

# Hard lessons: Newcomers and Ontario Private Colleges


## Student Toolkit



**LIP** LOCAL IMMIGRATION  
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TORONTO SOUTH

# Hard Lessons: Report Recommendations


The focus of this study has been the newcomer experience with private colleges. Obviously many of the recommendations below would also help other categories of students (notably other immigrants as well as the Canadian-born). It may well be that newcomers are the most vulnerable in a circumstance where they feel under more intense pressure to secure the appropriate credentials and find a job, while also experiencing the most confusion in a marketplace of educational choices where not all the relevant information is available. These ideas seek to make the process more transparent and make it easier for prospective students to make informed choices:



1. Pay more attention to the quality of the education provided.

The incidence of substandard education from some PCCs has a broader impact; it harms reputable PCCs, it undermines the integrity of the post-secondary education system in Ontario and, hence, the Ministry itself, and it confounds employers, including the disservice done to the students immediately affected. A more proactive approach by the Ministry in ensuring the quality of education offered at PCCs would benefit everyone. Ontario, perhaps, can learn few things from Manitoba:

“Anyone wishing to launch a private school must apply to the Minister and meet 13 specific criteria, including faculty-to-student ratio, fees, etc. Unlike in any other province, the applicant must also provide details on how the school intends to demonstrate that the student has successfully completed the curriculum.....There are specific criteria for faculty appointments, and the actual appointment is made by the minister. In addition, the minister must be informed immediately if a teacher leaves the school for any reason.”<sup>1</sup>



2. Require Key Performance Indicators of private colleges, just like community colleges.

Anyone seeking information on graduation rates, graduate employment, graduate satisfaction, employer satisfaction and student satisfaction related to community colleges can easily do so, not only for recent years but for previous years as well. A prospective student can compare the KPIs for an individual college, for its various programs and over the years, before making a decision. While everybody would agree that such information is invaluable, such information is nowhere to be found for PCCs. It should be the Ministry’s responsibility to ensure that KPIs, independently verified, are available for PCCs as well.




3. Increase enforcement activity.

*The Private Career Colleges Act* is an important step toward regulating PCCs and protecting the rights of students/consumers. Yet, there seems to be a disconnect between the protection the Act provides and the persistent complaints we heard in this and other studies. The Act monitors PCCs with regard to their administration, student refunds, complaints and the way in which they advertise their offerings. As our interviewees confirmed, some PCCs are violating these rules. As the Auditor General’s report indicates,


## Recommendations, continued

although there are over 650 campuses in Ontario, the Ministry estimated that only 30 campuses had been inspected in 2010 and, according to the Ministry, only 5% of inspectors' time was devoted to actual inspections.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, the real issue seems to be not the lack of regulation but the lack of enforcement and the Ministry should remedy this gap. This, however, does not mean that the regulations themselves do not need improvement.



#### 4. More awareness for prospective students.

Although the Ministry has undertaken some initiatives to enhance public awareness, more needs to be done in this area. For example, the Ministry was supposed to distribute “buyer beware” posters and pamphlets to immigrant-serving agencies, employment centres and high schools, to ensure that prospective students are aware of registered and unregistered PCCs and understand that programs need to be approved for licensing purposes. Yet, none of the frontline staff we interviewed mentioned receiving one at their agencies.



#### 5. More research and studies about PCCs.

One of the most challenging areas when it comes to PCCs is the lack of information on PCCs. We don't even know exactly how many registered PCCs exist in Ontario, given that the number changes almost daily. Hence, more research needs to be done on PCCs, including the experiences of newcomers, the views of employers about PCC training, the recognition of PCC certificates by regulatory bodies, and the labour market outcomes of PCC graduates.

Given that many newcomers seeking entry to private colleges do so because of the lack of recognition for their foreign credentials suggests that more still needs to be done to facilitate the process for acknowledging education and experience obtained overseas. That being said, the recommendations listed here would go a long way to reducing the disappointment and costs borne by many of our newcomers in their encounters with private colleges. Indeed, implementation of these recommendations would also help other prospective students, as well as the private college industry as a whole, by reducing the damage done to the reputation of the entire industry by the actions of an unscrupulous minority.


