

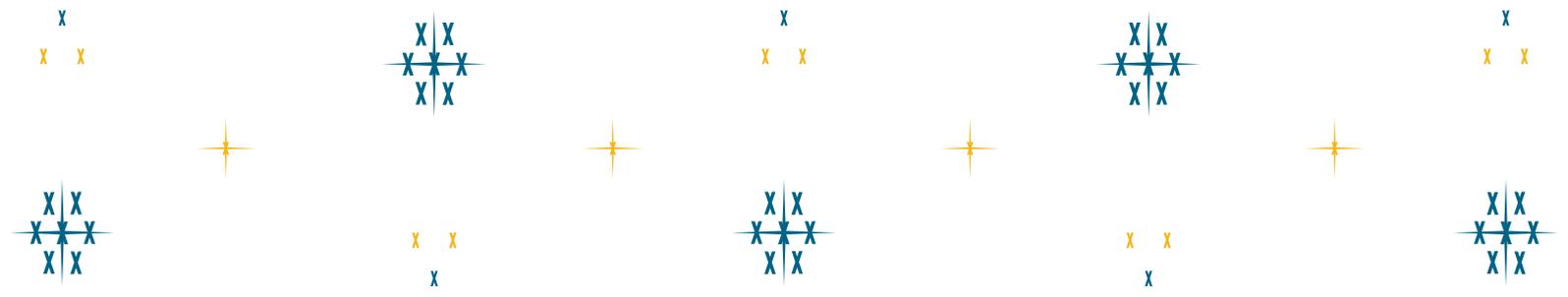


**Social Workers
Registration Board**
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Annual Social Work Education Report 2024

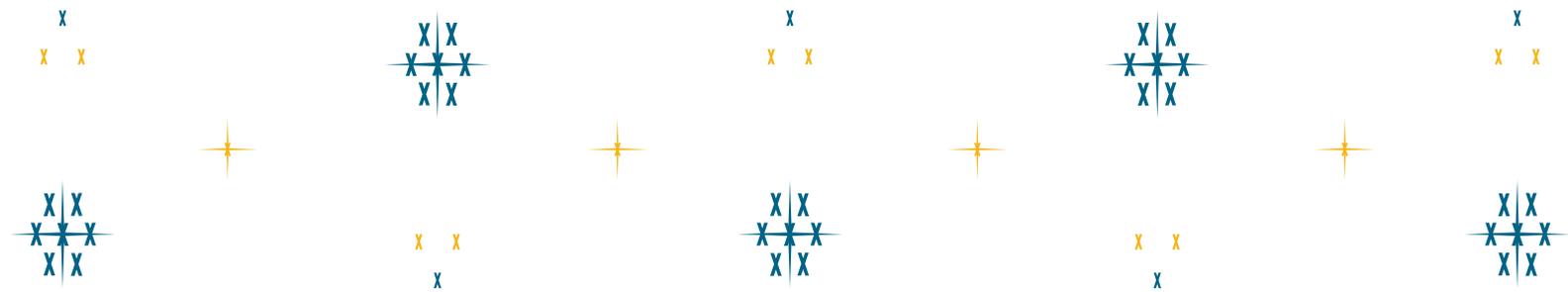
**He ara pūkenga, he ara tauwhiro,
hei whakamana mātā waka**

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



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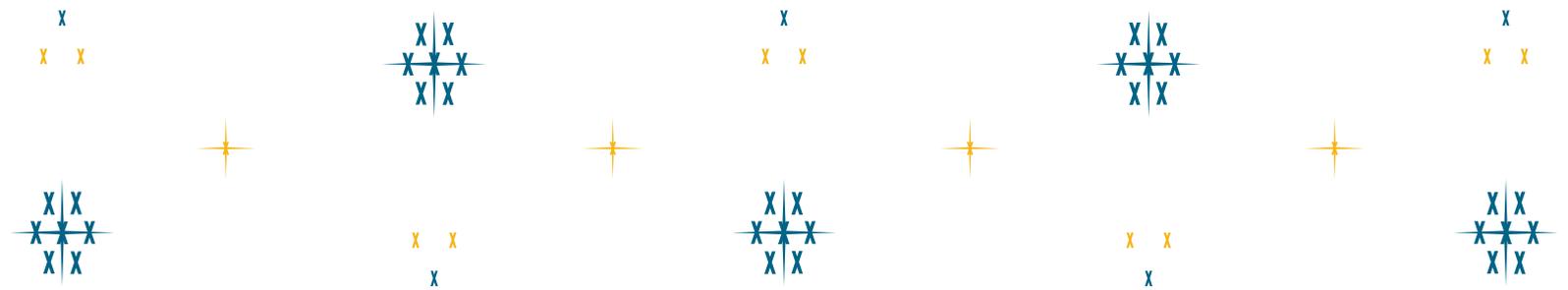


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Introduction

The Annual Social Work Education Report 2024 summarises information collected by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) about tertiary education organisations (TEOs) that deliver SWRB-prescribed social work programmes.

As the 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 by:

- prescribing qualifications for the purposes of registration under the General Scope of Social Work Practice
- setting standards for the delivery of our prescribed social work education programmes.

You can read more about our regulatory role in Appendix 1.

This report includes information about social work ākonga¹ demographics, enrolments and completion of social work programmes in the 2024 academic year. We invited all 18 TEOs delivering SWRB-prescribed social work programmes for the 2024 academic year to contribute data via an annual data return. We supplemented this with TEO-level data on social work qualifications from the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).

This year's report also takes a closer look at two issues that are critical to the strength of the education-to-workforce pipeline. First, in response to findings from previous surveys, including evidence of high attrition in social work programmes, we expanded our questions on field education placements. We asked TEOs about the challenges of meeting placement requirements, securing suitable host organisations, and ensuring access to practice supervision and support. Second, following our 2025 spotlight report on social workers employed by TEOs, which identified pressures relating to recruitment, retention and pay parity,² we asked TEOs about the sustainability of the social work educator workforce itself.

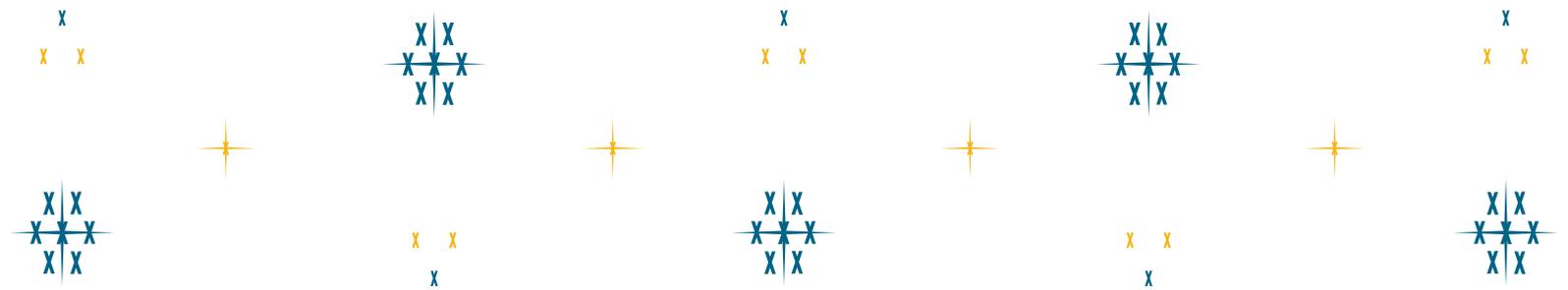
Together, these insights help show not only who is studying social work, but how well the current qualification pathway is functioning to produce the quantity and quality of new entrants needed for a resilient profession. The report forms part of the SWRB's broader evidence base on the social worker workforce in Aotearoa New Zealand, alongside publications such as the Annual Social Worker Workforce Report, and supports our work both as regulator and as lead agency for social worker workforce planning.³

At a time when workforce sustainability is a growing national concern, this report provides an important evidence base for action, with its findings also helping inform the development of the government's first social worker workforce strategy: **Sustainable Social Work Pathways – Tauwhiro Ararau**.

1 Ākonga is used throughout this report to describe social work students/learners/taura.

2 https://swrb.govt.nz/?attachment_id=10646

3 <https://swrb.govt.nz/workforce/workforce-reports/>



Summary of key findings

Social work ākonga numbers continue to decline. Those studying tend to be older and female, and there is high representation of Māori and Pacific peoples

- In 2024, enrolments in social work programmes were 4% lower than the previous year. In the past five years, enrolments have fallen 11% and are at their lowest level since 2013.
- Two TEOs, University of Waikato and Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, had no new undergraduate intake in 2024, contributing to the overall decline. Massey University had the largest number of enrolled students (565).
- The gender distribution of enrolled ākonga has remained the same between 2023 and 2024 (85% female and 14% male). This reflects the gender distribution in the practising social worker workforce.
- 33% of social work ākonga identify as Māori and 27% as Pacific peoples, a higher proportion than in the general population and in the practising workforce.
- 25% of enrolled ākonga are aged over 40 years.
- About 18% of undergraduate ākonga and 36% of postgraduate ākonga study part-time.

About half of undergraduate ākonga complete their qualification, compared to nearly three quarters of postgraduate ākonga

- In 2024, 505 ākonga completed a social work qualification (including 15% at postgraduate level). Completion numbers have remained stable despite declining enrolments.
- Results for undergraduate (level 7–8) completions showed that of those starting in 2017, 49% had completed their qualification by 2024.
- Results for postgraduate (level 9+) completions showed that of those starting in 2019, 73% had completed their qualification by 2024.
- Three quarters of ākonga who completed their qualification in 2024 registered with the SWRB in the following calendar year.

