Social Workers Registration Board

Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Annual Social Work Education Report 2023

A high-level overview of Aotearoa New Zealand social work education programmes for the 2023 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

Introduction

This Annual Social Work Education Report summarises information collected by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) about tertiary education organisations (TEOs) that deliver SWRB prescribed social work programmes.

As the government's occupational regulator of the social work profession, the SWRB is required to ensure that registered social workers are competent and safe to practise. In education we do this in two ways:

1. by setting standards for the delivery of our prescribed social work education programmes, and
2. by prescribing qualifications for the purposes of registration under the General Scope of Social Work Practice. You can read more about our regulatory role in Appendix 1.

This Report includes information about social work ākonga[1] enrolments, completion of social work programmes and field education placements (work-based learning) in the 2023 academic year. Information has been sourced directly from all 18 TEOs delivering SWRB prescribed social work programmes for the 2023 academic year via an annual data return, and supplemented by data from the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).

This Report forms part of the SWRB's suite of evidence and insights into trends and patterns relating to the social worker 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 its focus on the New Zealand qualification registration pathway and entry into the social work profession. The Report sits alongside other publications such as the SWRB's Annual Social Worker Workforce Report[2].

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[1] Ākonga is used throughout this report to describe ākonga, learners, pupils or tauira.
[2] https://swrb.govt.nz/about-us/news-and-publications/publications/#workforce-surveys

Summary of key findings

Social work ākonga numbers continue to fall, and those studying continue to be female, older, with high representation of Māori and Pacific Peoples

- In 2023, enrolments in social work programmes were 7% lower than the previous academic year. Over the last two academic years we have seen a 13% decline in enrolments, the 2023 enrolment figure is the lowest since 2013.

- The decline in ākonga numbers varies across TEOs. Three TEOs did not offer their undergraduate programmes to new ākonga in 2023, which will have had an impact on their overall enrolment numbers.

- The gender distribution of enrolled ākonga has remained the same between 2022 and 2023 (85% female and 14% male ākonga), and tracks with the higher proportion of females in the social work profession.

- Ākonga enrolled in social work qualifications continue to be ethnically diverse. The proportion of ākonga who identify as Māori (30%) and the proportion who identify as Pacific Peoples (26%) have increased slightly, and remain higher than the general population. However, the actual number of Māori ākonga has been declining since 2021.

- Almost a quarter of enrolled ākonga are aged over 40 years.

- Around a quarter of undergraduate and half of postgraduate ākonga studied part-time.

Social work programmes show high attrition, but a steady rate of completion. Four out of five ākonga who complete their qualification register with the SWRB the following year

- The attrition rate from social work programmes - the proportion of ākonga leaving before completing their qualification – is challenging to calculate at an aggregated level, and varies widely between TEOs. Over the last few years, the attrition rate for undergraduate social work programmes has been estimated to be as high as 45%. Most TEOs report that the highest attrition occurs in between the first and second year of undergraduate programmes.

- The number of ākonga completing social work qualifications in 2023 (470) is consistent with previous years.

- Of those who complete a social work qualification, around 80% go on to register with the SWRB the following year. This 'conversion rate' into the social work profession through the New Zealand qualification pathway will need close attention since it indicates that as many as one in five of those eligible to apply for registration and entry into the profession are not doing so directly after completing their qualification.

Two-thirds of ākonga complete their field education placements in non-government organisations (NGOs), and the remainder in government agencies

- Two-thirds of social work ākonga undertook their field education placements (work-based learning) in NGOs (65%) in 2023, and a third in government agencies (35%). The share of placements undertaken in government agencies such as Oranga Tamariki (12%) and health (12%) is far lower than the share of the social worker workforce they employ overall (22% and 21%, respectively).

- Where the outcome was known, 32% of ākonga went on to become employed within the organisation where they completed their fieldwork placement.

Data collection method

In early September 2024, programme leads for all 18 TEOs offering a SWRB-prescribed social work qualification in 2023 were asked to provide social work qualification data for the 2023 academic year. The data return used a PDF form based on past feedback to allow for different departments to complete their sections, save the file and return to the SWRB. By mid-October 2024, responses were received from all 18 TEOs (100% response rate).

Enrolment and completion data for the 2023 academic year were requested from the TEC. This new approach was designed to reduce the data reporting burden on individual providers and to allow for more consistent trend analysis over time, since some TEOs did not respond to past requests for data. This means that there may be variation in figures presented in previous Annual Social Work Education/Education Providers Reports that were based on data provided directly to us by TEOs themselves.

All TEC data reported for 2023 follows their rounding conventions with ākonga counts rounded to the nearest five. The SWRB acknowledges some differences in data collation, definitions and calculation methods 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.

Detailed findings

1.1 Ākonga enrolled in prescribed social work qualifications

For the 2023 academic year, 18 TEOs had ākonga enrolled for Bachelor's (level 7–8) qualifications in social work. Three of the 18 TEOs did not have a new intake for their social work undergraduate programmes in 2023. Four of the 18 TEOs offered Master's (level 9) programmes in social work: Massey University ('Applied'), the University of Auckland ('Professional'), University of Canterbury ('Applied'), and the University of Otago (Social and Community Work).

