

# POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

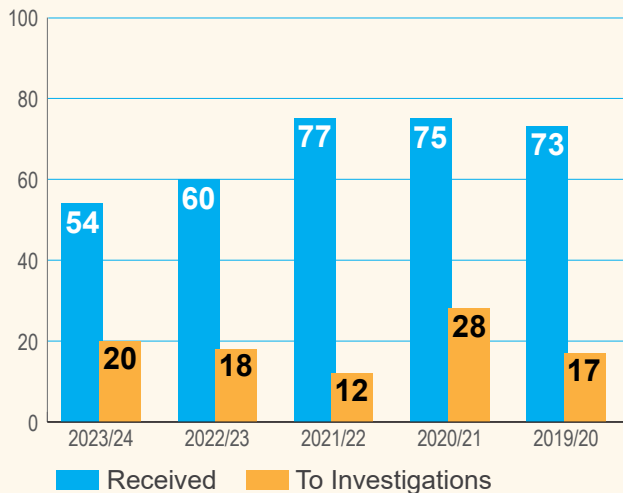
AT A GLANCE  
2025



**OMBUDSPERSON**  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

# POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS AT A GLANCE

## Complaint trends



## Common complaint topics

### **Academic program**

Complaints about the academic program, including about course instruction, course material, academic appeals, practicums or other issues.

### **Tuition and fees**

Includes complaints about requests for tuition and fee refunds.

### **Student discipline**

Complaints about response to academic or non-academic misconduct, including issues with the investigative process, sanctions imposed, reasons given, being required to withdraw, and other issues.

### **Human rights and disability accommodation**

Complaints about being discriminated against, including issues with requesting accommodation, and the adequacy of accommodation provided.

## Fairness tips

- **Accessible appeal and complaint processes.** Complaint and appeal processes should be easy to access and understand. Accessibility includes understandable, user-friendly information that is available through multiple channels including websites, student orientation and in decision letters.
- **Effective complaint processes.** It is important to have complaint processes that provide the opportunity for concerns to be impartially reviewed and responded to. Read our [Complaint Handling Guide](#) for information on setting up a fair and effective complaint process.
- **Fair decision-making processes.** When decisions are made that directly impact students and others, it is important to follow a fair decision-making process. This includes:
  - The decision being made by an impartial decision-maker who is open to persuasion.
  - Notifying people when decisions are being made that impact them. For students, this includes decisions which may affect their academic career.
  - Ensuring the person has an opportunity to participate and be heard in the decision-making process.
  - Providing understandable reasons that explain how and why the decision was made.
  - Explaining appeal or review options.

Our [Fairness by Design](#) guide provides information on reviewing policies and programs to ensure they are administratively fair.

# POST-SECONDARY CASE SUMMARIES



## Practicum problems

**The complaint:** Nolan contacted us with concerns about his university counselling program. Midway through the semester, the university removed him from his practicum. Nolan was initially told that his practicum was paused, then was told that he would need to redo the practicum entirely in a later semester. Nolan was concerned that the decision and the reasons for it were unclear and unfair.

**What we did:** We investigated whether the university acted fairly when it removed Nolan from the practicum. The university didn't provide Nolan with any warning that it was considering removing him. It also provided conflicting information about how he could resolve the issues that were arising throughout the practicum. When the university decided to remove Nolan, it did not clearly explain its decision or provide any reasons for it. We were concerned that the process the university followed was unfair.

**How we helped:** The university was responsive to our concerns. It apologized to Nolan, acknowledged its mistakes and refunded his tuition fees for the practicum. The university agreed to work with the faculty members involved in practicums to ensure they understand their duty to be fair. It also updated its student and faculty handbook to make sure all parties understand what the university may do when a student is not meeting expectations during their practicum.



## Transportation to school

**The complaint:** Sonia applied for an Adult Upgrade Grant for financial assistance to attend a class she was enrolled in at university. Her application was denied and she was in the process of seeking a reconsideration when the course began. Through the reconsideration, she was found eligible for the grant, but not in time for the start of the course.

She informed her instructor why she was absent for several classes but was withdrawn from the course under the school's "No Show" policy. Sonia complained because she felt she was unfairly withdrawn from the course.

**What we did:** We learned that Sonia had followed the rules under the "No Show Policy" in terms of notifying her instructor. We also found several gaps in how information was being provided to students who accessed the Adult Upgrading Grant.

**How we helped:** We asked the university to develop a policy and information package that clearly explains when and how the university provides Adult Upgrading Grant funding. The university agreed to develop a policy and information package about the Adult Upgrade Grant funding. It also agreed to extend Sonia's grant if she wished to take the course the following term.

## What is our role with post-secondary institutions in BC?

The Office of the Ombudsperson is responsible for overseeing fairness and accountability in the public sector. We are an independent office of the Provincial Legislature.

### 1. Complaints.

Under the *Ombudsperson Act*, the office receives complaints from members of the public about the administrative fairness of the decisions and actions of post-secondary institutions. We impartially investigate complaints that raise questions about whether the person was treated fairly.

### 2. Whistleblowing.

We receive disclosures of wrongdoing under the *Public Interest Disclosure Act*, BC's whistleblower protection legislation which applies to all post-secondary institutions in BC. It provides a way for current and former employees to report serious or systemic issues of wrongdoing. It also protects individuals against reprisal. Visit our website for more information.

### 3. Fairness resources and support.

The Public Authority Consultation and Training team at the office works proactively with public bodies to ensure administrative fairness and prevent complaints. We offer:

- administrative fairness training and resources
- consultation with public bodies about the fairness of their programs and policies



## What is administrative fairness?

Administrative fairness is the expectation that public bodies provide services to the public fairly. It includes:

- Following a **fair decision-making process**. This includes providing people a meaningful opportunity to participate and be heard in the decision-making process and providing understandable reasons for decisions.
- Making a **fair decision**. This includes following the rules (including any laws and policies) and making a reasonable and equitable decision.
- Delivering **fair service**. This is about treating people fairly and includes providing respectful, culturally safe and accessible services.

**FREE. INDEPENDENT. CONFIDENTIAL. FAIR.**