



**Social Workers
Registration Board**
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

**Annual Social Work
Education Report 2022**

A high-level overview of
Aotearoa New Zealand social work education programmes
for the 2022 academic year

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He ara pūkenga, he ara tauwhiro, hei whakamana mātā waka

*The many pathways of knowledge, the many pathways of social
work, upholding the dignity of all*

1. Introduction

This Annual Social Work Education Report summarises information collected by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) from tertiary education providers who deliver SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications.

As the regulator of the social work profession, the SWRB is required to ensure that registered social workers are competent and safe to practise. There are two ways we do this in education: setting standards in education, and prescribing qualifications for the purpose of registration under the General Scope of Practice. You can read more about our regulatory role in Appendix 1.

This Report includes information about social work ākonga¹ enrolments, completion of social work qualifications and field education placements ('work-based learning') in the 2022 academic year. Trends in enrolments and across other variables have also been included where available.

This Report forms part of the SWRB's suite of evidence and insights into trends and patterns relating to the social work workforce across Aotearoa New Zealand. The findings from this report inform and support the SWRB's wider role as lead agency for workforce planning for all social workers, and in particular the New Zealand-approved qualification pathway to registration and entry into the social work profession. The Report sits alongside other publications such as the SWRB's Annual Workforce Survey report².

¹ Ākonga is used throughout this report to describe students, learners, pupils or taura.

² <https://swrb.govt.nz/building-sustainable-workforce/>

2. Headline findings

These headline findings are compiled for the 18 tertiary education providers who delivered SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications for the 2022 academic year. All 18 offered undergraduate (level 7) social work qualifications, and four institutions offered postgraduate (levels 8-9) social work qualifications.

The two key findings from this report are:

- Social work ākonga numbers continue to fall, and
- The attrition rate for social work courses – the rate of ākonga leaving before completion – is almost 50%.

Ākonga enrolment

- There has been a reduction in the number of social work ākonga enrolled in the 2022 academic year with a total of 2,793 ākonga (compared with 3,059 in 2021). This represents a 9% drop in overall enrolment between 2021 and 2022, and is the lowest enrolment number since 2013.
- There has been an increase across all year levels in the proportion of ākonga studying on a part-time basis.

Ākonga demographics

- The percentage of ākonga identifying as female has remained constant at 85%, and 14% identify as male. Fewer than 1% ākonga identify as another gender.
- The largest age groups for ākonga were 24 or younger (30%) and 30–39 years old (26%). This trend was similar to the results for the previous 2021 academic year. This shows while many ākonga start their social work journey straight from school, a significant proportion return to education after gaining life experience.
- The proportion of ākonga who identify as Māori has remained steady in recent years, and the proportion who identify as Pacific Peoples has increased. However, the overall number of ākonga who identify as Māori has decreased in line with the decline in total ākonga numbers.

Retention, course completion and registering with the SWRB

- The attrition rate from undergraduate social work courses – the rate of people leaving before completion – remains around 46%.
- The number of ākonga completing their social work qualification has remained constant in 2022 (462 in total, compared with 465 in 2021).
- Of those who complete a social work qualification, 18% do not go on to register with the SWRB the following year. This figure is based on the four-year average to 2022.
- Two-thirds of ākonga undertook placements in non-government organisations (NGOs, 69%), and a third in government agencies (31%). Fifteen percent of placements took place in Māori/iwi-based organisations. Within government agencies, Oranga Tamariki provided 18% of placements, Te Whatu Ora/Te Aka Whai Ora provided 14%, Corrections 3%, and other government agencies provided 2% of placements.

3. Data collection method

In August 2023, the SWRB contacted programme leads for all 18 tertiary education providers that offered a SWRB-prescribed social work qualification in 2022. Providers were asked to complete a PDF form with data from the 2022 academic year, allowing sufficient time to collate enrolment and completion data. The closing date for data collection was October 2023. Completed forms were received from 17 of the 18 providers. Proxy data for Unitec, the education institute that did not respond, were provided by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) in order to calculate aggregated totals in this report.

Aggregated and institution-level enrolment data were cross-checked against TEC information for the 2022 academic year. The SWRB acknowledges some differences in data collation and definitions that can pose challenges for direct comparisons. We also understand that ākonga may be counted more than once across different institutions within a given academic year. These limitations have been noted where relevant in this report.