Field education placements outcomes were largely successful, and most were undertaken in non-government organisations

- Overall, fewer than 3% of placements over the year failed or did not complete.
- 65% of placements were in non-government organisations (NGOs). 35% were in government organisations (mainly Health NZ Te Whatu Ora and Oranga Tamariki).
- The share of placements undertaken in the government organisations that employ most social workers, such as Oranga Tamariki (15%) and health (15%), has risen since 2023, but remains lower than the share of the social worker workforce they employ overall (22% and 21%, respectively).
- A total of 81 ākonga were recorded as working with their field education employer once they had completed their qualification and entered the social worker workforce.
- In 2024, the majority of field education placements were completed in the same region as their institution.

Some challenges were noted in maintaining field education placements

- Overall, 24% of TEOs found it easy to find placements for ākonga in NGOs, compared with 12% in government organisations.
- The main challenges with placements included financial hardship and transport issues for ākonga, reduced organisation capacity, and higher staff turnover. TEOs addressed these through relationship-building, collaboration, and other support measures.
- Successful placements were linked to matching ākonga interests, good preparation and support, clear assessment methods, and strong relationships with host organisations.

Further challenges were noted in sustaining the social work educator workforce

- Two thirds of TEOs found it challenging to attract and retain social work educators, citing the specialised nature of the role, pay equity, and the need for incentives and professional development.

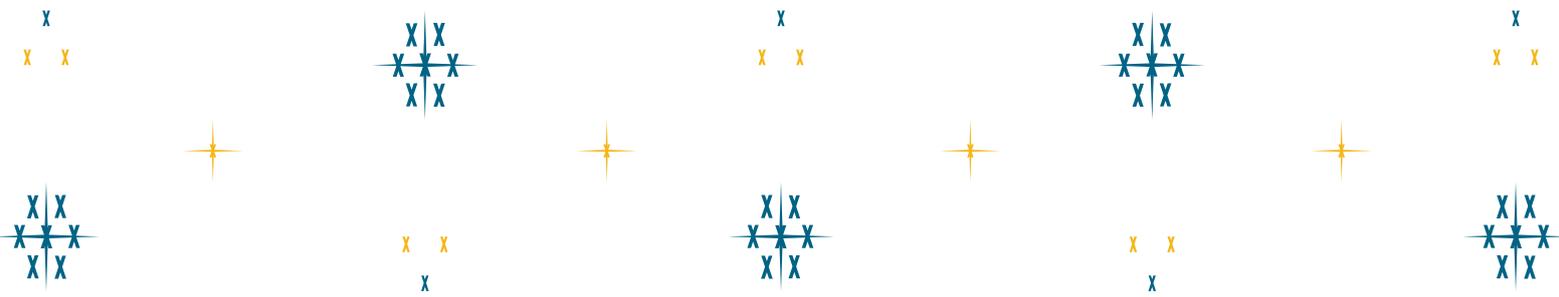
Data collection method

In September 2025, we asked programme leads for all 18 TEOs offering a SWRB-prescribed social work qualification in 2024 to provide social work qualification data for the 2024 academic year. We received responses from or on behalf of all TEOs.

We requested enrolment and completion data for the 2024 academic year from the TEC. All TEC data reported follows their rounding conventions with ākonga counts rounded to the nearest five. We also sourced data from the workforce analytics team at Health New Zealand; their data incorporates information from the Ministry of Education.

The differences in data collation, definitions and calculation methods between the organisations can pose challenges for direct comparison. There may also be variation from figures presented in previous Annual Social Work Education Reports that were based on data provided directly to us by TEOs themselves. These caveats are noted where relevant throughout this report.





Detailed findings

1.1 Ākonga enrolled in prescribed social work qualifications

For the 2024 academic year, 18 TEOs had ākonga enrolled for undergraduate (level 7–8) qualifications in social work. Two of the 18 TEOs – the University of Waikato and Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology – did not have a new intake for their social work undergraduate programmes in 2024.

Four of the 18 TEOs offered postgraduate programmes in social work: Massey University, the University of Auckland, University of Canterbury, and the University of Otago.

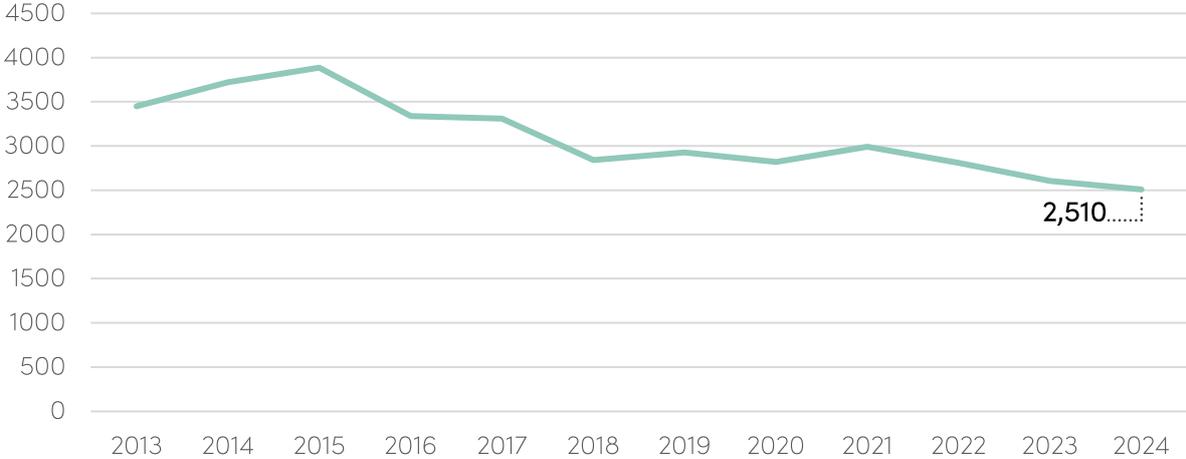
Ten TEOs were classed as Te Pūkenga – New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology. Five others were universities, two were wānanga, and one – Bethlehem Tertiary Institute – was a private training establishment. Both wānanga emphasise the mātauranga Māori focus of their programmes through the qualification titles: Ngā Poutoko Whakarara Oranga: Bachelor of Bicultural Social Work and Poutuārongo Toiora Whānau.

The total number of ākonga enrolled continues to decline

In the 2024 academic year, 2,510 ākonga were enrolled in social work programmes across Aotearoa New Zealand according to TEC data. This number has declined from 2023 when there were 2,605 ākonga enrolled in the 2023 academic year. This represents a 4% decrease in enrolments between 2023 and 2024, and a decrease of 11% since 2020.

The 2024 enrolment total is the lowest seen since 2013 and follows the general downward trend in enrolment numbers from 2015 onwards (figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of ākonga enrolled by year (2013–2024)



In 2024, four TEOs reported increases in the number of ākonga enrolled in social work programmes (table 1). The 2023 and 2024 data is provided by the TEC, which rounds ākonga counts to the nearest five.

Table 1. Number of ākonga enrolled by TEO (2020–2024)

Institution	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Ara Institute of Canterbury	112	110	91	90	85
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	53	60	47	45	40
Eastern Institute of Technology	111	106	96	75	65
Manukau Institute of Technology	237	298	306	295	310
Massey University	577	615	566	575	565
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	66	65	63	55	50
NorthTec	86	91	85	85	95
Open Polytechnic	162	159	149	105	85
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	375	364	341	355	375
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	47	47	43	40	60
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	35	29	32	35	20
Unitec Institute of Technology	191	202	196	185	185
University of Auckland	213	249	234	165	145
University of Canterbury	206	257	243	215	195
University of Otago	79	75	86	85	65
University of Waikato	57	55	44	25	20
Whitireia	127	120	107	105	95
Wintec	90	91	81	80	65
Total	2,820	2,991	2,810	2,605	2,510

Te Wānanga o Raukawa had the largest annual increase (50%), followed by NorthTec (12%), Te Wānanga o Aotearoa (6%) and Manukau Institute of Technology (5%) (table 2). Massey University had the highest number of ākonga enrolled overall, with 565 enrolled in a social work programme in the 2024 academic year. The remaining 14 institutions reported a reduction in enrolments.

The annual trend shows that the University of Otago and Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology had the largest fall in enrolments. The five-year trend shows that Manukau Institute of Technology and Te Wānanga o Raukawa had the largest rise in total number enrolled, whilst the University of Waikato and Open Polytechnic had the largest fall in the total number enrolled.

Table 2. Share of total ākonga enrolled nationally and change in number enrolled by institution 2024

Institution	% share of total enrolled 2024	% change in no. enrolled 2023–2024	% change in no. enrolled 2020–2024
Ara Institute of Canterbury	3%	-6% ▼	-24% ▼
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	2%	-11% ▼	-25% ▼
Eastern Institute of Technology	3%	-13% ▼	-41% ▼
Manukau Institute of Technology	12%	5% ▲	31% ▲
Massey University	23%	-2% ▼	-2% ▼
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	2%	-9% ▼	-24% ▼
NorthTec	4%	12% ▲	10% ▲
Open Polytechnic	3%	-19% ▼	-48% ▼
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	15%	6% ▲	0% —
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	2%	50% ▲	28% ▲
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	1%	-43% ▼	-43% ▼
Unitec Institute of Technology	2%	0% —	-3% ▼
University of Auckland	6%	-12% ▼	-32% ▼
University of Canterbury	8%	-9% ▼	-5% ▼
University of Otago	3%	-24% ▼	-18% ▼
University of Waikato	1%	-20% ▼	-65% ▼
Whitireia	4%	-10% ▼	-25% ▼
Wintec	3%	-19% ▼	-28% ▼
Total all TEOs	—	-4% ▼	-11% ▼

In 2022, the University of Waikato discontinued its Bachelor of Social Work programme due to academic staff departures. The University of Auckland in 2025 will discontinue its Bachelor of Social Work partly due to a focus on postgraduate programmes and this will be reflected in next year's results.

