News Release
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VIU's board of governors falls short in oversight of cybersecurity risk management

VICTORIA – The Vancouver Island University Board of Governors needs to improve its oversight of the university's cybersecurity risk management practices, says a new independent audit report. The audit found deficiencies in the board's training, and their oversight of policy and strategies that are critical to protecting VIU's information systems and data.

"Cyber attacks are common and they're evolving," Auditor General Michael Pickup said. "B.C. university boards, including the VIU board, play a critical role in ensuring management is protecting their institutions from the rise of ransomware and other cyber threats."

University boards oversee cybersecurity risk management by holding university management accountable for identifying and mitigating risks.

The Office of the Auditor General found the VIU board has defined roles and responsibilities for risk management, and it sets expectations of VIU's management. However, the audit found three areas where the board hasn't provided oversight of VIU's cybersecurity risk management practices.

- First, the board hasn't adequately overseen the university's risk mitigation strategies. "Last year the VIU board only did a review at the end of the year. It should be done throughout the year – especially in a field that changes as quickly as IT," Pickup said.

- Second, the VIU board lacks training in cybersecurity risk management. VIU board members should receive cybersecurity risk management training when they join the board, and then annually.

- Third, the VIU board hadn't approved an updated risk management policy in over 10 years. "Outdated policies become ineffective, and weaken accountability, " Pickup said.

The VIU board has accepted the report's four recommendations focused on cybersecurity risk mitigation and responses, board training and development, and keeping policies updated. "I'm pleased that the VIU board has committed to acting on our recommendations and I hope other university boards can learn from our report," Pickup said.

VIU stores the personal information of 12,000 students and 1,500 faculty and staff who are located at its campuses in Nanaimo, Duncan, Parksville, and Powell River. The 15-member board includes: eight members appointed by government; five members elected by faculty, staff and students; the university chancellor; and the university president.

The National Cyber Threat Assessment, issued by the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, says ransomware is a persistent threat and Canada's critical infrastructure is increasingly at risk from cyber threats.

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