans management system already had been... although the information had been recorded in the FANS information management system, and as a result, the students loan file was not followed up on; I guess it just deals with the different systems. What are the implications if this is one case where you found that, what implications does that have on the rest of the system? Mr. Lennox.

Mr. Lennox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, in our sample we found one case where the loan payment was in one system but not in the key system that is used to follow up on loans with the loans

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I think the key is that we took a sample, so we did not look at the complete population. So the difference there is that there could very well be other loans that are not in the loans management system that is being used to follow up on loans.

So the critical aspect is the need for these reconciliations to ensure that these systems are complete and contain all of the information, especially when needing to go ahead and manage those loans receivables, you need a system that's complete. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lennox. I guess given that, if that was only one, even if there was only one, would that skew the information that is passed on for reporting purposes? Just in this one case, let's say the information does come out and is passed on that would not... with this case or if there were other ones like that, would that then indicate that the information being provided would be inaccurate as opposed to what was actually happening? Mr. Lennox.

Mr. Lennox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One of the things that are critical in order to get a handle on the total amount of loans that are indeed outstanding, you need some assurance that the system is complete. What I'm not quite sure on in that particular one, for example, would have, I assume it is not in the \$4 million that's quoted for the amount outstanding that would be an example that one would be missed. I think the maybe the question should go to the department, with respect to that particular one.

That's the kind of issues that arise if a loan is not included in the system. If it's not

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included in the system that's used to accumulate that amount then it becomes a problem. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lennox. Maybe I'll ask Ms. Okpik that in this particular case what actions has been done to clarify that. If it's just in the small sample that the auditors looked at, has the department gone back through to ensure that there are no other cases like that so that they are, in fact, providing, through their reports, accurate information to the Assembly? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) With respect to this one case I would have to get the details from the Office of the Auditor General's staff and then to go back. I'll also have to go back with respect to people that know about the system. I can't answer that in terms of whether the information would be skewed if it wasn't entered.

I'll commit to getting that information to the members. And also to see if this is addressed at the year-end reconciliation, as well. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. I look forward to that. I think it's crucial if just in the small sample that was taken there is one case, it may be next to nothing, but it does lead that based on the information that is provided from the system that it hasn't been reconciled; there are things missing in there; information that we're being provided with isn't accurate. So I think it is important that they take a look at that and see if there are any more that were missed.

Any other questions on that section? Mr. Alagalak.

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Mr. Alagalak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On the same issue, we discussed 73 a bit. It seems like it's very difficult to understand this because we've been concerned about the \$4 million. As of March 31, 2006, the total amount of outstanding loans for this program was \$4 million. There are 550 students. It seems like we don't get that many students yearly. So I don't exactly understand how the procedure is. Those students who are in debt, many of these students have not been told about the fact that they had a debt.

In the 2005-06 fiscal years the total amount repaid was \$46,000. The minister had tabled this information in the House. For the fiscal years 2003-04 to 2004-05 do you have any idea how much was repaid in those years? That's my question to the GN officials. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Alagalak. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me look at my information. Can you state the years again? I have them listed here. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Alagalak.

Mr. Alagalak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the year 2005-06 only \$46,000 in loans were actually repaid. The question I have for the year 2003-04, how much money was repaid? Also in 2004-05, how much was repaid? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Alagalak. Ms. Okpik.

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Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Alagalak.

Mr. Alagalak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The repayment of loans by students, although I expect the students to pay their loans back, some of the students have to go school for four or five years, and the whole time they're in school they don't make any money to pay their bills or to pay their loans.

When they finally go home, they get summer jobs, which don't pay very much. What I would like to see here is that they remind the students that are in debt, perhaps provide a statement to the students and state the interest of how much they owe. It doesn't seem like there's a system in place like that.