4. Detailed findings

4.1 Ākonga enrolled in prescribed social work qualifications

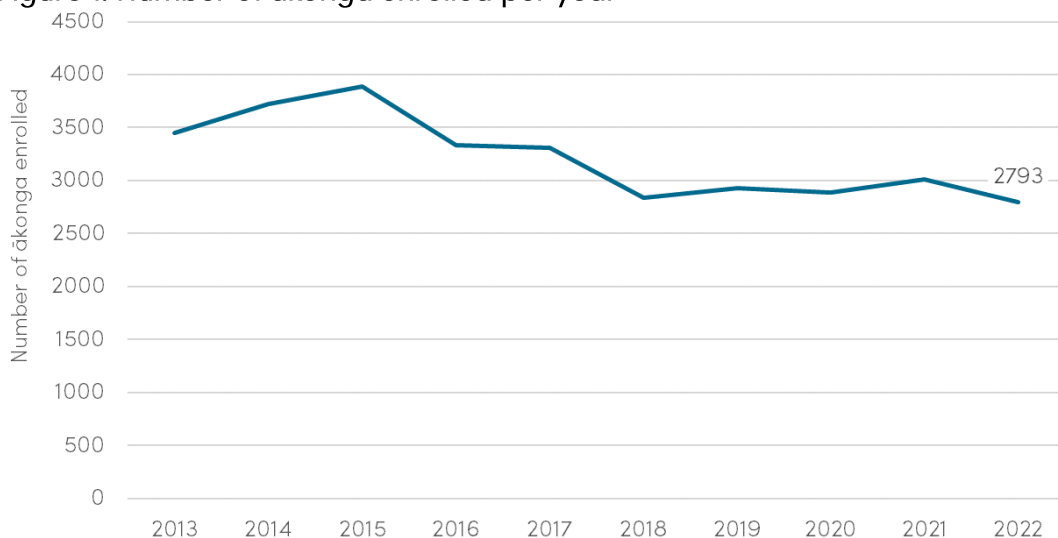
For the 2022 academic year, 18 tertiary education providers offered a Bachelor's (level 7) qualification in social work (four of these include an Honours/level 8 designation). Four of the 18 providers also offered a Master's (level 9) qualification in social work ('Applied' or 'Professional'). This is the same as the previous year.

When grouped by Tertiary Education Organisation (TEO) type, ten institutions were Te Pūkenga – New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology (55%); five were universities (28%); two were wānanga (11%) and one was a private training establishment (6%). Both wānanga emphasise the matauranga Māori focus of their programmes in the qualification title, *Ngā Poutoko Whakarara Oranga: Bachelor of Bicultural Social Work* and *Poutuarongo Toiora Whānau*.

Total number of ākonga enrolled

In the 2022 academic year, providers reported a total of 2,793 ākonga enrolled in social work courses across New Zealand. This number has declined from 2021 when there were 3,059 ākonga enrolled. This represents a 9% drop in overall ākonga enrolment between 2021 and 2022. The most recent enrolment total is the lowest seen since 2013.

Figure 1. Number of ākonga enrolled per year



As shown in Figure 1 above, there was a significant decline in the number of ākonga enrolling into social work courses between 2015 and 2018. This may reflect the changes made to prescribed social work degrees from three to four-year degree programmes, and changes to the ākonga allowance entitlements.

Table 1 below shows ākonga numbers by institution, and the relative change in enrolments since the previous academic year. Massey University had the largest number of ākonga, with 528 ākonga enrolled in a social work programme in the 2022 academic year.

In 2022, four institutes reported increases in the number of ākonga enrolled in social work programmes (Table 1), compared to nine with an increase in 2021. The remaining institutions reported a reduction in enrolments that ranged from 7% to 57%.

Table 1. Number of ākonga enrolled in each institution

Institution	Enrolled Ākonga 2021	Enrolled Ākonga 2022	Percentage of all ākonga 2022	Percentage change in enrolment
Ara Institute of Canterbury	112	91	3%	19% ↓
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	45	46	2%	2% ↑
Eastern Institute of Technology	93	97	3%	4% ↑
Manukau Institute of Technology	260	297	11%	14% ↑
Massey University ³	620	528	19%	15% ↓
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	68	63	2%	7% ↓
NorthTec	87	80	3%	8% ↓
Open Polytechnic	158	143	5%	9% ↓
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	369	343	12%	7% ↓
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	67	56	2%	16% ↓
The University of Auckland	245	229	8%	7% ↓
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	75	32	1%	57% ↓
Unitec ⁴	200	196	7%	2% ↓
University of Canterbury	260	225	8%	13% ↓
University of Otago	124	141	5%	14% ↑
University of Waikato	64	39	1%	39% ↓
Wintec	92	81	3%	12% ↓
Whitireia	120	106	4%	12% ↓
TOTAL	3,059	2,793		

Table 2 below shows the delivery location of social work programmes reported by each education provider, in descending order of the proportion of all social work ākonga at the institution.

³ 2021 data for Massey University enrolments were provided by the Tertiary Education Commission

⁴ 2022 data for Unitec enrolments were provided by the Tertiary Education Commission

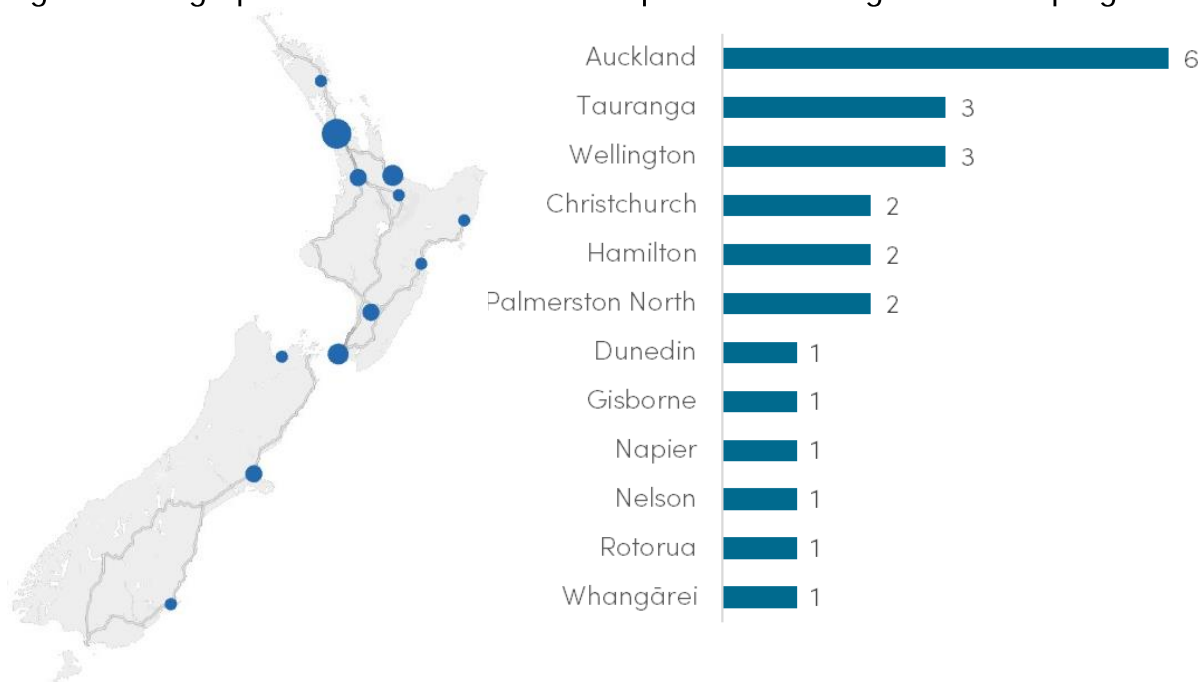
Table 2. Delivery location of education provider institutions

Institution	Delivery location(s) for social work programmes	% of all ākonga in 2022
Massey University	Palmerston North; Albany, Auckland; distance/online learning	19%
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	Mangakōtukutuku (Hamilton), Tukarere (Tauranga), Māngere (Auckland), Papaiōea (Palmerston North)	12%
Manukau Institute of Technology	Auckland	11%
University of Auckland	Auckland	8%
University of Canterbury	Christchurch; distance/online learning	8%
Unitec New Zealand	Auckland	7%*
Open Polytechnic	Nationwide; distance/online learning	5%
University of Otago	Dunedin	5%
Whitireia Polytechnic	Porirua	4%
Eastern Institute of Technology	Napier, Gisborne	3%
Ara Institute of Canterbury	Christchurch	3%
Wintec	Hamilton	3%
NorthTec	Whangārei	3%
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	Nelson	2%
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	Otaki; Manukau, Auckland	2%
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	Tauranga	2%
University of Waikato	Tauranga	1%
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	Rotorua	1%

The geographic distribution of education provider campuses has been plotted on the map in Figure 2 below, however this cannot be used as a direct proxy for the geographic location of ākonga (especially for those enrolled in distance/remote learning programmes, and with the increase in online learning options at the tertiary level).

* 2022 data for Unitec enrolments were provided by the Tertiary Education Commission

Figure 2. Geographic distribution of education providers offering social work programmes



Number of ākonga enrolled full-time and part-time, by year level

In 2022 there was a reduction in full-time ākonga enrolled into first year courses when compared to 2021. The number of first year ākonga studying part time has also reduced. However, the total number and proportion of undergraduate ākonga (level 7) who study part time has increased between 2021 and 2022 (20% to 28% of all ākonga studying part time, respectively). This increase in the proportion of ākonga studying part time is seen across all year levels within the undergraduate (level 7) programme. The institutions with the highest proportion of undergraduate (level 7) ākonga studying part-time were Open Polytechnic (69%), Manukau Institute of Technology (47%) and Massey University (45%).

Table 3. Number of part-time and full-time undergraduate ākonga 2022

Year level	Full-time ākonga 2021	Part-time ākonga 2021	Ākonga who are part-time 2021 %	Full-time ākonga 2022	Part-time ākonga 2022	Ākonga who are part-time 2022 %
Year 1	883	222	20%	528	186	26%
Year 2	507	126	20%	466	192	29%
Year 3	399	98	20%	350	127	27%
Year 4	395	106	21%	338	141	29%
Totals	2184	552	20%	1682*	646*	28%

In 2022, four institutions offered a master's (level 9) qualification in social work: Massey University ('Applied'), the University of Auckland ('Professional'), University of Canterbury ('Applied'), and the University of Otago (Social and Community Work). Postgraduate ākonga made up 9% of all enrolled ākonga in the 2022 academic year (265 out of 2,793 ākonga). The proportion of ākonga enrolled in a postgraduate (level 9) master's programme in social work has declined slightly from 11% in 2021.

Table 4. Number of part-time and full-time postgraduate ākonga 2022

Year level	Full-time ākonga 2021	Part-time ākonga 2021	Ākonga who are part-time 2021 %	Full-time ākonga 2022	Part-time ākonga 2022	Ākonga who are part-time 2022 %
Postgraduate year 1	102	50	33%	55	67	55%
Postgraduate year 2	80	96	55%	90	53	37%
Totals	182	146	45%	145*	120*	45%

*Data for Unitec provided by Tertiary Education Commission was not available by year level or full-time/part-time status, resulting in a slight undercount for 2022 totals.

4.2 Ākonga demographics

This section gives an overview of the demographic characteristics of ākonga in social work programmes, including gender, age, ethnicity and disability.

