

# Policy 5401 Proposed Changes: Department Response Resource

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## Background: What are the proposed Policy 5401 changes?

BCIT is proposing a policy change ([via EdCo](#)) to dramatically cut the minimum credit count for diplomas: from 110 to 75 credits. BCIT cites market comparisons to other post secondaries, as well as improving student wellness, as the main justifications for proposing these unprecedented, sweeping changes to programs and credentials.

While some consultation has occurred in accordance with BCIT's typical process for altering policies, it is our position that robust and meaningful consultation has not taken place as described in our Collective Agreement, especially given the magnitude of these proposed changes.

As recently shared with our Members in the FSA Friday Bulletin and FSA Blog, the FSA believes that all affected Departments need to be consulted individually and thoroughly on the feasibility and pedagogical soundness of these proposed cuts before any changes are made to existing policy.

The union is deeply concerned about potential damage to Department rights and to the high quality of education Departments provide.

It logically follows that damage to reputation, industry relationships, and job security could be additional consequences of such drastic cuts to credits.

### 2 Why can't the FSA simply respond on our behalf?

Departmental consultation rights are embedded in the Collective Agreement and those rights need to be exercised by the Departments themselves. Furthermore, Departments are the subject matter and pedagogical experts: you have the history, track record, direct contact with students, knowledge of best practices, and knowledge of / relationships with industry. You are best positioned to make decisions and articulate specific concerns about significant educational matters.

The FSA is here to support Departments with information and resources – and to ensure that Departments receive proper access to meaningful consultation as defined in the Collective Agreement.

## Next Steps: How can Departments respond?

While the FSA is actively responding to BCIT via official Labour Relations channels, it is important for all affected Departments to also respond individually. You have rights to meaningful consultation on educational matters and you need to exercise those rights.

**Departments are urged to respond via these two channels:**

### 1) Respond via the EdCo policy revision process:

Send letters to EdCo by January 31. [Write to EdCo](#) detailing your concerns with the proposed unilateral, dramatic reduction of the minimum credit count for all BCIT diplomas. Below you will

find consolidated, themed responses by other Departments and your fellow FSA Members which you can use, if you choose, to help quickly compose your own responses. [Learn more about EdCo.](#)

- 2) **Exercise your Departmental consultation rights on this significant educational matter:** Call for Department meeting(s) ASAP to discuss this matter as a collective. BCIT's obligation to consult with Departments does not end on January 31. While we encourage you to organize Department meeting(s)<sup>1</sup> on this topic as soon as possible, it is not mandatory to do so prior to January 31. You, the FSA Members, are the pedagogical and subject matter experts delivering education and you can drive the response to this educational issue. If you need more information and data from BCIT to support your discussions, such as data backing up BCIT's justifications for the proposed policy changes, you can ask your manager. Hopefully, your manager will be an ally in your discussions about the feasibility, pedagogical soundness, and potential impacts of the proposed cuts to the minimum credit count for diplomas. Finally, if your diplomas include courses taught by other Departments (including so-called "Service Departments"), remember to reach out to those Departments as part of your collegial process.

## Important Dates

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**January 10:** Tech Rep Meeting (this resource document distributed to all Departments)

**January 17:** FSA Board of Directors will endorse FSA official response (response will be made public)

**January 24:** FSA General Meeting (update for all Members on action plan)

**January 31:** Deadline to submit feedback to EdCo

**Ongoing:** Arrange your Department meeting(s):

- discuss and assess the feasibility, pedagogical soundness, and potential impacts of the proposed cuts
- send feedback to BCIT via your manager
- request information, data, and further consultation from BCIT
- keep FSA in the loop by emailing an update to [fsa@bcit.ca](mailto:fsa@bcit.ca)

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<sup>1</sup> Your immediate manager (usually the Associate Dean) is a member of your Department, but other non-FSA employees are not. Your immediate manager should be invited to participate but they have no special powers or privileges when it comes to Departmental collegial decision making. They are one member and hold one vote amidst the total Department collective. The Dean is not a member of your Department, although they could be invited as a non-voting guest. [Learn more about Departments and Department meetings.](#)

## Resources: What are some shared ideas and perspectives on this issue?

The FSA continues to pursue its official response to BCIT on this matter via the FSA Labour Relations team and the FSA Board. Please follow the FSA Friday Bulletin and FSA Blog for regular updates.

