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Education, awareness a priority as Merit Commissioner Annual Report highlights areas for improvement in BC public service hiring

Independent watchdog for merit-based hiring in the provincial public service details plans for special study, communication efforts as significant errors in hiring processes increase

VICTORIA, BC – David McCoy, Merit Commissioner for British Columbia, has released an annual report detailing his office’s plans to expand communication efforts and launch a special study to address issues in fair, transparent and merit-based hiring in BC’s public service.

The Office of the Merit Commissioner’s 2024-2025 Annual Report, tabled last week in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, highlighted findings from the [2023/24 Merit Performance Audit Report published earlier this year](#) that found errors may have negatively impacted hiring decisions in 10% of appointments made during the period in organizations who hire under the *Public Service Act*. Extrapolating from the sample audited, 1,114 of 11,467 in-scope appointments were found to have an error with a known negative impact, up from 6%, or 622 appointments, the previous fiscal year.

The Report noted a significant increase in errors at the short-listing stage, where applications are reviewed to determine which candidates meet the minimum requirements for a public service position. The number of these errors almost doubled from the previous audit cycle.

To address the challenges found in the audit, the Annual Report outlines the office’s plans to increase its outreach to public bodies, and to conduct a special study of short-listing in hiring.

Commissioner McCoy noted the importance of raising awareness of best practices in hiring and holding public bodies accountable for their decisions.

“This year’s report reflects our commitment to ensuring that merit-based hiring processes within the public service are conducted in a manner that is fair and equitable,” he said. “We are dedicated to upholding the principle of merit through fairness, impartiality, consistency and transparency, which are essential for maintaining public trust in our government institutions.”

As an independent Officer of the Legislature, the Merit Commissioner ensures that government hiring is based on the principle of merit and that dismissal processes adhere to established standards. The Merit Commissioner monitors merit-based hiring and reviews dismissal processes across government ministries, statutory offices, provincial courts, and other agencies, boards, commissions and tribunals.

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Additional highlights of the 2024/25 Annual Report of the Merit Commissioner:

- **Reviews of staffing decisions:** The Commissioner concluded 11 reviews of staffing decisions and in one case directed the organization head responsible for the competition to reconsider the appointment. This was down from two Commissioner-directed reconsiderations in the prior fiscal.
- **Just-cause dismissals processes:** The Commissioner reviewed files for 22 dismissals from the public service that had been made for just cause for reasons unrelated to the government's previous COVID-19 vaccination policy. While the Commissioner does not comment on the results of each dismissal, the Report does include general findings on administrative fairness, as well as recommendations to amend the *Public Service Act* to better facilitate the Merit Commissioner's independent examination of dismissals processes.
- **COVID-19-related just cause dismissals:** The report notes that the Commissioner's review of these dismissals from the public service is ongoing and analysis of findings will be included in the office's Annual Report once related legal processes have concluded.
- **Study on inclusive hiring practices:** Released in December, this report provided an in-depth examination on how public service employers can mitigate biases and foster an inclusive, welcoming environment for all job seekers.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** The Commissioner reflects on the office's consultations with stakeholders, including organization heads, hiring managers, and the hiring community, to raise awareness of merit-based hiring and the role of the office.
- **Future initiatives:** An outline of upcoming projects and strategies aimed at further enhancing the integrity of the public service hiring process.

The full report is available here: <https://meritcomm.bc.ca/publications/annual-reports/>

We encourage members of the public, stakeholders, and interested parties to review the findings and engage with us as we continue to strive for excellence in public service recruitment.

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