

January 2024 Environmental Scan

A dark green, solid-colored shape that starts as a thin line on the left side of the page and extends diagonally upwards to the right, eventually becoming a thick wedge that fills the bottom right portion of the image. This shape acts as a design element separating the header text from the main body of the document.

UPEI creates new positions in sexual violence prevention, equity, and student support

The University of Prince Edward Island has created seven new positions with a focus on student support, equity, diversity and inclusion, and sexual violence prevention, six months after a third-party review of workplace harassment and misconduct was released.

The report by Toronto law firm Rubin Thomlinson recommended the university hire more staff to help prevent and respond to issues in those areas.

"This is the beginning. There is lots more to do," interim UPEI president Greg Keefe said in an interview Thursday.

Including salary and benefits, the new employees will cost the university more than \$500,000 annually, said Keefe. The province is paying for about two-thirds of that with UPEI picking up the rest, he said.

The Rubin Thomlinson report, released in a redacted form in June 2023, brought to light allegations of sexual violence, bullying, racism and sexism on campus, with both students and staff as victims. It outlined evidence of what it called a toxic workplace culture, especially during the term of former president Alaa Abd-El-Aziz.

BRUTE FORCE

The first time Firouzeh Zarabi-Majd met a police officer, she was 13 years old. She and a friend had slipped out to a 7-Eleven for Slurpees without telling her mother, Fatima. Firouzeh, known to friends and family as Effy, was Fatima's baby, the youngest of four kids. The family had moved to Toronto from war-torn Iran just a few years earlier, settling south of Bathurst and Wilson, and Effy's English still wasn't great. At school, she was routinely bullied. When, after about an hour, Fatima couldn't find her, she panicked and called the police, saying her daughter was missing. Effy returned home to find a pair of uniformed constables standing in her living room. They were tall, kind and compassionate, she remembered, and they seemed as relieved to see her as Fatima was. When she grew up, Effy thought, she wanted to be just like them.

Effy's mother was an art teacher, her father a civil engineer, and they hoped that their kids would become lawyers or doctors. But, by the time Effy graduated from high school in the late 1990s, she was set on a career in law enforcement. She wanted to do something that she thought would be helpful and courageous, something that would make her mother proud. In truth, Fatima disliked the idea—policing was too dangerous, she said—but after she passed away in 2001, Effy forged ahead, enrolling in the police foundations program at Humber College. One of her close friends from that time described her as ideal law enforcement material—“reliable, resilient, always the one to stand up for the right thing.”

Tennessee judge denies release of more records in sexual harassment complaint against ex-lawmaker

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A Tennessee judge has squashed an attempt to release more records involving a sexual harassment complaint against a former state lawmaker, including information about how tax dollars may have been spent as part of the investigation.

Davidson County Chancellor Russell Perkins' ruling, handed down Tuesday, is the latest development in the monthslong speculation over how Tennessee's GOP-dominated House handled a complaint lodged by a legislative intern against former Rep. Scotty Campbell.

Campbell resigned last April after it was revealed that an ethics panel found that he violated the Legislature's workplace discrimination and harassment policy. The resignation came just two weeks after the Republican joined his fellow GOP members in expelling two Black Democratic legislators for protesting in support of gun control on the state House floor.

Critics cried foul over Campbell's ability to weigh in on the expulsions while his sexual harassment complaint remained hidden from the public.

UPEI releases 5-year plan for fixing problems highlighted in scathing review

The University of Prince Edward Island has released a draft of the five-year action plan it will use to follow through on the recommendations from the Rubin Thomlinson report.

That third-party report, commissioned in late 2021 and released last summer, identified a toxic environment on campus, where bullying and harassment were widespread and condoned at an institutional level.

Now the Charlottetown-based campus is looking for public feedback on the five-year plan designed to guarantee enough accountability and transparency to make sure UPEI never has that kind of issue again.