The FSA has a role in ensuring Departments can exercise their Collective Agreement rights to be properly involved and meaningfully consulted with respect to educational matters. Therefore, the FSA is not only facilitating Departmental responses to EdCo, but also facilitating and encouraging broader Department consultation on these significant proposed program changes. The FSA does not want to “direct” Departments, but rather to provide information and resources for Departments to organize your own responses.

However, knowing how busy Departments are, we have provided the consolidated, themed responses below contributed by other Departments and FSA Members which you can review and potentially use, if you choose, in responding to this issue.

### Problems with the Proposed Changes (from your FSA Colleagues)

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#### Pedagogical/ Academic Matters

Regarding student wellness at BCIT, proposing a one-solution response (dramatic, unilateral reduction of minimum diploma credits) to this complex problem is inadequate and likely to fail.

*Rather than the reductive approach of reducing credits across the board, consult with teaching faculty and departments about other ways of addressing wellness through course design:*

- Educators are best positioned to provide creative, pedagogically sound approaches to support wellness through learning design
- The best practices faculty and departments are already using can be shared and applied more broadly:
  - map and cap
  - combined projects
  - paired courses
  - “modular” approach of embedding cross-disciplinary modules into program courses with team teaching model

*Rather than reductive approach of reducing credits across the board, consult with teaching faculty and departments about OTHER ways of addressing wellness through program design:*

- Provide standardized alternative pathways to complete credentials on longer timelines e.g. a standard 3-year diploma alternative which is still eligible for financial aid as a full-time program
- Reducing credit count within the same 2-year, 4-term model (for diplomas) will not address the needs of diverse and neurodiverse learners
- Alternative pathways can include longer timelines and the ability to take courses via Flex in summertime to reduce workload in academic year
- Many students WANT the 2-year path and come to BCIT for this reason, but the 3-year option should also be advertised/ standardized
- For those who need the 3-year option, we are not reducing the skills taught, but instead decreasing the amount of courses in a term and spacing out that work into more terms; this would keep the student's skillset and increase their wellbeing while studying
- Employer's analysis is oversimplified and should be tied to overall workload; tying it just to contact hours is a shortcut, should be defined more comprehensively. In addition to labs and lectures, there are other activities that contribute to workload to varying degrees, which are currently not captured (e.g., independent investigations, clinical rotations, etc)

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*Regarding the Campus Wellbeing Survey results, more data needs to be gathered to examine these results thoroughly:*

- Blunt reduction of credits arguably misses the mark on many of the variables in the Study
- Discuss results in the context of our unique institution and unique programs
- Yes, wellness needs to be addressed, but this is a simplistic instrument to address it and may not work (or may even backfire)
- For example, considering these results, BCIT scores low for "supportive learning environment." This speaks to need for additional resources including more access to Counselling, Accessibility Services (which is overloaded), tutoring, etc
  - 73% cited difficulties with academic workload as a source of stress and obstacle to academic progress

- 69% felt BCIT is a supportive learning environment, statistically lower than the 83% reported by other Canadian institutions
- 67% were confident in program completion despite challenges, again statistically lower than the 80% reported at other Canadian institutions
- Low “confidence in program completion” also speaks to the need for more learning support resources; reducing credit count does not address this need

*Reduction of credit count could result in unintended negative consequences for student success:*

- e.g. financial wellness, how is this addressed? there is no intent to reduce tuition; there is ample data on the harsh realities of student financial stress in these times and in our geographic region
- Reducing credits moves financial barriers down the road - when students ladder into degrees, they may need more pre-requisites
- Initial placement and advancement in companies could also be impacted if students’ credentials are “less than” industry expects or have reduced competencies upon graduation compared to expectations set by our previous grads (affecting our industry stakeholder relationships)
- Shouldn’t we balance wellbeing in short-term student experience with ensuring long-term professional career wellbeing and advancement?

