

BRIEFING NOTE
Mar. 20, 2024



PREPARED FOR: Education Council

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On behalf of Policy 5401 working group

ISSUE: Revisions to Policy 5401 and Related Procedures

BACKGROUND:

Policy 5401 and its associated procedures outline the credentials offered by BCIT and our processes for program creation and renewal. The policy was scheduled for review in 2022.

Credential framework:

As part of the policy review process, the working group conducted a review of the credential framework. This work has been underway since 2021. The last review of the Institute's credential framework was conducted in 2011. The current review considered a variety of factors as part of the process:

- whether the current mix of credentials and specific requirements was continuing to meet the needs of BCIT's stakeholders
- increasing diversity in student demographics
- changing expectations for post-secondary education
- shifts in the post-secondary landscape
- growing concerns about student well-being due to BCIT's program intensity and workload
- considerations around effort/time to earn credentials and recognition of credentials in industry
- attracting and retaining students
- competitiveness of our programs

Based on extensive benchmarking and consultation, the key recommendation was to adjust minimum credits for BCIT's certificates and diplomas, which are significantly higher than at peer institutions provincially and nationally (please see Appendix 1). The working group recommends changing minimum credits for certificates to 30 (from 45) and for diplomas to 75 (from 110). These changes are aimed at addressing the issues noted above, in particular providing flexibility for programs to go below current minimums where warranted, to address issues around student well-being, student workload, student attrition/retention, and ultimately student success, all of which are key priorities for BCIT. Institutional values related to student well-being and equity, diversity, and inclusion have been embedded within the guiding principles in the revised policy.

There is growing evidence about the connection between high student workload and mental health impacts on students, with the recognition that these are complex issues. High course loads have significant mental health impacts on students, and contribute to a reduction in capacity to meet financial goals, engage in self care, take care of medical and psychological needs, and spend time with loved ones: necessary and basic activities needed to maintain wellbeing. Via BCIT's Early Assist and

Accessibility Services, we hear that students struggle to handle up to 9 courses per semester – substantially higher than comparative post-secondaries – because of the sheer volume of work that is expected of them. These challenges have also been observed by the Student Association, with students struggling to balance academic responsibilities with other commitments. This workload volume disproportionately affects equity-deserving students, who may be facing additional barriers such as financial concerns, uncertainty, stereotypes, family status, and disability. The inevitable result is that students, who could have thrived with a manageable workload, face a detrimental impact on either their wellbeing or academic progress. Previously, it might have been deemed acceptable to place students in these challenging situations, forcing them to choose between their wellbeing and academic ambitions. However, the repercussions of such choices have become untenable as students lack the necessary personal or systemic resources to support their wellbeing in pursuit of academic achievements. While the recommended policy change of reducing minimum credits for certificates and diplomas is not sufficient to address these issues on its own, it is an important element as part of a systems-based approach to improving student well-being at BCIT.

There is no mandated reduction in credits for any program based on this policy change, and we fully anticipate that some programs will continue to exceed the defined minimum credits for very good and valid reasons. As new programs are developed, and existing programs go through our regularly defined program review processes, departments would have the opportunity to consider the new minimum credits in their program design decisions. Outcomes from recent program reviews indicate that some departments would see flexibility to reduce credits as a benefit for their programs and their students. Through these processes, departments may opt to propose reducing program credits to reduce student workload and/or may opt to address improved student well-being in other ways such as coordinating timing of assessments, creating shared assignments, or other pedagogical approaches. The proposed changes to minimum credits are one element of a broader institutional approach to improving student well-being.

