

Wanaka Helicopters

2023

Self-review Public Summary

NZQA Code of Pastoral Care of
Domestic and International Students



What is this document?

Wanaka Helicopters Limited (WHL) has proudly been a signatory to the Code of Pastoral Care of Students practices from the start of the Diploma programme (2009). “The Code” contains a number of outcomes that the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) provides guidance on to establish a national strategy and support our domestic and international tertiary learners. Each signatory annually reviews the outcomes, which change from time to time, and compares their systems and policies with them. The Code lead staff member, our Academic Coordinator (AC) in this case, then makes observations on the adequacy of existing practices after reviewing evidence and makes recommendations for remediation or improvements where necessary. These reviews may also form part of our three-yearly External Evaluation Review where NZQA meets with our school’s staff, audits our documentation, and generally ensures that they can continue to have the high confidence that WHL accurately reports on its academic and financial performance. The annual self-review of the training programmes is a bulky collection of documents and online quality management systems and processes (especially in aviation!) including confidential learner and staff meeting minutes. lengthy series of documents which refers to a lot of internal procedures and meeting minutes. This document provides a higher-level, short summary of the AC’s reporting which can be released publicly without compromising any individual or organisation’s rights to privacy.

Outcomes 1-4 are established for all tertiary providers. Outcomes 5-7 are only for those providers who also have student accommodation. Since WHL doesn’t provide student accommodation, those outcomes are largely not addressed. Outcomes 8-12 are for providers enrolling international students. International students represent a very small proportion of our trainees so these outcomes are addressed, but briefly.

The self-review results in a synthetic achievement rating by the AC according to NZQA guidance publications for each outcome as:

- Well implemented
- Implemented
- Developing
- Early stages

Table of Contents

What is this document?	2
Table of Contents	3
Summary	4
Tertiary Education Organisation (TEO)	4
Code Contact Person	4
2023 Current Enrolments (as of 7 Nov)	4
Historical Achievements	4
Outcome 1	5
Physical Safety	5
Well-being	5
Well implemented	5
Recommendations	5
Outcome 2	7
Well implemented	7
Recommendations	7
Outcome 3	8
Well implemented	9
Recommendations	9
Outcome 4	10
Well implemented	11
Recommendations	11
Outcomes 5-7	12
Outcome 8	13
Well implemented	14
Recommendations	14
Outcomes 9-11	15
Well implemented	16
Recommendations	16
Outcome 12	16
Well implemented	17
Recommendations	17

Cover Photo: 2023 Cohort of NZ3688 (Rotary and Fixed Wing)

Summary

Tertiary Education Organisation (TEO)

Wanaka Helicopters Limited (Also known as Wanaka Helicopters, WHL, Wanaka Helicopters Flight Training, WHFT), Aeroplane operations are directed by WHL and conducted by wholly-owned affiliate company trading as Learn to Fly NZ (LTF).

Ministry of Education (MoE) Number 7826

Organisation CEO: Peter Spencer-Bower, CEO
Operating with advice from the WHL Board

Code Contact Person

Name and role: Brian Paavo, PhD
(Also Report Author) Academic Coordinator (AC)
Phone: +64 3 443 1085
Email address: brian.paavo@whft.ac.nz

2023 Current Enrolments (as of 7 Nov)

Domestic (including Australian): 16 (all 18 years or older) enrolled in Qualification
> 23 in Training Schemes
International: 0 enrolled in Qualification
>6 in Training Schemes

Historical Achievements

PPLH Achievements: 431
CPLH Achievement: 280
PPLA Achievements: 8
CPLA Achievements: 1
Qualification Achievements (NZ1706 or NZ3688): 50

Outcome 1

A learner wellbeing and safety system

Physical Safety

As an aviation school, 'physical safety' is always front-and-centre of every operation. We know that we provide a safe environment due to our bi-monthly report provided by our Safety Management System Officer (meetings minuted) indicating nothing more than rare, minor injuries (of a band-aid nature) have occurred. Annual safety analysis reporting did not find any recurring issues or problem areas. This tells us that our induction procedures, safety culture, and safety-first modeling by staff and senior students is working as intended on the flight line and in other operational areas. Our curriculum which includes risk-management, safety systems, first aid, dangerous goods handling, and decision making probably also help instill practical work safety habits as shown in classroom discussions and even in student reports addressing school environment hazards. We believe that our students are at greater risk on the motorway to school than at school or in the air.