*Policy 5012 (assigning of credits – policy currently under review) needs to be addressed prior to/ in conjunction with this inquiry:*

- Tie proposed work on Policy 5401 to “assigning of credits” revisions (Policy 5012) – this should be addressed before 5401 revisions are continued
- The two policies are inextricably tied together; the way credits are counted needs to be addressed; on paper the credits may look like they are a lot more than other post-secondaries but this needs to be clarified
- Analysis is needed regarding relationship of credit count to wellness goals
- Our brand of polytechnic applied education generally involves additional hands-on, applied learning – this is not a detriment to student success, this ensures higher success of our grads; therefore, a reductive approach to reducing credits across the board is problematic

- These value-added, hands-on hours could count as half credits (lab hours, capstone hours, tutorial hours, etc); lab and tutorial contact hours vastly improve student success, compared to the university model of sink or swim doing homework on your own
- Creative solutions via 5012 could reduce credits to meet market comparisons *while still empowering our grads to succeed in the workplace* e.g. change winter term to 15 weeks (reducing all Winter term courses to 3 credits); does not affect FTE count; does not affect student access to financial aid; provides time wellness and development time for both students and faculty
  - the additional hours from reducing to 15 weeks can provide instructors more time for curriculum planning, office hours, and service work, aligning our commitment to both faculty and student well-being.

### Process/ Consultation Matters

As the above discussion demonstrates, this is a complex issue and insufficient data has been provided, including a fundamental lack of consultation with educators and Departments.

#### *Thorough consultation with Departments has not been undertaken:*

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- Article 14 provides extensive Department rights, as do other sections of our Collective Agreement; in this sense, this proposed action seems far out of proportion to a simple revision of an EdCo policy. i.e. seems to be a massive overreach of the EdCo policy process
- The top-down approach of forcing a credit reduction across the board will have unintended consequences which threaten the success and integrity of BCIT's existing offerings, compounding enrolment, reputation, and revenue issues
- Educators report that curriculum has been reduced as much as possible; if we eliminate any more, our grads risk not being employable; grads are competing for jobs with 4-year undergrads; if we reduce the rigour of our programs, we eliminate the edge our students have when entering industry; we are known for hard working students who have practical skills
- Involvement of educators is key, as we have the background, history, and daily experience of working directly with students; we are the pedagogical experts
- Every affected Department needs to be consulted individually and thoroughly on the feasibility and pedagogical soundness of these proposed cuts
- Department rights to meaningful consultation are embedded in the Collective Agreement which takes precedence over the policy development process

- Departments need to be consulted via Department meetings and two-way communication with their managers (which can include requests for managers to obtain further information and data from the employer - access to the data purportedly driving these decisions)

*Significantly more data, wider consultation, and discussion are needed:*

- This issue is beyond the scope of the EdCo policy revision process
- Consultation needs to answer: *What is the problem we're trying to solve?* And, following from this: *what is the root cause analysis we need to perform?*
- Employer needs to provide the data driving the assumptions around things like credit count, market comparisons, also wellness data
- If the intention is truly student wellness focused, all options where students leave with the same skill set should be explored before just arbitrarily cutting material
- A good example of insufficient data is the Campus Wellbeing Survey; the CCWS had about a 10% response rate. What is the state of the wellbeing of the other 90% of the student body?
  - relationship of credit reduction to student wellbeing is not quantified; how many students have a "wellbeing" issue in terms of total population? How is a wellbeing issue defined outside of the 10% of students who answered the survey? What is the evidence that wellbeing is directly linked to number of credits?
- External/ environmental factors are captured in the [CCWS](#) among the main sources of stress to academic progress:
  - 84% of respondents cited financial pressures or work obligations. Current trends connect financial pressures to cost-of- living and food insecurity, meaning students must work more. How can this stressor be properly addressed by reducing course credits?
  - 64% of respondents cited personal or family problems. If students do not receive appropriate support (Counselling, Early Assist, Accessibility Services) in a reasonable period the problems will affect academic performance regardless of the number of credits in a program
- FSA Faculty and Departments have a long history of supporting student wellness; faculty and programs support hundreds of IAP's every term; e.g. Accessibility Services administers close to 1000 accommodated exams in a typical final exam period