As is currently the case, any changes to programs would continue to be done on a program-by-program basis and would follow the defined and rigorous program change processes. These processes are led by faculty and are based on evidence and extensive consultation (internal and external). Program changes need to be thoughtfully considered to ensure programs continue to meet educational/industry/accreditation standards, while also adapting to meet the diverse needs of students. To provide greater clarity and guidance for diploma changes, the credential standards for BCIT diplomas were revised in Procedure 5401-PR2 to ensure students would continue to meet the high standards expected of BCIT diploma graduates. The focus was on providing greater clarity on expectations for “depth and breadth of knowledge” and “communication skills,” and advice on these revisions was integrated from faculty colleagues in the School of Computing and Academic Studies. Appropriate revisions to align with these expectations have already been integrated into guiding documents and proposal templates housed on the Academic Planning & Quality Assurance website, to support these policy revisions.

Streamlining/clarifying processes:

In addition to recommended changes to the credential framework, other changes have been integrated into the policy and procedure documents as an outcome of the policy review and a recent initiative focused on process streamlining. These changes aim to provide programs more flexibility to respond to new or emerging opportunities:

- increasing the threshold for what are considered “minor changes” to programs (from 10% to 20% of program hours and/or credits)
- simplifying the approval process for all new associate certificates by adopting a process previously limited to only certain types of associate certificates (those based on existing courses)
- clarifying roles/responsibilities and processes for program development, including Ministry expectations related to degree programs
- revising process flowcharts to clarify key documents, document flow, and approval steps.

PROCESS:

- Established a working group with wide representation from faculty, associate deans, school quality committees, instructional development consultants, academic planning & quality assurance, registrars office, student financial aid, student success, institutional research & planning, student association. All schools and both trades and technology programs were represented.
- Group worked across 2022 & 2023 to conduct extensive benchmarking of credential requirements across BC and Canada, and to consider broad range of issues related to academic credentials (transfer/student mobility, credential recognition, student workload, laddering/pathways, student retention, impact of credit calculations, student financial aid, international students, etc)
- Conducted extensive consultation with BCIT community (see below)
- Edco Policy committee reviewed proposed policy/procedure changes at Oct. 18, 2023 meeting and approved them for community consultation
- Community consultation period extended from 30 to 90 days at request of FSA; closed Jan. 31, 2024
- Revisions incorporated into policy/procedure documents based on community consultation (please see summary of consultation in Appendix 2)
- Approved by Edco Policy Committee at Feb. 21, 2024 meeting.

CONSULTATIONS:

Extensive consultations were incorporated into the proposed changes (note - most groups were engaged multiple times throughout the consultations spanning 2021-2024):

- March 16, 2021: Deans Council
- Jun. 9, 2021: Education Council
- Oct. 27, 2021: Edco Programming
- November 2021: Institute-wide Thought Exchange
- Dec. 1, 2021: FSA Labour Management meeting
- Jan. 20, 2022: Associate Dean Forum
- Jan. 24, 2022: Student Association
- Jan. 26, 2022: Education Council
- Jan. 27, 2022: Union check-in meeting (all unions represented)
- Feb. 2, 2022: VP Academic Forum/Town Hall
- Feb. 24, 2022: School Quality Committee Chairs
- Mar. 30, 2022: Edco Programming
- Nov. 2, 2022: Edco Programming
- Mar. 20, 2023: FSA Leadership

- Mar. 20, 2023: BCGEU Faculty Leadership
- Mar. 24, 2023: BCGEU Support Staff Leadership
- Apr. 11, 2023: Deans Council
- Apr. 19, 2023: FSA Board
- May 15, 2023: Learning & Teaching Centre
- May 18, 2023: Associate Dean Forum
- May 24, 2023: Edco Programming
- May 31, 2023: Edco Executive
- Jun. 6, 2023: Deans Council
- Jun. 7, 2023: Education Council
- Jun. 15, 2023: School Quality Committee Chairs
- Jun. 16, 2023: Operational/Service Groups & Registrar's Office
- Aug. 10, 2023: Student Association
- Aug. 23, 2023: Deans Council
- Aug. 29, 2023: Academic Kick-off (all Program/Department Heads, Associate Deans, Deans)
- Sept. 6, 2023: Edco Programming
- Oct. 18, 2023: Edco Policy (approval for community consultation)
- Nov. 7, 2023: FSA Leadership
- Nov. 22, 2023: FSA Membership Meeting
- School-wide meetings (e.g. SOB+M Town Hall, Nov. 1, 2023), meetings with individual faculty
- Institute-wide community consultation as part of policy process (extended to 90 days: Oct. 31, 2023 – Jan. 31, 2024) – see summary in Appendix 2
- Jan. 24, 2024: FSA General Meeting

