



EcoQuest Centre
for Indigeneity, Ecology and
Creativity

SELF REVIEW

The Education
(Pastoral Care of Tertiary and
International Learners)
Code of Practice 2021
Self-Review 2024

Completed b By
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OUTCOME 1: A LEARNER WELLBEING AND SAFETY SYSTEM

EcoQuest is committed to fostering a sustainable, collaborative, and intercultural learning environment anchored in mutual respect, trust, and full participation. At the heart of our mission is a dedication to learner wellbeing, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health. Pastoral care is not merely a complementary aspect of our approach but is deeply woven into every aspect of EcoQuest's policy, practice, and organizational structure. Our goal is to effectively address and support the personal, social, and academic needs of all learners and staff, creating a nurturing space where each individual can flourish.

The responsibility for pastoral care is shared among all staff and adults within our learning community. Each team member plays a vital role in respecting, guiding, and caring for learners. Through their roles, they aim to empower learners to make informed, positive choices for themselves, both in education and life, grounded in good information, guidance, and trust.

In 2020, EcoQuest embarked on a significant collaborative journey with Dr. Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal of Ngāti Whanaunga and Ngāti Tamaterā, focusing on the confluence of mātauranga Māori (indigenous knowledge) and environmental science. This partnership seeks to identify and foster areas where indigenous knowledge and modern scientific approaches intersect, aiming to create frameworks that serve both local people and their natural environments. This collaboration underscored the importance of creativity as a driving force in education, science, and research, advocating for a dedicated space where these intersections could be explored, leading to the establishment of the EcoQuest Centre for Indigeneity, Ecology, and Creativity. The Centre emerged from a shared vision that recognizes the critical role of indigenous knowledge systems and holistic approaches in reshaping our relationship with the environment. This vision is a response to the urgent need for sustainable environmental stewardship, recognizing that the wellbeing of people and the planet are inextricably linked.

As we work towards finalizing a strategic plan for EcoQuest, our partnership with the University of New Hampshire (UNH) and other key stakeholders will help guide the ongoing development of our initiatives. Core to this strategic vision is the concept of “A Conscious, Compassionate, Intercultural Learning Community.” Intercultural: We celebrate and foster the ability to interact confidently, respectfully, and successfully within diverse cultural contexts, recognizing the strength that diversity brings. At EcoQuest, we believe that these values are not only foundational to our work but are essential to addressing the complex challenges facing our global community. Through the Centre and its strategic initiatives, EcoQuest aims to cultivate a learning environment that serves as a model for sustainability, compassion, and intercultural understanding.

REVIEW LEARNER WELLBEING AND SAFETY PRACTICES

At the end of each week, we do a debrief with students and staff. This is a good opportunity to learn about how students are tracking and address any issues or concerns. At the end of the programme the students complete comprehensive feedback on the programme and staff evaluations. All the feedback from the programme is used to improve the next programme.

TRAINING

We ensure that all staff have completed the required training for their roles. For example the kitchen team and field leaders have food safety qualifications, the academics attend conferences and management completes leadership training. All of our team have completed first aid training with our pastoral care lead completing mental health first aid.

It is important that we are continuing our commitment to our staff and their professional development. Training and development is very important in all aspects of our work. We maintain a good training register on our safety manager app that alerts us when training needs to be refreshed or completed.

We have annual performance reviews with our staff where we discuss training needs and set goals for training to be completed in the next year.

EMERGENCIES

We have an Emergency Response Plan and all staff receive training on how to respond to emergencies. Staff and students are involved in emergency drills. We have emergency procedures for all relevant emergency situations and staff are trained on these.

We have a comprehensive site induction for all students and staff which includes information on emergency response.

Our General Manager has completed Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) and is a volunteer firefighter so is trained to respond to a range of emergency situations.

We use an online safety management system to record near miss/accident/incident/sickness.