Gender of enrolled ākonga

The gender breakdown of enrolled ākonga has remained the same between 2021 and 2022. The gender distribution of ākonga mirrors that of registered and practising social workers for the 2022/23 period (85% and 84% female, respectively).

Table 5. Gender of enrolled ākonga

Gender	2021 Number	2021 %	2022 Number*	2022 %
Male	452	15%	369	14%
Female	2548	84%	2208	85%
Another gender	10	<1%	20	<1%
Not identified	4	<1%	9	<1%

Age of enrolled ākonga

The most common age group of enrolled ākonga was 24 or younger. The next largest age group was 30–39 years of age, who made up a quarter of the enrolled ākonga cohort. The age distribution of enrolled ākonga has remained constant between 2021 and 2022.

Table 6. Age of enrolled ākonga

Age	2021 Number	2021 %	2022 Number*	2022 %
24 or younger	970	32%	756	30%
25-29	530	18%	498	20%
30-39	724	25%	662	26%
40-49	503	17%	419	17%
50-59	213	7%	161	6%
60 or older	15	<1%	16	1%

* Data for Unitec provided by Tertiary Education Commission was not available at the level of gender, age or ethnicity, resulting in a slight undercount for 2022 totals.

Ethnicity of enrolled ākonga

The majority of education providers collect information about ethnicity in a way that allows ākonga to identify with multiple ethnic groups. As a result, individuals may be counted more than once across different ethnic groups ('total ethnicity'). Therefore, adding the number of ākonga by ethnicity will total to more than the actual number of ākonga. The ethnic distribution of ākonga reported here has been cross-checked against 2022 data from the Tertiary Education Commission, and closely aligns with their findings.

Over a quarter of ākonga in the 2022 academic year identified as Māori (27%), and a slightly lower proportion identified as Pacific Peoples (23%). Almost half of all ākonga identify as NZ European/Pākehā (47%), and six percent identify as Asian.

At the time of this data collection in mid-2023, 24% of the practising workforce of social workers in New Zealand identified as Māori, and 12% identified as Pacific Peoples. This is a useful comparison to the trends seen for ākonga enrolled in social work qualifications.

Table 7. Ethnicity distribution of enrolled ākonga

Ethnicity	2021 Number	2021 %	2022 Number*	2022 %
NZ Māori	908	27%	766	27%
NZ European/Pākehā	1392	41%	1308	47%
Pacific Peoples	659	19%	656	23%
European	132	4%	125	4%
Asian	170	5%	165	6%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	52	2%	56	2%
Other	67	2%	79	3%

* Data for Unitec provided by Tertiary Education Commission was not available at the level of gender, age or ethnicity, resulting in a slight undercount for 2022 totals.

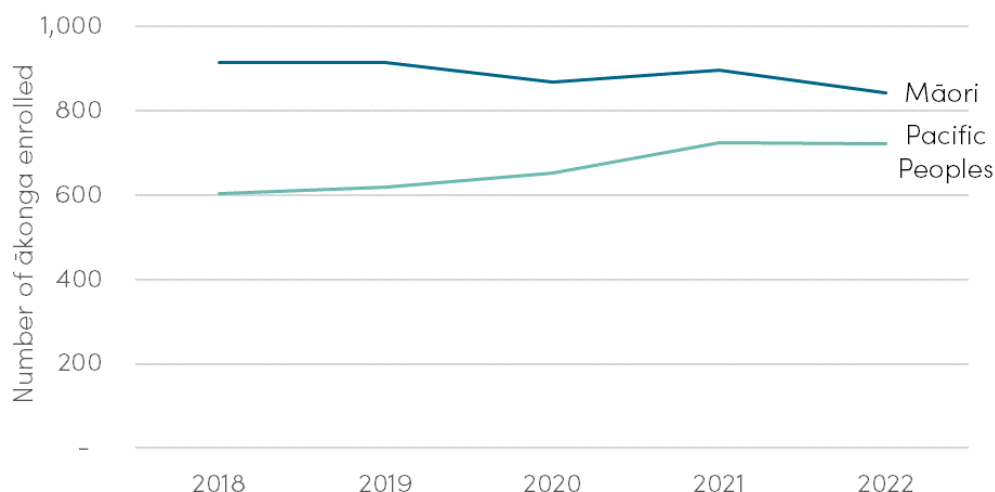
The table below shows the ethnicity distribution of enrolled ākonga in 2022 by educational institution. There was some variation in the way that different organisations collate detailed ethnicity categories for ākonga identifying as Pacific Peoples. Therefore, these numbers should be interpreted with care.

Table 8. Ethnicity distribution of enrolled ākonga, by institution

Institution	Total enrolled 2022	% of ākonga who identify as Māori 2022	% of ākonga who identify as Pacific Peoples 2022
Massey University	528	22%	14%
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	343	57%	44%
Manukau Institute of Technology	297	20%	57%
University of Auckland	229	10%	51%
University of Canterbury	225	12%	10%
Unitec New Zealand	196	Data not provided	Data not provided
Open Polytechnic	143	23%	10%
University of Otago	141	21%	8%
Whitireia Polytechnic	106	30%	44%
Eastern Institute of Technology	97	51%	6%
Ara Institute of Canterbury	91	25%	12%
Wintec	81	37%	10%
NorthTec	80	55%	8%
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	63	24%	3%
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	56	89%	14%
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	46	33%	0%
University of Waikato	39	31%	18%
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	32	28%	0%

Due to Unitec not responding to the SWRB data request with specific information for their institution, aggregated data from the Tertiary Education Commission have been used for the trend chart below. While the overall number of ākonga who identify as Māori appears to be declining, the proportion of all ākonga who identify as Māori has stayed constant at around 30% since 2018. This is because total ākonga numbers are also declining. The proportion of ākonga who identify as Pacific Peoples has increased slightly from 21% to 25% between the 2018 and 2022 academic years.

Figure 3. Changes in ākonga ethnicities over time – 2018 to 2022



Information about disabilities

The SWRB added a new question for the 2022 academic year, asking education providers about disabilities reported by ākonga enrolled in social work programmes, and the type of support they might require. There was some variation in how providers collect and report this information, and disaggregated data in the table below should be interpreted with care – several institutions could only report data for the total number of disabled ākonga. Overall, providers reported a total of 204 disabled ākonga across their institutions, and these included ākonga with anxiety disorders and chronic medical conditions that were self-identified by ākonga as a disability.

Table 9. Disability experienced by enrolled ākonga

Disability	2022 Number	2022 %*
Psychiatric/psychological	48	2%
Learning	34	1%
Vision	20	1%
Hearing	18	1%
Physical	16	1%
Total	204 [†]	8%

* Data for Unitec provided by Tertiary Education Commission were not available at the level of disability, resulting in a slight undercount for 2022 totals.

[†] Three institutions reported total number of ākonga with disabilities but could not provide detail about the type of disability, so the overall total exceeds the subtotal counts.

4.3 Retention, course completion and registering with the SWRB

This section gives an overview of average attrition (leaving study) and retention (continuation of study) rates for ākonga in undergraduate (level 7) social work courses, and how many completed a social work qualification in the 2022 academic year. It also shows the proportion of those completing a qualification who go on to register with the SWRB in the following year.

Retention and attrition in undergraduate (level 7) social work qualifications

Data are collected from each education provider annually. However, it is not possible for the SWRB to track individual ākonga to accurately measure attrition and retention from year to year. Using a three-year average, we can calculate our best estimate of attrition for full-time ākonga in year one to year four of an undergraduate degree, as shown in the following table. This best estimate shows that the highest attrition (leaving study) occurs between years one and two of undergraduate courses (31% attrition), and that 45% of those enrolled in year one do not continue to enrol in year four (the 'final' year of the qualification).

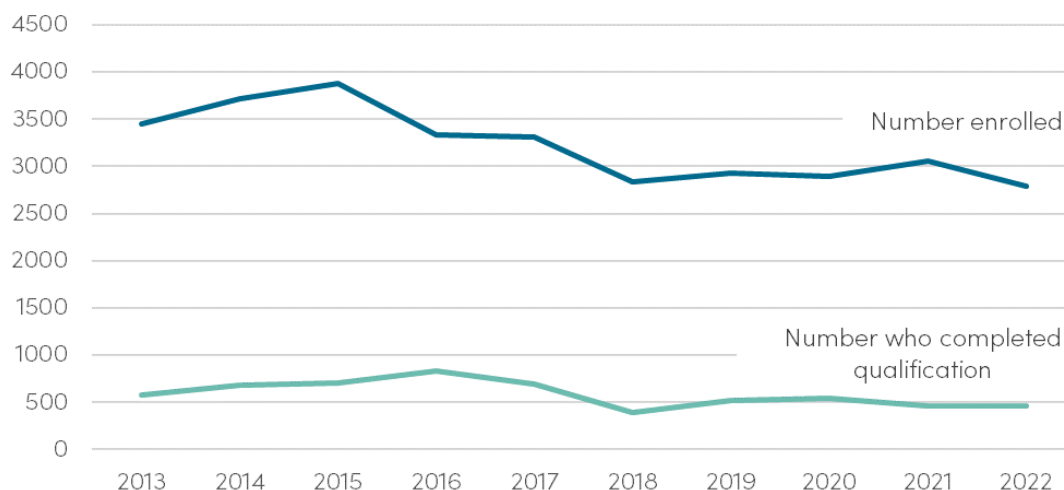
Table 10. Overall retention and attrition rates for undergraduate courses

Undergraduate (level 7) year of study	Enrolled full-time 2020	Enrolled full-time 2021	Enrolled full-time 2022	Average over three years (2020-2022)	Between levels:	Retention rate	Attrition rate
Year 1	687	883	528	699	Year 1 to Year 2	69%	31%
Year 2	484	507	466	486	Year 2 to Year 3	82%	18%
Year 3	451	399	350	400	Year 3 to Year 4	96%	4%
Year 4	417	395	338	383	Year 1 to Year 4	55%	45%

Ākonga completing social work qualifications

In the 2022 academic year, education providers reported that 462 ākonga completed their social work qualification. This has remained stable since the 2021 report. The chart below shows that the number of ākonga completing a qualification has levelled off over the past four years, and has not declined at the same rate as the reduction in the overall number of ākonga enrolled.

Figure 4. Number enrolled ākonga and number who completed qualification



Course completion and registration with the SWRB

A key part of workforce planning is understanding the proportion of those who complete a qualification who then go on to register as part of the social worker workforce.

Table 10 below displays an estimate of the proportion of ākonga who registered with the SWRB after completing their social work qualification, having become eligible to apply for registration through the NZ-approved qualification pathway. The number who register is calculated using the date that a social worker reports to the SWRB that they were awarded their qualification.