- With this demonstrated track record and vast experience of supporting student wellness, Departments have the quantitative data and qualitative experience working directly with students
- Robust gathering of quantitative and qualitative data should include other stakeholders such as industry, alumni and a broad range of current students

*A decision undertaken with insufficient data and insufficient consultation is likely to result in risky unintended consequences:*

- In trying to solve a problem by oversimplifying, the result could be a ripple effect of unforeseen negative consequences
- Changing BCIT's reputation and teaching practices around how and what we deliver removes one of the key differentiators from other colleges and universities
- The employers of BCIT grads are likely to be unhappy with the change (certainly, they have not been asked); this removes our differentiator, the difference that makes our grads instantly employable and valuable
- How can we claim that the skilled workforce of the future will be sufficiently trained with a third of the courses removed?
- Students may have a backlash as we depart from our long-standing and well-known education delivery; it also lands as a huge increase in tuition per credit/course since tuition will not be reduced for F/T programs
- This move completely sidesteps the established program review processes, which are precisely designed to ensure robust consultation with all stakeholders both internal and external regarding the efficacy of what we deliver
- No data has been presented to pinpoint what interventions influence student wellbeing, for better and for worse; therefore, we are just guessing (What builds student capacity and what detracts from it? And how do we identify those factors in a program review, prioritizing protective factors and intervening where possible to disrupt negative factors without causing unintended consequences?)
- It is almost certain that so-called “service courses” (Communication, Math, Physics, Chemistry, English Language Support, Basic Health Sciences, Liberal Studies, etc) will be heaviest hit by course cutting; these courses represent foundational subjects which, among other things, make up for the gaps of missing high school skills and other pre-requisites; removing these courses leaves students less prepared, more stressed, less resilient, and potentially set up to struggle in the workplace

*The Program Review Process should be reviewed and enhanced to ensure that any changes in credits are tied to the robust, transparent, accessible formal Program Review process:*

- We need to avoid unintended consequences for reputation, impacts on students, relationship with industry and ability to deliver what is needed to meet our mandate
- Make reduction in credits an exception, not the rule; must be justified and must go through the official program review/ program change/ new program process
- Ensure enhanced transparency in the consultative process; tends to take place behind closed doors because faculty are too busy with full teaching loads; consultation model needs to be reviewed; Who makes the decisions about cutting courses?
- Need to send clear messaging to managers that proper consultation takes precedence over the speed of any changes, and this needs to go through the formal Program Review process
- Communications plan making the process transparent, flow chart for the process, release time for faculty to participate (release time will also speed up the PR process, making faculty more available to participate, similar to accreditation process)
- What is to stop programs from creating new offerings which undercut the existing higher-count credentials, poaching from them? We do not want to trigger a race to the bottom
- Will there be a different tuition rate or value in the market between a diploma that raced to the bottom to 75 versus a program that maintains their standards? Does this not create competition within BCIT to give the market the easiest diploma while claiming the historic or continued rigour of diplomas who remain robust? e.g. If a grad with a 75-credit diploma is still eligible for the BBA, how are we going to stop shorter programs from obliterating other programs that remain 126 credits?
- Any possible reduction needs to be carefully managed through the official process, ensuring transparency and fulsome, documented consultation with all stakeholders, including proper consultation with Departments and “Service” Departments, along with
  - School SQC’s
  - EdCo reps
  - Tech Reps
  - PACs / Industry / Alumni
  - etc