When grouped by type, ten TEOs were classed as Te Pūkenga – New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology; five were universities; two were wānanga and one was a private training establishment. Both wānanga emphasise the mātauranga Māori focus of their programmes in the qualification title, *Ngā Poutoko Whakararaara Oranga: Bachelor of Bicultural Social Work* and *Poutuārongo Toiora Whānau*. It should be noted that work was underway to establish a unified degree as part of the establishment of the multi–TEO Te Pūkenga during the survey period.

Total number of ākonga enrolled

In the 2023 academic year, TEC data show that a total of 2,605 ākonga enrolled in social work programmes across New Zealand. This number has declined from 2022 when there were 2,810 ākonga enrolled. This represents a 7% drop in overall ākonga enrolment between 2022 and 2023. The most recent enrolment total is the lowest seen since 2013 and follows the general trend in enrolment numbers from 2015/2016 onwards. As noted above, three TEOs did not have a new first year intake for their social work undergraduate programmes in 2023 which will have been a contributing factor to overall numbers.

Figure 1. Number of ākonga enrolled per year
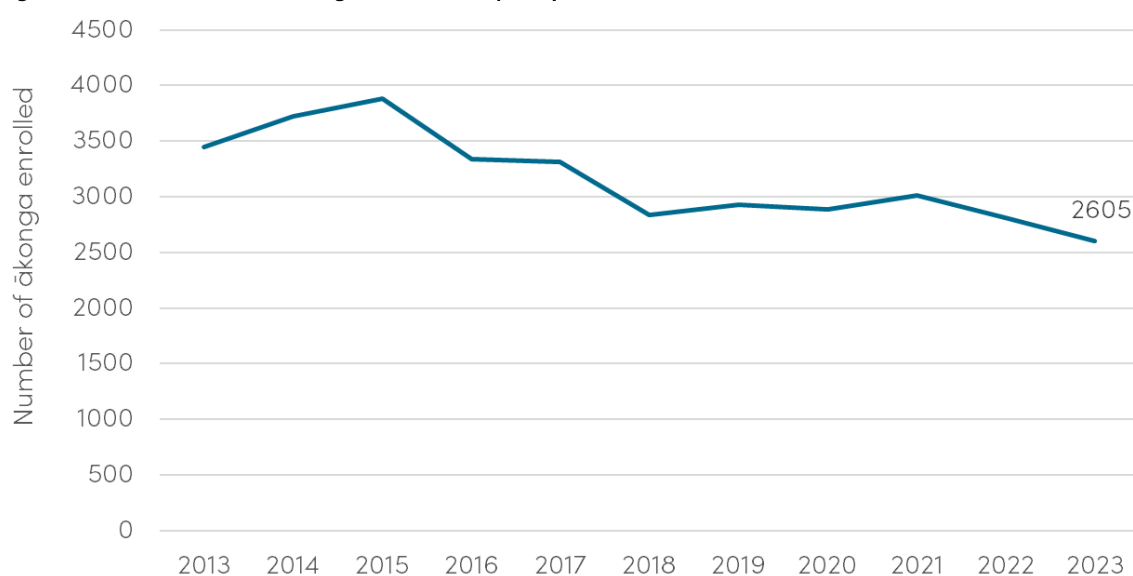
The last significant decline in the number of ākonga enrolling into social work programmes was between 2015 and 2018. It is likely this decline reflected the changes made to prescribed

social work degrees from three to four-year degree programmes, and changes to the ākonga allowance entitlements at that time.

Table 1 below shows ākonga enrolment numbers by TEO, and the relative change in enrolments (undergraduate and postgraduate) in the past year, and as a five-year trend. Massey University had the largest number of ākonga overall, with 575 ākonga enrolled in a social work programme in the 2023 academic year. In 2023, three TEOs reported increases in the number of ākonga enrolled in social work programmes (Table 1). The remaining institutions reported a reduction in enrolments that ranged from 1% to 43%. The increase in enrolments at Massey may partly reflect new enrolments for social work undergraduate programmes that, as noted earlier, were no longer available at three TEOs in 2023. Both the annual and the five-year trend shows that University of Waikato and Open Polytechnic had the largest fall in enrolments.

Table 1. Number of ākonga enrolled in each institution over time

Institution	Ākonga 2019	Ākonga 2020	Ākonga 2021	Ākonga 2022	Ākonga 2023[3]	Percentage change in enrolment 2022–2023	Percentage change in enrolment 2019–2023
Ara Institute of Canterbury	113	112	110	91	90	1% ↓	20% ↓
Bethlehem Institute Limited	64	53	60	47	45	4% ↓	30% ↓
Eastern Institute of Technology	106	111	106	96	80	17% ↓	25% ↓
Manukau Institute of Technology	226	237	298	306	295	4% ↓	31% ↑
Massey University	562	577	615	566	575	2% ↑	2% ↑
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	77	66	65	63	55	13% ↓	29% ↓
NorthTec	86	86	91	85	85	0%	1% ↓
Open Polytechnic	208	162	159	149	105	30% ↓	50% ↓
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	45	35	29	32	35	9% ↑	22% ↓
Unitec	200	191	202	196	185	6% ↓	8% ↓
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	405	375	364	341	355	4% ↑	12% ↓
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	39	47	47	43	40	7% ↓	3% ↑
University of Auckland	206	213	249	234	165	29% ↓	20% ↓
University of Canterbury	224	206	257	243	215	12% ↓	4% ↓
University of Otago	84	79	75	86	85	1% ↓	1% ↑
University of Waikato	72	57	55	44	25	43% ↓	65% ↓
Whitireia	127	127	120	107	105	2% ↓	17% ↓
Wintec	100	90	91	81	80	1% ↓	20% ↓
Total all TEOs	**2,938**	**2,820**	**2,991**	**2,810**	**2,605**	**7% ↓**	**11% ↓**