Finally a lesson can be drawn for Ontario's publicly-funded community colleges from the impetuses which drive newcomers to private college education. Private colleges offer flexible and intensive training over a compressed time period. They are also strong marketers. Community college should be listening.

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<sup>1</sup> Annual Report of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2011, pp. 252-3.

<sup>2</sup> Auld, p 20.

# Executive Summary



This report focuses on the experiences of newcomers with private colleges in Ontario. The report relies on the insights of front-line staff of agencies that serve newcomers, and offers their impressions of the newcomer encounter with private colleges: their motivation for seeking out private colleges, recruitment and admissions practices, financial issues, the educational and training process and eventual outcomes.

In order to provide some context, this report also reviews the limited literature that exists relating to private colleges, finding that these largely fall into two categories: either reports of questionable practices among private colleges or industry-sponsored studies heralding the successes of private colleges.

This report was prompted by the numerous anecdotes provided by newcomers about their encounters with private colleges. These emerged during deliberations about how best to support better settlement integration and better labour market outcomes among newcomers, part of the mandate of Local Immigration Partnerships promoted by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. This study was undertaken by the South Toronto LIP.

This report does not purport to be an in-depth investigation. Rather, it seeks to draw attention to what appears to be a pattern of problematic practices, to provide background information about private colleges, and to make policy recommendations.

Currently in Ontario, private colleges are not held to the same standards as community colleges or universities. Private colleges offering non-vocational programs, language training, programs less than 40 hours in length, programs costing less than \$1000, professional development programs and hobby courses are not required to be registered. There is no way of knowing how many such non-registered, non-monitored private colleges exist in Ontario.

Registered private colleges may be approved, for the purposes of the Second Career program and the Ontario Student Assistance Program, so that students may apply for financial assistance. Between 2008 and 2010, over half a billion dollars of public financial support was provided to students attending private colleges.

Private colleges in Ontario are not required to produce performance indicators relating to graduation rates, graduate employment, graduate satisfaction and employer satisfaction, as is required of community colleges. Thus, there is no way of measuring private college outcomes, and no way of assessing the suitability of a program when making choices about education or training.

# Executive Summary

On the basis of some two dozen interviews with settlement agency staff and other key informants, a number of common themes emerged:

- Newcomers feel under great pressure to find a job when they arrive to Canada, but often find they need a Canadian credential or upgrade; private colleges are attractive to them because they often have shorter courses and more options when it comes to classroom schedules;
- Among some private colleges, newcomers do not appear to be held to as stringent requirements for English proficiency as is typically the case for post-secondary education, resulting in more admissions of newcomer students whose weaker language skills may lead to poorer learning outcomes;
- In a number of cases, some private colleges appeared to use high-pressure sales techniques in their recruitment process and were not upfront about program fees and the nature of OSAP assistance;
- A number of key informants complained that standards of instruction, curriculum and facilities were poor in many instances among private colleges and that placement or practicum opportunities appeared either non-existent or inadequate;
- The experience of our key informants has been that newcomers graduating from private colleges have poorer employment outcomes than those graduating from community colleges.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations:

- Given the limited information available about private colleges, that more studies be commissioned to shed light on this sector;
- That more effort be invested in enforcing the laws and regulations currently in place, in particular in relation to the quality of education provided in private colleges;
- That private colleges be required to produce the same key performance indicators as community colleges, such as graduation rates, graduate employment, graduate satisfaction and employer satisfaction;
- That a greater effort be made to assist the broader public to be an informed consumer of educational services.

# Top Five Challenges



## Difficulty in finding reliable information on Private Colleges

Private colleges are independent, privately owned post-secondary institutions that provide career-specific programs. Typically, private college programs are condensed, employment-focused and offer flexible registrations. These programs must be registered with the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities. However, private colleges that offer non-vocational programs (that is, training not related to a vocation or career) language programs, programs less than 40 hours in length, programs costing less than \$1000, professional development programs and hobby courses are not required to be registered and are not monitored. Private colleges are not directly funded by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, there is no official published data available nor is any enrollment data collected by Statistics Canada for this sector, which unfortunately, translates into a lack of quality assurance related information about private colleges. The Ministry stopped collecting statistics on graduation rates and graduate employment rates for private colleges in 2005.