In 2024, TEOs reported a total of 38 international ākonga, representing just over 1% of all enrolments in social work qualifications and an increase on the 19 reported in 2023. 28 were studying at undergraduate level and 10 at postgraduate level. International undergraduate ākonga came from China, Hong Kong, and the United States, while postgraduate ākonga came from countries including India, Thailand, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Solomon Islands. Most international ākonga were enrolled at the University of Auckland and Massey University.

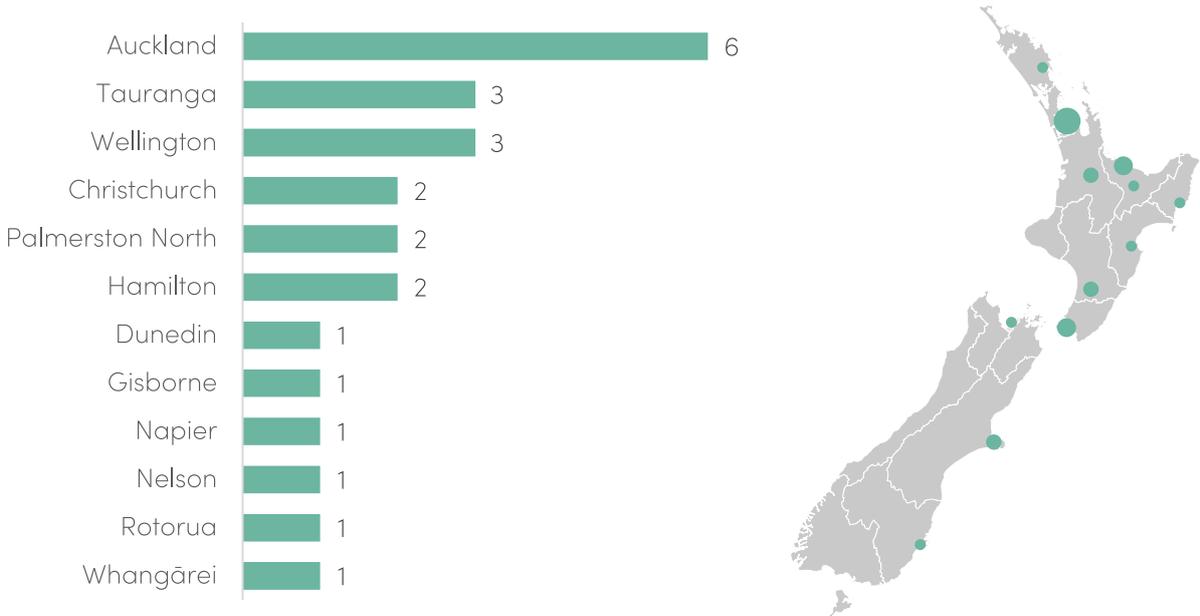
Six institutions deliver some or all of their programmes online, a slight decrease from seven last year (table 3).

Table 3. Delivery location of TEOs 2024

Institution	Delivery location(s) for social work programmes	≥25% online learning delivery
Ara Institute of Canterbury	Christchurch	No
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	Tauranga	No
Eastern Institute of Technology	Gisborne, Taradale	No
Manukau Institute of Technology	Auckland	No
Massey University	Auckland, Manawatū	Yes
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	Nelson	No
NorthTec	Whangārei	No
Open Polytechnic	Hutt Valley, Nationwide	Yes
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	Auckland, Tauranga, Hamilton	Yes
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	Ōtaki, Manukau, Auckland	Yes
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	Rotorua	No
Unitec Institute of Technology	Waitākere, Auckland	No
University of Auckland	Auckland	No
University of Canterbury	Christchurch	Yes
University of Otago	Dunedin	Yes
University of Waikato	Tauranga	n/a
Whitireia	Porirua	No
Wintec	Hamilton	No

Auckland has the most TEO sites delivering social work programmes (6), followed by Wellington and Tauranga (3) (figure 2). The geographic distribution of these TEO sites should not be treated as a direct proxy for the geographic location of ākonga, particularly due to the increased use of remote learning options.

Figure 2. Geographic distribution of TEO sites offering social work programmes 2024



A higher proportion of postgraduate ākonga study part-time

Around 18% of undergraduates and 36% of postgraduate ākonga studied part-time in 2024. Between 2016 and 2024, the percentage of all ākonga studying part-time has ranged between 18% and 27%. Part-time study remains more common at postgraduate than undergraduate level.

Overall, the institutions with a higher proportion of undergraduate ākonga studying part-time were Massey University, Open Polytechnic and Whitireia. All institutions offering postgraduate programmes reported a similar proportion studying part-time.

The 2024 figures for full-time and part-time study are based on actual numbers enrolled as reported by TEOs across each year of study.

The proportion of postgraduate ākonga has slightly increased

Four TEOs offered a postgraduate social work qualification in 2024. 13% of all social work ākonga were enrolled at the postgraduate level in 2024 (315 out of 2,510 total ākonga), compared to 11% in 2022 and 12% in 2023 (table 4).

Table 4. Number of undergraduate and postgraduate ākonga enrolled (2022–2024)

Qualification level	2022	2023	2024
Undergraduate (levels 7–8)	2,515	2,280	2,205
Postgraduate (level 9+)	294	325	315

Number of ākonga enrolled in other postgraduate study related to social work

This year, we asked TEOs about ākonga enrolled in postgraduate programmes that are not prescribed by the SWRB and don't lead to social work qualification but are in a related field of study.

In total, there were 133 ākonga engaged in postgraduate research (85) or other postgraduate social work programmes (48), such as supervision training.

1.2 Ākonga demographics

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

Table 5. Gender of enrolled ākonga

Gender	2023		2024	
	Number	%	Number	%
Male	365	14%	345	14%
Female	2,225	85%	2,145	85%
Another gender	20	<1%	25	1%
Not identified	0	0%	0	0%

Social work ākonga are predominantly female

The gender distribution of enrolled ākonga in 2024 is unchanged from 2023 and is similar to the practising workforce (85% female and 15% male) (table 5).

Most social work ākonga are aged 25+

A quarter of ākonga (25%) are aged 40 or older (table 6). Slightly less than half (47%) are aged 25–39.

Table 6. Age of enrolled ākonga

Age	2023		2024	
	Number	%	Number	%
24 or younger	760	29%	695	28%
25–39 years	1,225	47%	1,180	47%
40 or older	620	24%	635	25%

There is high representation of ākonga identifying as Māori and Pacific peoples

A third of ākonga in the 2024 academic year identified as Māori (33%), up from 30% in 2023 (table 7). This is a higher proportion than in the general population (18% in 2023).⁴ A quarter identified as Pacific peoples (27%), similar to 2023 (26%). In comparison, 24% of the practising workforce identified as Māori and 12% identified as Pacific peoples in 2024/25.⁵ Half of all ākonga identify as European (52%), and 9% identify as Asian.

Table 7. Ethnicity distribution of enrolled ākonga

Ethnicity	2023		2024	
	Number	%	Number	%
NZ Māori	790	30%	820	33%
European	1,415	54%	1,305	52%
Pacific peoples	690	26%	670	27%
Asian	205	8%	215	9%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	80	3%	75	3%
Other	90	3%	50	2%

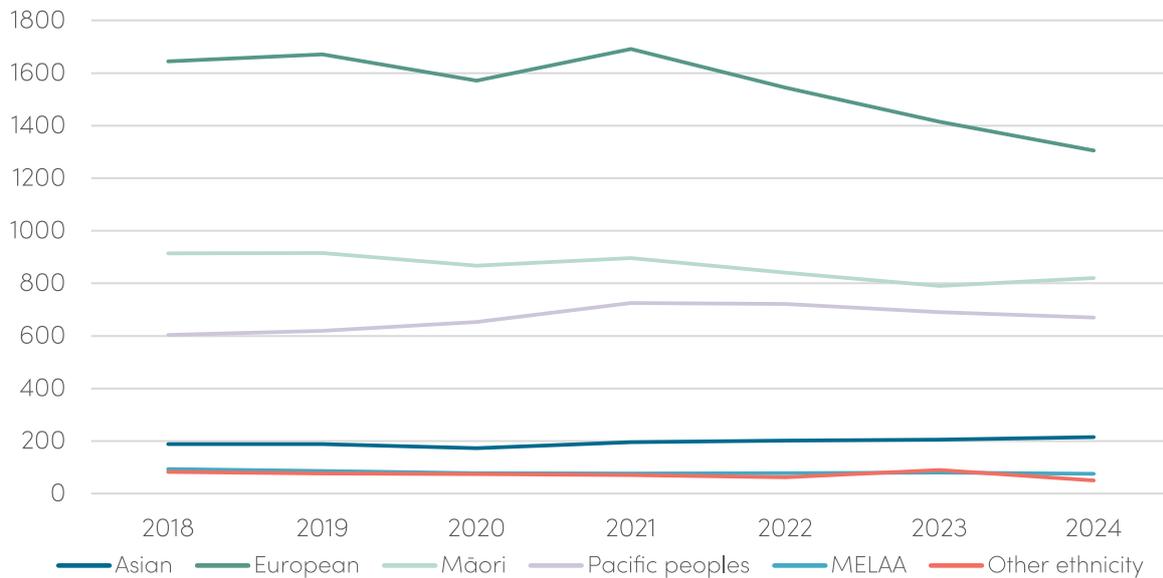
⁴ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/>

⁵ <https://swrb.govt.nz/workforce/workforce-reports/>

The TEC provided the 2024 data about ethnicity distribution. Both the SWRB and the TEC use a 'total ethnicity' analysis and reporting approach. Ākonga can identify with more than one ethnic group, which better recognises and reflects the diversity of enrolled ākonga. This approach aligns with reporting by Statistics NZ and other government organisations.