Well-being

A satisfactory system of ensuring student wellbeing is a more nebulous goal. As a small, family-run organisation with open-door policies among staff straight to Director level and a full-time student advocate (AC), our systems appear to be robust. In past years events including personal intervention, voluntary reduction of flight stress periods, individual scheduling, additional study assistance, discounted remedial classes, and other individualised interventions indicate that monitoring is working and students usually reach for assistance where necessary. Documented observations of trainee well-being and offers of support and intervention have occurred in the past year. Graduate surveys continue to indicate that trainees feel safe and supported during study. These observations indicate that staff, especially instructors, are seeking and receiving workplace assistance to aid learners experiencing troubles. As learners are all adults, however, staff must respect individual coping mechanisms and choices unless they are reasonably likely to impact flight safety. The instructor logs and training meetings (minuted) are additional formal systems to help achieve responsible balance. This is all on top of the formal CAA Medical Certificate system required of all trainees and which includes mental health parameters and assessments.

Well implemented

Recommendations

No significant gaps were found in learner well-being and safety systems that we, as providers, feel we can improve. Stresses associated with the high-cost of flight training and

accommodation security seem to be principal concerns. Accommodation insecurity and training unaffordability are an increasing threats. WHL, the Aviation Industry Representatives (AviationNZ), and other Training organisations have actively lobbied government agencies for several years to take remedial measures including supporting accommodation subsidy increases, support school accommodation initiatives, recognising cost differences between helicopter and fixed-wing training, linking student allowance to cost-of-living instead of one-off arbitrary policy amounts, and revising student loan caps (fixed since 2013). There has been no improvement in MoE, TEC, StudyLink provision and the high-staff turnover rate in those agencies confounds strong relationship building.

“While the Ministry received and noted seven submissions regarding the aviation student loan cap, the Ministry did not actively discuss changing the cap [in 2023].”

–James Campbell, Senior Policy Manager Ministry of Education



Figure 1. Students undertaking Helicopter Underwater Escape Training which improves their survivability in a real-world incident by 60%. This exercise (where they are forced underwater, flipped upside down) is overseen by an instructor, two safety divers, and you can notice emergency releases for all doors and seatbelts on the side of the training device.

Outcome 2

Learner voice

The staff student ratio remains approximately 1.5:1 effectively ensuring that each learner has ready access to individuals at every level of the organisation and their voice is consistently heard and heeded in every day operations as seen in our constantly evolving student handbook (a controlled document) and weekly briefs with each cohort. Student feedback (each course), the lack of formal group concerns unresolved by Trainee Management Team meetings (TMT) (1 'notification' event in the past 5 years), and the low-level of student-driven problems is an indication of an effective student voice structure. While each instructor can review past course feedback during their preparation for delivery phase, the feedback is annually summarised and presented to management. The AC also reports to the board quarterly to escalate student voice issues if they are not resolved by staff or management.

As our handbook explains there are formal complaint and mediation services available to students and contacts are provided to learners for each of our major stakeholder's complaints (CAA, StudyLink, TEC, MoE, NZQA most prominently). We have had conversations, but no mediation has been required nor escalated to the national system. Three to six times per year (semi-regular due to feedback from student-elected cohort representatives) WHL holds TMT meetings (minuted and distributed to all learners) where representatives add to the standing agenda and ask questions, management also provides announcements and asks after group concerns. Finally our annual graduate surveys provide feedback (where there is no longer a concern about academic anonymity) about student engagement in their own training plan and responses are overwhelmingly supportive of current procedures.

