

Speaking Notes for Joel Murray, Kwantlen Faculty Association

Presentation to the Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

October 16, 2009

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 almost 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.

On a personal note, as an instructor and a former chair of the English Language Studies department, which delivers ESL at Kwantlen, I would like the Committee to know that according to the StatsCan 2006 Census, forty-four percent of those living in the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area, from which Kwantlen students originate, speak a mother tongue other than English. Many are students who are immigrants, and many of those are professionals seeking to return to their professions. This fact speaks to the importance of a comprehensive approach that reflects the real needs of the communities we serve.

I would like to begin by emphasizing for Committee members that funding for post-secondary education has been problematic for most of this decade. In real terms, after accounting for the impact of inflation and changes in the number of students that we have in the post-secondary education system, real per-student funding has dropped by 8 percent since 2001.

What that means at an institution like Kwantlen is that we are forced to do more with less. Complicating our funding problems even more is the fact that Kwantlen became one of the five newly designated universities in BC in 2008. However, that new designation came with no additional funding to support the activities that are part of providing a university education. In order for Kwantlen to become the teaching university envisioned by the provincial government, an increase in funding is needed.

Indeed, the lack of proper funding support from the provincial government undermines the important mandate that Kwantlen has, and that is to provide comprehensive post-secondary learning opportunities for the communities in which we operate. Our campuses are located in culturally diverse communities. We deliver programs and course offerings designed to meet the needs of students, employers, and the broader community. We have developed a strong track record on all these fronts. However, when funding fails to keep pace with the growing demands of the region Kwantlen serves or even the basic costs of operating a post-secondary facility, our ability to maintain the commitment to the community starts to diminish.

Part of that commitment is to people like Anne, a single mother who is a student at Kwantlen. Anne's story was related to me by one of my colleagues, who teaches Criminology.

Anne is a single mother of two in her late 20s. She has two jobs and at the same time is trying to study part time for her Associate of Arts degree. She came to my colleague at the beginning of the semester to ask about her flexibility concerning exam writing and so on, as getting a babysitter for her was very difficult. She often came late to class, because of late caretakers, and clearly struggled in balancing the many duties in her life. Nonetheless, she was very committed and often stayed after class (which ended at 10 pm) to make sure she did not miss anything at the beginning due to her tardiness. Her struggles were many; her supports, few. For example, she said that having the opportunity to have a childcare service at the University would not only give her more flexibility in the course times she could commit to, but it would provide an extreme relief of stress in trying to track down steady daycare options. She said she felt she could take more than one or two classes per semester if this resource was available, which would significantly cut down the length of time it would take for her to complete her Associate of Arts degree. She said she'd even consider a Bachelor of Arts if such an opportunity were to present itself.

I cannot think of a better story than Anne's to push for these kinds of resources that support our students and their learning. These resources are not just for staff—they are a necessity that students here at Kwantlen deserve as well. And with more and more mature students coming back to University in the recession, the need will only increase.

One of the arguments that we often hear from government is that the "fiscal cupboard is bare" and services will have to suffer through this period. This begs the question: how will the under-funding of post-secondary education position BC to deal with the looming skills shortage, a shortage that previous budget documents have noted as a risk to future economic growth in our province?

We know that demographic as well as technological changes require BC to significantly increase the number of post-secondary graduates. The TD Economics Special Report of August 24, 2009, makes clear that greater attainment of higher quality post-secondary education will become increasingly important to Canada's economic progress. When you underfund post-secondary institutions, you make it more difficult to increase the number of graduates. Underfunding means we offer fewer programs to our students. It often means that completing a degree, certificate, diploma or apprenticeship program takes longer for our students. I should add that the decision to de-regulate tuition fees also undermines our goal of increasing post-secondary graduates because we are making post-secondary education more expensive for our students. However, at the same time that access and affordability are becoming barriers, the provincial government this past summer cut \$16 million to student-aid programs—programs that for example provided bursaries to nurses in training and loan forgiveness for the disabled.

I should point out as well that in some of the specific areas where we need to do more in terms of training—areas such as our apprenticeship and trades training programs—the funding problems have

been doubly complicated by the Industry Training Authority's approach to funding trades programs in our institution. It also doesn't provide the full costs for infrastructure needed in trades training, such as machinery, equipment and shops. More and more, post-secondary institutions are forced to cover the administrative costs of trades programs, costs such as those related to counselling and curriculum development, that had previously been covered by ITA's predecessor, the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission. In other words, although the ITA has returned to the Ministry of Advanced Education, trades training still faces funding challenges.

We hope that this Committee will consider the following solutions and incorporate them into its final report. I would like to summarize some of the key changes that we need to see for post-secondary education.

Affordability is an issue across the entire public post-secondary system. We have burdened students with more debt because we de-regulated tuition fees in 2001. That creates an enormous access barrier at a time when our province needs to be training and educating more post-secondary students, not fewer. The skills shortage is real and post-secondary education is part of the solution, but that won't happen with the current funding commitments. Students need and deserve much more affordable tuitions and far more generous financial aid than is currently the case. You need to address that problem in the 2010 budget.

Post-secondary institutions need to see a significant overhaul of the funding formula. Operating grants have not kept pace with inflation. Provincial funding has not kept pace with the demands that we know are there for programs. It has not closed the gap that exists in the funding of rural versus urban post-secondary institutions. Rather than add Band-Aids to the problem, the Committee's report should seriously consider a recommendation to bring all the stakeholders together to revise and renew the funding formula.

In closing, the Ministry of Finance has asked what choices to make and how to increase revenues to pay for services such as health and education. The answer is clear: Invest in education. Why? The TD Economics Special Report that I quoted earlier states that educational attainment has a direct impact on individual earnings and that schooling yields substantial social rates of return. In fact, according to Stats Can figures, for those with a post-secondary certificate or degree, unemployment rates are lower than average.

An education has proven to be the best solution to poverty; with access to post secondary education, the poorest members of our communities will see their options improve greatly—resulting in an increase in contribution to the tax base.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon, and I would be happy to take any questions that you might have.