While the proportion of ākonga identifying as European or Pacific peoples has decreased since 2023, the proportion of ākonga identifying as Māori has increased from 30% in 2023 to 33% in 2024 (figure 3).

Figure 3. Changes in ākonga ethnicities over time (2018–2024)



Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, Te Wānanga o Raukawa and Toi Ohomai have the highest proportion of Māori enrolments, while Manukau Institute of Technology has the highest proportion of ākonga who identify as Pacific peoples (table 8). In 6 of the 18 institutions, 50% or more ākonga identified as Māori.

Table 8. Percentage of ākonga identifying as Māori and/or Pacific peoples by TEO 2024

Institution	Total number enrolled	% identifying as Māori	% identifying as Pacific peoples
Ara Institute of Canterbury	85	24%	18%
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	40	25%	0%
Eastern Institute of Technology	65	54%	15%
Manukau Institute of Technology	310	23%	65%
Massey University	565	24%	10%
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	50	30%	0%
NorthTec	95	58%	16%
Open Polytechnic	85	24%	12%
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	375	60%	37%
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	60	92%	8%
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	20	75%	0%
University of Auckland	145	14%	38%
University of Waikato	20	50%	0%
University of Canterbury	195	13%	15%
University of Otago	65	15%	15%
Unitec Institute of Technology	185	24%	41%
Whitireia	95	37%	37%
Wintec	65	31%	8%

Information about disabilities

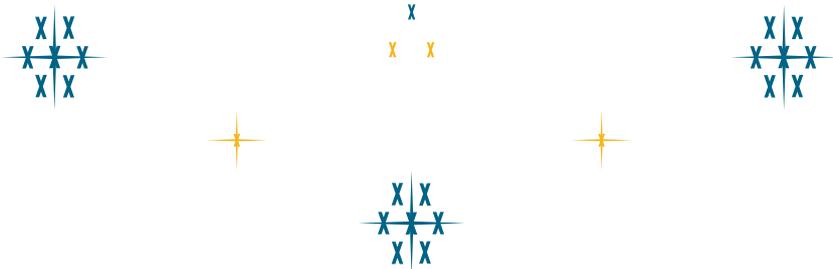
The SWRB asked TEOs about disabilities reported by ākonga enrolled in social work programmes. Overall, TEOs reported a total of 144 ākonga (6%) with disabilities across their institutions, which was similar to the proportion reported last year.

The most commonly reported disabilities are listed in table 9. There was some variation in how TEOs collect and record this information, and the table sub-categories should be interpreted with care. Two institutions said they did not record this information.

Table 9. Disability experienced by ākonga 2024

Disability	Number	%
Physical	23	<1%
Vision	17	<1%
Hearing	15	<1%
Speaking	1	<1%
Learning	36	1%
Psychiatric/psychological	32	1%
Other disabilities	20	<1%
Total	144	6%

One TEO shared that managing field education placements for ākonga with mobility impairments can be challenging as ākonga need access to all areas of their workplace. Some TEOs noted the specific disability support services they made available, such as support for neurodiverse learners and providing access to assistive technologies.



1.3 Retention, programme completion and registering with the Social Workers Registration Board

This section gives an overview of the number of ākonga who completed a SWRB-prescribed social work qualification in the 2024 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.

Measuring retention and attrition in social work programmes

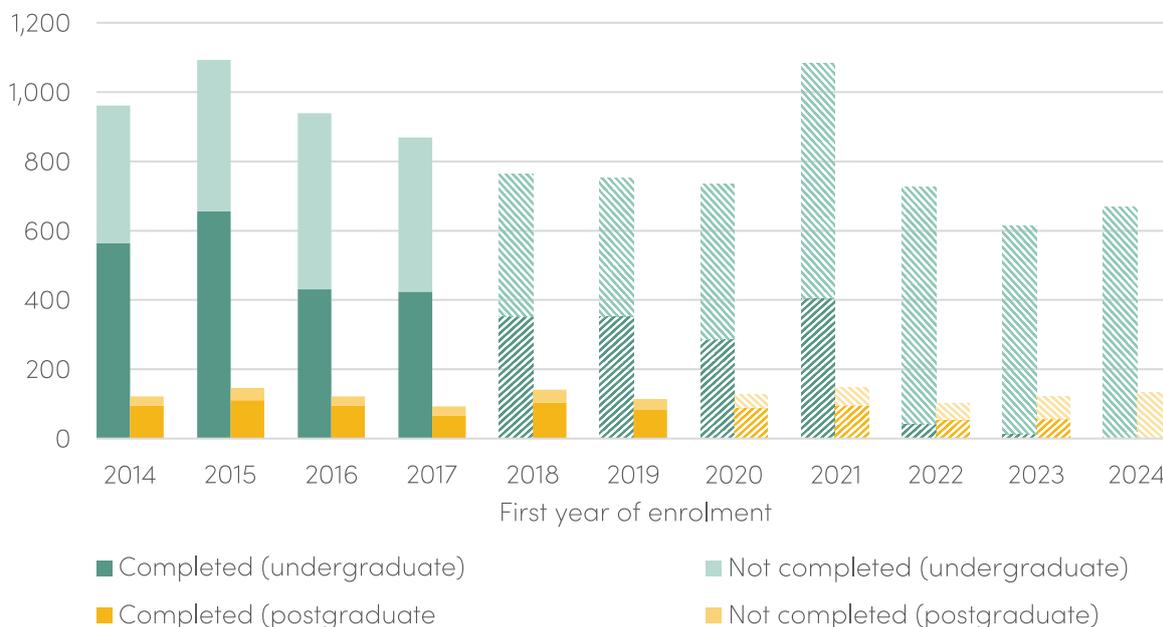
We have investigated a range of methods for measuring retention and attrition in social work programmes. As part of this, we have engaged in cross-government agency collaboration by working with Health New Zealand’s workforce analytics team using data provided by the Ministry of Education (MoE). This data is not directly comparable to TEC data used elsewhere in the report, but it offers a convenient and reliable means of tracking this information and can be updated each year.

We track whether ākonga complete their qualification within a set timeframe from programme start. If they were not awarded a qualification within this set timeframe, the qualification is considered as not completed.

The set timeframe is 8 years from programme start date for undergraduate qualifications and 6 years from programme start date for postgraduate qualifications. These timeframes account for how long it usually takes ākonga to complete courses when studying on a part-time basis. Ākonga may take breaks from their study that result in completing qualifications outside this set timeframe, but the MoE data does not record return-to-study intentions.

Figure 4 shows new entrants into SWRB-prescribed programmes each year and the number who subsequently completed their qualification by the end of 2024. The shaded areas represent cohorts still within their completion timeframes.

Figure 4. Enrolments and completions in SWRB-prescribed qualifications by year of programme start (2014–2024)



The last complete dataset for qualification completions is 2017 for undergraduate qualifications and 2019 for postgraduate qualifications.

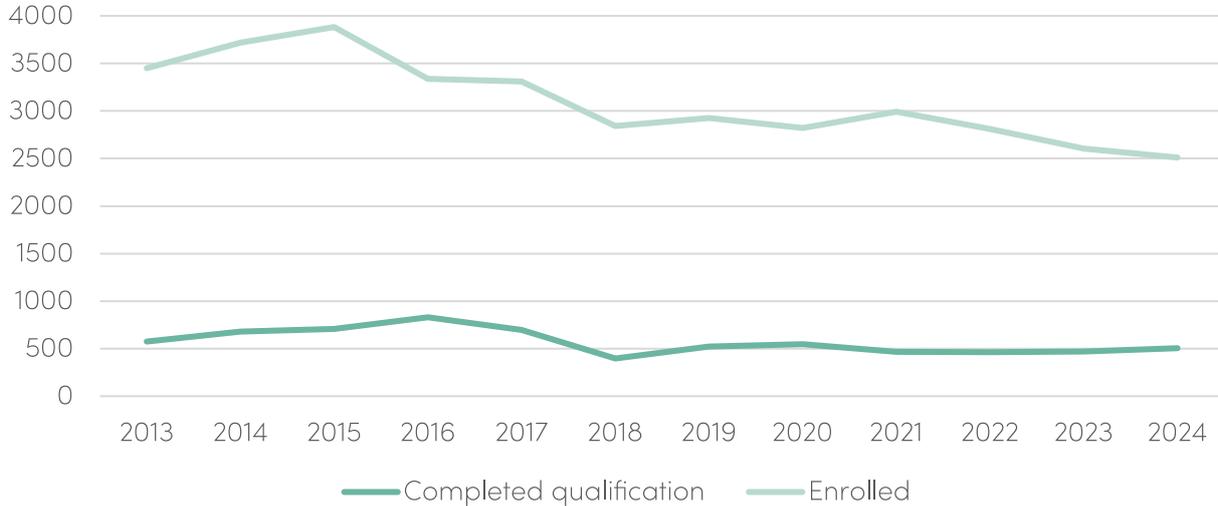
Significant variations in the proportions who complete both undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications were identified between TEOs. Various factors may contribute to the differences among different institutions. As the impact of these factors on completions is likely to be unevenly spread, a comparison by TEO is not included in this report.