Well implemented

Recommendations

After delivering the Diploma for more than eight years and flight training for more than 42, the organisation seems to have robust learner-input systems. No significant gaps were identified. The greatest threats include static course requirements (NZQA credits) in a rapidly-changing industry with more and increasing number of learning and compliance steps which are not funded by the national system, but are expected by employers in the Graduate Outcomes profile. For example, NZQA does not support Crew Resource Management nor First Aid in programmes, but all NZ/Australian employers expect the former and are required by law to have the latter. Students are not able to individualise training options (e.g. aircraft type) and training progressions (e.g. post-qualification pathways) due to national minimum-experience requirements expectations by NZQA and MoE.



Figure 2. Student conducting a fire-bucket sling operation with a two-seat trainer (Robinson R22)

Outcome 3

Safe, inclusive, supportive, and accessible physical and digital learning environments

Aviation is an unusual learning environment compared to most tertiary education situations. Physical safety is well-looked after in this risk-intolerant industry and managed primarily according to CAA regulations (most specifically Rule/AC100 Safety Management Systems) and our obligations under Workplace Health and Safety Regulations (also managed by NZ CAA in flight situations). WHL is a certificated Air Operator with an excellent safety record. What is most unusual about aviation is that our learners undergo extensive screening prior to enrolment which specifically excludes candidates with physical, mental, developmental, or learning characteristics contra-indicated to safely acting as the Pilot in Command of an aircraft with passengers on board. This is most obvious in each Class 01 Medical Certificate issuance, but supported by ongoing assessment. While our offices, hangar, and classrooms are wheelchair accessible, that is for other events and passengers, our learners must all be fully able-bodied and in a fit mental state for flight.

Each course does have digital learning components using our online learning and assessment system, Moodle, but all classes are normally held in-person. Our course materials are made readily available to NZQA/Ringa Hora inspections and assessments are annually available for audit, though formal consistency review process was fraught in 2023. Ringa Hora staff were unable to produce industry-wide pre-moderation documentation,

were not familiar with subject matter or assessment methods, and could not assist with external moderation requests. Continued development and regular review of course materials indicate that each course clearly lays out expectations in course syllabi, assessment standards in rubrics (in advance), and formative assessment opportunities prior to summative assessments.

Each Moodle course has a student feedback module. Summatively open-ended comments are productive, and usually highlight small improvements readily integrated into future deliveries and/or praise for the instructors, but the supportive comments indicate success in digital learning. This is most telling in the large number of 'strongly agree' responses to the questions in each course 'The course helped me do better on the Aspeq exam than I likely would have done on my own' and 'The course content was relevant to my career intentions.'

Inclusivity is a difficult aspect to build into a course. The costs of helicopter training are so high that almost all underrepresented groups are at a historical and inherited wealth disadvantage to even beginning training. WHL provides \$10,000 (helicopter) and \$4,000 (aeroplane) scholarships for at least one NZ Māori/Pasifika each intake. WHL Women in Aviation Scholarships, \$5000 for helicopter and \$2000 for fixed wing, also seek to communicate our inclusiveness as well as help address the industry's pilot gender disparity. These seem to be working as our applicant pool has become more diverse and several candidates have mentioned, even during private flight training planning, that they came to WHL because of the message communicated even though they were not individually eligible for the scholarship.

Well implemented

Recommendations

The physical and digital environments are producing good pilots with a high first-attempt pass-rate at flight tests (98%) and an extremely low in-year failure or withdrawal rate (<5%). First-attempt (theory) pass rates significantly exceed national rates (usually by 20% or more in scores). No significant gaps were identified in existing systems. We should continue to request that governmental agencies match WHL inclusivity initiatives dollar for dollar, but they have so far declined. We should continue to advocate for more accountability to national oversight by private assessment company Aspeq and encourage moderation and graduate outcome consistency improvements by Ringa Hora and NZQA for improved, provide pre-moderation and external documentation procedures and provide evidence of a cohesive, sector-wide pre-moderation standard.



Figure 3. 2023 Diploma trainees participate in peer-exercise integrating rotary (VR, left), instructor/ATC (centre), and aeroplane (right) traffic in newly operational simulator suite.