## Addendum

### What is EdCo & What is an EdCo Policy Review?

EdCo ([BCIT Education Council](#)) is a decision-making and advisory body to the BCIT Board of Governors (as legislated by the College and Institute Act) on academic matters such as setting policies, criteria and procedures for awards, academic standing, appeals, and examinations; defining curriculum content for courses; advising the Board of Governors on developing educational policies, programs or priorities. Of the 20 voting members, 10 are faculty (elected), 4 are BCIT administrators (appointed by the President), 2 are BCGEU Support Staff (elected), 4 are students (elected).

Departments should reach out to their School's elected EdCo FSA Rep and copy them on your responses (if you do not know who that is, visit the EdCo ShareSpace link found on the EdCo webpage or email [kerri\\_macmillan@bcit.ca](mailto:kerri_macmillan@bcit.ca)). Ask your Rep to keep you up to date on these policy developments.

EdCo has multiple subcommittees, including Academic Programming and Policy. Additional voting members are appointed to the subcommittees.

The EdCo Policy committee reviews academic policies (“5000” series) on a regular cycle and in some cases, creates new academic policy when gaps are identified within areas of scope. These policies are typically revised or written by a working group.

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Here’s the process:

- 1) EdCo Executive identifies policy for review or identifies a policy gap, triggering creation of a new policy.
- 2) EdCo Policy committee strikes a working group. Chair may identify resource individuals (e.g., LTC) to sit on working group or champion the policy review.
- 3) Working group may consult with internal stakeholders.
- 4) Working group creates a draft policy (and often, an accompanying Procedure).
- 5) EdCo Policy committee votes to send draft out for community consultation (30 days).
- 6) Working group incorporates stakeholder feedback into draft. If a revision is substantial, the draft may go back to community consultation at this point.
- 7) EdCo Policy committee votes whether to send the revised policy/procedure to EdCo or to continue revision.
- 8) Depending on type of educational policy, EdCo will either vote to approve the policy or recommend it to the BoG for approval.

Notes:

While all voting members of the Programming Standing Committee are faculty (BCGEU and FSA), in contrast the Policy Standing Committee has only 3 faculty versus 12 non-faculty voting members.

All education policies are publicly available at the link above; however, the wording of any draft policy change is typically not shared publicly until the community consultation phase.

In addition to Policy 5401 "Program Development and Credentials" which Departments are currently responding to, another relevant policy currently under review is Policy 5012 "Assigning of Credits to Courses" which will be brought to an upcoming EdCo meeting in the near future. Many Departments believe that Policy 5012 has bearing on Policy 5401, and their interdependence should be further analyzed before changes are finalized.

### Departments and Department meetings

See the January 10, 2024 Tech Rep Meeting notes for information on running an effective Department meeting.

#### *What is a Department & What are Department Rights?*

- Departments are defined in Article 1.8.5.1 and are generally listed in Appendix III of the Collective Agreement.
- Each reference to "Department" means: "the Employees and the related Manager". The "employees" refers to employees in the Department who are FSA members, not to employees who are represented by the BCGEU units.
- Each FSA member of the Department has the authority – the right – to participate in "deliberations and decisions with a single voice and a single vote".
- If the subject is one the Department has the right to decide (e.g. Article 14.2), it's a single voice/vote for each FSA-represented employee + their related manager.
- If the subject is one the Department has the right to be consulted on (e.g. Article 2.3.3.1 or 14.1), then there must be opportunity for each FSA member to voice their opinion and there must be a serious exchange of information or ideas before a decision is made.
- This is important because the Collective Agreement assigns a number of rights and responsibilities to the Department. It is important that all FSA members become familiar with the general rights that your Departments have. A good place to start is becoming familiar with Article 14 of the Collective Agreement!

FSA representatives can visit your Department to provide the highly recommended 90-minute presentation "Department Rights & Responsibilities: Article 14 Training." Contact [Matt Greaves](#) if you are interested.