Appendix 1: Comparison of Minimum Credits for Diplomas and Certificates

Diploma Comparison

Institution	Minimum credits required for diploma
BCIT	110 (proposed: 75)
Camosun College	60
Capilano University	60
Douglas College	60
Justice Institute	60
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	60
Langara College	60
Royal Roads University	60
Selkirk College	60
University of Fraser Valley	60
Vancouver Community College	60
Vancouver Island University	60
Alberta (province-wide)	60

Certificate comparison

Institution	Minimum credits required for certificate
BCIT	45 (proposed: 30)
Camosun College	30
Capilano University	15
Douglas College	15
Justice Institute	20
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	30
Langara College	30
Royal Roads University	30
Selkirk College	18
University of Fraser Valley	18
Vancouver Community College	18
Vancouver Island University	12
Alberta (province-wide)	12

Appendix 2: Summary of policy community consultation feedback

Community Feedback Themes	Response to Comments
Comments regarding credential framework changes	
<p>Support for proposed minimum credit changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Changes are student-centred ○ Better alignment with expectations for credential types as at peer institutions and in industry (BCIT currently at disadvantage with peer institutions) ○ Important for student well-being, mental health, student success (part of overall Institute attention to these issues) ○ Provides programs/departments flexibility as one way to address student workload/well-being ○ Support for reducing student workload for improved learning experience (ability to synthesize information), opportunities for work (to help with financial pressures), richer campus life, reduced need for accommodations, reduced stress/anxiety, more time to access supports, better balance between school and other commitments ○ Concern about attrition; policy changes could help improve retention and graduation rates ○ Creates opportunity to attract more students (improve enrolment, more competitive with other institutions), serve broader student demographics, more diversity, make BCIT education more accessible ○ Creates opportunity to adjust current programs, create new programs, create new laddering paths, and offer more intakes for programs with waitlists 	<p>These comments received from the community reflect the purpose of the changes to the credential framework, including to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - address growing concerns about the intensity of our programs and the impact on student well-being - provide programs flexibility to make changes to reduce student workload such as credit reductions where this is supported by evidence - improve student retention and success, and attract new students to BCIT’s applied education model <p>There is clear recognition that student workload and connection to student well-being is a complex issue, and this policy change is one aspect of a system-wide institutional approach to address student well-being.</p> <p>Most program review self-study reports from the last few years include discussion, strategies, and often recommendations related to addressing student workload and improving student well-being. Several program reviews in the last year have specifically referenced monitoring the credential framework discussions with the intention to consider revised minimum credits in future program change decisions.</p>
Concern about potential impact of policy change:	