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[3] 2023 values for ākonga counts are rounded to the nearest five, as per TEC reporting.

This is the first year that TEOs were asked for information about international ākonga. There were 19 international ākonga (fewer than 1 percent) enrolled in social work qualification in 2023. International ākonga came from a range of countries including China, Germany and USA (undergraduate) and India and USA (postgraduate), among others. The TEOs where international ākonga were enrolled included Ara, Auckland, Manukau Institute of Technology, Massey, Otago and Eastern Institute of Technology.

Table 2 below shows the delivery location of social work programmes reported by each TEO, in descending order of the proportion of all social work ākonga at the institution. The table also shows that seven institutions now deliver some or all their programmes on-line.

Table 2. Delivery location of TEO institutions

Institution	% of all ākonga in 2023	Delivery location(s) for social work programmes	25% or more online/remote learning delivery
Ara Institute of Canterbury	3%	Christchurch	No
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	2%	Tauranga	Yes
Eastern Institute of Technology	3%	Napier, Gisborne, Taradale	No
Manukau Institute of Technology	11%	Auckland	No
Massey University	22%	Palmerston North; Albany, Auckland;	Yes
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	2%	Nelson	No
NorthTec	3%	Whangārei	Yes
Open Polytechnic	4%	Nationwide; distance/online learning	Yes
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	14%	Mangakōtukutuku (Hamilton), Tukarere (Tauranga), Manukau/Māngere (Auckland), Papaiōea (Palmerston North)	No
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	2%	Otaki; Manukau, Auckland	Yes
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	1%	Rotorua	No
Unitec New Zealand	7%	Waitakere, Auckland	No
University of Auckland	6%	Auckland	No
University of Canterbury	8%	Christchurch;	Yes
University of Otago	3%	Dunedin	Yes
University of Waikato	1%	Tauranga	No
Whitireia	4%	Porirua	No
Wintec	3%	Hamilton	No

The geographic distribution of TEO sites delivering social work programmes has been plotted on the map in Figure 2 below. This is not a direct proxy for the geographic location of ākonga, particularly due to the increased use of distance/remote and online learning options.

Figure 2. Geographic distribution of TEO sites offering social work programmes
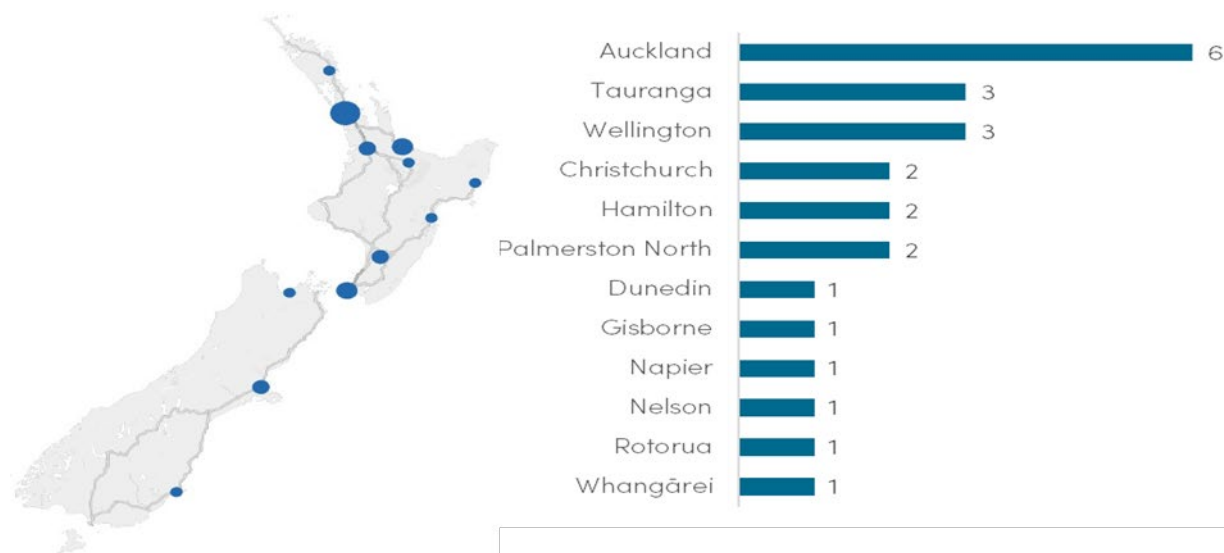
Number of ākonga enrolled full-time and part-time

In 2023, around one quarter of undergraduates and half of postgraduate ākonga studied part-time. This was based on TEOs own reporting of percentages across each year of study, and seemed consistent from years one to four of the undergraduate qualifications in particular.