While enrolments have declined, the number of ākonga completing social work qualifications remains steady

In 2024 academic year, 505 ākonga completed social work qualifications, including 75 (15%) at postgraduate level.

The total number of ākonga completing social work qualifications each year has remained stable over the past five years, while the number of ākonga enrolled has declined (figure 5).

Figure 5. Total ākonga enrolled and qualifications awarded by year (2013–2024)



Most ākonga register with the SWRB in the year after they completed a social work programme

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.

Of those who completed a qualification in 2024, 375 (74%) registered in 2025 (table 10). This means that 26% did not register with the SWRB and did not enter the social worker workforce.

Table 10. Registration rate after programme completion by year (2020–2024)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Five-year average
Number eligible to register due to completing qualification	546	465	470	470	505	491
Number who register with the SWRB the following year	431	381	387	352	375	385
Registration rate	79%	82%	82%	75%	74%	78%

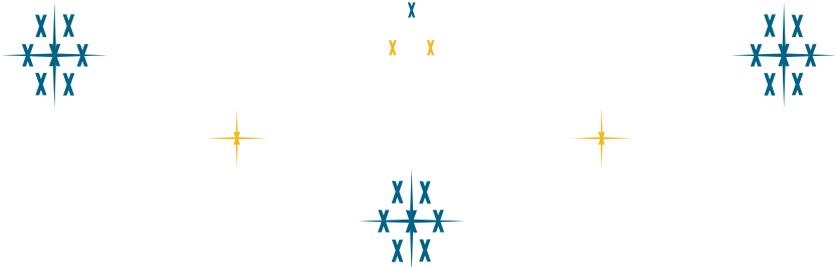
The registration rate is indicative only, due to the discrepancy that can occur between the year a qualification is completed according to TEC data and the year a qualification is awarded (often the following calendar year) and recorded at registration.

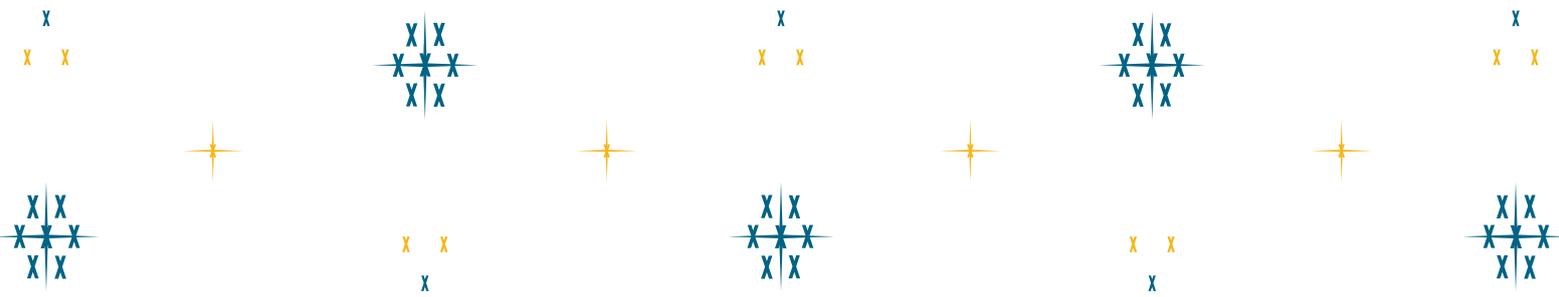
The five-year average registration rate through 2024 is approximately 78%, meaning each year around 22% of ākonga do not register with the SWRB the year after they complete their qualification. There may be many reasons why new graduates do not enter the workforce within this time period, but quantifying those reasons is outside the scope of this report.

Of the 430 ākonga who completed their undergraduate qualification in 2024, 303 went on to register with the SWRB in 2025, representing a registration rate of 70% (table 11). Of the 75 who completed a postgraduate qualification, 72 went on to register (96%).

Table 11. Registration rate by qualification level 2024

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
Number eligible to register due to completing qualification	430	75
Number who register with the SWRB the following year	303	72
Registration rate	70%	96%





1.4 Field education placements for social work ākonga

Work-based learning (field education placements) is a critical component of SWRB-prescribed social work degree programmes. Field education placements provide ākonga with opportunities to apply theory to practice in real world settings, supported by practising social workers. Under the SWRB Programme Recognition Standards (PRS) that applied to the 2024 academic year:

- ākonga must undertake at least 120 days supervised practise in the field
- supervisors must be registered social workers
- there should be at least two different placement experiences
- one placement must be of at least 50 days in duration.

During the 2024 academic year, 1,036 ākonga undertook placements. This is similar to 2023, during which 1,033 ākonga undertook placements. All TEOs fulfilled their obligations around the provision of field education placements, offering placements lasting either 60 and 60 or 50 and 70 days. This applied to both undergraduate and postgraduate ākonga.

Most ākonga undertake placements in the region they study in

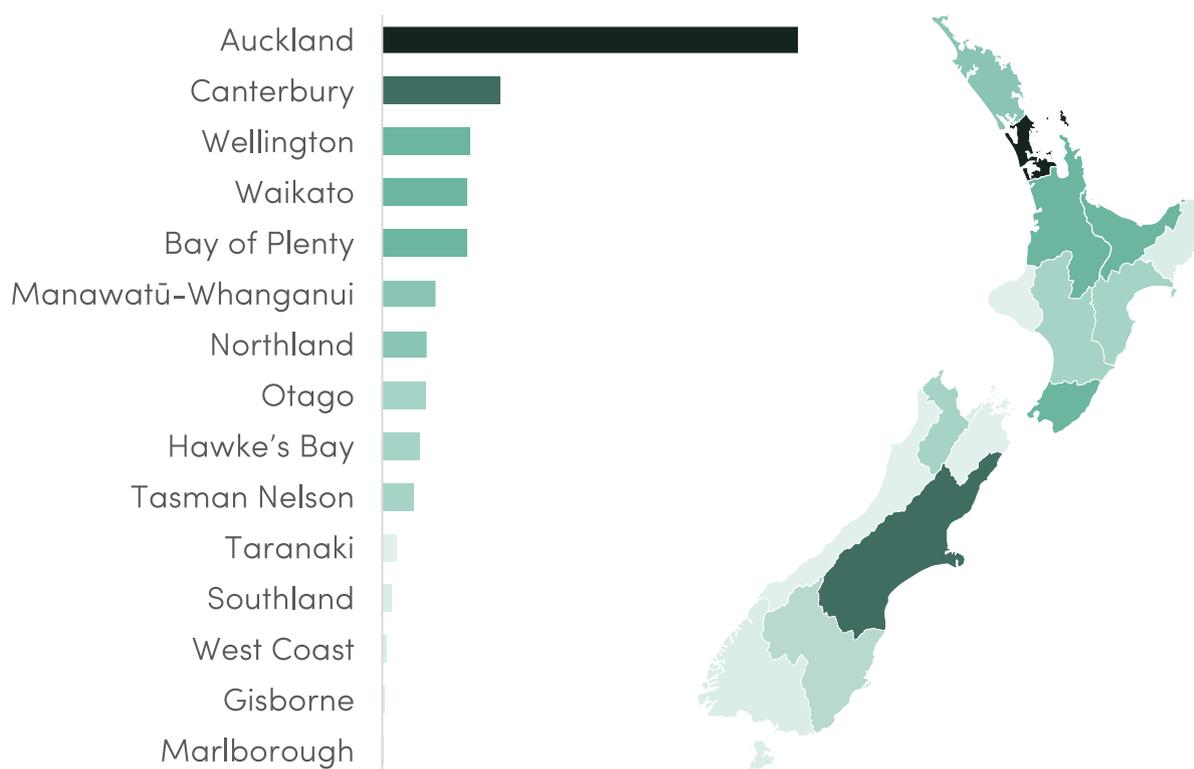
In most cases, placements were undertaken in the same region as the institution’s primary campus (table 12).

Table 12. Number of ākonga on field education placement and region(s) of placements by institution 2024

Institute	Number on placement	Geographic region(s) of placements
Ara Institute of Canterbury	36	Canterbury
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	14	Waikato, Bay of Plenty
Eastern Institute of Technology	22	Hawke’s Bay
Manukau Institute of Technology	104	Auckland
Massey University	240	Auckland; a number across other regions
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	22	Nelson
NorthTec	34	Northland
Open Polytechnic	37	Multiple regions
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	137	Auckland; a number across other regions
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	19	Multiple regions
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	21	Bay of Plenty
Unitec Institute of Technology	61	Auckland
University of Auckland	89	Auckland
University of Canterbury	70	Canterbury
University of Otago	48	Otago; small number across other regions
University of Waikato	19	Waikato, Bay of Plenty
Whitireia	34	Wellington
Wintec	29	Waikato

Most placements were undertaken in Auckland and Canterbury (figure 6).

Figure 6. Location of field education placements by region 2024



Most placements are undertaken in NGOs; the remainder are in government organisations

TEOs reported that two thirds of ākonga (65%) undertook field education placements in NGOs; the remainder (35%) undertook placements in government organisations. The proportion of all placements in NGOs and government organisations remained the same between 2023 and 2024.

672 ākonga undertook their placements in NGOs (table 13). 17% of all placements took place in kaupapa Māori and iwi-based organisations, similar to the proportion last year (16%). 4% were within Pacific-based NGOs, fewer than the 8% recorded last year.

