



The Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021- Self-Review 2023

Overview and OUTCOME 1: A LEARNER WELLBEING AND SAFETY SYSTEM

EcoQuest core principles, as stated in our current pastoral care policy, are as follows:

EcoQuest strives to operate as a sustainable learning community based on mutual respect, trust and full participation. The term 'learner wellbeing' includes the physical, mental and emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of a learner's health. Pastoral care is not merely a complementary practice; it is policy and practices fully integrated throughout the teaching and learning and structural organisation of EcoQuest to effectively meet the personal, social (wellbeing) and academic needs of learners and staff. The pastoral care of learners is the shared responsibility of all staff and adults in our learning community. Each staff member has a part to play in respecting and caring for learners. Their pastoral role is to guide, enable and empower learners to use good information to make well-considered positive choices for themselves, educationally and in life.

In 2020, EcoQuest formally entered into a collaboration with Dr Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal of Ngāti Whanaunga and Ngāti Tamaterā. This collaboration investigated synergies that exist in mātauranga Māori/indigenous knowledge and environmental science, as well as settings in which this approach can deliver for local people and their places. The role of creativity in education, science, and research is well-documented, but not always overtly supported. The need to establish a space in which these areas can be explored became evident early on in the discussions. A shared vision emerged, which acknowledges that more than ever, indigenous knowledge systems and approaches are critical in reorienting our understanding and guardianship of the natural environment to safeguard the long-term wellbeing of people and (ultimately) the planet. The EcoQuest Centre for Indigeneity, Ecology and Creativity emerged from this shared vision.

We are working on what will become a strategic plan for EcoQuest. Once we have finalised our strategic plan, we will be able to make it available to the public, and work with our key stakeholder (UNH) on its ongoing development.

Core to this plan is the concept of "A Conscious, Compassionate, Intercultural Learning Community".

The Centre places importance on being a conscious, compassionate, intercultural learning community. This is so that the activities of the Centre model the kinds of changes in the world that the Centre itself seeks:

- By conscious we mean that all those involved in the Centre, including staff and students, are critically engaged in the issues of our times and find ways, large and small, to address them.
- By compassionate we mean that community members are loving and empathetic toward one another, toward themselves and to life around them.
- By intercultural we mean that community members possess the ability to confidently, respectfully and successfully interact in diverse cultural circumstances.
- By learning we mean that all possess a humility, an interest and an openness to new knowledge, insights and understanding.
- By community we mean a group of people who freely share ideas, values and understandings, who desire to be together and work collaboratively on shared goals



Review learner wellbeing and safety practices.

These practices are described in our Program Delivery Standard Operating Procedures. During each program, we have multiple feedback sessions with learners (debriefs) as well as an end of program learner evaluation. This feedback is folded into our processes for ongoing improvement.

Training

- (a) Te Tiriti – It is clear from the overview at the beginning of this review that EcoQuest is committed to meeting our obligations under Te Tiriti and creating a supportive learning environment for **staff**, under the guidance and leadership of Dr Royal.
- (b) In August 2022, we ran an externally led workshop on DEI, and plan to run further workshops.
- (c) We have a student affairs coordinator who is active in internal communication pathways and referral to external services

Emergencies

We have an Emergency Plan which we share with staff, and practice an emergency drill with learners at the Centre.

Students are issued with an ID card that has emergency numbers on the back

We use Near Miss/Accident/Incident/Sickness forms, and collate and analyse these for action.

OUTCOME 2: LEARNER VOICE

The relationship between the learner and EcoQuest often starts well before the application process. We have a full-time Director of Admissions based at the University of New Hampshire (UNH). This person works closely with prospective and enrolled students, sometimes up to two years before a student attends our programme. During this time, they build a relationship and rapport with the student, and as part of the admissions process extensive interviews take place.

The admissions process is transparent, caring and supportive, with the outcome that students who are accepted are a good match for our residential programmes.

Once students are at EcoQuest, we have student meetings, students elect a student rep, who communicate with our student affairs coordinator. We foster a Tuakana-Teina approach, and encourage students to look out for each other, both during programme time and during time off. We have (often weekly) debrief processes, and an end of program student evaluation (the latter is optional). We incorporate feedback from students in our planning for future programs and activities.

We have lots of day-to-day engagement between staff-students. We also keep in touch on a regular basis with UNH, and as much as possible we stay abreast of the socio-cultural and political landscapes in the home country of our learners.

Complaints procedures are outlined in the student handbook. Our student affairs coordinator keeps in close contact with students. All staff are open to being contacted by students and to highlighting any concerns they have to the student affairs coordinator for follow-up or referral.

EcoQuest has an excellent record with mostly positive feedback. We have had unfavourable feedback at times on some aspects of the programme delivery, but as yet EcoQuest has not received an official complaint. We are aware of societal changes which may affect our students e.g. a



general increase in the levels of anxiety, from which our students will not be exempt, and we seek to be pro-active through discussions with our Director of Admissions and the UNH-EcoQuest Program Coordinator, so we remain equipped to look after our students' wellbeing.

