

Subject: COVID-19 Response	Policy Number: EXT-4	Last reviewed: 2022 Jan. 18
Approved by: Council	Managed by: Advocacy & Policy Committee	Next review: 2023 Jan. 31

Policy Rationale:

The ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it goes without saying, have had an enormous impact on British Columbians, especially students. Fortunately, vaccination rates have been strong, leading to 90.3% of eligible adults receiving their second dose¹. At the same time, the Omicron variant has spread like wildfire throughout the province, with active cases counts (33,997) and hospitalizations (924) exceeding previous highs². This has, in turn, led to calls to delay the resumption of in-person classes in January 2022: one such petition sponsored by BCIT students reached over 4,350 signatures in a matter of weeks³.

On the other hand, BCIT is known for its applied learning model and offers many programs not necessarily suited to an online education. Further, recent findings and surveys have shown that many students in British Columbia experienced a “lack of connections with professors and other students” which impaired both their engagement and learning at the post-secondary level⁴.

Given that the *College and Institute Act* as well as Supreme Court precedent make clear that institutions such as BCIT are legally subordinate to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training, it is all the more important that the provincial government exercise restraint in prescribing matters that are better left to individual schools to decide⁵. This must include striking the appropriate balance between in-person, hybrid, and online forms of learning.

Finally, it is imperative that student voices be included in these conversations, and that post-secondary institutions practice reasonable levels of transparency when communicating about their pandemic response. In recent years at BCIT, for example, revenues from tuition fees have exceeded by several million dollars the amount of funding received in grants from the Province of BC⁶. There can be no doubt that student voices should have a seat at the table commensurate with both their financial contribution and their unique stake in the outcome of decisions affecting their education, their future, and their health and well-being.

¹ “Daily update on COVID-19, January 21st 2022”. British Columbia ([link](#)).

² *Ibid.*

³ “BCIT: Delay the return to in-person classes”. Change.org, accessed Jan. 21 2022 ([link](#)).

⁴ Page 33, “Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Health and Well-being of Young Adults in British Columbia”. BC Centre for Disease Control, July 2021 ([link](#)).

⁵ Section 2, *College and Institute Act*. Revised Statutes of British Columbia, 1996 ([link](#)); *Douglas/Kwantlen Faculty Assn. v. Douglas College*. Supreme Court of Canada, 1990 ([link](#)).

⁶ Page 7, Revenues in *Consolidated Financial Statements for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020*. British Columbia Institute of Technology ([link](#)).

External Policy Position:

1. The Student Association supports:

- A. That individual programs, departments, and schools should be given adequate autonomy by BCIT to make decisions about mode of delivery, taking into account public health guidelines, academic considerations, and input from students, faculty and staff;
- B. That BCIT Senior Leadership should more proactively and transparently convey relevant information, considerations, and processes to students, staff, and faculty about how decisions are made with respect to the collective response to COVID-19;
- C. That BCIT should continue to prioritize all measures necessary to promote public health on campus, including improved ventilation and sanitation procedures, while also improving communications to students, faculty, and staff regarding preventative measures and emergency response planning going forward;
- D. That, where a student experiences symptoms of COVID-19 or tests positive, a comprehensive approach to academic concessions must be applied by BCIT, whether that be standardized across the board or formalized in policy as a discretionary matter for instructors;

2. The Student Association opposes:

- A. Any actions by the Office of the Public Health Officer or the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training to limit, whether by explicit legal directive or through political pressure, any B.C. post-secondary institution from pursuing objectives consistent with this policy.