Table 13. Field education placements by NGO type 2024

NGO type	Number on placement	% of all placements
Non-iwi or Pacific-based NGOs	454	44%
Iwi-based NGOs	176	17%
Pacific-based NGOs	42	4%
Total NGO placements	672	65%

367 ākonga undertook their placements in government organisations (table 14). The majority of these were in Oranga Tamariki (155; 15% of all placements) and Health NZ Te Whatu Ora (158 placements; 15% of all placements). The proportion of placements at these government organisations increased from 24% in 2023 to 30% in 2024. However, the proportion of placements in other government organisations decreased from 10% in 2023 to 5% in 2024.

Table 14. Field education placements by government organisation 2024

Government organisation	Number on placement	% of all placements
Oranga Tamariki	155	15%
Health NZ Te Whatu Ora	158	15%
Corrections, NZ Police, and the Ministry of Justice	35	3%
Other government (or unspecified)	19	2%
Total government placements	367	35%

Comparing where ākonga are undertaking government organisation-based placements with the current practising social worker workforce may be a useful way to understand where social workers are employed after registration. As of 30 June 2025, 29% of all practising social workers reported being employed by NGOs, followed by Oranga Tamariki (24%), health (21%), and iwi-based/kaupapa Māori organisations (9%). The remainder worked for other employer types (education institutions; self-employment/private practice; other government and Pacific organisations). This indicates that while government organisations are hosting an increased proportion of placements, it is lower than the proportion of the social worker workforce they employ overall.

Some ākonga undertake placements in their current place of employment

The SWRB Programme Recognition Standards permit ākonga to undertake placements in their current place of employment under certain conditions, such as if the field education provides a significantly different social work experience to their normal employment. In 2024, 99 ākonga completed their field education placements in their current place of employment, representing about 10% of all ākonga on placement, compared with 12% in 2023.

Financial hardship (both for individuals and host organisations) is one reason ākonga undertake placements in their current place of employment. One TEO said that:

“Financial hardship is very real for our students. We have had an increase of 10 students applying for a second placement in their place of work due to being the main income holder in their household, or their employer can no longer give them three months leave to do placements (elsewhere), forcing the taura to choose between work or study.”

In 2024, we asked TEOs if ākonga went on to be employed by their host organisation after completing their qualification. Of the ākonga alumni from the 13 TEOs that were able to report on this, a total of 81 ākonga went on to be employed by their host organisation once they had completed their qualification. By comparison, in 2023 the total was 128 across 12 TEOs.

The majority of ākonga successfully complete their field education placements

In 2024, approximately 97% of ākonga successfully completed their placements. Fewer than 3% failed or did not complete their placement. 16 ākonga received a placement fail grade in 2024, which is twice as many as in 2023 (8).

Reasons (which may overlap) for a fail grade included: failing to submit documents and/or coursework components; failing to meet SWRB core competence standards; failing to do the hours or course assessments; and a variety of other reasons, including non-attendance, medical grounds, or unspecified issues with their host organisation.

A further 11 ākonga did not complete or deferred their field education placements in 2024 for reasons other than failing their assessments. Reasons for incomplete or deferred placements included ākonga hauora issues, financial hardship, and matters relating to the host organisation.

One TEO gave an example of being flexible in a situation where a student became unwell.

“The placement was reallocated when the student was able to complete, and they did so successfully”.

Sourcing field education placements

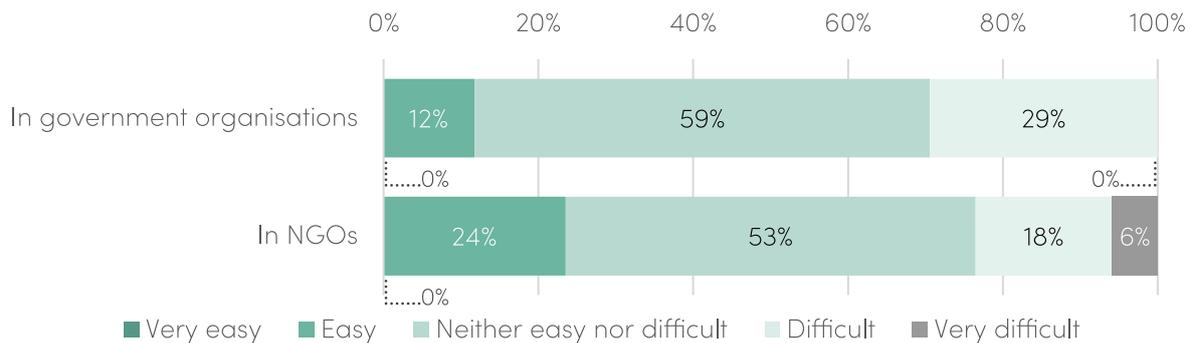
TEOs were asked how they source field education placements for their ākonga. Responses show that sourcing placements continues to rely on regular personal contact, networking and liaison between TEO field education co-ordinators and organisations employing social workers to

nurture ongoing relationships. TEOs refer to the combination of continued relationship-building and administrative efforts (reminder emails, visits to organisations) throughout the academic year. As with last year, TEOs also referenced the use of alumni networks and recommendations from previous ākonga to source new placements.

Reflecting feedback from previous surveys, in 2024 TEOs were also asked to comment on how challenging it was to secure placements for ākonga.

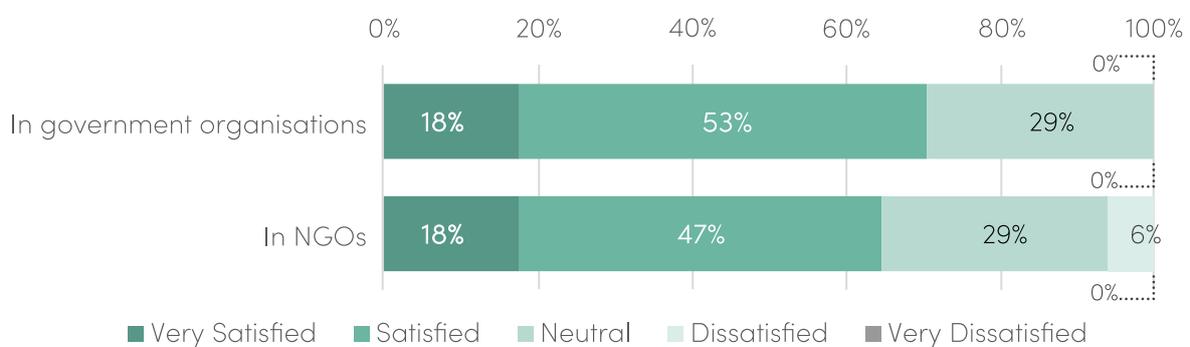
29% of TEOs said finding placements in government organisations was difficult, while 24% of TEOs said finding placements in NGOs was easy (figure 7).

Figure 7. Ease of finding field education placements 2024



TEOs were asked to comment on their level of satisfaction with the quality of field education placements offered to their ākonga. 71% of TEOs were very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of the placements in government organisations, while 65% were very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of NGO placements (figure 8).

Figure 8. TEO satisfaction with field education placement quality 2024



TEOs note challenges sourcing placements

TEOs were asked to comment on any challenges they faced in sourcing enough field education placements and the way they addressed them. The challenges they reported included:

- increasing numbers of ākonga facing financial difficulties, making it harder to support themselves during unpaid placements
- transport difficulties and/or ākonga needing a driver’s license limit placement options
- social sector organisations having reduced capacity to support field education placement, with less staffing and other resources to support ākonga due to changes in funding arrangements
- other organisations, especially in government, facing constraints due to higher staff turnover and public service cuts resulting in a more selective approach to ākonga to meet ‘team fit’ and stricter eligibility criteria.

Some noted these factors were worse in rural areas. One TEO shared the following:

“With some ākongā in rural areas, it can be challenging to find agencies in the same area where ākongā live. The cost of travel is expensive for ākongā and can become a barrier.

Loss in government funding has impacted some agencies willingness to have ākongā. Many NGOs have been in a holding pattern about the level of government funding they will be receiving, this has led to some declining ākongā on placement.”

TEOs identified a number of proactive measures they are taking to address these challenges:

- building strong relationships with health and social sector organisations to foster trust and collaboration as potential placement hosts
- collaborating with other TEOs to allocate placements fairly
- providing flexibility in placement arrangements where possible
- connecting students with potential host organisations early to maximise placement opportunities
- providing host organisations with preparation and support before and during placements, including orientation, clarification of expectations, and ongoing support for field education staff. Many TEO placement teams meet regularly to address challenges and help both students and host organisations
- offering external supervisors to ease pressure on host organisations and provide professional development opportunities for field educators
- advocating for ākongā and, where possible, providing them with financial hardship support (e.g., petrol vouchers).

One TEO shared the following about the kinds of support and networking that goes into planning for placements:

“Providing onsite supervision, working hard at establishing and maintaining relationships with organisations, making personal visits to sell students. Have the students present their ‘portfolio’ to impress potential placements and have a day where we connect potential placement providers and students for their mutual benefit.”

TEOs have identified factors that contribute to successful field education placements

TEOs were asked to indicate the key factors that contribute to a successful field education placement. A number of themes emerged:

- Matching ākongā with their preferred interests and learning objectives
- Ensuring good preparation, including training for field education supervisors, before placements begin. For example, a TEO offered free field education training courses
- Providing regular and accessible support for ākongā and supervisors during placements
- Ensuring host organisations know when and who to contact (such as a programme coordinator), and that there are clear expectations of the purpose and timing of placement site visits
- Making sure that assessment methods are clear and meaningful to all parties.

Developing and maintaining relationships with health and social sector organisations was seen as the most important factor. One example of this was in creating accessible opportunities for potential host organisations to engage with TEOs in their regions.