OUTCOME 2: LEARNER VOICE

The relationship between EcoQuest and our students often begins long before the application process. Our full-time Director of Admissions, based at the University of New Hampshire (UNH), connects with prospective and enrolled students, sometimes up to two years before they join our program. During this time, they build relationships and rapport with students, conducting thorough interviews as part of our transparent, caring, and supportive admissions process to ensure a strong match with our residential programs.

Once students arrive at EcoQuest, we hold regular meetings, and students elect a representative who communicates directly with our student affairs coordinator. We foster a Tuakana-Teina approach, encouraging students to support one another both during program activities and in their free time. We conduct regular debrief sessions, often weekly, and offer optional end-of-program evaluations to incorporate student feedback into our planning for future programs.

Day-to-day engagement between staff and students is frequent, and we maintain regular communication with UNH. We stay informed about socio-cultural and political developments in our students' home countries to better understand and support their experiences here. Our complaints procedure is detailed in the student handbook, and our student affairs coordinator maintains close contact with students. Staff members are readily available to address concerns, referring issues to the coordinator for follow-up as needed.

EcoQuest has an excellent track record with largely positive feedback. Occasionally, we receive less favorable feedback on specific program aspects, though no official complaints have been filed. Recognizing societal shifts, such as rising anxiety levels, we take proactive steps, working closely with our Director of Admissions and the UNH-EcoQuest Program Coordinator to remain attentive to student well-being. All feedback is shared with EcoQuest staff and the UNH-EcoQuest Program Coordinator to enhance our support.

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



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

At the start of the program, field leaders facilitate a Manaakitanga session, where students collaboratively establish guidelines for living and studying together during their time here. These agreed-upon guidelines are displayed in the student lounge as a reference, with staff reinforcing them throughout the program.

In this session, we also review our drug and alcohol policy and emphasize respectful use of shared spaces. Students are prohibited from consuming alcohol during program hours, and we discuss the value of using their time here productively, prioritizing their studies.

SUPPORT LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

The core values of our organisation are manaakitanga, inclusivity, mana enhancing relationships, reciprocity and mutual support. Our programmes offer diverse learning opportunities where learners are encouraged to share their experiences and views.

EcoQuest is very well staffed, we currently have the equivalent of four full time academics who are available to provide good oversight of learner achievement and engagement. We work to understand learners needs and try and accommodate these as much as possible. We hold weekly debrief sessions to gather feedback and make adjustments where possible or necessary.



PHYSICAL SPACES

The EcoQuest campus has extensive space for recreation and leisure. We have beach access where students are welcome to go for nature-based walks. There is biking, walking and access to Kaihua Settlement which has a range of activities available. Our grounds have a garden and orchard where students are welcome to contribute to the growing of food that is utilised in our kitchen for meals.

EcoQuest has been operating in Kaihua for over twenty years now and so we have strong connections with our local community. We encourage students to use their weekends to explore and connect with our local community.

DIGITAL SPACE

We provide all students access to our online portal Sharepoint. We have this well organised so they can access their course materials as well as information on the programme and living in New Zealand.

EcoQuest is located in a rural area where we have internet accessibility issues, however, we tell students this before they arrive. Where possible we provide internet access on field trips, although some of the places we stay often do not have good internet access.

OUTCOME 4: LEARNERS ARE SAFE AND WELL

PROMOTE PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

EcoQuest has a garden on-site that students have access to and are encouraged to participate in. The garden provides fresh, healthy produce that is utilized in our kitchen for student meals. At EcoQuest we have two people employed full time in our kitchen who prepare all meals for our students. They are able to cater for a variety of dietary requirements.

PROACTIVE MONITORING

Students provide emergency contact details for designated next of kin to be informed in case of emergencies. We coordinate with UNH Global to utilize the SOS International Tracker, where students can enter their own and their next of kin's contact information. Students are also encouraged to download the SOS app, which enables them to share their location, receive real-time health and safety updates, and directly communicate with UNH Global.

In cases where there are safety or well-being concerns regarding students, we notify their next of kin. We may also reach out proactively, such as when a major event (e.g., cyclone or earthquake) occurs in Aotearoa that could draw international attention, even if our group is unaffected. We also maintain communication with the students' home universities.