Community Feedback Themes	Response to Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reputational impacts of reducing minimum credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Benchmarking with other institutions shows clearly that 60 credits is the standard for minimum diploma credits in BC (see Appendix 1). This is the same for Alberta, where NAIT and SAIT are often considered close comparisons for BCIT. BCIT’s reputation would not suffer from reducing our diploma minimum credits to 75, still above peer institutions. This is similar for certificate minimum credits. ○ Individual programs would continue to determine curriculum and credits to ensure programs will meet stakeholder expectations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Concern about future creation of new smaller programs in competition with existing programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Any new diploma or certificate program would follow the same rigorous approval process required of all new programs, which requires extensive internal/external consultation. This process provides multiple opportunities to address any concerns about potential competition of new programs with existing programs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Questions raised about connection between student workload and student well-being (and whether the Campus Well-being Survey provides sufficient data) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is growing evidence regarding the connection between excessive student workload and negative impacts on student well-being. The Campus Well-being Survey provides one source of information on this issue. Improving student well-being is a growing issue across the post-secondary system and an important initiative at BCIT. There is recognition that this is a complex issue, and this policy change is one approach as part of a systems-based initiative to improving student well-being.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Concern re complex “opt out” process to be exempt from reducing credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is no mandate for programs to reduce credits, and there is no “opt out” process required to be exempt from reducing credits. Existing programs will consider evidence through processes such as program reviews, curriculum reviews, and major changes to determine whether there is a need to address student workload issues and if so how to address these concerns. Reducing program credits is just one of the ways this can be done, and this policy change provides programs the flexibility to do so. Any changes to

Community Feedback Themes	Response to Comments
	<p>programs will follow existing program change process requirements, which require that changes are substantiated by appropriate evidence.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Concern re impact on accredited programs, degrees (e.g. degree completion model) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is no mandate for programs to reduce credits. Accredited programs will need to continue aligning with accreditation requirements, and they will determine how best to establish program curriculum to meet accreditation requirements, as is currently the case. This may result in programs with higher than minimum credits for the credential type, as is currently the case. ○ There is no impact on degree programs through this policy change. Degree completion programs will continue to meet provincial and policy expectations (diploma credits plus 60 degree completion credits).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ May have disproportionate impact on some teaching areas, especially service courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Service courses (courses taught into a program by a different department) are an important component of many programs at BCIT, contributing to important foundational knowledge/skills, to breadth of knowledge, and to critical skills related to communication. As part of the policy change, the credential standards for diplomas were revised to emphasize the importance of these skills, and this was done in consultation with faculty teaching in these areas. In addition, guiding documents related to program review and program change have been revised to emphasize the need to maintain alignment with credential standards in any program change, and to consult with faculty teaching into a program to inform proposed program changes. There is and will continue to be an expectation of involvement and consultation with areas teaching service courses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy 5012 credit calculation revisions should be finalized first; concern about transfer credit recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ BCIT's credit calculation Policy 5012 was recently revised to provide greater clarity on how to calculate credits, including a range of examples in the newly created Procedure. This policy and procedure reflect current practice in terms of how credits are calculated at the Institute, and they have

Community Feedback Themes	Response to Comments
	<p>now been fully approved through the Institute’s governance process. The revision to Policy 5012 involved comprehensive research, including extensive benchmarking with other post-secondary practices around credit calculation. BCIT’s credit calculation practices are aligned with other polytechnic institutions, such as NAIT and SAIT, who all place a high value on applied, experiential learning including lab-based pedagogy. At these institutions and at BCIT, labs are often embedded as a pedagogical approach within a course to connect theory to practice, rather than separating these components into individual courses. Some other post-secondary institutions discount credits for lab-based pedagogy/courses although there is no consensus in terms of how this is done at different institutions. Similarly there is no consensus for how work-integrated learning credits are calculated across different institutions. Recognizing that there are different approaches to calculating credits in the post-secondary sector, BCIT’s minimum credits for diplomas has been proposed at 75 rather than 60 (which is the system norm) to account for how other institutions weigh the value of pedagogical approaches such as labs. Students will continue to achieve appropriate transfer recognition at peer institutions with the proposed changes.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Concern about decreased enrolment, graduate skills due to changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The proposed changes are anticipated to lead to greater interest in BCIT’s educational model by a broader range of students who would perceive that they could be successful in our programs. This is anticipated to lead to greater enrolment over time. Individual programs will be responsible, as they are now, for determining appropriate curriculum in their discipline, and for consulting with industry and other internal/external parties to ensure graduates will meet expectations to be successful in their future endeavours (i.e. careers or further education).

