

Education Standards and Prescription and Monitoring Framework – Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ document is designed to support tertiary education organisations (TEOs) and others involved in the delivery of SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications.

The document will be updated regularly when queries arise during the implementation of the education standards and associated prescription and monitoring framework. Please send any questions to education@swrb.govt.nz.

We look forward to hearing from you as work through the fees consultation process.

This version was finalised for publication on 26 August 2025.

PRESCRIPTION AND MONITORING FRAMEWORK

Q. Why is the model for monitoring prescribed qualifications being changed?

A. The SWRB believes that the new framework provides a level of flexibility that gives TEOs more agency to influence the amount of monitoring required of them. The existing model had been in place since 2016, before the introduction of mandatory registration, and represented a more traditional regulatory structure. TEOs who establish highly compliant programmes will have less regulatory engagement with the SWRB under the new proportionate monitoring model. We acknowledge that moving from a one-size-fits-all model to the new framework may cause some uncertainty for TEOs, especially the introduction of custom monitoring. The SWRB education team are available to answer your questions and provide clarification as you settle into the new structure.

Q. Has the language around programme prescription and monitoring changed?

A. Yes, it has. Explanations of each activity are in the [Prescription and Monitoring Framework](#). The activities are linked to the education fees which are being proposed in the fees consultation which opens in June 2025.

	Current terminology	New terminology
Activity	Education programme recognition vetting (known as programme recognition or re-recognition)	New qualification prescription (one-off)
		Prescription confirmation (usually every four years)
		Annual monitoring (annual except for prescription confirmation year)
		Custom monitoring (if required)

Support	Education programme annual fee	Annual programme support
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Q. Do the new Education Standards remove the requirement for undergraduate degree level programmes to be four years (Level 7, 480 credits) or a postgraduate Master's qualification to be two years (Level 9, 240 credits) in length? That is, can a qualification leading to the graduation of students who are eligible for registration with the SWRB be three years at Level 7, 360 credits or one year–18 months at Level 9, 120+ credits long?

A. Yes. The new Education Standards allow more flexibility in the length of qualifications. Point 1.1 specifies that an undergraduate degree programme must be at Level 7 or above and a postgraduate programme at Level 9 or above. Any proposed programme must meet the Education Standards.

The previous expectation for a social work qualification to be delivered as either a four-year full time equivalent 480 credits Bachelor's degree or a two-year full time equivalent 240 credit Master's level qualification no longer applies.

As they are more flexible, the new Education Standards do not specify the length of the qualification but note that an undergraduate qualification is to be delivered at Level 7 on the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework (NZQCF), therefore 360 credits or more, and a postgraduate qualification to be Level 9, therefore 120 credits or more.

Under the new Education Standards, the Board will therefore be able to receive applications for the prescription of:

- new qualifications which differ in structure and length from current programmes **OR**
- changes to the structure and length of existing programmes.

The flexibility in the length of the qualification allows for innovation in the design and delivery of social work qualifications. This aligns the sector with international moves towards alternative models of study. Scotland and England are notable examples where the move towards apprenticeship-type social work qualifications has developed in response to social worker workforce challenges.

Q. Will this mean that social work undergraduate programmes which are three years or postgraduate programmes which are less than two years in length will be more accessible to students? Would this potentially cause less financial hardship?

A. The SWRB anticipates that the option of a reduced length of study may be a positive step in terms of reducing barriers to retention. Work on student poverty suggests that the length of qualification has been difficult for some students. The room for innovation provided by the new Education Standards may support the reduction of financial burdens faced by ākonga. Encouraging retention in programmes through reducing the financial burden facing ākonga may therefore have a positive impact on the social worker workforce.

Section 5B(2)(c) of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 (the Act) requires that prescribed qualifications "must not impose undue costs on persons seeking to be registered as social workers or the public."

Q. Can we apply for the prescription of a programme shortened from 4 years to 3 years?

A. Yes. A change in the length of an existing qualification will be treated as a new qualification application. Evidence must be shown in the application that the new qualification meets the [Education Standards](#).

Q. When can we apply for prescription of a new qualification? When will we be able to deliver a new programme?

A. We welcome expressions of interest in new prescription applications to support the setting of realistic processing timeframes. We anticipate that applications would need to be submitted by the end of June annually for new programmes to start in the following year i.e. 2026 application for 2027 delivery.