A four-year average to 2022 indicates that 18% of those who complete a social work qualification do not go on to register with the SWRB the following year. This is only indicative data of the number of ākonga registering each year, and should be interpreted with care. However, it does suggest that many ākonga who gain an SWRB-prescribed qualification do not move directly from study into the workforce. This has implications for forecasting and being able to predict patterns in our workforce pipeline in the coming years.

Table 11. Registration rate after course completion

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Average over four years
Number eligible to register due to completing qualification	521	546	465	470	501
Number who register with the SWRB the following year	445	431	381	387	411
Registration rate (proportion who complete qualification and go on to register with the SWRB the following year)	85%	79%	82%	82%	82%

The table below compares the number of ākonga from each institution who completed a qualification in the 2022 academic year and then joined the SWRB register with a NZ-approved qualification that was awarded in 2022. As noted above, there are some limitations with the way data are reported or recorded at registration, as we know that a qualification 'completed' in a given year will not always match how it is reported by the institution, since ākonga can defer graduation, or be awaiting assessment until their completion is signed off the following year. However, proxy data can still give a useful indication of key trends.

Overall, 82% of ākonga who completed a social work qualification in New Zealand in 2022 went on to register with the SWRB in 2023.

Table 12. Registration rate after course completion, by institution

Institution	Number who completed qualification in 2022 academic year	Number who joined the SWRB register in 2023 with qualification awarded in 2022 ⁶	% of total completed who go on to register
Ara Institute of Canterbury	16	18	113%
University of Waikato	10	11	110%
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	4	4	100%
NorthTec	5	5	100%
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	5	5	100%
Wintec	7	7	100%
Massey University	81	79	98%
University of Otago	28	25	89%
Open Polytechnic	23	19	83%
University of Canterbury	45	37	82%
University of Auckland	51	40	78%
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	9	7	78%
Unitec New Zealand	32	24	75%
Manukau Institute of Technology	52	37	71%
Whitireia Polytechnic	20	14	70%
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	53	37	70%
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	13	8	62%
Eastern Institute of Technology	17	10	59%
Total	470	387	82%

⁶ Note the numbers registering with a qualification awarded in 2022 may exceed the number of ākonga recorded as completing their qualification in 2022. This may be due to variations in the way institutions report qualification completion compared with the way the information is recorded during registration.

4.4 Field education placements (work-based learning) for social work ākonga

A total of 964 ākonga undertook field education placements (work-based learning) in the 2022 academic year. Of these, 888 ākonga completed their placements during the academic year. This has declined from 2021 when 1025 social work ākonga completed their placements.

Massey University, Manukau Institute of Technology and Te Wānanga o Aotearoa reported the largest number of ākonga completing placements, reflecting their higher ākonga numbers overall. Data were not provided by Unitec for the 2022 academic year, and the totals in this section of the report are likely to represent a slight undercount for this reason.

Distribution of placement days

Social work education programmes are required to provide ākonga with a minimum of 120 days of field education placements (work-based learning). There must be at least two different placement experiences, and one must be at least 50 days in duration. The majority of education providers fulfil the required 120 days across two placements of 60 days each. Two institutions allocated their placement days into 50 and 70 day increments.

For postgraduate ākonga, placements were also fulfilled as 60/60 or 50/70 days.

Geographic location of field education placements (work-based learning)

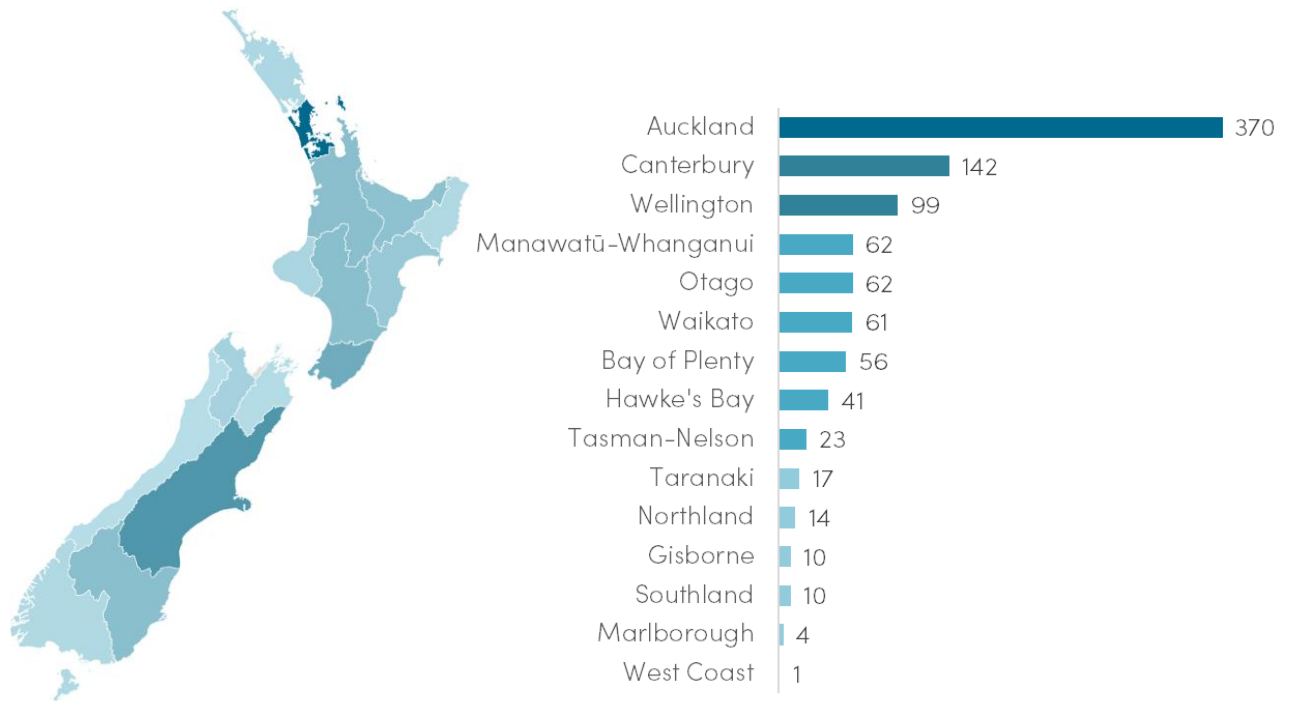
The table below shows the total number of ākonga on placement for each institution during the 2022 academic year, along with the location of the placements undertaken by ākonga for that institution. In most cases, placements took place in the same region as the institution. Given the increased use of distance and online learning, some ākonga may take their placements outside of the location where an institute is based.

