

Trustee Decision on Student Complaint

Complainant: [REDACTED]

Institution: 3294 – Vancouver College of Counsellor
Training

1. Introduction

The Complainant was enrolled in the Diploma of Professional Counselling program [Program]. The Complainant filed a complaint against the Institution [Complaint] on July 3, 2025, after having completed the Program on April 13, 2025.

The Complainant exhausted the Institution's dispute resolution process [DRP] prior to filing this Complaint. The matters at issue are: Was the Complainant misled in relation to the instruction and currency of the Program?

For the reasons outlined below I find the Institution misled the Complainant regarding a significant aspect of the Program and, accordingly, approve the claim.

2. Statutory Scheme

Section 23(1) of the *Private Training Act* [PTA] provides that, a student may file a claim against the Student Tuition Protection Fund [Fund] on the ground that a certified institution misled the student regarding any significant aspect of an approved program of instruction in which that student was enrolled. Claims are filed with the Trustee, being the minister or the person to whom the minister has delegated the relevant powers or duties.

Claims must be filed no later than one year after the student completed or was dismissed or withdrew from the program and only after the student has exhausted the institution's dispute resolution process.

Following receipt of the complaint, the process is as follows:

Claim the student was misled		
Who	What	When
Trustee	Gives a copy of the claim to the institution	As soon as practicable
Institution	May respond to the claim [Response]	Within 15 days of receiving a copy of the claim from the Trustee
Trustee	Gives the Response from the institution, if any, to the student	Within 15 days of receiving the Response from the institution
Student	May reply to the Response from the institution [Reply]	Within 15 days of receiving the Response from the Trustee
Trustee	Must give the Reply from the student, if any, to the institution	Within 15 days of receiving the Reply from the student
Trustee	Adjudicates the claim to determine whether any refund should be issued, and provides written reasons to the student, the institution, and the registrar.	

If a claim is approved, the Trustee may authorize payment from the Fund of all or a portion of the tuition paid to the institution by or on behalf of the student. Section 25(4) of the *Fees and Student Tuition Protection Fund Regulation* requires that payments from the Fund be directed first to the government if all or a portion of the tuition was paid using funds from a provincial or federal student assistance program, and then to the claimant.

3. Program Information

Program:	Diploma of Professional Counselling
Start date:	April 15, 2024
End date:	April 13, 2025
Graduation date:	April 13, 2025
Total charged:	\$ 16,186
Tuition:	\$ 15,680
Comprehensive Exam Fee*:	\$ 300
Application Fee:	\$ 100
Student Annual Fee:	\$ 200
Archiving Fee:	\$ 6
Discount: Application fee	\$ 100
Amount paid to date by Complainant:	\$ 16,186
Amount of tuition paid to date by Complainant:	\$ 15,980

*The exam fee itemized above is properly characterized as tuition.

4. Issues

The following issues arise for consideration: Was the Complainant misled in relation to the instruction and currency of the Program?

5. Chronology

April 3, 2024	Complainant receives introductory email from instructor Dr. Brooks
April 15, 2024	Complainant starts Program
September 2024	Complainant gives feedback about online delivery of Program
October 2024	Complainant raises issue regarding sourcing volunteers for mock sessions
November 2024	Complainant complains about instructor and discovers her instructor had been changed without notice
April 13, 2025	Complainant graduates from Program
June 6, 2025	Complainant initiates DRP requesting full refund
June 20, 2025	Institution denies refund request [Decision 1]
June 27, 2025	Institution affirms Decision 1 [Decision 2]
July 3, 2025	Complainant files Complaint

6. Analysis

The Program was delivered to the Complainant online with 100% asynchronous instruction.

The Program Outline describes the Program as follows:

The Diploma of Professional Counselling exposes students to intensive study of theories & skills that represent current research, practice and techniques recognized in the field of counselling as core competencies associated with contemporary social issues and current professional and ethical standards. The program also emphasizes intensive hands-on counselling skill development with 180 hours dedicated to study, practice and instructor review of clinical skills.

The Complainant alleges that she did not receive the instruction she paid for, or any instruction at all:

At no point was I given access to any lectures, discussion groups, seminars, or instruction of any kind. At no point was I given direct contact with an instructor. Not for any evaluation, guidance, individualized tutorials, advice on the curriculum or career, or hands-on training. Graded papers are not instruction, and they are the only thing I received. No instruction whatsoever.

Other than an introductory letter dated April 3, 2024, the Complainant says her only direct communication with an instructor was when she copied her first assignment to the instructor's email and the instructor replied informing her to direct all assignments through the Institution's Distance Learning Coordinator. The Complainant says assignments were graded and returned via regular mail which could take up to two months to receive.

The Complainant says that her instructor was changed at some point in the Program, but she only became aware of the change in November 2024 when she made a complaint about her instructor and was told that the person named in the complaint was not her originally assigned instructor. The Institution's initial response to her complaint was that it was not possible to reassign her instructor as the Institution was "currently undergoing a major transition with new ownership". The Institution subsequently offered the Complainant an alternative instructor.

The Complainant says that she was not told when she enrolled in the Program that she was expected to source her own volunteers for mock counseling sessions. The Complainant says this caused her considerable stress and the Institution did not assist her efforts to connect with other students for this purpose. When she raised this issue with the Institution in October 2024, the Distance Education Coordinator responded as follows:

Furthermore, VCCT does not need to inform you prior to registration that you need to source people to interview for assignments, rather the responsibility is on you as the potential student to ask questions about our program that are of interest or concern to you either during our weekly information session or during an interview/appointment with the Admissions Advisor.