I was wondering if your department is going to work on this as one of their first priorities to remind the students of their debts. The students must be reminded that they owe debts. It seems like they should be notified; there should be a system whereby the students are notified that they should be paying their loans. Is this going to be one of your priorities? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Alagalak. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: The review of the student loan files is one of the main priorities of

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So what we're doing is all the files that we inherited from the GNWT and all of the files of the students that have accessed loans, we're in the process, right now, of reviewing every single file. We're going to confirm the amounts that are currently outstanding. We're going to establish an appropriate loan documentation procedure. We're going to determine collection procedures and options for addressing long outstanding amounts. We're doing this work in consultation with the Departments of Finance and Justice.

Maybe to provide the members of an update of the work that we have been doing; we have hired, on contract, an individual, who is a chartered accountant, who is doing a review of all the files. We have an inventory of the student loan files with non-active files transferred here to our Iqaluit office. Our active files that are in Arviat, we've also copied them and brought them to Iqaluit where we have additional files, correspondence, and any type of related documentation gathered in the Arviat office to be centrally organized with all of the student files here in Iqaluit.

We held meetings in mid-May. Our staff went to the GNWT, who have the responsibility for administration of the FANS Program in the NWT, and who currently administer the GNWT's Financial Assistance Program, to get an understanding of their processes, procedures, and systems in place for that jurisdiction.

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bηΓεριερώσυς Γα ιδυασ Διρστημού συτλαίτη αριστρώση. Cγραστημού συταστημού συταστημο The NWT also uses the student loans manager, the same system that we use here. So we did a lot of cross training and reviewing of the program there.

We've done a review of the forms and agreements in use under the loans program with the Department of Justice. So they've taken a legal review of that. Also the Department of Justice is reviewing the applicable law and legislation under which the program operates.

Preliminary overview of the files that we've done confirms the finding of the Office of the Auditor General's staff with respect to the state and completeness of the student loans plans.

As I previously stated, we have the ability to access that and now contain in the loans manager and the FANS database here in our Iqaluit office. We have additional technical support as needed to extract and analyze the data. So our IT person here on staff, and our own office has also gone over to the NWT to see the Student Loans Manager database and to receive training. So this work in ongoing.

To get an appreciation of the amount of work, we'll be reviewing almost 600 hard copy files and verifying the electronic records across the two systems. There are students that have more than one account, if you look at it in terms of an account. You may have one person that has access to FANS benefits under the grant system, but also has access to the loans program as well under, let's say for beneficiaries, they would be able to access the Needs Assessed Loan.

Also for students who had previously attended K to 12 schooling, they're eligible for the basic grant in the benefits

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in the grant system as well as the primary loan. So there are students that access both avenues.

We'll be working very hard with our Arviat staff as well. So if there is any outstanding information that we need, we will seek from the Arviat office. Like I said, this is a major priority for us to look at our loans files and to be able to address the concerns.

We've worked with the Department of Justice already in posing questions to them, with respect to a lot of the loans questions in terms of, what's the statute of limitations for the collection of loans, if we had determined wrong interest payments? What are our options in possible release for students?

So there are a number of outstanding that we have. We are working with the Department of Justice, but this is one of our main priority areas. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Alagalak.

Mr. Alagalak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Okpik.

In envisioning the work this \$4 million is quite a large sum of money. If you look at approximately 15 years now the individual who owes money, how many years do they have to owe money before they are forgiven of their loan? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Alagalak. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have asked that

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question to the Department of Justice and we haven't received a response yet. Once we get a response we'll be able to relay that response to the members. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. On this section, the management of student loans, you had indicated earlier that these are all the things that you're doing now. I am just wondering if I can get an indication of why that work had not happened in the past. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik: I guess to the best of my knowledge, during the first few years of the FANS Program, we focused on removing barriers to student participation and making sure that monies were available to qualified eligible recipients.

So that's the best answer I can provide you right now. We wanted to ensure that finances were not a barrier to post-secondary education and I think we've done a good job at that. But our big issue and our step will be looking at all the loan files and looking at repayment. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Maybe my next question will be for the officials from the Auditor General's Office. In paragraph 72, you indicate that information communicated to students was incomplete and incorrect. Then you go on to say that students were charged interest at the wrong rate, and the students' monthly installments and payment periods were calculated incorrectly.