“We hold our professional development series from March–November each year. Our placement agencies have open access (at no charge) to attend in person, or online. This is a way for us to acknowledge their contribution to our ākongā, and provide them and their staff with ongoing professional development opportunities.”

The Social Worker Employers Report 2024 highlighted challenges employers of social workers in health and social sector organisations face. Noted challenges include the availability of qualified supervisors and a lack of financial support for hosting ākonga.⁶ In light of these findings, TEOs were asked to give examples of how they collaborated with employers to build the social worker workforce.

Collaborative initiatives described by TEOs included providing employers with opportunities to attend free training and development sessions and invitations to share knowledge and experience with ākonga through presentations. One TEO noted how they do an evaluation each year to develop continuing learning and feedback:

“Each year, the practicum team launches an online survey to understand field educators’ experiences. We continually gather feedback from social work agencies to understand how we can work collaboratively with practitioners in the field to develop the social work workforce”.

Challenges facing the social work educator workforce

In 2024, new questions were added to the annual data return asking TEOs about the challenges they faced in maintaining the social work educator workforce required to deliver SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications. This followed the publication of a SWRB spotlight report on social workers employed by TEOs delivering social work qualifications.⁷ This spotlight report highlighted sustainability challenges for this part of the social worker workforce, including recruitment, retention and pay parity.

Two thirds of TEOs find it slightly or moderately challenging for their institution to attract an adequate workforce to deliver education requirements. 10% said recruitment was very challenging. A similar proportion found it slightly or moderately challenging to support and retain their workforce.

The specialised nature of the roles, which could involve direct teaching as well as placement support and co-ordination, was noted by some.

“Finding the combination of registration, experience and a doctoral degree can be challenging. They are also required to understand Te Tiriti and the Aotearoa context, limiting the international applicants we might consider”.

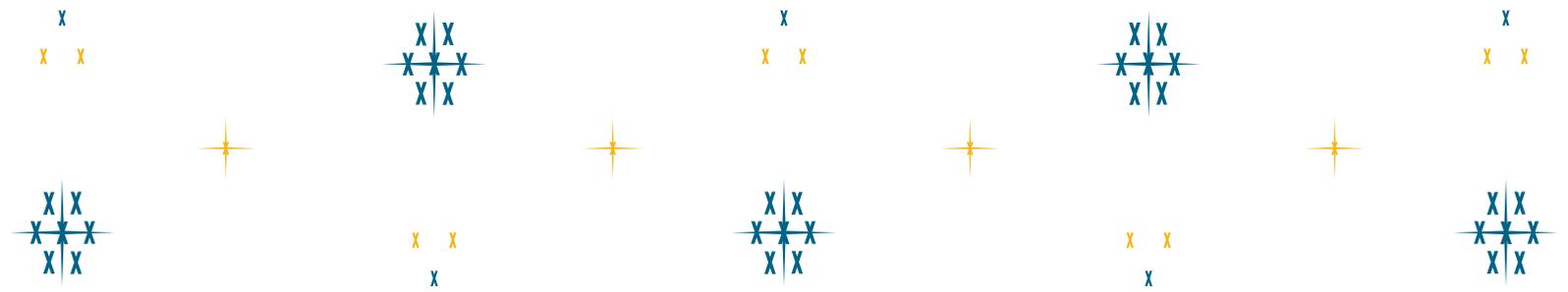
In order to build a sustainable social work educator workforce, some TEOs noted the importance of incentives to employ social workers like providing free insurance, giving staff more input into planning and decision-making, having flexibility and research time to compliment teaching time, and opportunities for continuing professional development.

Most TEOs commented on salary distribution noting pay parity with other parts of the social worker workforce as an issue for recruitment and retention now and into the future.

“Recruiting in social work education is hampered and impacted by a lack of pay equity – social workers can earn more in practice than in the education space.”

6 <https://swrb.govt.nz/download/social-worker-employers-report-2024/?tmstv=1762827471>

7 <https://swrb.govt.nz/download/workforce-survey-2024-teos-delivering-swrp-prescribed-qualifications-spotlight/?tmstv=1762297488>



Closing comments

This report provides a detailed picture of the state of social work education across Aotearoa New Zealand. While there are encouraging signs of resilience in parts of the education pipeline, the report also highlights a number of trends that warrant continued attention and action from the SWRB and the wider sector.

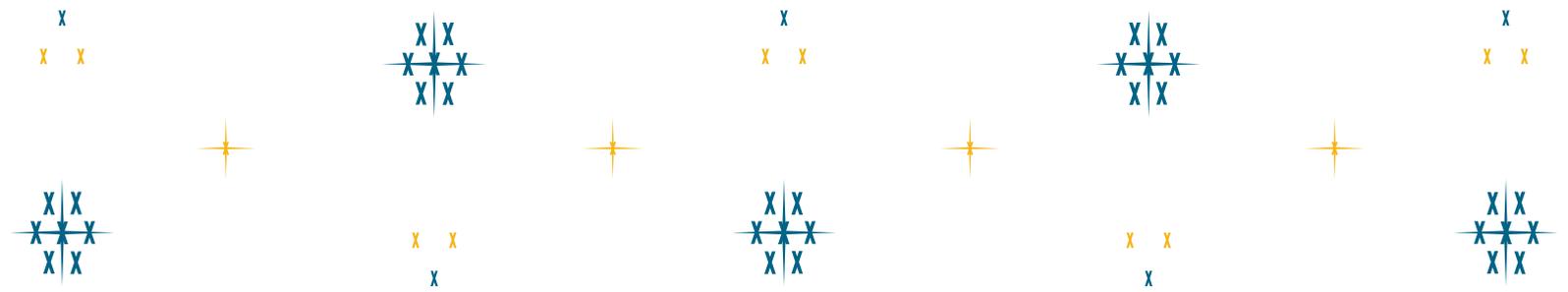
The continued decline in enrolments, now at their lowest level since 2013, is a concern for the long-term sustainability of the social work workforce. The discontinuation of undergraduate programmes at some institutions further reduces the range of pathways into the profession and concentrates delivery among fewer providers. The SWRB is committed to working with the tertiary education sector and government partners to better understand the drivers behind declining enrolments and to ensure its regulatory settings support the attractiveness and accessibility of social work as a career pathway.

Despite falling enrolments, it is notable that the number of ākonga completing social work qualifications has remained broadly stable. This suggests that retention efforts within programmes are having a positive effect, and the SWRB encourages TEOs to continue building on the practices that support ākonga through to completion.

At the same time, the undergraduate completion rate of 49% indicates that roughly half of those who begin a social work qualification do not finish it. The SWRB will continue to work with TEOs and other stakeholders to strengthen how attrition and completion are understood, and to identify the factors – financial, pastoral, academic, and structural – that contribute to ākonga not completing their qualifications.

The report's expanded focus on field education placements provides valuable new insights. While the overall success rate of placements remains high, the challenges reported by TEOs, including financial hardship among ākonga, reduced organisational capacity to host placements, and difficulties sourcing placements in government organisations, point to systemic pressures that extend beyond the education sector. The SWRB will use these findings to inform its ongoing engagement with employers and sector stakeholders, and to consider what regulatory and operational responses may be appropriate.

The finding that 26% of ākonga who complete a social work qualification do not go on to register with the SWRB in the following year represents a notable leakage in the workforce pipeline. Understanding why qualified graduates choose not to enter the registered workforce is an area where the SWRB intends to deepen its analysis, drawing on education, registration, and workforce survey data to build a more complete picture of the pathways into and through the profession.



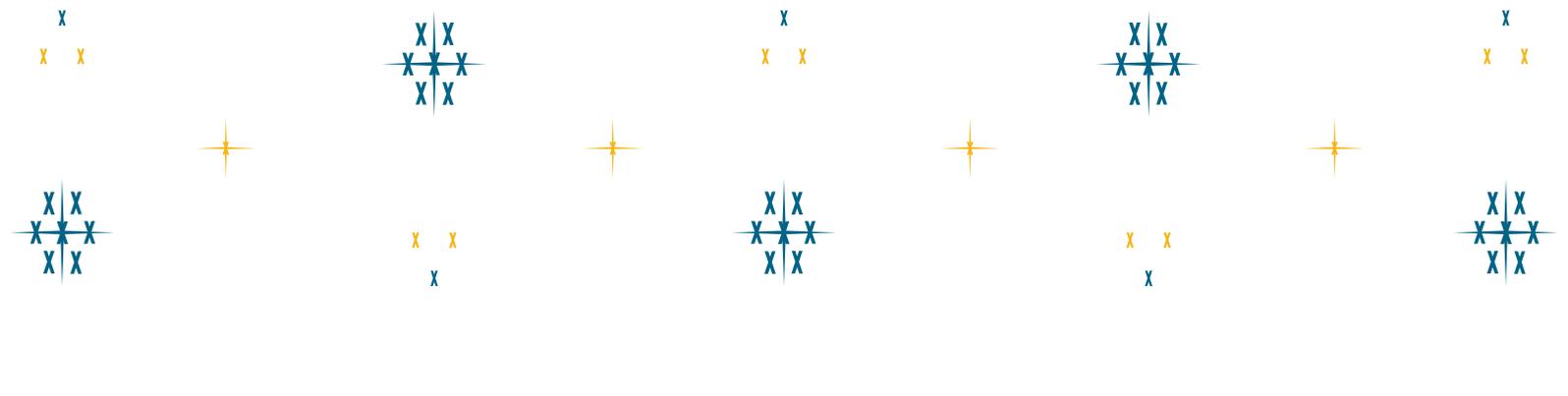
Finally, the challenges facing the social work educator workforce are a matter of concern for the quality and sustainability of social work education itself. Pay parity, the specialised nature of the educator role, and difficulties attracting and retaining qualified staff are issues that require a coordinated response. The SWRB will continue to monitor these trends closely and engage with TEOs through its programme recognition and review functions on how the educator workforce can be better supported.