All feedback is shared with EcoQuest staff and the UNH-EcoQuest Program Coordinator.

EcoQuest is familiar with the Dispute Resolution Scheme rules for (domestic and) international learners.

OUTCOME 3: SAFE, INCLUSIVE, SUPPORTIVE, AND ACCESSIBLE PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Safe and inclusive communities - How effective are our systems and practices?

EcoQuest employs staff who understand that they are mentors to our students.

Prior to programmes starting we have all-in staff meetings and we run through and reinforce our commitments to providing a safe and inclusive learning community, and what practices we have which support students and staff

Support learner engagement –

- Opportunities
- Oversight
- In-confidence forum
- Advice on further learning

Core aspect of our practices include manaakitanga, inclusivity, mana enhancing relationships, reciprocity and mutual support.

EcoQuest programmes offer a wide variety of learning opportunities actively engage learners actively, and invite sharing of experiences and views.

We maintain appropriate oversight of learner achievement and engagement, ensure that student needs and special accommodations are provided for, and where appropriate support learners in their career path through references and outreach activities.

Physical spaces

Our Centre has and maintains designated spaces for teaching-learning, leisure, study spaces, library, accommodation. There are gardens and space for play, fitness, access to the beach at the Centre and walking-biking access to the village (Kaiaua).

Digital space

We are located in a coastal rural area, and similarly, our field trips can take us to places where internet is good most of the time, but not always to the extent that our learners are used to. We make this clear to our students before they enrol, and once they arrive. In the past, we have had very positive feedback from students about being off the internet grid when working and living for a period in remote locations. However, we realise it is something that can be hard for some of the students at times. We listen to our student feedback on this matter, and we work constantly on improving our capacity. Currently we are considering options to give us better coverage on field trips.



OUTCOME 4: LEARNERS ARE SAFE AND WELL

Information

Our programs are residential, and we take care of the students' needs: academic, food, housing, learning resources, and drop-off at/pick-ups from transport hubs for student time off.

Promote physical & mental health awareness

Students have access to gardens, nutritious food, and EcoQuest caters for all dietary requirements. Our programs include a range of activities for a range of levels of fitness, work and study in the outdoors, as well as lectures and labs.

We provide for the head, heart, and hands. Whole-person learning is at the heart of our operations. Our learners are the compass for open discussions and inclusion of what is topical for them in terms of big issues back home, in Aotearoa and globally.

EcoQuest has guidelines and contacts for medical and mental health services in the handbook. These processes and avenues are reinforced during orientation once students are at EcoQuest. The student affairs coordinator invites students to be proactive in matters of wellbeing. EcoQuest provide access and transport to medical services and emergency care.

Proactive monitoring

Students provide details of emergency contacts for next of kin they wish to be informed in case of emergencies.

We coordinate with UNH Global on the use of SOS International Tracker. Students enter their contact details and next of kin. The students also are invited to download the SOS app, which enables them to enter their location at any time and receive real time updates of any health and safety alerts. It allows them to communicate directly with UNH Global as well.

We contact next of kin when there is concern regarding learner safety and wellbeing. We also contact them as a precaution if, for example, our group is not directly affected, but a major event (e.g. cyclone or earthquake) occurs in Aotearoa which is likely to make the international news. We also communicate with the students' home universities.

At EcoQuest, students have pathways to communicate health and mental health needs with staff in confidence. We have a student affairs coordinator, on-call staff in weekends and during the mid-semester break, and we encourage students to reach out to any staff with whom they feel (most) comfortable. Our in-house system of sharing information is on a need-to-know basis, and all staff at EcoQuest respect confidentiality.

EcoQuest looks after the needs of students who have been granted special accommodations at their home schools and/or those who whose learning is disrupted due to ill-health / circumstances outside their control while participating in an EcoQuest program. Because our programs are residential, staff is able to respond at very short notice and help the student strategise to enable them to complete course work.



OUTCOME 05 ADDITIONAL – STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

Information and promotional activities

All information is transparent and easy to find: Description of accommodation is in the handbook and on the website – illustrations of the Centre and cabins are on the website. All accommodation the EcoQuest Centre is owned and maintained by EcoQuest, and is under our control.

EcoQuest collects information on schools of origin and gender to best cater for the students' needs and increase the likelihood of creating an inclusive and suitable mix of people in each of the accommodation units.

Suitability of staff in student accommodation

Staff travel with students on extended field trips and help ensure students are looked after.

Learning and Living at EcoQuest:

Because our programs are residential, and our accommodation and learning areas largely the same, the information below overlaps with Outcomes 1-4.

Staff work closely with students to develop a supportive learning community and living environment. They provide information and tools that help students understand their responsibilities, including those relating to shared tasks, peer support, and diversity.

We have a comprehensive orientation programme, supported by staff. Our teaching and field staff work very closely with our learners, and often are involved in the preparation and sharing of meals. This gives ample opportunity for providing support for all the learner wellbeing and safety needs, including access to services in the community. We provide transport to medical and support services when needed.

