



Private Career Colleges Oversight 2021 Value-for-Money Audit

Why we did this audit

- Private career colleges are privately operated businesses regulated by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities under the Private Career Colleges Act, 2005 (Act).
- They range from large, multi-campus organizations teaching multiple subjects to small, focused specialist institutions and typically offer more flexible timing of enrolment and smaller class sizes compared to public colleges.
- Private career colleges that are regulated well and operate effectively can help supply employers with trained workers to fill their more specific job demands in a shorter period.

Why it matters

- Private career colleges train adults who require specific job skills or who already possess academic qualifications but want to enhance their practical skills to become even more competitive in the job market.
- Graduates of private career colleges work as paramedics, massage therapists, personal support workers, hairstylists, truck drivers and many other occupations that serve the public.
- Students who invest money into tuition and other fees to obtain vocational training from private career colleges deserve to get the training that they paid for and have access to accurate information about the colleges.

What we found

Outdated Programs

- Almost 1,400 outdated programs, approved more than five years ago, are being delivered by private career colleges.
- Outdated programs include IT and paramedicine - students may not receive relevant training to find employment in their chosen field and help them perform effectively in the job market.

RECOMMENDATIONS 1-4

Compliance Inspection Targets Not Met, Higher Fees Charged

- The Ministry does not examine the content delivered to students to verify that it is the program approved by the Ministry. The Ministry cannot confirm that students are receiving adequate education for employment from private career college programs.
- As of June 2021, the Ministry had not met its target of inspecting all colleges within three years at 214 or 30% of college campuses. These inspections are conducted to confirm that private career colleges are compliant with the conditions of their registration and legislative requirements.
- The Ministry lacked processes to identify private career colleges that charge students fees that exceed the amounts on the fee lists held on record by the Ministry; 33% of a sample of private career colleges quoted a higher fee.

RECOMMENDATIONS 5-8

Course and Fee Complaints Common

- The Ministry does not analyze complaints or publish repeat complaints and cannot identify common issues at private career colleges to guide inspections, and students cannot get this information for decision-making.
- In a sample of 146 complaints, we found the most common significant complaints were about course delivery/instruction and fees/refunds.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Poor Reporting of Enforcement Against Colleges

- The Ministry's poor public reporting of enforcement hinders students' ability to make informed decisions.
- Information posted had errors and was not always published on a timely basis, sometimes up to a year after enforcement.

RECOMMENDATIONS 10–13

Late Payments and Risks for College Closures and Training Completion Assurance Fund

- The Ministry did not collect annual premiums to the Training Completion Assurance Fund from colleges on a timely basis and did not enforce timely payment.
- The Ministry did not know some private career colleges were operating with no financial security, which could put unnecessary pressure on the assurance fund should these colleges suddenly close.

RECOMMENDATIONS 14–16

Increase in International Students in General and at Undesignated Colleges

- The number of international students enrolled has increased by 420% from 1,994 in 2015 to 10,368 in 2019. Such an increase is unusual given that students of private career colleges, unlike their counterparts in the public college system, cannot apply to stay in Canada on a federal post-graduation work permit.
- Four private career colleges with international students enrolled had not received Ministry permission for international students.
- The Ministry did not provide this information to the federal government, which is responsible for granting permits to international students to enter Canada.

RECOMMENDATIONS 17–18

Performance Results Outdated or Not Available

- The results the Ministry posts on private career colleges' graduation rates, graduate employment rates and other performance indicators are at least two years old.
- Performance results for up to 83% of programs were not available, limiting their usefulness to students.

RECOMMENDATIONS 19–20

No Strategy to Connect Programs to Labour Market

- The Ministry does not have an overarching post-secondary education strategy to link labour market needs with vocational options.
- Robust data on regional labour market needs is not being collected to check for regional saturation or shortages of specific training programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS 21–22

Conclusions

- The Ministry does not effectively administer, oversee and enforce the legislation and Ministry policies that are in place to protect the interests of existing and prospective students of private career colleges in Ontario.
- The Ministry has not established adequate systems and processes to validate that private career colleges are providing quality, up-to-date education to students.
- The Ministry does not have an overarching post-secondary education strategy to link labour market needs to vocational offerings. As a result, it is missing an essential opportunity to balance the supply of career college and other post-secondary education with the demands and expectations of local communities.