These findings form part of the evidence base informing the development of the upcoming social worker workforce strategy and action plan, Sustainable Social Work Pathways – Tauwhiro Ararau. At the time of writing, early indications were that the revised Education Standards were likely to generate change to programme delivery amongst some TEOs. While there has also been some discussion within the education sector on the longer-term impacts, there is recognition of the importance of the education pathway for the profession. This allows the SWRB to anticipate an increase in student numbers and graduates, more TEOs moving from four to three-year degrees, and some additional engagement with TEOs around their reception of change.

The SWRB is committed to ensuring that its regulatory functions, workforce intelligence, and sector engagement are aligned with the goal of building a sustainable, skilled, and representative social work workforce for Aotearoa New Zealand. We look forward to continuing to work alongside TEOs, employers, government agencies, and the profession to address the challenges and opportunities this report has identified.

For more information about the social worker workforce please visit the workforce planning page on our website.⁸

8 <https://swrb.govt.nz/workforce/our-lead-agency-role/>



Appendix 1: Our role in social work education

The SWRB has two roles in social work education:

- to recognise social work qualifications that meet our Education Standards
- to work with providers and the bodies that set standards for social work education and training in NZ, to promote and set standards.

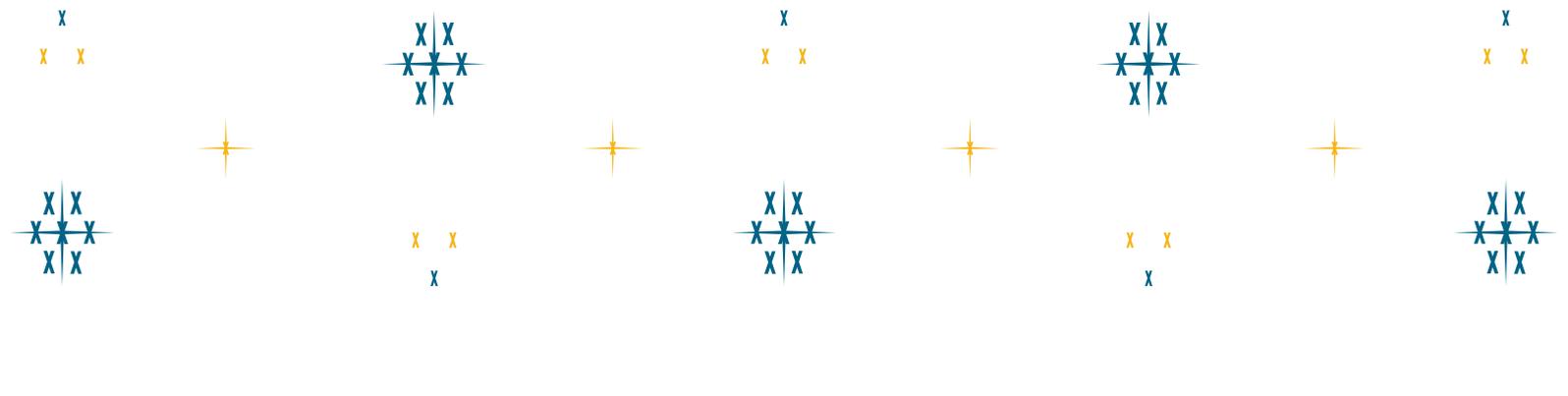
These standards ensure social work programmes reflect the content of the General Scope of Social Work Practice. They support graduates to meet professional standards for entry into the social work profession such as fitness to practise requirements, the Code of Conduct and the ten Core Competence Standards.

All TEOs delivering SWRB-prescribed social work education in New Zealand are reviewed on a regular basis by the SWRB. TEOs are required to meet the SWRB 2021 revised Programme Recognition Standards (PRS) throughout the 2023–25 academic years. The new Education Standards (approved by the Board in June 2025) come into effect on 1 January 2026, replacing the PRS.

Ākonga who complete an SWRB-prescribed qualification will be eligible to apply to register as a social worker and practice within the General Scope of Social Work Practice through the New Zealand approved registration pathway. These qualifications currently include a four-year Bachelor's (level 7–8) and a two-year Master's of applied practice (level 9) qualification. Both qualifications currently require ākonga to complete 120 days of field education placements (work-based learning).

In addition to the New Zealand qualification pathway, people can also become registered with the SWRB through the overseas social work qualification pathway.⁹ The experience pathway (S13) was available for new applications until 28 February 2026.

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



Appendix 2: Glossary

Ākonga

Learners or students. In this report, the term is used to describe people enrolled in social work education programmes.

Core Competence Standards

The ten professional competence standards that support entry into the social work profession and are referenced in the SWRB's education and training framework.

Field education placement

A supervised practice placement completed in a real-world social work setting as part of a prescribed qualification. Field education is a required component of SWRB-prescribed programmes.

Fitness to practise

The requirement that a person is suitable, competent and safe to practise social work. Education standards help prepare graduates to meet this threshold.

General Scope of Social Work Practice

The main scope of practice for registered social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. SWRB-prescribed qualifications are designed to prepare graduates for registration within this scope.

Government organisation placements

Field education placements hosted by government agencies such as Oranga Tamariki, Health NZ Te Whatu Ora, Corrections, NZ Police or the Ministry of Justice.

Host organisation

The organisation that provides a field education placement for an ākonga and supports their learning in practice.

Mātauranga Māori

Māori knowledge, ways of knowing and understanding. The report notes that some programmes emphasise a mātauranga Māori focus.

NGO (non-government organisation)

An organisation outside central or local government. In this report, NGOs are a major setting for field education placements, including iwi-based and Pacific-based organisations.

Postgraduate qualification (level 9+)

An advanced social work qualification above undergraduate level. In this report, postgraduate study includes prescribed qualifications that can lead to registration, as well as some related non-prescribed postgraduate study.

Prescribed qualification

A New Zealand educational qualification formally recognised or prescribed by the SWRB for the purposes of registration under the Social Workers Registration Act 2003.

Programme Recognition Standards (PRS)

The standards that TEOs delivering SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications were required to meet during the 2023–25 academic years. These are being replaced by new Education Standards from 1 January 2026.

Registration/register with the SWRB

The process by which a person who has completed an approved qualification or met another pathway's requirements becomes a registered social worker.

Retention

The extent to which ākonga remain in and progress through a social work programme toward completion.

S13 experience pathway

A registration pathway available for new applications until 28 February 2026, referred to in the report as the experience pathway under section 13 of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003.

Scope of practice

The area of professional practice a registered social worker is authorised to work within. Qualifications are prescribed for each scope of practice under the Social Workers Registration Act 2003.

Social work educator workforce

The teaching and placement-support workforce within TEOs responsible for delivering prescribed social work qualifications.

Social Workers Registration Act 2003 (the Act)

The legislation that sets out the SWRB's responsibilities, including prescribing qualifications and setting education and training standards.

Sustainable Social Work Pathways – Tauwhiro Ararau

The government's social worker workforce strategy and action plan referred to in the report.

TEC (Tertiary Education Commission)

The government agency that provided TEO-level data on social work qualifications used in the report.

TEO (tertiary education organisation)

A university, institute of technology, wānanga, private training establishment, or other tertiary provider that delivers social work education.

Te Pūkenga – New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology

The national network of institutes of technology and polytechnics referenced in the report; ten of the TEOs are identified as part of Te Pūkenga.

Total ethnicity approach

A reporting method that allows a person to be counted in more than one ethnic group if they identify with multiple ethnicities.

Undergraduate qualification (levels 7–8)

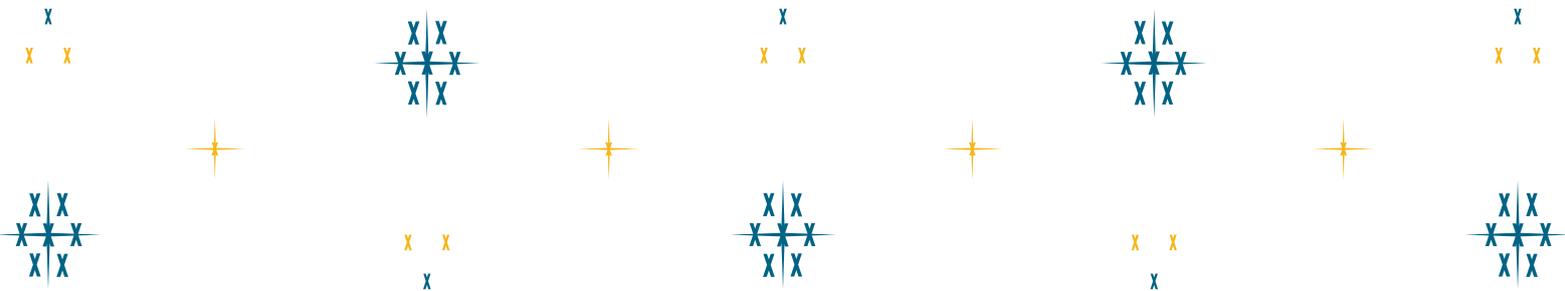
A bachelor-level social work qualification that can lead to eligibility for registration.

Wānanga

A tertiary education organisation grounded in Māori knowledge and educational approaches. Two wānanga delivering prescribed social work qualifications are referenced in the report.

Work-based learning

Learning that takes place in practice settings as part of a qualification. In this report, this refers to field education placements.



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Registration Board**
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro