

Speaking Notes for KFA Presentation to The Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Speaking Notes for Joel Murray, Kwantlen Faculty Association

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September 16, 2010

Good afternoon, and welcome to Surrey. My name is Joel Murray, and I'm on the Executive of the Kwantlen Faculty Association as the Member-at-Large. In addition to representing the KFA, I'm an instructor at Kwantlen where I've been employed for more than 10 years. I teach academic English as a Second Language courses.

The KFA's 800 members work at the four different campuses of Kwantlen Polytechnic University located in Surrey, Richmond, and Langley. We are glad that the Committee made the decision to come to Surrey and gather public input directly from citizens and organizations in this community, and we thank you for the opportunity to share our faculty association's views on what should be the priorities for the February 2011 provincial budget.

Before outlining those priorities, let me give you a brief overview of Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Established by the government of British Columbia in 1981, Kwantlen was first known as a community college, then a university college and now Kwantlen Polytechnic University. We have four campuses located south of the Fraser in Richmond, Surrey and Langley. Kwantlen offers bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, diplomas, certificates and citations in over 135 programs. Equally as important, we also provide over 25 services to help students with their studies. We are home to about 17,000 students, drawn mostly from regions south of the Fraser, but not exclusively so.

As a special-purpose, teaching university, Kwantlen's mission is, to quote Kwantlen's Mission and Mandate statement, to "offer all learners, regardless of background and preparation, opportunities to achieve the highest standards of academic performance." In order to do so, Kwantlen provides students with a broad range of post-secondary options. We work closely with community partners to ensure that the programs we offer reflect the needs of students and the broader communities in which we operate. In addition to our Bachelor's degree programs and university courses, we have an extensive trades and technology program which is concentrated at our Cloverdale campus. We offer an Adult Special Education program and an English as a Second Language program. And finally, we provide Developmental Education programs for adult learners who are returning to a post-secondary institution to upgrade their skills, complete their high school education or secure the necessary pre-requisites to enter new programs or career options.

The good news this Fall is that like many other public post-secondary institutions in BC, Kwantlen is seeing an increase in enrolments. The increase is approximately 5 percent and is ahead of what was

estimated to be the enrolment target for this year. The encouraging part of this development is that students are recognizing that their world is changing, and to keep pace with that change, they need some form of post-secondary education.

That perception is a good one to have because all of the evidence suggests that post-secondary education is a wise investment. It makes sense for the student because that education can become the platform to not only a new career and greater mobility in the job market, but also a greater sense of engagement in the community. It also makes a lot of sense for the public treasury that funds a significant portion of this education. The new skills, the greater mobility—both have a positive impact on an individual's income over their entire working life. That positive impact is also reflected in high tax revenues to the public treasury.

Both types of returns—to the individual and to government—are well documented and have been presented to this committee by post-secondary education advocates in previous years.

The challenge we face currently, however, is that despite the evidence that supports increasing the investment in post-secondary education, BC's public institutions find that their operating grants from the provincial government are failing to keep pace with the demands in the various communities in which we operate. Previous presenters have stressed the importance of measuring the level of public funding support in post-secondary education by looking at operating grants in inflation-adjusted dollars relative to the number of students we have.

Kwantlen is suffering from the same funding crunch that we see across the entire public post-secondary education system. This year we will receive less funding per Full Time Equivalent student than we did last year. That decrease doesn't take into account the cost pressures of inflation. But the real crunch for our institutions comes from the fact that what the Ministry budgets in terms of enrolment is well short of what we are experiencing in our institution. For this current fiscal year, for example, our enrolment figures are approximately 10,500 FTE's versus a Ministry budgeted FTE of about 9,100.

What that shortfall means is that the institution has to find other ways to make ends meet.

How that plays out will vary from department to department, but there are some common threads through it all. The most glaring impact has been on the affordability of a post-secondary education. Skyrocketing tuition fees may have become a new revenue source for post-secondary institutions, but it has simply shouldered students with more debt and less access. The funding crunch has also meant that student support services have been scaled back dramatically. The problem with doing that of course is that students have a much harder time sorting through the courses they might need to graduate or the various career options that they should consider. The "do-more-with-less" problem also means wait lists for students who want to access the course or program they need or have an interest in completing. That translates into students taking longer to graduate and, unfortunately, taking on more debt as they work their way toward graduation.