Table 13. Institute, location and number of ākonga on placements

Institute	Number of Ākonga on Placement 2022	Geographic region of placements
Massey University	201	Majority Auckland, Manawatu-Whanganui and Wellington; small number across other regions
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	112	Majority Auckland and Waikato; small number across other regions
University of Auckland	95	Auckland
University of Canterbury	88	Canterbury
Manukau Institute of Technology	86	Auckland
University of Otago	66	Majority Otago; small number across other regions
Open Polytechnic	40	Multiple regions
Whitireia Polytechnic	46	Majority Wellington; small number across other regions
Eastern Institute of Technology	39	Gisborne; Hawke's Bay
Ara Institute of Canterbury	31	Canterbury
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	23	Multiple regions
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	22	Nelson
Wintec	22	Waikato
University of Waikato	15	Hamilton
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	13	Bay of Plenty
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	6	Bay of Plenty
NorthTec	5	Northland
Unitec	Data not provided	Data not provided

The three regions where the most ākonga placements were undertaken were Auckland, Christchurch, and Wellington, respectively (Figure 5 below). Marlborough and the West Coast had the lowest number of placements by region.

Figure 5. Regional location of field education placements 2022



Field education placements by organisation type

The table below depicts the number of ākonga that undertook field education placements in government agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs) or iwi organisations. Two-thirds of ākonga undertook placements in NGOs (69%), and a third in government agencies (31%). Fifteen percent of placements took place in Māori/iwi-based organisations.

Table 14. Field education placement organisation type

Field education placement	2021 number	2021 %	2022 number	2022 %
Government agency	323	29%	302	31%
NGO	651	58%	664	69%
Iwi-based organisation	148	13%	144	15%
Total	1122 ⁷	100%	964 ^{††}	100%

Field education placements in government agencies

A total of 302 ākonga undertook their field education placements in government agencies. The most common government agencies are described in the table below, and a small number of placements were conducted in the Ministry of Education, Ministry for Social Development, New Zealand Police, and local/regional government.

Table 15. Breakdown of government agency placements

Government agency	Number of ākonga on placement in 2022	Percentage of all placements in 2022
Oranga Tamariki	173	18%
Te Whatu Ora/Te Aka Whai Ora	131	14%
Corrections	28	3%
Other government	12	2%

Comparing where ākonga are undertaking government agency placements with the current practising workforce of social workers is a useful way to understand the registration pathway for those completing a NZ qualification. As of 30 June 2023, social workers report being employed by non-Government organisations (29%), Oranga Tamariki (26%), and in health (including Te Whatu Ora/DHBs/PHOs; 21%). Eight percent report working for an iwi-based organisation, and the remainder work for other employer types (educational institutions; self-employment/private practice; other Government and Pacific organisations).

⁷ Aggregated totals higher than the number of ākonga on field placements as ākonga may do more than one field placement during an academic year

Field education placements in current place of work

At the time of this data collection, the SWRB's Programme Recognition Standards allowed for no more than one field education placement within the place of work for ākonga. In 2022, 106 ākonga completed their field education placements (work-based learning) in their place of employment, representing 11% of all ākonga on placement that year. This is similar to what was reported for the 2021 academic year.

Placement fail grades and placement non-completion

In 2022, ten ākonga received a placement fail grade, similar to the 12 ākonga reported as receiving a placement fail grade in 2021.

The main reasons for fail grades being given were for:

- lack of professional behaviour (including misconduct)
- being unable to undertake client work proficiently (despite feedback and coaching)
- failing placement assessments
- personal reasons.

A total of 18 ākonga did not complete their field education placements in the 2022 academic year, which is a reduction from 28 ākonga in 2021. This is out of a total of 964 on placements in 2022, indicating that around 2% of ākonga do not complete their placement for reasons other than a fail grade.

The reasons for these non-completions were mostly due to:

- illness and health issues, for self and whānau
- organisations ceasing placement
- personal difficulties, especially financial pressures due to placements being unpaid.