Outcome 4

Learners are safe and well during study

This particular outcome is distinguished from Outcome 1 where the focus is on systems, however the evidence reviewed overlaps. Ultimately the present safety and wellbeing of our learners is managed according to monitoring and self-reporting rules required by Aviation Medical Certificate holders. In addition to these we have ongoing monitoring of core health through the system mentioned above and attendance as a gross measure. All learners are required to scan in when coming onto the premises since the operations environment is a core part of our education programme. In-person classes also have attendance recording modules (within Moodle). Additionally, we encourage the majority of learners to live with other learners during terms in self-arranged housing. All flights are followed by Front-of-House staff and electronic trackers. As a consequence, it is rare that we don't know a student's whereabouts and general health every weekday during term. The flight-following culture has also cultivated a practice of students notifying staff if absent (for flight or ground study). It is very unlikely a student could be unwell and alone for more than 48 hours without having had one or more interventions or notifications.

Well implemented

Recommendations

We have confidence in our ability to directly or indirectly learn if a trainee is unwell. In each of the few past instances, intervention and support services were activated quickly and accessed from different levels within the organisation. This continued to be the case in 2023. Support was triggered by bereavement and study-related stressors. The AC recommends continued operations as established with an eye toward learning of potential improvements when any future events reveal a gap in the system.



Figure 4. Trainees who feel safe, but challenged, and who live in an atmosphere of looking after each other is an essential part of a good learning environment. Academic minima COULD be achieved in the immediate vicinity of aerodromes, however, preparing trainees for the weather, terrain, and logistical challenges of the real operational area, here in the Southern Alps, is an investment in future well being and safety for themselves, their passengers, and cargo.

Outcomes 5-7

Student Accommodation

Outcomes 5-7 are only for those providers who also have student accommodation. Since WHL doesn't provide student accommodation, those outcomes are not addressed in any significant manner. However, WHL recognises the national shortage of affordable student accommodation, especially in Central Otago where median house prices are currently 14 times the median adult annual salary. Further, student allowance accommodation subsidies remain woefully inadequate. The amount has remained static for several years and at an unacceptable rate (Wānaka is rural by the current classification system). Subsidies <\$100/wk contrast with rooms in shared houses carrying a market price of about \$195/wk PLUS utilities, grocery, and transport costs. According to graduate surveys, most students receive about \$220/wk in TOTAL aid. The school has made significant investments in property with the express aim of supporting students with housing in a volatile local market, especially the most vulnerable (first years relocating from significant distances). Our application for funding (TEC to match \$1 for every \$16 we provided) was declined. We hope to bring student accommodation, at least for the first year, into being as soon as practicable.

To support our learners insofar as we are able, offer letters are sent out in October and November to help students with planning for mid-January start of classes. All candidates accepting placements are given school email addresses and then connected to each other via this and social media channels with senior (2nd year) students. They and staff invite the new trainees into closed local social media groups which contain the majority of available housing stocks. WHL also cultivates several 'Helicopter Houses' in the area. Landlords and agencies who have appreciated our long-term (1-2 year), well-behaved students as tenants often pass the property onto the next year's students.



Figure 5. The few international learners we have had take advantage of our family-business culture and our support of local 'helicopter houses' to also experience immersion in Kiwi culture. Here students gather in a historic Canterbury farm sharing meals and preparations for night flying lessons through controlled airspace at Christchurch International Airport and experiencing rural vs urban flight situations.

Outcome 8

Responding to the distinct wellbeing and safety needs of international tertiary learners

International trainees have special needs and corresponding requirements before taking on the time, financial, and personal responsibility commitments flight training involves. There are two handbooks for training, one for students enrolled in the entire qualification (NZ3688) and one for trainees undertaking part-time study or studying under a specific programme (as required by Immigration), training scheme (future micro-credential). Both handbooks include a section specifically addressing international trainee needs and general information about NZ customs, laws, and norms.

The AC is responsible for communicating several times with each candidate, collecting evidence, and composing the letter of offer. Often this is in coordination with a delegate of MBIE who holds a liaison position with NZ Immigration. All international learners must show evidence of academic ability to undertake training (usually transcripts or prior flight theory training), and English Proficiency (all pilots must be able to speak English as a flight requirement in any country). Those who speak English as a first language

from NZ, Australia, The United States, The United Kingdom, South Africa, and Canada are not required to produce formal testing prior to enrolment, all others are.