## Student Recruitment

- **Questionable assessment process**  
Newcomer students, with poor English skills are being aggressively recruited and admitted into private colleges despite their language assessment results.
- **Recruitment practices**  
Admission process is often rushed, relying on high pressure tactics. Aggressive recruitment methods are common as many recruiters are paid on commission. It is not uncommon for people who call to inquire about courses, to receive a large number of phone call making a 'sales pitch' to the point of harassment.
- **Fees and OSAP Loans**  
Some private colleges are not upfront about their fees, not posting them on their website or tell people over the phone. They invite prospective students to visit and then subject them to aggressive sales tactics. There are questionable practices about how OSAP is characterized to potential students by some Private Colleges. It is common practice to deduct the 'forgivable' part of the OSAP loan from the cost to calculate total fees. This is misleading as students are responsible for the entirety of their loan and there are no guarantees that any portion will be forgiven. Many newcomer students report that they did not know, or fully understand that OSAP is a loan.

## Top Five Challenges



### **Registered and Non-registered programs**

Not all programs are registered with Ministry of Education, even though the school, as a whole, may be registered. Students are not always aware of the difference assuming that all programs in a registered school are registered programs. Non registered programs are not protected by the *Private Career Colleges Act, 2005* and are not subject to approval or monitoring by the Ministry.



### **Recognition of Private College Diplomas**

Some employers don't recognize Private College diplomas as equivalent to Community College diplomas or report that graduates are not job ready. Some interviewees mentioned that sometimes the employer does not recognize the name of the private college and so the quality of the certificate is unknown. Others reported having a bad experience with a private college graduate and may then generalize other students from the same college.

Some regulatory bodies don't recognize the Private College diploma because it does not meet their standards, such as number of hours of instruction.



### **Poor employment outcomes**

Most of the interviewees stated that their clients who attended community colleges have better employment outcomes than those who attended private colleges. For those programs that are offered by both community colleges and private colleges – the community college graduates were able to find jobs faster. One interviewee stated that none of her clients that attended a private college were able to secure employment. The success of placements depends on many factors, including job readiness, soft skills and English language skills.

# Private Colleges: Student Rights

For the full document on Student Rights and Responsibilities, please go to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities site <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/statement.pdf>



## 1. Contract

When you enroll in a program, you must receive a written contract. The college is not allowed to require you to purchase a product or service from a particular person as a condition of admission into the program.



## 2. Fee Collection and Refunds

### Local Residents (Immigrants and Canadian born)

- A private career college can only collect fees for a program in Canadian dollars.
- The college cannot collect any compulsory fee for a program that is not published on the Service Ontario web site or that is higher than what is published.
- The college is not allowed to charge a fee for a program that is not approved by the Superintendent of Private Career Colleges.
- They can collect no more than \$500 or %20 of the enrollment fee, whichever is less
- There is a 2 day “cooling off” period after signing a contract to decide if you really want to pursue the program.
- You have the right to withdraw, and should do so in writing. Also, usually entitled to a refund, depending on when you withdrew – please check the Ministry guidelines at <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/audiences/pcc/factsheet2.pdf>

### International Students (On a student Visa)

If you are attending a private career college under an International Student Visa, some special rules apply.

- Be sure you are familiar with the fee collection and refunds for International or Visa students
- A private college is allowed to charge international fees, but these cannot be higher than what are published on the ServiceOntario website. Any fees published on the Service Ontario website are covered by the refund policy.
- After you sign a contract, the college is allowed to collect no more than 25% of total fees. Some colleges are required to hold the money in trust until you begin the program.



# Student Rights, Continued

- You have the right to withdraw, and should do so in writing. Also, usually entitled to a refund, depending on when you withdrew – please check the Ministry guidelines at <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/audiences/pcc/factsheet2.pdf>
- One special rule applies to International students – if you are unable to obtain a student Visa to enter Canada- you must provide a written notice to the college before half of the program has passed, to receive your refund minus 20% or \$500 (whichever is less) for administration fees



### 3. Credentials

A private career college is required to issue you a credential (diploma or certificate) within 60 days of completing a program. The college does not have to issue your credential until you have paid your fees in full.



