

October 6, 2011

Good morning, and welcome to Surrey. My name is Joel Murray, and I'm on the Executive of the Kwantlen Faculty Association as the Vice-President—Grievances. In addition to representing the KFA, I'm an instructor at Kwantlen where I've been employed for more than 11 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, Cloverdale, 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 2012 provincial budget.

I would like to give you a brief overview of our institution. Established by the BC government in 1981, Kwantlen was first a community college, then a university college, and now Kwantlen Polytechnic University. I would like to point out that Kwantlen is the only public post-secondary option in the south Fraser area west of Abbotsford.

Kwantlen offers bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, diplomas, certificates, citations, and trades training. We do all of this by offering over 135 programs. We also provide over 25 services to help students with their studies. We are home to about 17,000 students who come largely from communities located south of the Fraser, but also from outside of BC, a point which I will address later in this presentation.

One of the critical objectives of our institution is to provide students with a broad range of post-secondary education options. In addition to our university programs, we offer an extensive trades training program at our Cloverdale campus, which works closely with local and provincial employers. We offer an Adult Special Education program and an English as a Second Language program. Our Adult Basic Education program and Developmental Education program provide people with the opportunity to upgrade their skills, complete their high school education, or secure the necessary pre-requisites to enter new programs or improve their career options.

Premier Clark has stressed many times over the last several months that she sees education, both post-secondary and K-12, as key priorities for BC. You won't get much disagreement from our members on that point. We see the transformations that are possible when learning and opportunity intersect. Our students, regardless of the program they are in, gain more than just knowledge or skills when they attend Kwantlen—they gain a renewed sense of self-confidence, a confidence that helps them transition to new careers in many instances, but also a confidence that leads them to become more fully engaged in their communities.

Where we struggle, both as an institution and as post-secondary educators, is on the details of how to ensure that our institution and our students have all the opportunities to learn and build that confidence. The two most significant challenges we face at Kwantlen have to do with access and

affordability. We need to improve both if we want to fulfil Premier Clark's stated goal of making education a sustainable priority in BC's economic and social future.

Let me touch briefly on the issue of access. Operating grants from the province are critical funding sources for every public post-secondary institution in BC. Those grants are the largest single investment that the provincial treasury makes in our institutions. What has happened over the last ten years is that operating grants have not kept pace with either basic inflationary pressures or the steady increase in the number of students who are attending our institution. Province-wide real per-student operating grants have declined by over 8 percent since 2001.

What that means at an institution like ours is that we are forced to do more with less. While we pride ourselves on being able to provide our students with the courses and services they need to be successful, our institution struggles with tighter and tighter budgets. The casualty in all of this is the students. It is more and more difficult for them to get into courses or to receive services such as personal and career counselling. For example, students face growing waiting lists for course offerings that they need to complete their degree or want as part of a career change. They face increasing delays in accessing counselling, a service that has seen little growth in spite of increased enrollment.

The other major challenge at Kwantlen is affordability. Tuition fees for an undergraduate degree have more than doubled in the last ten years. The spike in fees may not have dented enrolment levels at our institution, but it has had a negative impact. Our students now take on much greater debt than was the case ten years ago. According to the Canadian Federation of Students, the average student graduates with a \$27,000 debt. Our students also are taking longer to complete their degree programs because ... with rising tuition fees, with greater debt comes the pressure to work part-time, a pressure that naturally forces a student to take less than a full course load to balance work and school commitments. Our concern is that these pressures will, at some point, drive participation rates down, a move that we don't want to see in this province if we hope to deal effectively with the impacts of demographic shifts and looming skills shortages.

The affordability crunch has also distorted how much tuition fee revenue drives the overall revenue picture at our institution. In 2001, tuition fee revenues amounted to just over \$11 million at Kwantlen. That number translated into about 13% of total revenue. By 2011, tuition fee revenue stood at over \$44 million, a fourfold increase. Tuition fees, however, now account for over 30% of total revenues. When you have shifts of that magnitude over a relatively short period of time, it begs a number of questions ... questions like why is the current generation of students paying a far higher portion of the costs of their education than was the case for earlier generations. At some point inter-generational equity has to find a balance, but making today's students pay a third of the costs when previously it was half that number strikes us as being profoundly out of balance.

The Premier also highlighted the importance of international education in both the Throne speech and several announcements that she made in September. Kwantlen, like many universities and colleges in BC, has a long history of opening doors to international students. It's not only good for those students, who are able to access a quality education here in BC, it is also good for our institution and our domestic

students who are able to engage in the diversity that comes from having international students within our classrooms. As noted in the Kwantlen 2009/10-2011/12 Accountability Plan and Report, “Kwantlen is very aware of the importance in internationalizing its curriculum and preparing its graduates for a world driven by the forces of globalization.”

We are not so sure, however, that diversity is what motivates the government’s interest in international students. Our concern is that there is far too much interest in the “revenue potential” of these students. The enthusiasm for that international revenue has to be balanced against the reality that international students need and deserve additional support if they are going to receive the quality education that has attracted them to BC post-secondary institutions in the first place. As an instructor who teaches many of these international students, I see firsthand that their needs are far more complex than anyone who is promoting the expansion of international education is prepared to recognize. And I see firsthand the result when those needs are not met. Therein lays a significant problem. If there is an expectation that increased international students could provide a revenue stream to offset the chronic under-funding provided by provincial operating grants, that calculation needs to be examined very carefully because it does not take into account the significant new costs that need to be covered if we are going to meet the needs of international students.

To summarize, the Kwantlen Faculty Association would like to suggest some priorities that need to be strengthened in the 2012 provincial budget.

- We need to address the affordability challenges that current students face. Simply capping already expensive tuition fees doesn’t address the real problem. We could make a meaningful step in the right direction by reviving the student grant program, which would at least allow those with the most significant financial challenges some relief.
- We need to see new money provided to post-secondary institutions to ensure that they have the capacity to restore student services that have been scaled back over the last ten years.
- We need to see an overhaul in the funding relationship between the Industry Training Authority and public post-secondary institutions, which deliver over 90% of trades training programs in BC. That relationship needs to better reflect the true cost of the trades programs that we deliver.
- The government needs to look at a new funding formula for post-secondary institutions, a formula that will not only guard against the impact of inflation, but also recognize the unique cost pressures that various institutions face in providing access to post-secondary learning in their community.

Thank you and I will take any questions that you might have.