The Complainant alleges the Institution failed to provide job search support and client referrals upon graduation, both of which were referenced on the Institution's website and factored into the Complainant's decision to enrol in the Program.

The Complainant alleges that contrary to the Institution's marketing materials which refer to current and contemporary learning, the course materials and assignments were outdated. The Complainant provides numerous examples of reference materials and textbooks that were 20-30 years old. She also provides the following blurb from the Institution's website: "Our courses are based on the most current and widely recognized research, techniques, academic and ethical standards in the counselling field today."

Throughout the Program, the Complainant raised concerns about the method of delivery and expressed her dissatisfaction with her experience as a distance learner.

On September 17, 2024, the Complainant completed a Student Process Assessment form offering the following feedback to the Institution regarding the Program and lack of instruction:

Offer better and more modern options for your distance students to engage with your school. A web-portal. The ability to attend live classes online. Or at the very least, to stream pre-recorded versions of live classes. The ability to have Zoom meetings for feedback and actual instruction from your teachers.

In an email dated November 7, 2024:

My experience with being a distance learning student has been difficult. Primarily due to the outdated methods of learning provided by the school, and the almost complete lack of actual student support or resources. Issues, questions, or concerns, have been either ignored, dismissed, or debated when I've brought them to the school's attention.

When completing the final assignment, the Complainant commented as follows:

When reading the requirements for this assignment, my immediate thought was ... "What part of this \$16,000 experience with VCCT, involved being actually instructed? Other than a few sentences written on my assignments, has an instructor actively taught me anything?" No. Not at all.

Hopefully this is different for your on-campus students, and I assume that it is. But your distance learning students are fending for themselves on every level. And now, after a year of receiving absolutely no real-world, live interaction with a teacher, we're expected to evaluate our own progress.

The Institution denies having misled the Complainant as alleged, or at all. In Decision 2, it maintains that the method of delivery was clearly communicated to the Complainant at enrolment:

The program you selected was offered in an asynchronous/distance education format. This format was designed to provide students with flexibility, allowing them to complete coursework at their own pace. At the time of enrolment, it was communicated that instructor interaction would be limited (primarily via email) and that opportunities for peer engagement would be minimal due to the self-paced nature of the program. Course materials were provided, and support was available through both the assigned instructor and VCCT's dedicated student support account.

The Institution says that "hands-on elements were not part of the delivery model" and that "[s]tudents seeking more interactive instruction are advised to select our on-campus programs", an option that was available to the Complainant when she enrolled.

In response to the claim that materials and resources were outdated, the Institution says that it is “undergoing a period of transition and improvement under new leadership” which includes reviewing and updating program content, but that the Complainant has not demonstrated “any...academic disadvantage...due to the materials referenced”. Further, the Complainant successfully completed the program with high academic standing.

In terms of lack of peer interaction, the Institution says that the delivery method and self-paced structure limit opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction, but it has recently implemented additional supports for distance learners, including optional virtual meetings, online discussion forums and a dedicated asynchronous support system.

Finally, the Institution responds to the claim it failed to provide promised career services and client referrals as follows:

VCCT provides general career counselling and guidance on accessing community resources. However, direct client referrals are not guaranteed and are influenced by factors such as licensure requirements, regulatory frameworks, and individual practice readiness. We continue to refine our graduate communications to reflect these considerations more clearly.

7. Decision

I have carefully reviewed the submissions of both the Complainant and the Institution and find the Complainant was misled in relation to the instruction and currency of the Program.

The Complaint is comprehensive and well organized. The Complainant provides documentary support for each of her claims. By contrast, the Institution’s Response is thin and as noted by the Complainant in her Reply amounts to a bare denial with some excuses related to new ownership and recent changes that have been implemented.

The Institution points to the delivery method (asynchronous distance education) as explanation for what the Complainant describes as “no instruction”.

The Complainant consistently raised her concerns about the delivery method throughout the Program. The Institution acknowledges it has recently implemented new supports for distance learners which is arguably an acknowledgement that earlier supports were inadequate.

The Complainant provides multiple examples of outdated reference materials. In addition, she also demonstrates how the program delivery itself is outdated. For example, assignments were graded and returned by regular mail and there was no ability to participate via Zoom/Teams, to stream recorded lectures, or to communicate with instructors, face to face, electronically.

Asynchronous distance education, when done properly, can be an effective delivery method. In this case, however, I find the Complainant’s allegations credible. Distance education cannot mean no instruction.

The claim is approved. The Complainant is entitled to a refund of **\$15,980**, the amount of tuition paid by the Complainant and which includes a \$300 exam fee properly considered tuition as defined by the PTA.

I authorize payment of **\$15,980** from the Fund. The payment will be directed in the following order: first, to the government, if all or a portion of the tuition was paid using funds from a provincial or federal student assistance program, and second, to the Complainant (PTA 25).

The Institution is required to repay the total amount of **\$15,980** to the Fund (PTA 27).

This decision is final. The Trustee does not have authority to re-open or reconsider the decision and there is no appeal under the PTA. Parties may wish to seek legal advice regarding a judicial review by the BC Supreme Court.

20 November 2025



Joanna White

Trustee, Student Tuition Protection Fund