Maybe if I could ask you based on what information that you looked at for you to make an observation like that in your report. Mr. Lennox.

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Mr. Lennox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the specific examples we provide in paragraph 72, we note that the interest rate was the wrong rate. My understanding is that the regulations specify the need to use the Bank of Canada rate, the interest rate that's specified by the Bank of Canada, and instead, the interest rate being used was one from the Royal Bank, which is at a higher percentage point than that specified by the Bank of Canada.

With respect to the students' monthly installments, it deals with the calculations involved to amortize a loan over a particular period of time that dictates the amount of installment payments required by a student, and we noted a number of errors in that process. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lennox. Maybe Ms. Okpik, if you could, If you heard what some of the problems were there, if you could identify how or why those things happen. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I can't answer how it happened but I can state that we have since established what the rate is from 1999 onwards, and have confirmed our interest rates with the NWT because they follow the same type of program that we do.

As the loan files are being reviewed and in conjunction with the responses we will get from the Department of Justice with respect to the legal opinions that we will be getting, it will determine what loans we can go back and collect on, and whether we will do interest relief. Those are some of the options that we're exploring and reviewing right now.

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So we will be able to provide a more indepth answer once the review of all 600 student loan files have been completed. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. I guess one thing that Mr. Lennox pointed that it's right in the regulations on which interest rate is to be used and a different one was used. I'm just wondering if there's an explanation as to how or why that happened because it seems like it's very clear in the regulations of where it should come from, and why a different one was used. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I don't have an answer for that right now. I would have to go back and ask as to why that was done. I'd also have to have staff look at the student loans manager to make sure that that's not the rate that was entered in the beginning. So I don't know if it's from an IT aspect, or whether it was on human error. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Here we have some that have been identified here in her report.

I am just wondering if the department has let those individuals know that their files were incorrect, or if they've been since corrected. Ms. Okpik. Å^ςbCDσσ^ςL^ηŪ^ςb. CL^bdσ

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Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Once we do the review and then determine which people were informed. That's the other thing; we have to go through every single file to see what type of correspondence was sent to students. This will confirm whether students were advised, or not.

As we start to review all the files and start to address them then we will be corresponding with the students to make sure that we send out proper letters that determine whether, or not there is going to be interest relief, or how much their outstanding loan is. So we'll have a better idea, again once those loans files are reviewed. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. I'm a little concerned if I look at it from a student's perspective. In seeing and reading through this I would assume that the same incorrect interest rate was applied to all of the loans out there. So basically, every single one of them is being charged more than what they actually owe.

Something should go out to them, or should've gone already once the errors were realized. That's an error throughout the whole system. Do you expect them to keep re-paying their loan even though the information they got is wrong? Or hold off until we get it sorted out and get the correct information to them through exactly what it is that they owe. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) If we look back at the amounts of loans paid; they're very small amounts, as the way the Δ %ba Δ 5% $\dot{\cap}$ 6 %bAL%%b Δ Δ %ba Δ 5% $\dot{\cap}$ 6 %bAL%%b Δ Δ %ba Δ 5% $\dot{\cap}$ 6 %bAL%8%ba Δ 5% $\dot{\cap}$ 6%ba Δ 5%ba Δ 5%ba

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staff has pointed out the collections has virtually not taken place. I would see a letter going out initially to students who have had made payments on their own to advise them that incorrect interest amounts have been applied and that we will review their files and respond to them accordingly.

I'd like to point out that; for example, in the 2005-06 fiscal year we collected \$46,000 in loans. It would mean contacting about maybe 14 or 15 individuals with respect to their loan payments. I expect us to send letters to students who have paid loan amounts to advise them of this. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. When can those students expect those letters? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) What we'll have to do is go back into their files, the active files, to see which students have made payments. I would anticipate anywhere from one to three months to be able to provide letters to those students. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. You say that the amount of repayments has been pretty minimal. Also, at the same time, I think I understand that if someone moves back here and they're getting their loan forgiven for every three months that means that'll affect each and every one of those files as well.