At EcoQuest, students have confidential pathways to discuss health and mental health needs with staff. We have a dedicated student affairs coordinator, staff on-call during weekends and mid-semester breaks, and encourage students to reach out to any staff member with whom they feel comfortable. Information shared is managed on a need-to-know basis, and all EcoQuest staff respect confidentiality.

EcoQuest supports students who have been granted special accommodations by their home schools or those experiencing disruptions due to health or other unforeseen circumstances while participating in our program. As our programs are residential, our staff can respond quickly to assist students in strategizing and completing their coursework.



OUTCOME 05: ADDITIONAL - STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

Our student handbook outlines information on our accommodation which students are able to familiarise themselves with before they arrive. There is also information on our facilities on our website. Our US coordinator also talks to the students before they arrive to tell them about what they can expect in terms of accommodation and facilities. All the buildings and facilities at EcoQuest are owned and regularly maintained by us.

We have a team who undertakes all the maintenance work at EcoQuest. They are on-site regularly to fix anything that may break as well as doing daily cleaning. We have a process for reporting things that need to be fixed by the students. The staff also have an online safety manager app for reporting anything that requires fixing.

SUITABILITY OF STAFF IN STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

When on extended field trips students and staff may be sharing the same accommodation. Staff and students don't share rooms but share facilities in order to ensure they are looked after.

On-site students share accommodation with each other (mostly two-bedroom cabins).

LEARNING AND LIVING AT ECOQUEST

Our staff collaborate closely with students to foster a supportive learning community and a positive living environment. They provide guidance and resources to help students understand their responsibilities, including shared tasks, peer support, and embracing diversity.

We offer a robust orientation program facilitated by our dedicated staff. Both teaching and field staff actively engage with learners, frequently participating in meal preparation and sharing. These interactions create opportunities to address learners' wellbeing and safety, ensuring access to necessary community services. When required, we also provide transportation to medical and support services.

PROACTIVE MONITORING

EcoQuest has approximately fifteen staff who work from our Campus, which means we always have staff available to deal with student matters arising. We have three field leaders employed who have daily direct contact with the students. We also have a staff member on call at all times after hours. We are always available to contact via phone.

We conduct weekly debriefs with the students where they are able to raise concerns, issues or ask questions with a field leader. The students are told that they are also able to raise concerns with any staff member who they feel comfortable with.

Our students have access to a full and wide range of services and know where they can access these. We have our pastoral care lead who is available for students to access these services. Field leaders are available on a daily basis to assist students. Students have a staff number they can communicate with at all times if they need assistance.

SAFE AND INCLUSIVE RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY

EcoQuest provides in-house training on roles and responsibilities, supported by a dedicated student affairs coordinator. Emergency preparedness is prioritized with resources such as grab bags, first aid kits, vehicles for potential evacuations, and a generator for power outages.

We maintain close, daily interactions with students, sharing meals and organizing transport to ensure access to weekend destinations. On-call staff are always available, and students typically share accommodations, fostering a sense of community. In rare instances where students are isolated due to illness (e.g., COVID-19), staff conduct multiple daily check-ins, and students are encouraged to support one another.



OUTCOME 06: ACCOMMODATION ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES AND CONTRACTS

Accommodation at EcoQuest is well-maintained by our maintenance staff. We ensure that students know how to inform of any maintenance issues so they can be fixed in a timely manner. We encourage students to clean and keep tidy their individual accommodation. We have a laundry on site so that they can clean their clothes, and we also clean their bedding throughout the semester.

Rules and responsibilities of students are clearly outlined at the beginning of each semester and reinforced throughout the semester. All this information is available in the student handbook.

All the student accommodation is safe and secure. They have keys for their accommodation and can lock and keep secure their cabins. All the student common areas are lockable with a student code for access. We also have staff that live on-site and are available in the case of emergencies. There are a number of security cameras positioned around our campus.