"We understand that we must do better and that we are accountable for encouraging and enabling the changes needed for UPEI and its people," says the note of apology to the campus community that opens the 94-page document, signed by board of governors chair Shannon MacDonald and interim university president Greg Keefe.

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Head of Quebec CEGEP placed on paid leave following toxic workplace allegations

The campus director for Champlain College Lennoxville has been placed on temporary paid leave effective immediately following allegations of psychological harassment and a motion of non-confidence from the teachers' union.

The resolution came during a special meeting of the Champlain Regional College's board of governors on Wednesday evening. It follows CBC's investigation into ongoing hearings about Nancy Beattie at Quebec's labour tribunal.

Board chair Matthew Mazur read out the resolution, stating that the board will provide a paid leave of absence until the "conclusions of the different investigations are brought to the board of governors."

According to a letter obtained by CBC, Quebec's minister of higher education has launched an investigation into the management and finances at Champlain College Lennoxville and the regional college as a whole.

Four people who reported to Beattie at the college have testified against her under oath at the Tribunal administratif du travail, including one person who is the plaintiff in the case.

7 years after Weinstein, commission finds cultural shift in Hollywood but less accountability

NEW YORK (AP) — A new survey of the entertainment industry finds that the culture of Hollywood has shifted in the years since the downfall of Harvey Weinstein and the launch of the #MeToo movement, but many still don't trust that sexual harassers will be held accountable.

The Hollywood Commission, chaired by Anita Hill, was founded in 2017 to help stop workplace harassment and discrimination in the entertainment industry. On Thursday, it released its second survey, pulled from interviews with more than 5,200 anonymous industry workers, of how behavior and attitudes are changing in Hollywood.

“There has been increased awareness of what the problems are, what behaviors are acceptable and what behaviors aren't acceptable, and what the systems are for confronting those problems,” Hill said in an interview. “Now, people are understanding that this is a systemic problem.”

The study, conducted over 2022 and 2023, follows a similar survey carried out in 2019–2020. It found that 82% of workers are aware of unacceptable behaviors in the workplace, a 6% increase compared to in 2020. Some 74% of workers said they're aware of how to share their concerns about workplace conduct, up 6% from 2020.

What are some of the best practices around workplace investigations?

“Not every investigation needs to be a Cadillac. It’s important for investigators to be judicious about the steps they take, the resources they put into it, and when to put their pens down.”

So says Sandra Guarascio, partner at Roper Greyell in Vancouver, when discussing best practices around workplace investigations.

Guarascio will be speaking at the upcoming HRD Employment Law Masterclass Vancouver, to be held on Feb. 22.

She shared some of her talking points with Canadian HR Reporter about the panel discussion: “Effective strategies for conducting workplace investigations: Best practices for responding to incident reporting.”

“There’s been just such a sharp rise in workplace investigations over recent years, and there’s a lot of factors that are contributing to that. First, we’re still in the wake of #MeToo, which has created a lot of awareness about rights and a desire to pursue accountability and a huge focus on culture and governance in workplaces.”

Empowering Safe Workplaces: CCA, WomanACT, and SCWIST Join Forces to Tackle Harassment in STEM and Trades

The Safe STEM Workplaces project is a collaborative effort between WomanACT, and the Society for Canadian Women in Science & Technology (SCWIST) aimed at fostering safe and harassment-free workplaces, particularly within the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and trade sectors. The project, funded by the Department of Justice, seeks to enhance prevention and response measures for gender-based and sexual harassment. It directly confronts harassment in workplaces, especially affecting women, with the goal of reducing stress, enhancing productivity, and retaining women in these industries. This program could not be possible without the involvement of employers such as Canadian Construction Association (CCA), Chandos Construction, Tandem Launch, and EllisDon, who are among many employers dedicated to nurturing respectful and secure work environments.

The pervasive issue of workplace harassment has garnered global attention, catalyzed by the #MeToo movement. Alarming statistics persist, with approximately 40% of women worldwide experiencing workplace sexual harassment (Mayer et al., 2020). These concerning figures are mirrored in the Canadian context, where reports of sexual harassment from women consistently outnumber those from men by ratios ranging from 2.4 to 3.6 times (Angus Reid Institute, 2018; Angus Reid Institute, 2014).

