

**For immediate release**

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### **UBC failed to meet FOI response timelines in 90% of requests, audit finds**

**VICTORIA** – An audit by the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for BC found that the University of British Columbia took an average of 100 business days to respond to freedom of information requests – over three times the 30-day legal benchmark set out in the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA).

The report, released today, details how systemic delays, a backlog of overdue requests, and process errors led to UBC having the lowest rate of compliance with FIPPA time limits of any public body in 10 years of OIPC Duty to Assist audits.

The audit examined UBC’s response to 300 FOI requests received from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2024. Among the findings were:

- UBC failed to comply with FIPPA’s maximum time limits 90% of the time.
- UBC only met the FIPPA benchmark to respond within 30 business days in 8% of responses; the university’s average response time over this period was 100 business days.
- Three primary areas where delays occurred in UBC’s FOI response process were:
  - Upon receiving requests, UBC took 18 days on average to initiate a search for requested records.
  - Retrieving records took an additional 28 days on average.
  - Processing and responding to applicants took 59 days on average.
- Concerns over applicant anonymity after records searches were completed.

Michael Harvey, Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia, said that all public bodies in the province could learn from this audit to improve their own FOI processes.

“This report is a cautionary tale for all public bodies about what can happen when they treat transparency as secondary rather than fundamental to their core mission,” he said. “The lessons learned from this report provide all public bodies with an opportunity to assess and improve their own FOI processes – to train staff, improve systems, and foster a culture of openness that serves FIPPA’s core purpose of building trust through transparent and accountable public institutions.

Doing so benefits not only the individual public body and the people they serve – it strengthens the fabric of our institutions, and our democracy.”

The OIPC conducted the audit following a review of complaints and requests for review filed with the OIPC over the previous three fiscal years, along with a recent jump in UBC’s deemed refusal complaints – instances where applicants complained to the OIPC after not receiving a response to requests within FIPPA’s mandated 30-day response time.

The report includes nine recommendations for UBC to improve its FOI processes, including addressing the process issues identified in the report, eliminating its FOI request backlog within one year, and ensuring proper training to staff to ensure that the university meets its duty to assist applicants under FIPPA.

The report notes that UBC has begun making improvements to their processes, and that the OIPC will follow up with the university.

The full report is available here: <https://www.oipc.bc.ca/reports/investigation-and-audit-reports/>

Video summarizing report: <https://youtu.be/89aF3zcEmCk>

Fact sheet summary: <https://www.oipc.bc.ca/resources/infographics/>

Guidance on the freedom of information process for public bodies:

<https://www.oipc.bc.ca/documents/guidance-documents/3009>

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