

Watch Out for Bogus Schools and Diplomas

If you're planning to study in B.C., make sure to choose a school wisely. Phony online schools may trick you into paying money for a worthless diploma. If a private career training school shuts down, you may not be able to get your tuition refunded. Protect yourself by knowing the facts about bogus schools and diplomas.

Public schools and private schools: What's the difference?

Public schools in B.C. are generally of high quality and offer many different programs, from academic degrees to career training diplomas. Private schools vary in quality and in some cases are risky. Before choosing any school, it is a good idea to know which schools are regulated, and to visit and talk to some of the students and instructors.

I want to get a degree: How can I check what schools are legitimate?

The government of British Columbia authorizes a number of public and private schools to grant degrees. If you're interested in a degree program, make sure the school is authorized by the province. If the school isn't listed, your degree may be worthless.

Private career-training schools: Are there protections for students?

There are hundreds of private career-training schools in B.C. offering training for a variety of skilled jobs, including automotive technicians, truck drivers, office and dental assistants, computer programmers, legal administrative assistants, hair stylists and event planners.

If a school has a career-related training program that provides at least 40 hours of instruction and costs at least \$1,000 in tuition, it must be registered with the Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA).

The PCTIA provides students with several levels of consumer protection. To get registered and keep in good standing, a school has to meet basic quality standards. If there's a dispute between a student and a school, the PCTIA can offer dispute resolution services. If the school goes out of business or has to close, the PCTIA will help students complete their program at another institution or have their tuition refunded.

Schools registered with the PCTIA may also be accredited, which provides students with the option to apply for a student loan from StudentAid BC.

If your school isn't registered with the PCTIA, then the agency can't help you if there are problems. Before registering for a program, it is a good idea to contact the PCTIA directly to see if the school is registered and in good standing.

English as a second language (ESL) schools

Private language schools, such as ESL schools, are generally NOT required to register with the PCTIA (though they may choose to do so voluntarily), unless the school also offers a career training program. This means it is even more important to do your own research about ESL schools.

If an ESL school closes before you complete your studies, it may be very difficult to get your money back. Consider a school where you don't have to pay a lot of money at the beginning. Another option is to sign up for ESL classes at a public community college or university.

If you have problems with a school

If you have problems with a school, you can:

- contact the PCTIA, if the school is registered;
- contact the Better Business Bureau, which helps to resolve complaints between consumers and businesses, and rates businesses, including training institutions, based on their complaint history; or
- sue the school in court; before starting any legal action, get professional advice about your chances for success.

For further information

Ministry of Advanced Education

Information is available about post-secondary education options, including a list of authorized degree-granting institutions.

www.aved.gov.bc.ca/institutions/welcome.htm

Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA)

1 800 661-7441 or 604 660-4400

www.pctia.bc.ca

Better Business Bureau (BBB)

604 682-2711 (Lower Mainland) or 1 888 803-1222

www.mbc.bbb.org

Notes

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