Overall, the institutions with the higher proportion of undergraduate ākonga studying part-time were Massey, Open Polytechnic and Whitireia. All institutions offering postgraduate programmes reported a similar proportion studying part-time (around half of all ākonga). One TEO noted that rather than leave a programme, many ākonga took the option of moving to part-time study in response to financial challenges. The flexibility offered by part-time study may be a means of enabling ākonga to remain in study if they are facing other pressures.

Number of ākonga enrolled by level of study

In 2023, four TEOs offered a postgraduate Master's qualification in social work. Twelve percent of all social work ākonga were enrolled at the postgraduate Master's level in the 2023 academic year (325 out of 2,605 total ākonga). This has changed from 11% in 2021 and 9% in the 2022 academic year.

Table 3. Number of undergraduate and postgraduate ākonga in 2023

Qualification level	Number of ākonga 2021	Number of ākonga 2022	Number of ākonga 2023
Master's (level 9)	318	294	325
Bachelor's (level 7–8)	2,861	2,515	2,280

Of the postgraduate ākonga, 55 were engaged in postgraduate research, and 13 were international ākonga.

1.2 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 2022 and 2023. The gender distribution of ākonga mirrors that of the registered and practising social worker workforce, for the 2023/24 period (85% female and 14% male).

Table 4. Gender of enrolled ākonga

Gender	2022 Number	2022 %	2023 Number	2023 %
Male	369	14%	365	14%
Female	2208	85%	2,225	85%
Another gender	20	<1%	20	<1%
Not identified	9	<1%	0	0%

Age of enrolled ākonga

There was little change in the age profile of ākonga between 2022 and 2023. Looking at the data in the three broad bands in Table 5 below, the higher age profile is apparent, with the number of ākonga aged over 40 now only slightly smaller than the number of 'traditional' under-25 years student age group.

Table 5. Age of enrolled ākonga

Age	2022 Number	2022 %	2023 Number	2023 %
24 or younger	756	30%	760	29%
25-39 years	1160	46%	1225	47%
40 or older	596	24%	620	24%

Ethnicity of enrolled ākonga

A third of ākonga in the 2023 academic year identified as Māori (30%), similar to 2022 (29%). A quarter identified as Pacific Peoples (26%), also similar to 2022 (25%). The percentage of ākonga who identify as Māori is higher than the percentage of the general population (18% in 2023)[4]. Over half of all ākonga identify as European (54%), and eight percent identify as Asian. The SWRB's register data show that 24% of the practising workforce identified as Māori and 12% identified as Pacific peoples in 2022/23[5].

Table 6. Ethnicity distribution of enrolled ākonga

Ethnicity	2022 Number	2022 %	2023 Number	2023 %
NZ Māori	841	29%	790	30%
European	1545	51%	1,415	54%
Pacific Peoples	722	25%	690	26%
Asian	202	6%	205	8%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	78	2%	80	3%
Other	62	3%	90	3%

A total response calculation was used so individuals may be counted more than once across different ethnic groups ('total ethnicity').

The number of ākonga in each of the three main ethnic groups has fallen in line with the overall decline in ākonga numbers between 2022 and 2023 although the number of Māori and Pacific ākonga have fallen at a slower rate than European. There has been a small increase in the number of Asian and smaller ethnic groups.

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[4] https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/

[5] https://swrb.govt.nz/about-us/news-and-publications/publications/#Annual-Reports

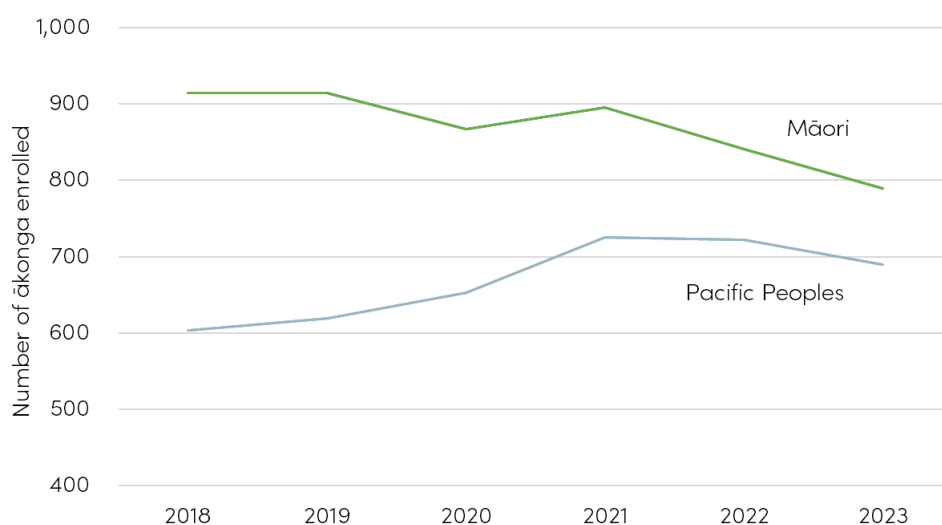## Figure 3. Changes in ākonga ethnicities over time – 2018 to 2023

Table 7 below shows the ethnicity distribution of enrolled ākonga in 2023 by TEO, as provided by TEC. The two Wānanga and Northtec have the highest proportion of Māori enrolments, whilst Manukau Institute of Technology has the highest proportion of ākonga who identify as Pacific Peoples.

Table 7. Ethnicity distribution of enrolled ākonga, by institution

Institution	Total enrolled 2023	% of ākonga who identify as Māori 2023	% of ākonga who identify as Pacific Peoples 2023
Massey University	575	23%	13%
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	355	58%	38%
Manukau Institute of Technology	295	22%	63%
University of Canterbury	215	12%	42%
Unitec New Zealand	185	14%	14%
University of Auckland	165	24%	41%
Open Polytechnic	105	19%	14%
Wintec	105	18%	6%
Ara Institute of Canterbury	90	38%	50%
University of Otago	85	50%	13%
NorthTec	85	22%	17%
Whitireia Polytechnic	80	24%	5%
Eastern Institute of Technology	80	59%	12%
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	55	18%	4%
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	45	88%	13%
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	40	33%	4%
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	35	40%	20%
University of Waikato	25	57%	0%

Information about disabilities

The SWRB asked education TEOs about disabilities reported by ākonga enrolled in social work programmes. There was some variation in how TEOs collect and report this information, and disaggregated data in the table below should be interpreted with care. Three institutions did not ask or record this information due to privacy concerns. Overall, TEOs reported a total of 154 ākonga (6%) with disabilities across their institutions, and the most commonly reported disabilities included psychiatric or psychological disorders for example anxiety (30), and learning disorders such as dyslexia (30).

Table 8. Disability experienced by enrolled ākonga

Disability	2023 Number	2023 %
Psychiatric/psychological	30	1%
Learning	30	1%
Mobility	17	1%
Hearing	12	1%
Vision	11	1%
Total	154[†]	6%

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

1.3 Retention, programme completion and registering with the SWRB

This section gives an overview of average attrition (leaving study) rates for ākonga in social work programmes, and how many completed a social work qualification in the 2023 academic year. It also shows the proportion of those completing a qualification who do or do not go on to register with the SWRB in the following year.

Retention and attrition in social work programmes

Over previous years we have reported attrition rates based on a 'proxy' method, using raw enrolment numbers over time to calculate attrition from first to final year of qualification. This has given us estimates of as high as 45% of all ākonga leaving social work programmes before completing their qualification. For the 2023 academic year, a different approach was used to request attrition data directly from TEOs across undergraduate and postgraduate social work programmes.

The reported attrition rates for 2023 varied between individual institutions. Where TEOs were able to report data, attrition tended to be higher between the first and second year of study than later years of the qualification. This is consistent with the pattern seen in previous years, where as many as 31% of ākonga do not continue study after their first year in a social work programme.

TEOs were asked to indicate if the attrition for their social work programmes was similar to that for other comparable courses of study that they offer. About half of the TEOs were uncertain, and indicated that they were unable to reliably determine this. Some felt that several factors made high attrition more likely in social work than in other similar programmes. These included the length of the social work degree programme, and the costs of undertaking the fieldwork components of the programme.

The SWRB is exploring more accurate and appropriate ways to reliably capture attrition across social work programmes, and will be working closely with TEC and TEOs ahead of reporting for the next academic year. As such we will continue to refer to the proxy attrition rate calculated for the 2022 academic year, until an alternative calculation methodology is developed.

Ākonga completing social work qualifications

In the 2023 academic year, TEOs reported that 470 ākonga completed their social work qualification, with 95 of these completions (20%) at postgraduate Master's level.

As shown in Figure 4, the total number of ākonga completing social work qualifications has remained stable over the past five years, while the number of ākonga enrolled has declined. This trend will need close monitoring to assess the impact of reducing enrolment numbers on the number who complete a social work qualification in the coming years.

Figure 4. Number enrolled ākonga and number who completed qualification
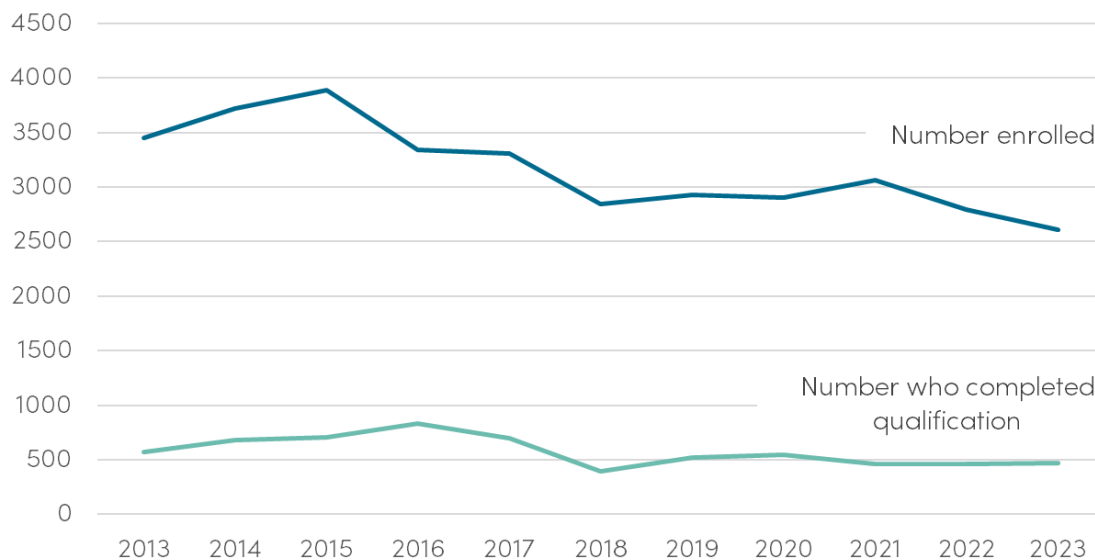
Programme completion and registration with the SWRB

For workforce planning it is important to understand the pipeline into the social work profession, including the proportion of ākonga who complete a New Zealand social work qualification and then go on to register with the SWRB and become part of the social worker workforce. Table 10 displays an estimate of the proportion of ākonga who registered with the SWRB in the year after completing their social work qualification.

For 2023, the overall registration rate was 75%. This means that 25% of ākonga who were eligible to apply to register with the SWRB within the ten months between completing an approved social work qualification in 2023 and the time of reporting did not do so.

Table 9. Registration rate after programme completion

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Five-year average
Number eligible to register due to completing qualification	521	546	465	470	470	494
Number who register with the SWRB the following year	445	431	381	387	352	399
Registration rate (proportion who complete qualification and go on to register with the SWRB the following year)	85%	79%	82%	82%	75%	81%

The registration rate is indicative only, due to the discrepancy that can occur between the year a qualification is 'completed' according to TEC data, and the year a qualification is 'awarded' (often the following calendar year) and recorded at registration.

The five-year rolling average of the registration rate up to 2023 indicates that 81% of those who complete a social work qualification go on to register with the SWRB the following year. This implies a rolling average of 19% of ākonga who do not register with the SWRB the year after they complete their qualification. There are a number of reasons for these ākonga not registering with the SWRB, and these may include newly qualified social workers choosing to defer their registration, move onto further study or go overseas. The registration rate is important to analyse further as it has implications for forecasting numbers of graduates entering the workforce in future years.

Table 11 below compares the number of ākonga from each institution who completed a New Zealand-prescribed qualification in the 2023 academic year and then joined the SWRB register (up to 27 September 2024).

Table 10. Registration rate after programme completion, by institution

Institution	Number who completed qualification in 2023 academic year	Number who joined the SWRB register in 2024 with qualification awarded in 2023	% of total completed who go on to register[6]
Ara Institute of Canterbury	15	13	87%
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	5	6	120%
Eastern Institute of Technology	2	12	600%[7]
Manukau Institute of Technology	40	23	58%
Massey University	105	85	81%
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	15	4	27%
NorthTec	15	8	53%
Open Polytechnic	15	13	87%
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	55	34	62%
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	5	5	100%
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	5	4	80%
Unitec New Zealand	25	18	72%
University of Auckland	30	24	80%
University of Canterbury	45	38	84%
University of Otago	40	29	73%
University of Waikato	15	4	27%
Whitireia	25	20	80%
Wintec	20	12	60%
Total	470	352	75%

Table 12 compares new registrations with 2023 qualification completions broken down by the type of qualification. It shows that the share of new registrations who are Master's ākonga is broadly similar to their share of completions. (19% of completions and 20% of registrations). This suggests that the level of programmes completed (either degree level or Master's) does not affect the probability of joining the register.

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[6] The registration rate is indicative only, due to the discrepancy that can occur between the year a qualification is 'completed' according to TEC data, and the year a qualification is 'awarded' (often the following calendar year) and recorded at registration.

[7] As per footnote above, values for this TEO reflect the discrepancy in when a qualification was completed vs awarded, and how data are recorded between the TEC and SWRB register.

Table 11. Registrations after programme completion, by qualification type

	Undergraduate qualification Number	Undergraduate qualification %	Postgraduate qualification Number	Postgraduate qualification %
Completions in 2023 academic year	384	80%	95	20%
2024 Registrations with qualifications awarded in 2023	286	81%	66	19%

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

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 placement must be of at least 50 days in duration.

A total of 1,033 ākonga undertook field education placements in the 2023 academic year, a slight increase from 2022 when 964 social work ākonga undertook placements. [8]

All education TEOs fulfilled their required obligations concerning fieldwork days with placements of either 60/60 or 50/70 days. This applied to both undergraduate and postgraduate ākonga.

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

Table 13 below shows the total number of ākonga on field education placements from each institution during the 2023 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.

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[8] As noted in the 2022 report, missing data from one TEO may have led to under-reporting of placements for 2022.