California emergency services official sued for sexual harassment, retaliation

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A lawsuit filed Tuesday accused a deputy director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services of sexual harassment and retaliation against a senior employee while the agency did nothing to stop it.

Ryan Buras, an appointee of Gov. Gavin Newsom, harassed Kendra Bowyer for a year beginning in 2020 despite the agency's knowledge of similar previous allegations made by other women employees, the lawsuit contends. Newsom named Buras in 2019 as deputy director of recovery operations, a role that includes wildfire and other disaster response. Bowyer was a senior emergency services coordinator.

"This administration swept a predator's campaign of sexual and psychological abuse under the rug," Bowyer said in a statement released by her lawyers. "A workplace that centers around supporting disaster survivors became a terrifying and nightmarish disaster zone in and of itself because they enabled his disgusting behavior."

An email seeking comment from Buras wasn't immediately returned. Buras's alleged harassment included crawling into bed with Bowyer while she was asleep during a gathering at his home, "touching her nonconsensually, attempting to get her alone in hotel rooms, grabbing her hand in public, calling and texting her nearly every night and more," according to the release from her lawyer.

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Former Western women's hockey players say program toxic under Moxley before recent investigation

Kaitlyn Booth marched across the London, Ont., campus of Western University one morning in the fall of 2018 and into the office of Candice Moxley, head coach of the women's hockey team.

Booth, a goalie who then was in her first of three seasons with the Mustangs, says she told Moxley that she was upset with and felt threatened by Jeff Watson, then a strength and conditioning coach at the school who worked with many of Western's sports teams.

Booth told Moxley that she had been working out in the school gym when Watson had thrown her to the floor, and while she was on all fours, knelt behind her, touched her inappropriately, and simulated a sexual act.

"Moxley told me that I should wear longer shorts," Booth said in an interview with TSN. "That was it. That was her response. I couldn't believe what I was hearing."

A year later, in November 2019, Tareya Webster and Sydnee Baker say they confronted Moxley with a similar concern.

Groups launch Safe STEM Workplaces to address sexual harassment

Several Canadian groups are stepping up to address the issue of workplace sexual harassment in the country.

WomanACT and the Society for Canadian Women in Science & Technology (SCWIST) have launched their Safe STEM Workplaces project to foster safe and harassment-free workplaces, particularly within the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and trade sectors.

As part of the program, the two groups partnered with the Canadian Construction Association (CCA) to launch a “Micro-Lesson Training Series”.

The training series aims to reshape workplace cultures and eliminate gender-based and sexual harassment within workplaces.

Participants will delve into trauma-informed practices, procedural fairness, equity, as well as the nuances of gender, sexual orientation and harassment, and will receive a certificate upon completion.

Black staff ‘less likely’ to view NHS as an inclusive place to work, study finds

Black NHS staff say they are treated worse than their white or Asian counterparts at work, a new study has found.

In research seen exclusively by The Independent, just 40 per cent of Black health service employees rated their workplace as ‘very’ or ‘highly’ fair, compared to 61 per cent and 72 per cent of their Asian and white counterparts.

The study, which asked more than 1,500 Black, Asian and white staff about inclusion in the workplace, called for greater diversity training among NHS staff. Jon Czul, the Head of Consultancy and Research at the not-for-profit group Skills for Health, said the health service deserved to be celebrated for its diversity but that progress was still needed to improve fairness among the workforce.

He said while the NHS was getting “some things right”, it required an “expansion of skills training and shared learning to improve equality, diversity and inclusion”.

The study comes after The Independent revealed a third of Black and ethnic minority health staff have suffered racism or bullying as the NHS fails to address systemic levels of discrimination.

Push to hold elected officials accountable against workplace harassment gains momentum in Barrie

A renewed push aimed at holding local elected officials accountable if found to have harassed or abused others in the workplace is gaining momentum in Barrie.

Advocate Emily McIntosh is part of the leadership group trying to get legislation passed that she says will prevent ongoing abuse and sexual harassment in cities and towns across the province by elected officials who can't lose their jobs unless voted out.

"We still are seeing councillors, and often the outliers, perpetrating violence and harassment in a way that is going unchecked," said McIntosh from outside City Hall in Barrie. 'Accountability now' is the message from the advocacy group Women of Ontario Say No as it fights for the provincial government to pass the legislation McIntosh says now has the backing of about 200 municipalities across the province.

The group urges the Ford government to pass it after the private members' bill titled Stopping Harassment and Abuse by Local Leaders Act failed last May. The provincial government expressed concerns over giving Integrity Commissioners greater powers; in the process of potentially removing a local elected official from their seat if they were found to have violated the city or town's code of conduct for workplace harassment and abuse.

The hidden cost of workplace harassment

Workplace sexual harassment has a profound impact on victims and witnesses, but there is ample research which reveals that harassment results in negative consequences that can affect every level of an organization.

“On the other hand, we know now that addressing these issues at their root and proactively working to prevent them has far-reaching benefits,” says Carmina Ravanera, senior research associate at the Institute for Gender and the Economy, University of Toronto, an organization that shares and translates research related to equitable and inclusive workplaces.

Workplaces that prevent and address harassment enable workers to function productively, work collaboratively and contribute fully to the workplace. Healthy workplaces also benefit from higher job satisfaction and worker retention.

Ravanera explains that when someone is faced with an unsafe work environment, it can result in negative outcomes such as absenteeism or presenteeism, which is when the worker shows up but is unable to perform to their full potential due to stress. “If you don’t have solutions to this problem, then you might end up leaving your work, which can of course affect you, your family and the people you are supporting,” she says. “Even the anticipation of being harassed has been shown to have a profound effect on people.”

Cochrane mayor bullied, harassed senior managers: Integrity commissioner

Cochrane's mayor bullied, harassed and intimidated two senior town managers, the town's integrity commissioner has ruled.

Harold G. Elston is recommending that Mayor Peter Politis's pay be suspended for 90 days — 45 days for each investigation. The pay suspension still has to be approved by council.

Last July, CAO Monika Malherbe and then-director of community services Jason Boyer filed separate complaints, alleging they were subject to workplace harassment, bullying and intimidation by Politis.

On July 19, 2023, Boyer went on a leave of absence and later resigned on Dec. 15. Malherbe has been on medical leave since June 28, 2023. Politis was elected as mayor in October 2022. He previously served as mayor from 2014-18.

The ethics commissioner's reports highlight examples of incidents and email exchanges between Boyer and Politis, as well as Malherbe and Politis. In both of the investigations, Elston found that the mayor tried to micromanage town business and events.

Sources confirm NHL players facing charges in sexual assault investigation

Four National Hockey League players – Carter Hart, Michael McLeod, Dillon Dube, and Cal Foote – have been directed to surrender to police in London, Ont., to be charged with sexual assault in connection with an alleged incident that occurred during a Hockey Canada event in the city in June 2018, two sources familiar with the matter told TSN.

The players are expected to surrender before the London Police Service holds a press conference on Monday to update the public on the high-profile case. The Globe and Mail reported on Jan. 24 that London police have instructed five members of Canada's 2018 World Junior team to surrender to be charged with sexual assault. Former Ottawa Senators player Alex Formenton, who currently plays in Switzerland, reported to police on Jan. 28 to be officially charged.

Gary Ellis, the former head of Toronto Police Service's sex crimes unit, told TSN in an interview that the players would be photographed, fingerprinted, and directed to sign an undertaking not to have contact with the alleged victim, either the first time they report to police or at a subsequent date.

The five players are accused of sexually assaulting a woman at a London hotel on June 19, 2018, following a Hockey Canada Foundation golf and gala event.