

TO: Members of Academic Council
FROM: Robert Ventresca, President (Interim)
DATE: December 17, 2024
RE: Monthly Report for December 2024

Dear Colleagues,

Speaking about Mission

If I may, I would like to begin my report to Academic Council with a personal observation that, I hope, speaks to you all about mission - that oft-used word about which there is justifiable confusion and uncertainty. One of the questions I am asked most frequently these days is, *how are you doing?* I'm always touched by the question, grateful for the genuine, I hope, concern it conveys for my well-being during what we all acknowledge is a challenging time for universities. Which raises the question: What sustains us in our respective roles as members of a learning community? One simple answer to that question that resonates with me is: *love of mission*.

This is not empty rhetoric. In the many listening sessions and coffee hours I have been hosting this term with staff and faculty, I have consistently heard how our mission – the promise to provide an accessible, quality education for students from all backgrounds and perspectives – is a rich source of meaning, purpose and sustenance. I have also heard firsthand about the enduring impact of a King's education in meetings with alumni whose experiences with King's span well over fifty years. Their stories recount the history and evolution of King's, from its early days as an all-male institution with an almost exclusively clerical faculty to the efforts of those who helped pave the way for a more diverse and inclusive campus culture. Yet for all the differences in their experiences, I was struck by the common refrain in their stories which tells of lifelong friendships, transformative lessons, and a deep affection for King's as a *place*.

Inspired by this common refrain, I maintain a laser focus on advancing our shared mission. I look forward to continuing to work collaboratively and collegially with the Council and all King's constituencies to ensure our long-term flourishing.

Planning and Budget Update

At its most recent meeting on November 27, I provided the Board of Directors with a budget update that conveyed new information about the additional revenue shortfall for the current fiscal year. As I reported previously to Council, this information was discovered by the fractional CFO/Finance working

at my direction to scrutinize more closely the projections versus actual results of the annual budget. As a result, we now have a clearer understanding of the fiscal challenges we face. As concerning as this information is, knowing the data and providing a more robust and transparent approach to planning and budget are essential first steps to effective risk assessment and management.

Short-term measures and long-term changes are needed to ensure our long-term flourishing. In the new year, we will be reporting to you and the community about a series of measures to manage costs while also diversifying and generating revenue to address projected shortfalls. We will need to pursue multiple avenues at the same time, notably in academic programming, ancillary services and operations.

Council and its standing committees will play an important role here, exercising the authority delegated to academic governance to oversee institutional curriculum planning, program development and review, and strategic enrolment management. For example, we need to achieve a greater degree of cross-departmental collaboration to support a coherent, integrated institutional approach to recruitment and retention, both of which are critical to our mission and financial sustainability.

New Budget Model

The development of a new model of planning and budgeting is arguably the most pressing adaptive challenge we face as an institution. Accordingly, with the support of the Board and in alignment with key strategic directions, in October I directed the development of a new multi-year planning and budget model, in consultation with all constituencies, that includes ongoing review and interventions for the current fiscal year, as well as a complete 5-year financial forecast from FY25-26 to FY29-30.

In response to updated information about our projected revenue shortfall, I have directed the fractional CFO/Finance to design a comprehensive budget model that can work with various assumptions, including proposed interventions to manage costs and grow revenue. This will help us gain a comprehensive and accurate understanding of King's financial outlook over the next five years. **NOTE:** I expect to receive this model for internal review in the President's Office **by mid-January**. It will guide the Planning and Priorities Committee – and Council – to prepare the 2025-2026 budget. It will also inform the 5-year planning and budget horizon.

As you know, I already have convened the **President's Task Force on Planning and Budget** to solicit information and input from all members of the King's community approaches to planning and budget. I hope to present the report to the Board and to Council by **no later than April 2025**, and it will be publicly available.

Report from the Board

The Board has received the Council's feedback on the executive appointments policy and is giving this its due consideration. More information will be provided in the new year. The Board has also received a preliminary report on the operational review, with a final report from Strategy Corp expected in the new year. As promised, once completed, the findings of the review will be shared with Council and will be publicly available.

After considerable deliberation, the Board has made the very difficult decision not to support the proposal to house the Research Institute with Children (RIC) at Western Research Parks, which also

means forfeiting the associated Canada Foundation for Innovation Award. This decision reflects significant concerns about the financial and enrollment challenges facing the sector, despite the transformative potential of the RIC to advance child-centered research and embody King's mission of social justice, ethical action, and community engagement. I acknowledge the disappointment this decision will bring, especially to those who have worked tirelessly on this initiative, and I sincerely thank everyone involved for their dedication and efforts.

Bill 166: Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act

Members of Council have asked for an update on Bill 166. As you may know, the legislation stipulates the following:

- Every college and university are required to have a student mental health policy that describes the programs, policies, services and support available at the college or university in respect of student mental health.
- Every college and university are required to have policies and rules to address and combat racism and hate, including but not limited to anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia.
- The Minister is authorized to issue directives in relation to the information to be provided about the costs associated with attendance at the college or university.

I am grateful to the Dean of Students, Joe Henry, and Director of Human Resources, Karen Gingrich, for their assistance in preparing the following update related to our ongoing compliance with Bill 166 legislation:

- **King's Mental Health policies, programs services and supports** are outlined via the [Mental Health and Wellness webpage](#). Additionally, Annual Reporting is completed and reported via the [Student Services and Supports reporting](#) and will be incorporated into the annual Board work plan. King's has also been working with our partners at Western, in an update to the Mental Health Strategic Plan which is forthcoming.
- Definitions have been added to our existing **Harassment and Discrimination** policy to capture anti-racism/anti-hate. King's will also incorporate some wording to reflect that the policy also encompasses anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia. This will be updated on our [Safe Campus website](#). Reports on policy will be incorporated into the annual Board work plan.
- In relation to costs associated with attendance, faculty were asked on November 28 to provide costs for textbooks and other learning materials to the Vice-President Academic Dean's Office for half-year courses beginning in January 2025. Additional information for costs and fees is available on the [Money Matters website](#). To ensure further transparency, the Dean of Students will be consulting with student government on a new student-fee protocol beginning in January 2025.

Season's Greetings

I want to take this opportunity to thank all members of Council and its respective committees for your time and collegial spirit in discharging your duties in the exercise of academic governance. Please accept my prayers and best wishes to you and your loved ones for a restful and restorative holiday season.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Ventresca', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

R. Ventresca, Ph.D.

President (Interim) and Professor