In one of our program areas—Adult Basic Education (ABE)—the funding crunch means that adult learners who are taking the initiative to return to school and upgrade their skills are being stymied by

the lack of proper funding in their area. It is particularly frustrating for Kwantlen because the funding formula used to finance ABE programs produces uneven results when you compare various public post-secondary institutions across the region. Kwantlen, for example, services a much larger population base, but has anywhere from a third to a half of the FTE's for ABE programs as is the case for institutions such as Douglas College or Capilano University.

Allow me a moment to relate how this lack of proper funding affects real people—students. One of my colleagues who teaches ABE courses tells me that Kwantlen is, for the first time ever, facing a shortfall in the Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Program, otherwise known as ABESAP. She tells me that we are apparently \$300,000 over budget for ABESAP, and we have been told we are not going to receive any more funds. The decision was made to prioritize paying tuition and student fees and to disallow funding for transportation and books.

The result of this decision is that we have one student who is now forced to walk from the vicinity of King George Hwy and 96th Avenue to the Surrey campus to come to class—a distance of 7 kilometers one way. We have other students who are now walking similarly long distances to come to school. These students have expressed their dismay with this outcome, as they have planned their lives and made sacrifices just to come to Kwantlen, but being disallowed from having access to transportation reduces their ability to access their education. Because of this decision to disallow ABE students' use of ABESAP funds, they may end up losing their chance for education.

The ABE problem is also frustrating because it is through ABE that we are truly able to open the doors to learners in our communities. These are the adults who gain the most when they are able to complete these programs. They are also the adults who require more individual attention to achieve the learning outcomes that will benefit them in the long run.

The funding crunch is by no means limited to our degree and certificate program areas. Our trades departments continue to struggle with a funding arrangement controlled by the Industry Training Authority. The ITA and the public post-secondary institutions that deliver over 90% of the trades training programs in BC have had a difficult relationship over the years. The fact that the ITA now reports to the Ministry of Advanced Education is an improvement, but there are still serious gaps in the level of trades training that the ITA will support through their funding arrangements with post-secondary institutions. As a result, some of our trades programs have to cope with less than adequate technology, a problem that only serves to undermine the quality and relevance of the skills that apprentices in those programs are able to acquire and that employers expect.

The trades also suffer from a serious gender gap. Women are under-represented in most of the trades. The most effective way to correct that problem is to have more targeted funding available, either directly from the ITA or from the Ministry, that will encourage and support more women in trades and apprenticeship programs. Under the existing arrangement, that funding is not forthcoming, and as a result, women are being effectively excluded from career options that would be valuable to them and to the province as a whole.

One final point and that has to do with the change that was made to Kwantlen in 2008. The provincial government announced that five existing public post-secondary institutions would be made special-

purpose, teaching universities. Although it was a welcome change for Kwantlen, there was no additional funding at the time to cover the costs of becoming a new university. The frustration for our institution is that the announced change in our status raises all sorts of questions about the rationale for making the change in the first place. Kwantlen is still facing the same funding challenges as we did when we were a university college. The message from the 2008 announcement seems to be that we can change our letterhead, but everything else stays the same.

In conclusion, our faculty association asks that the committee's final report advise the Minister of Finance to:

- 1) Make a long term commitment to increase real per student operating grants to public post-secondary institutions. At the very least, the Minister's target should be to increase real per-student operating grants to the level that they were when his party first took office in 2001.
- 2) Address the affordability problems that today's students face by expanding student support services and restoring the student grant program.
- 3) Target and support the needs of adult learners by funding an expansion of ABE programs and support services in public post-secondary institutions.
- 4) Ensure sufficient funding for trades training for all who wish to access foundation programs or apprenticeship programs.
- 5) Evaluate the current funding formula for all public post-secondary institutions to eliminate inequities within the existing system and ensure that future funding is not eroded by inflation.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today, and I will take any questions that you might have.