



**Social Workers  
Registration Board**  
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

## **COMPETENCE**

---

### **POLICY (INTERIM)**

Approved by: Shannon Pakura, SWRB Chair  
Date Approved: November 2010  
Last Reviewed: 11 August 2021  
Scheduled for Review: July 2022

## **COMPETENCE**

This policy statement is based on the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 (the Act), and addresses competence requirements described in Sections 6, 7, 38, 38B, 39 and 42.

### **Core Competence Framework**

The Social Workers Registration Board (the Board) recognises core competencies that reflect practice standards accepted in New Zealand. These core competencies apply to all competence assessment processes that are set and approved by the Board. When assessing competence, the Board acknowledges that social workers are not a homogeneous group but come from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Further, culture recognises but is not limited to, disability, gender identity, religious beliefs and sexuality.

The requirements of the Act, the International Federation of Social Workers' (IFSW) definition of Social Work and the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers practice standards, informed the Board in determining the following as initial core competencies that must be held by all registered social workers:

1. Competence to practice social work with Māori
2. Competence to practice social work with different ethnic and cultural groups in New Zealand
3. Competence to work respectfully and inclusively with diversity and difference in practice
4. Competence to promote the principles of human rights and social and economic justice
5. Competence to engage in practice which promotes social change
6. Competence to understand and articulate social work theories, indigenous practice knowledge, other relevant theories, and social work practice methods and models
7. Competence to apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgements
8. Competence to promote empowerment of people and communities to enable positive change
9. Competence to practice within legal and ethical boundaries of the social work profession
10. Represents the social work profession with integrity and professionalism

Competence to practise social work, as per the ten core competencies above, is a requirement for registration. The Act entitles a person who has a recognised New Zealand qualification to be registered if the Board is satisfied that he or she is a fit and proper person to practise social work; and is competent to practise social work with Māori and with different ethnic and cultural groups in New Zealand.

Educational institutions are required to sign off on the competence of each new graduate. Information on New Zealand recognised social work qualifications is available [here](#)

The Board acknowledges that overseas-qualified social workers applying for registration may not be able to demonstrate their competence against the first two competencies listed above. Therefore, they will initially be required to demonstrate their competence against competencies 3-10 and demonstrate competence against competencies 1-2 within six months of commencing social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## **Competence Assessment**

The Act outlines the following expectations for competence assessment processes:

- 1) The Board may, from time to time, set programmes for the purpose of helping it decide whether people:
  - a) have the skill and knowledge required to practise social work in accordance with their registration (or proposed registration); and
  - b) meet the professional standards reasonably to be expected of a social worker
- 2) A competence assessment may consist of one or more:
  - a) components set by the Board; or
  - b) components set by another person or body and recognised by the Board with or without change.
- 3) At least one competence assessment must apply to all social work.
- 4) Any other competence assessment:
  - a) may apply to all social work; or
  - b) may apply only to social work of a stated description; or
  - c) may apply to all social work other than social work of a stated description.

More information on the Board's Competence Assessment process is available [here](#)

In the event that a social worker who has undergone a competence assessment disagrees with the outcome, they have the right of appeal to the District Court. Any appeal must be on a notice of appeal and lodged within 20 working days of the Board's decision in relation to the outcome.

### **Obligations of employers**

If an employer becomes aware that a social worker may not be competent to practise, that employer is required to investigate the social worker's competence as soon as practicable. If that investigation leads the employer to believe that the social worker requires assistance to improve their competence, it is the employer's responsibility to take reasonable steps to provide that assistance.

After fulfilling these duties, if the employer believes the social worker is still not competent to practise, the employer is required to promptly report that belief to the Board.

If a social worker resigns or is dismissed for reasons relating to competence, the most recent employer must submit a written report to the Board, stating:

- a) the reason for the resignation or dismissal;
- b) the reasons why the employer believes the social worker is not or may not be competent to practise; and
- c) the actions the employer has taken to assist the social worker and the outcome of the assistance.

An employer who makes a report like this in good faith cannot be prosecuted for doing so.

### **Obligations of the Board**

The Act allows the Board to review a social worker's competence to practise social work at any time.

The Board may also review a social worker's competence to practise social work if it receives information that raises doubt about their competence. This review may result in a prescribed competence assessment.