Table 12. Institute, location and number of ākonga on fieldwork (work-based learning) placements

Institute	Number of Ākonga on Placement 2023	Geographic region of placements
Ara Institute of Canterbury	40	Canterbury
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	22	Bay of Plenty
Eastern Institute of Technology	31	Gisborne; Hawke's Bay
Manukau Institute of Technology	77	Auckland
Massey University	171	Majority Auckland, Manawatu-Whanganui and Wellington; small number across other regions
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	17	Nelson
NorthTec	43	Northland
Open Polytechnic	37	Multiple regions
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	134	Majority Auckland and Waikato; small number across other regions
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	20	Multiple regions
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	14	Bay of Plenty
Unitec	80	Auckland
University of Auckland	78	Auckland
University of Canterbury	88	Canterbury
University of Otago	73	Majority Otago; small number across other regions
University of Waikato	24	Mainly Waikato and Bay of Plenty
Whitireia Polytechnic	46	Majority Wellington; small number across other regions
Wintec	38	Waikato

The two regions where the most ākonga placements were undertaken were Auckland and Canterbury respectively (Figure 5 below). West Coast and Southland had no placements reported in 2023.

Figure 5. Regional location of field education placements (work-based learning) 2023***
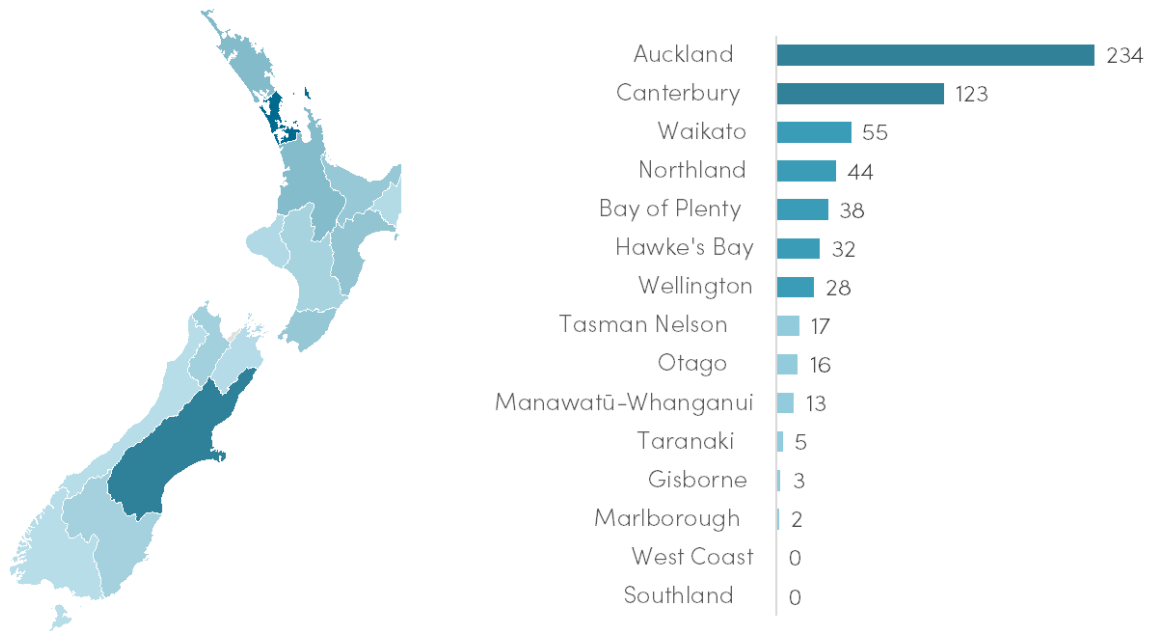
Field education placements (work-based learning) by organisation type†††

TEOs reported that two-thirds of ākonga (65%) undertook field education placements NGOs, and a third in government agencies (35%). Government agencies included Oranga Tamariki (12%) and Health (Te Whatu Ora/Te Aka Whai Ora; (12%). The proportion of all placements in government agencies increased slightly between 2022 and 2023 whilst the proportion in NGOs fell.

Table 13 and 14 show the proportion of placements across NGOs and government agencies. Table 14 shows that 16% of all placements took place in kaupapa Māori/iwi-based organisations, and 8% were within Pacific NGOs.

Table 13. NGO field education (work-based learning) placements

Non-government organisation (NGO)	Number of ākonga on placement in 2023	Percentage of all placements in 2023
Non-Iwi or Pacific-based NGOs	363	41%
Iwi-based NGOs	147	16%
Pacific-based NGOs	75	8%
Total NGO placements	585	65%

*** This chart includes those placements where a geographic region was identified by the TEO.
††† Note that some TEOs did not specify the organisation type for all placements, resulting in an undercount for some subsets.

A total of 309 ākonga undertook their field education (work-based learning) placements in government agencies (Table 14). The majority of government placements were in two organisations: Oranga Tamariki (106 placements, or 12% of all placements), and health (111 placements, or 12%). A smaller number of placements were conducted in other national and local/regional government entities.

Table 14. Government agency field education (work-based learning) placements

Government agency	Number of ākonga on placement in 2023	Percentage of all placements in 2023
Oranga Tamariki	106	12%
Health (Te Whatu Ora/Te Aka Whai Ora/DHBs/PHOs)	111	12%
Justice	26	3%
Other government (or unspecified)	66	7%
Total Government agency placements	**309**	**35%**

Comparing where ākonga are undertaking government agency-based placements with the current practising workforce of social workers may be a useful way to understand and compare trends for placements with where social workers are employed after registration. As of 30 June 2024, 29% of practising social workers reported being employed by NGOs, followed by Oranga Tamariki (22%), and health (21%). Nine percent reported working for an iwi-based organisation, and the remainder were working for other employer types (educational institutions; self-employment/private practice; other Government and Pacific organisations). This comparison indicates that the proportion of placements undertaken in government agencies such as Oranga Tamariki and health is far lower than the proportion of the social worker workforce they employ overall.

Field education (work-based learning) placements in current place of work

At the time of data collection, the SWRB's Programme Recognition Standards allowed for no more than one field education placement within the current place of work for ākonga. In 2023, 118 ākonga completed their field education placements in their place of employment, representing about 12% of all ākonga on placement.

In 2023, we asked TEOs if ākonga completing their fieldwork placements went on to be employed by their fieldwork placement provider. Of the 12 TEOs that were able to report on this, a total of 128 ākonga went on to work with their field education employer once they had completed their qualification and entered the social worker workforce (32%).

Placement fail grades and placement non-completion

In 2023, eight ākonga received a placement fail grade, similar to the 10 ākonga reported as receiving a placement fail grade in 2022.

The reasons for fail grades (and numbers involved) included:

- personal or unspecified reasons (3)
- failing placement assessments (2)
- unsafe practice, e.g. not attending supervision (2)
- medical grounds (1).

A total of 22 ākonga did not complete their field education placements in the 2023 academic year, which is similar to the 18 ākonga in 2022. Overall, fewer than 3% of placements over the year failed or did not complete.

The reasons for these non-completions included;

- health issues (6)
- whānau reasons (5)
- personal issues (2)
- cost of living issues (2).

Some TEOs also noted that they deferred the completion of some placements due to issues like family, or cost of living pressures.

> *"They were working night shift, financially couldn't afford to do a placement."*

Sourcing, quantity and quality of field education (work-based learning) placements

TEOs were asked how they source field education (work-based learning) placements for their ākonga, and if they have any concerns or challenges with the quality of these placements.

The sourcing of field education (work-based learning) placements continues to rely on strong personal relationships and existing staff networks and relationships with agencies and communities built up over time. TEOs refer to the combination of continued administrative (reminder emails, visits to agencies) and relationship-building efforts throughout the academic year. In some cases, placement agencies have approached TEOs with a request for ākonga and TEOs also refer to the use of alumni networks and recommendations from previous ākonga to source new placements.

> *"Whanaungatanga and manaakitanga. We have strong relationships with organisations and so do many or our ākonga, and we nurture those relationships. We start planning toward the end of year 2 with ākonga to find out where they are hoping to go, and if they have connections that they would like us to follow up."*

TEOs were asked if they have enough fieldwork (work-based learning) placements for ākonga and most said they did, although four mentioned severe pressure in finding enough placements. Several responses referenced the importance of government agencies being willing to provide placements for ākonga:

> *"It is with difficulty as organisations are under pressure. We would like to see government organisations be more willing to take ākonga in both year 3 and 4."*

Two TEOs reported concerns about the quality of field education placements (10%), and reflected that TEOs were under-resourced to support both ākonga and the agencies 'hosting' the placement. In several cases, the TEOs were offering additional support to agencies to help them meet placement requirements such as professional supervision. TEOs do not have any mandate or influence over those offering placements, and wider pressures on TEOs and not being able to offer financial compensation were identified as affecting the quality of placements overall.

> *"We do find enough placements, but we do use external group supervision with a registered social worker to cover any placements that do not have registered social workers in the organisation."*

> *"When we have large classes (which we haven't recently), finding enough placements for year 3 ākonga with in-house registered social workers is challenging. Most placements are excellent but because we work on the goodwill of the agencies we cannot 'require' they lift standards."*

Closing comments

This Social Work Education Report provides data and insights into the key trends in ākonga completing SWRB-prescribed social work programmes in New Zealand, which enables them to become eligible to register with the SWRB as a social worker within the General Scope of Social Work Practice.

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

This Report forms part of a suite of social worker workforce data and insights shared by the SWRB each year, designed to highlight the opportunities and challenges facing the social worker workforce across Aotearoa New Zealand. It supports sector understanding of issues and challenges being faced by TEOs and social work ākonga.

For more information about the social worker workforce 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 TEOs 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 practise requirements, the Code of Conduct and the ten Core Competence Standards.

Education TEOs were required to meet the SWRB 2021 revised Programme Recognition Standards (PRS) at the time of the 2023 academic year. The PRS have since been revised and will be known as Education Standards once adopted by the Board. All TEOs delivering SWRB-prescribed social work 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 and practice within the Scope of Social Work Practice, through the New Zealand approved registration pathway. These qualifications include a four-year Bachelor's (Level 7-8) and a two-year Master's of applied practice (Level 9) 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 qualification registration pathway there are two other pathways to registration with the SWRB: the experience pathway (S13), and the overseas social work qualification pathway[‡‡‡].

[‡‡‡] https://swrb.govt.nz/registration/