You are going to have to look at every single one of them. They have a right to know exactly maybe \$10 in interest, or who knows what the numbers could be. By the sounds of things each and every

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student, whether they were actually paying back the loan, or having it forgiven, the amounts in there are incorrect.

Maybe if I could just get an idea of when all of them can expect to have correct information to go on. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Again, with respect to the forgivable loans, the forgivable loans are at a rate of \$750 for every three months that they're back in the territory. So it's really not an out of pocket expense to them; where they're not actually expending money, but what it does is it'll probably reduce that time.

I guess our first and foremost issue is to advise people who had made the payment. Then the next step would be, obviously, to students who have forgivable loans. I can't commit to a time limit because we have to go through active files and non-active files. I would expect us to address students that are in the active file component.

I am saying one to three months for those people have paid. And then because it's not an actual money exchange, the forgivable loan for every three months, no doubt their files will be adjusted accordingly and then they will be advised. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. As you had indicated that the amount repaid for the 2005-06 fiscal year was \$46,000 and the year before that it was \$90,000.

I am just wondering if that is a result of a less uptake on the program or why does there seem to be such a drop in funds that are being repaid. There always seems to be more uptakes in the program but less money coming back. Maybe I can get an

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idea of why that's occurring like that. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) It's less collection on our part, so we will be training staff and looking at the full student loan portfolio, and looking at our management practices, and our collection practices, and also working with the Department of Finance with respect to collections, in general. We anticipate that within the year our loan amount that we collect back will be higher. That's what the goal is. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Maybe the next question is for officials in the Auditor General's Office. In paragraph 75 you indicate that the department has recorded an allowance for bad debt of 56 percent.

I am just wondering your opinion on that. Is that a normal rate? Is it high? Is it low? Just from an audit perspective, whether it seems to be something that's in line with the norm, or what side of norm is that on? Mr. Lennox.

Mr. Lennox: Allowance of 56 percent is, in a very general sense, considered to be a very high level of allowance. How that compares to the student loan programs in other jurisdictions, I'm not sure if the team looked at that specific comparison. The representatives of the government may know that comparison, but there is no question that 56 percent allowance is a very high allowance. One would question whether that is a loan or a grant program, when you look at something that's that high. So it is a very high allowance.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lennox.

Maybe to Ms. Okpik, if she could give us an indication of how they come up with that percentage. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I guess it is 56 percent because of the lack of loans collection that we are doing. Bad debt expense represents an estimate of the portion of the total student loan portfolio that would be considered uncollectible. There is no actual cash transaction involved and the bad debt expense is recorded through a journal entry.

The bad debt is calculated by annually reviewing the total outstanding loans portfolio to estimate what portions of the loans are uncollectible. The estimate is compared to the prior year and the change in the estimates from year to year is recorded as a bad debt expense. And because we haven't been collecting, then we have a higher bad debt expense that we have defined.

Now, if our collection process has improved and we have higher amounts coming into this, then we anticipate the bad debt expense to go down. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. I guess the question out there is that every person out there with a loan that has to be repaid, they say, "I wonder if I'm going to be included in that 56 percent." What criteria or what guidelines will you use to a point where you say, "Okay, we can't collect that and it's going to be written off." How do you determine which ones will stay in that 56 percent and which ones won't? Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) That

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So all it does is it estimates the portion of the loan portfolio that we are expecting not to collect. As I stated, if the amount that we collect from students increases, then that 56 percent goes down.

I don't know, Jeffrey, would you like to elaborate a bit more on that, or do you feel that captured it? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Mr. Chown.

Mr. Chown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to elaborate a little bit on what do you think that I said, there are two components to bad debt. There's the allowance for doubtful accounts, which is on our balance sheet and which looks at the total loan portfolio of the bank, in this case, the \$4 million, and you provide an estimate of what portion of that portfolio may not be collected.

The ideal process for doing that estimate would be to look at every individual loan, or to have reports from your loans management system that would identify when the last payment, for example, was made on a loan, or have notes in your loans system that indicate that you have contact information for a student.