One education provider made the following note in their response:

Ākonga often quietly withdraw prior to 300-level papers or in their third year of study as they cannot cope with the financial and other placement-related pressures such as juggling childcare commitments.

Education providers were asked how they support ākonga who have not passed their field education placements. Responses included:

- Providing an opportunity to complete/remedy written work or placement itself (i.e. extend deadline to complete remaining hours).
- Re-enrolment in following year.
- Early/mid-placement review to identify potential issues, working with ākonga and field educator to agree new goals. If not met, cease placement (and do not wait until the end), requiring additional days/specific project to meet learning goals not met originally.
- Counselling, pastoral care; wraparound, support services to support holistic 'well-being'; limited financial assistance.

Sourcing, quantity and quality of field placements

Tertiary education providers were asked how they source field education placements for their ākonga, and if they have any concerns or challenges with the quantity and quality of these placements.

The sourcing of field education placements seems to rely heavily on personal relationships and networking of staff and coordinators. Education providers described 'existing whanaungatanga' and having built strong relationships with organisations where placements have taken place in the past. They also use colleague recommendations to source placements. The process usually involves coordinators reaching out to organisations on behalf of ākonga, using email lists in advance of the placement semester.

We rely upon personal networks to identify possible placement opportunities. Relationships with colleagues in the field and proactive searching and visiting of new and expanding agencies.

When asked if they can find 'enough' field education placements, 15 out of the 17 who responded said yes (88%). Those who answered 'no' explained that it can be challenging in smaller towns/regions where 'the competition is high...with fewer agencies'.

When asked if they have concerns about the quality of the field education placements, six providers said yes (35%). Reasons for their concern included:

- field education agencies being unprepared to work with ākonga;
- poor teaching skills or over-committed field educators;
- smaller agencies not having a registered social worker on-site to fulfil supervision requirements;
- a general sense of pressure and demand on services has overwhelmed capacity to take placements.

A strong theme throughout all sections of feedback from education providers was the financial burden on ākonga when undertaking unpaid field education placements.

Of more concern are the pressures on ākonga because of poverty and mental distress caused by pressures of completing unpaid placements.

I am hopeful that [TEC funding increase] will be able in some way to support ākonga financially as it is a huge struggle for them to be able to afford to do placement, especially when almost all are parents and grandparents caring for a household.

5. Closing comments

This Social Work Education Report provides data and insights into the key trends in ākonga completing social work qualifications in New Zealand, thus becoming eligible to register as a social worker through the NZ-approved qualification pathway.

The report uses programme-level data to better understand enrolment, geographic and other trends in how social work education is provided.

This report is one component of the SWRB's engagement with social work education providers in its role as regulator of the social work profession. In this regulatory role, the SWRB is required to ensure that registered social workers are competent and safe to practise. The SWRB works closely with education providers and conducts regular reviews to ensure prescribed qualifications and standards for social worker education and training are being met.

This report forms part of a suite of social worker workforce data and insights shared by the SWRB each year, designed to 'shine a light' on the opportunities and challenges facing the social worker workforce across Aotearoa New Zealand. It supports sector understanding of issues and challenges being faced by education providers and ākonga in social work education.

The SWRB is aware that in the time since the 2022 academic year on which this report is based, changes and uncertainty across the tertiary education landscape may affect the provision of social work education in the future. This could lead to a further reduction the number of ākonga enrolled in social work programmes.

For more information about the workforce and education provider data collected and reported by the SWRB, please visit our publications page <https://swrb.govt.nz/about-us/news-and-publications/publications/>

Appendix 1 – Overview – setting standards and evaluating prescribed social work qualifications in New Zealand

Under the Social Workers Registration Act (SWRA 2003), the SWRB is mandated to:

- recognise or prescribe New Zealand educational qualifications for the purposes of the Act, and
- to promote and set standards for such education and training for the purposes of the Act, in consultation with providers of social work education and training in New Zealand and bodies that set standards for social work education and training in New Zealand.

Under Section 5B of the Act, *Prescribed qualifications*, the Board must, by notice, prescribe the qualifications for each scope of practice.

Under Section 99 of the Act, *Functions of Board*, the Board sets education and training standards. These standards ensure social work programmes reflect the content of the General Scope of Social Work Practice. They support graduates to meet professional standards for entry into the social work profession such as fitness to practice requirements, the Code of Conduct and the ten Core Competence Standards.

Education providers were required to meet the SWRB 2016 Programme Recognition Standards (PRS) at the time of the 2022 academic year. The PRS have since been revised and are now known as Education Standards (as of 2024)⁸. All education institutes delivering SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications in New Zealand are reviewed on a regular basis by the SWRB.

Ākonga who complete a SWRB-prescribed qualification will be eligible to apply to register as a social worker through the New Zealand approved registration pathway. These qualifications include a four-year Bachelor's (level 7) and a two-year Master's applied level qualification. Both degrees currently require ākonga to complete 120 days of field education ('work-based learning') in the final two years of their study.

In addition to the New Zealand-approved qualification registration pathway there are two alternative pathways to registration with the SWRB: the experience pathway (S13), and the overseas social work qualification pathway⁹.

⁸ SWRB Education Standards 2024 <https://swrb.govt.nz/educators/programme-recognition-standards-review-2022/>

⁹ <https://swrb.govt.nz/registration/>