### 4. Student Complaint Procedure

All private career colleges must have a student complaint procedure. You must file a complaint with the college *before* you file a complaint with the Superintendent of Private Career Colleges. If it is not resolved, you can file a complaint through Service Ontario.



### 5. Midway Evaluation

If your program is 12 months or shorter or is delivered over an undefined period of time, the private college is required to provide you with the result of at least one evaluation before you complete half of the total length of the program. If the program is longer than 12 months, the private college is required to provide an evaluation for each of the 12 month periods before you complete the second half.



### 6. Closure

If your college closes before you complete your program, all efforts will be made to have you complete your training or receive a refund of fees.

# Private College Checklist

<http://www.ontario.ca/education-and-training/private-career-colleges>

The following applies only to accredited private colleges, however, they are good questions to ask of any educational institution. Before you apply to a private career college, make sure:

- the college is registered and the program is approved under the Private Career Colleges Act, 2005  
**Remember:** If you enroll in an unregistered institution or an unapproved program, the law doesn't protect you -check here to make sure the program is registered  
<http://www.ontario.ca/education-and-training/search-private-career-college-ontario>
- investigate whether complaints have been made against the college at  
<http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/audiences/pcc/notices.asp>
- you speak with employers in the field to make sure the private career college's programs meet their needs and the program will help you reach your goals
- you (or someone you know and trust) have visited the college to see the facilities and equipment
- you know the total cost of enrolling in the program, including the application fee, tuition, books, equipment, transportation and room and board
- Find out your fees are with and without OSAP – some colleges may include the OSAP loan forgiveness portion as part of your total fees. The loan forgiveness is not guaranteed - be sure to ask what the fees are without the loan forgiveness.
- you meet the admission requirements for the program
- you have read the Statement of Students' Rights and Responsibilities
- both you and a representative of the college have signed an enrolment contract.
- You are responsible for the total fees – whether or not you receive a loan
- Ask your private college about their graduation rates and job placement rates (community colleges can tell you the % of graduates that are working in their field after graduation)
- Ask about the complaints process at your private college – the ministry requires all colleges to have one.
- All instructors should have work experience in the field they are teaching

## More information on Community and Private Colleges

### Community Colleges

In Ontario, there are 28 Community Colleges ([www.ontariocolleges.ca](http://www.ontariocolleges.ca)). Community Colleges are publicly funded and offer government-recognized diplomas, degrees and accreditations for a variety of professions. (See Glossary of Terms)

These colleges are highly regulated and their programs are recognized by employers in the various sectors.

#### List of Community Colleges in Ontario


Western	Central	Eastern	Northern
<a href="#">Conestoga</a>	<a href="#">Centennial</a>	<a href="#">Alfred</a>	<a href="#">Boreal</a>
<a href="#">Fanshawe</a>	<a href="#">George Brown</a>	<a href="#">Algonquin</a>	<a href="#">Cambrian</a>
<a href="#">Lambton</a>	<a href="#">Georgian</a>	<a href="#">Durham</a>	<a href="#">Canadore</a>
<a href="#">Mohawk</a>	<a href="#">Humber</a>	<a href="#">Fleming</a>	<a href="#">Confederation</a>
<a href="#">Niagara</a>	<a href="#">Michener</a>	<a href="#">Kemptville</a>	<a href="#">Northern</a>
<a href="#">Ridgetown</a>	<a href="#">Seneca</a>	<a href="#">La Cite</a>	<a href="#">Sault</a>
<a href="#">St. Clair</a>	<a href="#">Sheridan</a>	<a href="#">Loyalist</a>	
		<a href="#">St. Lawrence</a>	

### Private Colleges

Private Colleges are independent and, often, for-profit corporations. Private colleges may offer specialized education or more general programs which may also be found at the Community Colleges. There are more than 500 accredited private colleges in Ontario. If they offer more in-depth education (more than 40 hours or \$1,000 tuition), they must be accredited through the Ontario Ministry of Colleges, Training and Universities. Accredited private colleges can offer program certificates and diplomas to students. Accredited colleges can be checked through the Ontario government's website at:

<http://www.ontario.ca/education-and-training/search-private-career-college-ontario>

# Glossary of Terms




**Accreditation** A process of quality assurance through which accredited status is granted by responsible professional authorities to an educational institution or program that meets the standards of education established by these authorities.