You can take your loans then and put them in groups of that nature, and then if you have students you haven't been able to contact for several years, you would estimate that the likelihood of collecting those loans is very low.

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So you might say for that type of loans, we're setting up an allowance for bad debt of 100 percent. You may have other students who are two or three months in default on their loans, and for that group of students, you may only estimate eight to 10 to 20 percent estimate of bad debt. You take all those groups together and you end up with a dollar figure that is your estimate of bad debt. That's the ideal process.

In Nunavut, over the last several years, when I looked at the history of how this was calculated, 56 percent was the number that was being used back as far as 2001. In my term with education I wasn't able to determine exactly where that percentage came from. I suspect at one point in time there was an analysis done and that was a reasonable percentage at the time.

In 2006-07 we have attempted to come up with some information that will allow us to more accurately estimate the allowance for bad debt, as part of the project that is now going on. As reporting capabilities are improved in the loans systems the department will better move towards accurately estimating what the uncollectible portion of the loans are.

The impact in the department's financial position from their Vote 1 Appropriation is when you compare from one year to the next what the total outstanding allowance for doubtful accounts is, if it increases then the amount is increased from one year to the next, it is an expenditure in the Vote 1 Appropriation. It reduces from year to the next then you end up with revenue on your financial statements for recovery of bad debt. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Chown. Mr.

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Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have the Student Loan Fund financial statements from March 31, 2006 and the figure is now \$3 million; so it increased by a million from 2005.

I see the Auditor General is saying in that section, Mr. Chairman, paragraph 75 that they're recording an allowance for bad debts, and then in the financial statements that the government has prepared there they are calling it an estimated provision for remission in doubtful accounts.

Perhaps I'll direct this question to the Auditor General's Office. Did you note that that the government had that accounting estimating provision for remission of doubtful accounts and that it's a little bit different than what you're stating in paragraph 75? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Mr. Lennox.

Mr. Lennox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, the wording in our paragraph 75 could be more accurately worded an allowance for doubtful accounts as compared to an allowance for bad debt. That's probably a distinction that only an accountant would enjoy, but, nonetheless, it is more accurate terminology that should have been doubtful accounts rather than bad debts. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lennox. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Lennox. It is good of you to clear that up.

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I wonder if it would make more sense for the Government of Nunavut, when they're preparing their financial statements if they break that figure that they have in the 2006 statements and then break it down and sum it up all into one figure. Break it down by what is actually remission numbers and what are the doubtful accounts. That would help us understand a little better; the difference between the students who are working out their loan by returning to Nunavut, and then the students who are actually not repaying, like there's no chance of repaying.

I am wondering if that's something that might be useful. That's for the Auditor General's Office. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Charron.

Ms. Charron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is definitely a possibility, and it's a question of disclosure. The Government of Nunavut would have to determine what would be the preferred disclosure in this case, but it could be an acceptable presentation to break down the figure that you currently have into its component. This is ultimately the decision of the government. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Charron. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Auditor General's Office.

The Government of Nunavut, is it possible if you know who's not repaying their loans, or where you're having difficulties getting the students to repay their loans, if they seek employment with the Government of Nunavut and are

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successful in getting employment with the Government of Nunavut, is it not possible to do some collections from their pay cheque to pay off their loan? Is that something that your department can arrange with the Department of Finance? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) That's something, definitely, that we can work with the Department of Finance on. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. Are there questions on that? We're getting close to the end now. Our last section is just the Measurement, Reporting and Use of Program Results.

Maybe just a quick general question here and I'll ask it to the officials from the Auditor General's Office. It's where you highlight on paragraph 80 that the department does not have clear objectives for the program. I'm just wondering if you could elaborate on that for us. Mr. Lennox.

Mr. Lennox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In this particular section, we begin to get into the overall topic of measurement of results of what's been achieved by the program. In order to have a good mechanism in place to measure what has been achieved by the program, the starting point needs to be clear objectives that can be measured, that can be tracked, and as to their achievement.