Our staff are trained on how to manage un-wanted visitors onto our campus. We also have good relationships with our neighbours and the wider community.

OUTCOME 07: ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES AND SERVICES

EcoQuest has clean, fit for purpose accommodation for our students. Our cabins are mainly two-person accommodation to encourage students to develop good relationships with each other and so they do not feel loneliness while they are away from home. We have also a range of other communal spaces so they can integrate with the wider group. We have a communal student lounge, fitness area, study rooms, classroom, dining room, outdoor recreation spaces, garden and kitchen.

Students are expected to participate in weekly mahi (work) sessions that are an hour long in order to contribute to the running of our campus. Students help in the kitchen and garden as well as cleaning common spaces. This helps foster a sense of ownership and pride in the facilities and spaces.

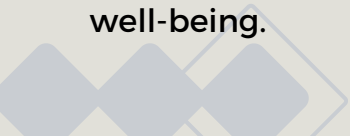
Experienced climbers are able to utilize our climbing wall. We also have hammocks and a slackline for students to use. During the first week of the programme students do an induction in the garden and are encouraged to use their free time doing activities such as weeding, harvesting and looking after the compost. Students are encouraged to explore our local area (Kaiaua) as well as the beach for recreation.

We have security cameras operating around our driveways and kitchen areas for security.

OUTCOME 08: INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS - DISTINCT WELLBEING AND SAFETY NEEDS

Having delivered our Ecology in Action Programme for over two decades now to senior students from Universities in the United States we have a good understanding of these students requirements and needs. We have a Director of Admissions with an office at UNH and put great effort into ensuring that every student who enrolls has good preparation for the programme and will be capable of coping with study abroad. Our programme is designed so that the students have plenty of opportunities to form connections with each other and develop long-lasting friendships through the fostering of healthy and caring relationships with each other, the environment and their local community.

Our staff complete an internal training module on Hauora and the Māori concept of health and how we can integrate this into how we care for students. Staff are encouraged to consider the students mental and emotional, physical, spiritual and social well-being.





OUTCOME 09: PROSPECTIVE INTERNATIONAL TERTIARY LEARNERS ARE WELL INFORMED

Students who are interested in attending the programme are able to speak to our EcoQuest Director of Admissions based in the US. They are able to have face-to-face meetings with her and have any questions answered. They are also able to access information on the programme through our website.

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

All students in our programs are enrolled at the University of New Hampshire (UNH), with our courses listed under the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture (COLSA) degree offerings. As such, the direct contractual relationship exists between UNH and the student. EcoQuest operates under a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or Service Provider Agreement (SPA) with COLSA to deliver our programs, an arrangement approved by NZQA.

Students receive an official offer of place, and UNH arranges insurance coverage for all students traveling abroad. Additionally, we require students to have trip interruption and cancellation insurance. All students fulfill their entry requirements with Immigration New Zealand, which is notified in the rare case of a student not completing the program. Details regarding enrollment dates, grounds for termination, roles and responsibilities, rules, withdrawal, refund conditions, and disciplinary procedures are outlined in the student handbook, provided at the time of the offer of place. Withdrawal and refunds are managed in alignment with the fee protection conditions approved by NZQA and specified in our MOA/SPA with COLSA.



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

All students have received information on the programme before arriving as well as having numerous meetings with our staff in the US. When students arrive our campus, we have a powhiri and officially welcome them to our programme. We also have a full week of orientation activities, so they have a good understanding of our programme, campus, staff, location and the wider community in which EcoQuest is located. They are given access to our online portal where they can access all the information relevant to the programme and for their time in Aotearoa.

OUTCOME 12: SAFETY AND APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION OF INTERNATIONAL TERTIARY LEARNERS

Our staff undertake a range of different internal and external training in order to provide a safe learning environment for our students. All our staff are first aid trained and our pastoral care lead has current mental health first aid training. Our team have completed internal training modules on the Pastoral Care Code of Practice.