In Canada, individuals and educational institutions are not accredited. The term applies only to educational programs of study.

**Certification** A formal document that recognizes that a person has a certain set of skills, knowledge and abilities. Certificates are often used to recognize a short course of study.

**Qualification** The combination of credentials, knowledge, skills and work experience.



**Credentials** The degrees or certificates that are earned after the completion of the required academic training, such as a Bachelor of Science degree or a Certificate in Human Resources.

**Competency** A measurable skill or set of skills, level of knowledge, and behavioural practices obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning

An academic **Degree** is awarded in recognition of the recipient having satisfactorily completed a prescribed course of study. Academic degrees are a higher level than certificates or diploma and must be approved by Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance.

An academic **Diploma** testifies that the recipient has successfully completed a particular course of study at a college level. Further studies through a recognized program at a university sometimes allows degree-completion, as well.




## Regulated and Non-Regulated Professions

A "regulated" occupation is one that is controlled by provincial and territorial law and governed by a professional organization or regulatory body. . If you want to work in a regulated occupation and use a regulated title, you **MUST** have a license or certificate or be registered with the regulatory body for your occupation. Examples include lawyers, doctors, engineers, electricians, real estate agent, social worker. For a full list click here [http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/en/working/OI\\_HOW\\_WORK\\_PROF.html](http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/en/working/OI_HOW_WORK_PROF.html)

A "non-regulated" occupation is a profession/trade for which there is no legal requirement or restriction or practice with regard to licenses, certificates, or registration. The vast majority of occupations in Canada fall into this category. For some non-regulated occupations, certification/registration with a professional body is available to applicants on a voluntary basis and may be required by an employer.


**Regulatory Body** a regulatory body governs a regulated profession/trade and has the authority to set entry requirements and standards of practice, to assess applicants' qualifications and credentials, to certify, register, or license qualified applicants, and to discipline members of the profession/trade.

# Glossary of Terms




**Licensing** a license is granted to allow an activity that would otherwise be forbidden. It may require paying a fee and/or proving a capability. The requirement may also serve to keep the authorities informed on a type of activity, and to give them the opportunity to set conditions and limitations.

**OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program)** OSAP is a loan program run by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and funded by the government of Canada and Ontario. You can apply for assistance as a full-time student or as a part-time student. These applications automatically consider you for funding from several grants, bursaries and loans. Your OSAP loan is interest-free until 6 months after graduation or termination of your studies. In addition, if you are a full-time student, you may qualify for the '30% Off Ontario Tuition' (this program will forgive 30% of your tuition – see if you qualify here <http://www.ontario.ca/education-and-training/30-off-ontario-tuition>)



**Registered (Program/College)** a registered program or college is one that is recognized by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities. A 'registered' college may offer individual programs that are not registered (and therefore not recognized or monitored).

**Certification** implies that a person is certified as being able to competently complete a job or task, usually by the passing of an examination. Certification does not refer to the state of legally being able to practice or work in a profession. That requires a license.



**Apprenticeship/Vocational Education** is education that prepares people for specific trades, crafts and careers at various levels from a trade, a craft, technician, or a professional position in engineering, accountancy, nursing, medicine, architecture, pharmacy, law etc.

**Second Career** Second Career is a program launched by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities to assist people in finding jobs. Students in this program can attend private colleges or community colleges [http://www.secondcareerontario.com/web/second\\_career/](http://www.secondcareerontario.com/web/second_career/)

**Foreign Credential Assessment** a process of verifying that the education and training obtained in another country are equal to the standards established for Canadian professionals.



## **Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities**

The Ministry is a provincial government department that gives the authority to colleges to grant diplomas. They do inspections, approve curriculum and follow up on complaints.