In that regard, we noted that, in this particular case, the objectives aren't clear enough in order to enable that process of being able to ultimately measure and

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conclude as to whether the programs, indeed, achieve the end results that it was intended to achieve, which is very important in the sense of whether to continue with the current program as it is, or to make alterations going forward with respect to needed changes in order to achieve those objectives. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lennox. Maybe just to Ms. Okpik, I know in the work plan that you handed out to us yesterday, number three on there indicates that they will revisit and confirm the FMB decision on the intent of FANS, and establish clear and concrete objectives for FANS.

So I would assume that something has already been approved by FMB, and if that's something that could be shared with members and with the audit team so that it gives us an idea of... and maybe get some feedback on for the department. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) One of the things that we had undertaken and one successful was in finding the original FMB's record of decision pre-1999 to what the intent at that time of the Student Financial Assistance Program of the GNWT.

We have committed to keep looking to see what the intent of the program is. If we can't find it, then obviously, as identified in our work plan, as I stated yesterday, we have draft goals and objectives but we would like to see what other jurisdictions have documented, and then again, taking into consideration with respect to Nunavut's unique needs, then we will draft our objectives.

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With respect to this FMB submission prior to 1999 and what the intent of the program was before pre-1999. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Okpik. When I read that it looks like it may be our FMB that did it but it's a little outdated as I would imagine.

Just another question on paragraph 81 where it indicates figuring out or calculating the total enrolment for a year, it indicates that they add the total number of students in the fall semester and the total number in the winter semester and doesn't differentiate of students who attended both; they're counted twice.

I am just wondering if Ms. Okpik could commit to providing us with accurate numbers for that. If we had been provided, and I would assume this report, the one that was done in 2002. That would be incorrect based on this information, but if we could get accurate on that would be great. Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) In this instance, unfortunately, it was a new casual that had used the Excel spreadsheet and manually counted. In the last month and a half the Excel spreadsheet is no longer used. We do have crystal reporting capabilities now on the FANS database, where actual numbers by semester can be broken out. This I don't believe is an issue anymore. (Interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: That's good. Thanks. Anyone else have any more questions on the final part? Anything on the conclusion or anything like that? Is there any questions

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or comments? Mr. Alagalak.

Mr. Alagalak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make concluding remarks that it's evident that within the last seven years it has been a very busy time for government departments due to the fact that we lacked foundation, that's why this had occurred.

I would like to say that this is very important and the auditor's reports are very important. We have to treat that as such. That's the only way we can resolve some of the issues. If we don't take this seriously then the problems will continue to increase and snowball. So therefore, we should treat this very seriously.

This is the first time that I have actually seen some results coming out from this review. I would like to thank the Auditor General's Office for reviewing that. I would like to see some type kind of program reviews too in the future.

We will be dealing with other reviews done by the Office of the Auditor General, which we'll be reviewing this fall and work with the Nunavut Government officials. I believe that all the programs of the Government of Nunavut should be audited.

In the beginning when we first started the Nunavut Government it was very difficult to get concrete foundations. In spite of that, I would like to congratulate the staff of the GN for working very hard. After this review I know that you'll get busier.

I would like to provide support to the staff of the Department of Education. I know that they lack staff and they have day to day programs that they have to run. I would like to provide more support to the **Δ⁶/«ΡϹʹ⁶** (Ͻ¹/₂⁶): ϤϹϤͼΔ⁶. ʹϭͰ⁶. <ʹϭͰΡΛ¹/₅⁶/₆ / ἐ²/₆? ¹/₆/₆/₆ Δ⁷/₆/₆ Δ⁶/₆ Δ⁶/₆? ¹/₆/₆ Δ⁶/₆ Δ⁶/₆?

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staff here and provide more support and staff to the branch because they have to deal with the student financial assistance for Nunavut, and to provide loans.

Within the government 50 percent of the workforce is still not beneficiaries so we still need to increase the number of beneficiary staff within the government as a whole. I believe that is the only way that we can keep up with the work that needs to be done to help beneficiaries in the workforce.

Although we need all the staff, we need to give them time to have rest and work and to have rest and talk with their peers. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Alagalak. Mr. Peterson.