Community Feedback Themes	Response to Comments
<p>Questions about consultation process</p>	<p>As noted in the briefing note, work on this policy has been underway since 2021. The briefing note outlines the extensive opportunities undertaken as part of this work to consult widely across the institute. All required consultations have been integrated, in many cases multiple times (for example, meeting with union representatives multiple times at their request). The policy consultation period was also lengthened to 90 days from the standard 30 days to allow more time for the community to deliberate on the proposed changes.</p> <p>During the community consultation period, a significant number of comments were submitted in support of the proposed changes. These comments were received from all schools and many academic and student support departments. Typically, comments submitted through the policy consultation process are focused on concerns or problems with the policy under review. The fact that many members of the community chose to submit comments in support of this policy change is significant and should be noted.</p>
<p>Program changes as outcome of policy change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ need to be done thoughtfully, based on evidence to maintain educational/industry standards ○ are an opportunity to consider what is required versus desired in programs ○ need to be driven by faculty through processes such as program review ○ need to be done on program-by-program basis ○ recognition that will apply initially to new programs, no mandate to reduce for existing programs ○ programs will need time to implement policy changes 	<p>Program changes will continue to be aligned with current rigorous processes and expectations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - any changes should be proposed based on appropriate evidence and demonstrate alignment with stakeholder needs - consultation (internal and external) is an expected component of program changes - individual program changes are led by faculty to determine appropriate curriculum for the program in alignment with stakeholder needs <p>There is no mandate for programs to reduce credits. Existing programs will consider evidence through processes such as program reviews, curriculum reviews, and major changes to</p>

Community Feedback Themes	Response to Comments
	<p>determine whether there is a need to address student workload issues and if so how to address these concerns. Reducing program credits is just one of the ways this can be done, and this policy change provides programs the flexibility to do so.</p> <p>There is an established schedule for program reviews over a rolling 7-year cycle. Programs may choose to implement changes as an outcome of a program review or a different review process (e.g., curriculum review). It is anticipated that program changes as an outcome of this policy change will be incremental and may occur over several program review cycles.</p> <p>New programs proposed under the revised policy would be expected to align with new minimum credits or provide rationale for why higher credits are required (e.g., accreditation/certification requirements, professional body expectations, benchmarking, etc.)</p>
Questions around what is reasonable student workload	<p>Establishing parameters for reasonable student workload is typically done on a program or departmental basis. This is appropriate, given the diversity of BCIT's programs. Programs/departments are encouraged to consider reasonable student workload in their program review/development/change decisions, with faculty expertise at the core of these discussions.</p>
Comments related to other aspects of policy/procedure 5401	
Need to reflect importance of student well-being, student success in policy	This has been integrated in policy/procedure documents to reflect importance of these issues
Need to better reflect importance of applied, experiential model (including WIL – work integrated learning) in policy	This has been integrated in policy/procedure documents to reflect importance of these issues
Need to reflect importance of EDI (equity, diversity, inclusion) values in program development	This has been integrated in policy/procedure documents to reflect importance of these issues
Correction required: Process for death of student	Correction made in procedure document to accurately reflect current practice

Community Feedback Themes	Response to Comments
Correction required: Discrepancy between policy 5401 and 5104 re powers to rescind a credential	Correction made in policy/procedure documents to remove discrepancy
International programs – consider if current language is too restrictive if looking at other models	Language broadened to be more flexible and speak to credentials offered in partnership more generally
Support for greater flexibility around minor changes (increasing threshold from 10% to 20%)	This will allow programs to be more responsive to changes in their industry, and are at the request of the community. This change aligns with practices at peer institutions.
Support for greater clarity around credential standards for diplomas	These changes provide greater guidance around graduate expectations for diploma credentials, specifically in the areas of breadth/depth and communication skills. This will provide the community greater clarity when proposing new diplomas or during diploma program reviews and revisions.