Proactive monitoring

EcoQuest develops and implements welfare management plans for learners as needed: this may include interviews with health care professionals in the US prior to learners arriving at EcoQuest, and continue during the program as needed; we have access to a counselling network as needed.

Field leaders are in close contact with students on a daily basis, ensuring good levels of communication between learners and staff at all times.

Safe and inclusive residential community

Core aspect of our practices include Manaaki, inclusivity, mana enhancing relationships, reciprocity, and mutual support.

We provide students with information and advice on what action to take in an emergency and the mechanisms for reporting incidents and raising health and safety concerns (e.g. orientation, emergency-drill, student meetings, sign-out sheets, hazard forms).

EcoQuest provides in-house training on roles and responsibilities; we have a student affairs coordinator. Emergency equipment is available (e.g. emergency grab-bag and first aid kits, vehicles available if evacuation is needed, generator).

We see our students every day, share meals and have a system in place to take students to transport hubs so they can get to weekend destinations, and we have on-call staff. We very rarely have students alone in accommodation, almost everyone has at least one room-mate. In the event that



students are separated because of illness (e.g. Covid), staff check on students multiple times a day – and students are encouraged to check on each other.

OUTCOME 06 ACCOMMODATION ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES AND CONTRACTS

Accommodation at the EcoQuest Centre is owned by EcoQuest, under our control, and maintained by EcoQuest staff. Students do not enter into accommodation contracts with EcoQuest.

The handbook outlines rules, roles and responsibilities that guide behaviour and interactions at the EcoQuest Centre.

Students have an overarching agreement with UNH. All matters pertaining to fees and refund policies are detailed in the handbook.

OUTCOME 07 ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Our Centre has, and EcoQuest maintains, designated spaces for teaching-learning, leisure, study spaces, library, accommodation. There are gardens and space for play, fitness, access to the beach at the Centre and walking-biking access to the village (Kaiaua).

EcoQuest has appropriate insurance cover for its site and activities.

OUTCOME 08: INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS – distinct wellbeing and safety needs

Our programmes have been designed specifically to cater for senior undergraduate students from the US, and we have been delivering these programmes successfully for over two decades. All students attending our programs enrol with UNH, but not all students are UNH students. For those students from different home universities and colleges, we work closely with the study abroad offices at their schools as much as we can, to ensure students and their home schools are informed about our programs and practices. The EcoQuest Director of Admissions and Academic Director, as well as at times the UNH-EcoQuest Program Coordinator, make regular visits to these institutions and to their study abroad fairs. During the interview and enrolment process, our Director of Admissions gets to know each student, beginning sometimes up to two years before they attend EcoQuest, so by the time they arrive in Aotearoa, we have a good understanding of the students' particular wellbeing needs. We have developed our systems and practices to support both individuals and the group as a whole, in building healthy caring relationships while they are with us.

OUTCOME 09: PROSPECTIVE INTERNATIONAL TERTIARY LEARNERS ARE WELL INFORMED

Prospective students have access to information about EcoQuest programmes, the EcoQuest Centre, research and learning activities online, through their advisors, alumni, and the EcoQuest Director of Admissions. A link to the NZQA EER report is available on the EcoQuest website. All students attending our programs enrol with UNH, but not all students are UNH students. For those students from different home universities and colleges, we work closely with the study abroad offices at their school, to ensure students and their home schools are informed about our programs and practices (see outcome 08 above).

All information on fees is available online, as are application forms and contact details for the EcoQuest Director of Admissions.

Policies, money matters (fees, deposits, refund policy, additional costs) are all outlined in detail in the student handbook, and available to prospective students.

We do not engage external education agents.



OUTCOME 10: OFFER, ENROLMENT, CONTRACTS, INSURANCE AND VISA

All students are enrolled at the University of New Hampshire (UNH), and our programmes are listed in the degree courses in the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture (COLSA) so the direct contractual arrangement is between UNH and the student. EcoQuest has Memoranda of Agreement (MOA)/SPA with COLSA for the delivery of our programmes. This arrangement has been accepted by NZQA.

Students receive an offer of place, and UNH puts in place their own insurance arrangement for all students traveling abroad. We also require students to have trip interruption and cancellation insurance. Students all meet their entry obligations with Immigration New Zealand, who are informed on the rare event of a student not completing the programme.

Enrolment dates, termination grounds and arrangements, rules roles and responsibilities, withdrawal and refund conditions, disciplinary procedures for students are all detailed in the student handbook, issued at the time of offer of place. Withdrawal and refunds are managed in accordance with the conditions of the fee protection arrangement approved by NZQA and are included in our MOA/SPA with COLSA .

OUTCOME 11: INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS RECEIVE APPROPRIATE ORIENTATIONS, INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Students have pre-departure meetings in the US before attending. Alumni are invited to participate to enrich the information provided to the new team before they arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand. We also conduct two to three days of orientation at the beginning of each programme, fully covering both academic and pastoral care information.

OUTCOME 12: SAFETY AND APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION OF INTERNATIONAL TERTIARY LEARNERS

All the above information pertains to international learners.