Additionally, trainees must demonstrate a financial ability to achieve in training by depositing funds (corresponding to the offer letter and for courses registered on STEO) into a Student Fee-Protect Public Trust for maximum transparency in financial dealings (which are audited annually). Finally all international students must carry personal health insurance valid for the entire flight training period. The policies are required to provide for at least \$250,000 in-country health care and complete coverage of medical evacuation to home country if it becomes necessary. Two national student insurance organisations; Southern Cross and StudentSafe, provide affordable options to our international trainees under an exception of their standard policy (which otherwise excludes flight crew) through a Memorandum of Understanding. A recent internal audit (pre-saging our external audit) of our international learners found no gaps in our required documentation. In the past year, one trainee made a recommendation to provide more in-depth information on costs-related to post-achievement study, but otherwise no issues arose regarding cost-inclusion improvements recommended in 2022.

Well implemented

Recommendations

Improve the user interface of our Student Management System for staff undertaking enrolments and produce a more in-depth induction tool for them. This should take place in conjunction with mandated (2024/25) changes in enrolment forms and reporting (primarily SDR) requirements from TEC/NZQA.



Figure 6. Though WHL primarily trains NZ Domestic learners, we are proud to have trained pilots from each of these countries in the recent past lending a surprisingly international culture for such a small school.

Outcomes 9-11

Prospective international tertiary learners are well informed, Offers, enrolments, contracts, insurance, and visa requirements are properly obtained, and learners receive appropriate information and advice.

Because language barriers are heavily mitigated if not entirely removed by the requirements of aviation training, the principal barrier to candidates prior to making a study commitment are our marketing materials. To ensure that correct and timely information is provided without any up-front costs to international learners we do NOT engage any international agents. All prospective trainees receive student handbooks, training agreements, formal offers of placement for Immigration, insurance quotations, and fees associated with training in the prospectus (see online at: <https://wanakahelicopters.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/tt-diploma-in-aviation-2023-course-info.pdf>). Unfortunately the biggest unknowns experienced by international (pragmatically the situation is similar for domestic trainees) are the requirements of the CAA syllabi. While references and links to these syllabi are made available, most trainees do not have the technical knowledge prior to training to fully understand and appreciate them in full detail. A recent internal audit of international enquiries (collated in our Customer Relationship Management software) indicates that all international enquiries of the last year progressing past the initial enquiry stage, received the information mentioned above.

Well implemented

Recommendations

No breaches of policy and no significant information gaps were identified in our review. As mentioned for the outcomes above, the only recommended action is continued personal engagement relating to international course costs and career progression.



Figure 7. For most of our students becoming a pilot is the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. Whether from the North Island or overseas, learning in the Central Otago environment with its expansive landscapes, challenging weather, and varied airspaces remains a special treat with exceptional career advantages.

Outcome 12

Safety and appropriate supervision of international tertiary learners

This outcome would be an essential and separate consideration in many tertiary environments, however the aviation training has intrinsic requirements. All inductions are carried out one-on-one with instructors, documented, and audited by -often redundant- compliance mechanisms for CAA and NZQA. All incoming learners, international or domestic, undertake a 3-day orientation programme, but receive further induction training

throughout the two-year programme as they encounter new operations. All flight instruction is done one-on-one, of course. All classroom instruction is conducted via small group discussions with an instructor, there are no large-group lectures. Instructors (who meet monthly and maintain instructor logs of individual student progress) maintain constant situational awareness of each student's progress. These 'background' processes are further augmented by weekly cohort meetings where each small group (up to 7) meets with a flight instructor, reviews progress, plans the coming week, and any gaps are identified and dealt with.

Well implemented

Recommendations

With one-on-one instruction the norm at WHL, supervision and safety practices are solidly in place and no significant gaps have been identified.



Figure 8. Students meet with flight instructor Che' Freese in an early-morning session to discuss the week's flights and flight-study progress reporting, a weekly event during term before the full day of courses, ground and air, take-off.