Mr. Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the Auditor General's Office for the hard work they've done and I'm pleased with the performance audit.

I would like to thank Ms. Okpik and all of her staff also for their hard work. I know it has probably been difficult over the years to deliver the program without all the tools that it should have to be an effective program, but I could see from the evidence and information that has been provided that it is to some degree been effective, it probably has been very effective, we just don't know how effective. I know a lot of students in Cambridge Bay and in my riding have benefited over the years.

So I hope that this whole exercise does contribute to making a stronger and more effective program going forward, and I think we owe it to our students and our constituents to make it a stronger program.

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I commend you for coming to this meeting this week with an action plan all ready, instead of coming to it and then we get all over your staff and yourself, you come with a plan, that's a commendable action in itself.

So I appreciate that I leave this meeting with more confidence that the program will be improved and hopefully, at some point in the future when you table a report to the Legislative Assembly, we'll have a lot of good information then that we can share with our constituents and other organizations throughout Nunavut.

So, again, I thank you for all your hard work. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. I just want to add in, too, that I would like to thank everyone for coming here.

One thing I know in the end here we talked about developing performance outcomes, and I'm sure Mr. Lennox and the staff at the Auditor General's Office will know that that's something that I've pushed for in this government for about six years now, you know the committee evaluates them, how do we find out to make sure that the programs that we're running are actually achieving what we want them to, and I wish you luck in that endeayour.

Again, as a result of this review in the audit and the hearings, I'm confident that we can assure the students out there that some of the problems that they've faced in the past for whatever reason are going to be rectified and we would have a better, more improved run program into the future that would be here for everyone involved. That's you, the students, the

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auditor's office; it would be much easier to look at after this.

I look forward to seeing that in the future and look forward to seeing the performance and the development of the performance outcomes, and the different things that you outline in your work plan. I look forward to a meeting and getting updates from the minister on this.

So maybe with that, I would like to ask Ms. Okpik, if you have any closing remarks you would like to make, and then I'll go to Mr. Lennox. Go ahead, Ms. Okpik.

Ms. Okpik (interpretation): Thank you. (interpretation ends) On behalf of myself and my staff, I would like to once again express our thanks to the staff of the Office of the Auditor General. This, I think, has been a learning experience for all.

We just happened to be the first program but I think what's really important is that we'll go back and provide information to all the departments in terms of key performance indicators, objectives, ties to legislation, reporting, and the importance of that.

So I look forward to sharing this with my colleagues and the other departments. I would like to also take this opportunity to thank my staff who have done a tremendous amount of work in putting the work drawn together for the work that has already begun.

And I would also like to thank the members for providing us with the opportunity to speak to the recommendations and to the work that we will be doing and have already started.

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(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Okpik. Mr. Lennox.

Mr. Lennox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I as well want to thank everybody involved with this. We had great cooperation from the department, I thank you for that. I also would like to thank the committee for having a hearing on this. I think it's important that such hearings occur; it's part of the overall accountability process, which we help serve.

I look forward to providing you with future reports, the next one of which will come later this fall. Thanks for everything. Again I would also like to thank my staff for the hard work that they put into this as well. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lennox. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank everyone involved from the Auditor General's Office to the staff of the department, and out staff and interpreters, and everyone that's here. I'd like to thank the media for being here. We always get good coverage that the Standing Committee does with the Auditor General's work. So we look forward to seeing that come out.

Just a message; Ms. Okpik indicated that this is the first performance audit done on any program in the government, and the work that they're going to move forward in. I think it's great that the department, as the minister likes to say, is on the leading edge of things. Once again he is in the position to be in the leading edge for the government to move forward on some of these important issues that have been identified. I know we all wish him the best of luck in doing that.

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With that, thank you, very much all for being here. I won't adjourn the meeting but we'll take a 15-minute break. Some people have to get to the airport. Maybe just committee members and the staff of the Auditor General's Office can come back and we'll have our wrap up. Come back, okay. Thank you, very much.

>>Committee adjourned at 14:42

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