



ONTARIO'S WATCHDOG
CHIEN DE GARDE DE L'ONTARIO

Too Cool for School – Facts and Highlights

Bestech Academy, Inc. – Private career college offering gas technician training

Founded: 2006 – President: June Ballegeer

Number of students: Estimated 174 total; facilities in Stoney Creek and St. Catharines

Complaints to Ombudsman: 30, including 9 students

Private career colleges in Ontario:

425 colleges, 500 campuses, more than 27,000 students

Colleges under conditional registration: 12; under conditional program approval: 71

Key Dates:

- **August 2006:** June Ballegeer submits pre-screening form to Ministry; receives response in November warning her not to deliver or advertise training while unregistered.
- **September 2006:** *Private Career Colleges Act (PCCA), 2005* comes into force.
- **April-May 2007:** Two students apply for subsidized training at Bestech; internal email shows Ministry officials worried they could be funding an “illegal” institution, but funding goes ahead. (In all, seven students are funded to attend Bestech.)
- **July 2007:** Ministry reminds Ballegeer she is in violation of the *PCCA*.
- **December 2007:** Bestech caught falsely marketing itself as “registered.”
- **March 2008:** A wider crackdown on gas tech training facilities results in a formal warning to Bestech that it is operating illegally and could be penalized.
- **April 2008:** Bestech tells Ministry it will apply for registration, but doesn't.
- **June 2008:** Ministry issues restraining order and July deadline for registration.
- **August 2008:** Ballegeer asks for an extension, promises to file for registration by Aug. 22 but doesn't. Ministry gives Bestech another chance, visits the Stoney Creek location, sends another warning. Bestech submits registration application Aug. 29, but it is incomplete.
- **September 2008:** Ministry tells Bestech there are problems with application, sets another deadline. Ballegeer applies for job with Ministry.
- **October 2008:** Bestech submits revised application; closes its doors just before Ministry issues new restraining order and refusal to register.
- **November 2008:** Ballegeer hired by Ministry on Nov. 7, starts work Nov. 10.
- **December 2008:** Ballegeer suspended by Ministry Dec. 16. Former student's story is featured in *Hamilton Spectator* and student complains to Ombudsman.
- **January 2009:** Ombudsman's investigation announced on Jan. 8; Ministry lets Ballegeer go on Jan. 12.

Some students' stories:

William Roberts, 57 (page 26): Certified as a Gas Tech 2 technician, he paid \$1,750 in tuition to Bestech and complained when he learned it wasn't accredited by the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA). Received a partial refund, but Ballegeer's cheque bounced.

Todd Abernethy, 42 (page 27): An unemployed steelworker, his Bestech tuition was paid by the Ontario Skills Development Program, but he gained almost no practical experience.

Greg Griffiths, 27 (page 27): Assured by Ballegeer that Bestech was registered; enrolled June 2008 in course with only three students. Practical work on furnaces was impossible because Bestech's suppliers had stopped delivering oil. He was unable to write the TSSA exam.

Derek Beattie, 19 (page 27): His parents helped him pay \$4,700 for two courses; Bestech closed just before he finished the second. He and his mother confronted Ballegeer at a restaurant where she was working at a waitress; he was promised repayment but received none.

Kristopher Neiser, 28 (page 28): Paid more than \$3,000 to start a course one month before Bestech closed. Won a small claims judgment, but has been unable to collect.

Mike Heywood, 31 (page 28): Gave up a part-time job to attend Bestech; paid \$2,578 in tuition for a course starting in mid-October 2008 with only two students and photocopies instead of textbooks. Classes were cancelled repeatedly without explanation before the school closed.

Ombudsman's recommendations: The Ministry should...

1. Issue public warnings through a website "buyer beware" list and post notices at illegal private career colleges when they present a risk to student consumer.
2. Keep its website notices about decision and orders affecting private career colleges updated.
3. Rigorously enforce the *Private Career Colleges Act, 2005* to the full extent of its powers.
4. Ensure the regulations to enable it to enforce penalties are developed ASAP.
5. Consider employing provincial offences officers in its compliance unit for private career colleges.
6. Work with the TSSA and other bodies to ensure illegal colleges are not promoted.
7. Conduct an organizational review of its private career college operations
8. Implement new practices to address registration and approval delays.
9. Be more diligent in checking employees' references.
10. Identify students who suffered and compensate them as warranted.
11. Report back to the Ombudsman every three months.