By the beginning of 2026, we expect to have the mechanisms in place to support the transition to the new standards from the previous Programme Recognition Standards. This includes the introduction of the prescription and monitoring framework and implementation of the new education fee.

If a group of TEOs express an interest in prescription of new qualifications as part of a consortia agreement, the SWRB will need to consider its capacity to handle these alongside the transition of existing programmes to the new standards. The processes for implementation and panel identification, training and organisation may take time. There is a relationship between the prescription approach, balance of internal and external resource as well as Board time, to be taken into consideration. The scheduling of new qualification applications would need to be factored into the existing timetable for prescription confirmation to ensure the SWRB is able to deliver.

The period for new qualification applications will be from January to June annually which should allow time for a full prescription process prior to a new academic year's delivery. The SWRB's regulatory function to ensure the safety of the public by monitoring existing qualifications must take priority over new applications if there is a time conflict.

It may be possible for new programmes to begin delivery from 2027. This is subject to qualification applications meeting the Education Standards thoroughly and the SWRB's capacity for prescription as outlined above.

Q. Will the reduction in programme length negatively affect public safety?

A. A reduction in programme length will not compromise public safety where the programme meets and continues to meet the SWRB Education Standards. The emphasis remains on each programme needing to meet standards which produce graduates who are competent and safe to practise and therefore are eligible to apply for registration under the General Scope of Social Work Practice as a beginning social work practitioner. The SWRB anticipates that this will better meet the needs of the New Zealand health and social sector and the social worker workforce.

Other approaches may be explored by TEOs, e.g. internships or a '3 + 1' or an 'Earn as you Learn' model. We encourage any provider to discuss SWRB's expectations around demonstrating that public safety is met through any prescription proposal in development.

Q. What will the prescription monitoring arrangements be?

A.

Monitoring Activity	Monitoring Arrangements
Prescription confirmation (usually every four years)	From January 2026, over the next four years, all TEOs will be visited and assessed against the Education

	Standards and assigned a matrix score which will inform the level of monitoring required.
Annual monitoring (annual except for prescription confirmation year)	Prescribed qualifications will be monitored annually through a desk review of the TEO's annual submission. This will begin in 2027.
Custom monitoring (if required)	Where prescription status includes requirements, custom monitoring may be scheduled. Unscheduled custom monitoring may be required if the SWRB believe there has been a breach of the Education Standards.

Q. Will there be a mid-cycle review?

A. No, this is no longer part of the cycle. All TEOs will be required to complete an annual monitoring submission every year between prescription confirmation visits. If an issue arises within a programme, the SWRB may plan custom monitoring events such as an extra visit or additional consultation. If a TEO is fully compliant with the Education Standards, no custom monitoring will be required.

Q. Will the SWRB visit each TEO every year?

A. No, this is not planned. However, in circumstances where an issue meeting one of the Education Standards arises for a TEO, the SWRB may plan custom monitoring events such as an extra visit or additional consultation.

Q. How can TEOs demonstrate that they meet the SWRB Core Competences as in 1.2 (d) of the new Education Standards?

A. For new prescription applications and prescription confirmation, TEOs will be required to map in detail how the curriculum addresses each of the Core Competence Standards and demonstrate how students will be assessed to ensure graduates meet all Core Competence Standards before graduation.

Q. How will the Standards be weighted?

A. The Standards are not weighted. In developing the framework, the SWRB tested the concept of weighting the Standards and found it impractical. All Standards carry equal weight, and we expect that all Standards will be met.

We found that the concept of weighting is best applied to requirements. Requirements will be set if any Standard is not met or is likely to not be consistently met. Requirements that are complex and expected to take significant change to achieve will have a heavier "weighting" and are likely to result in a higher matrix score. Simple, easy to achieve requirements will carry a lower "weighting". There are many variables to consider so there is no formula to determine weighting, but considering the nature of any requirements will be the focus to guide panellists in applying regulatory judgement to decide matrix scores.

Q. What will be looked for when the SWRB monitors? How will TEOs know what to provide during a Prescription Confirmation Renewal process?

A. The SWRB will provide templates to assist TEOs with their reporting. This will include suggestions for the type of evidence expected, guidelines for visits and useful or required documentation. If TEOs need guidance with their submission, they will be able to ask questions by emailing the education email address or ringing the education phone number (see contact details at end of this document).

Q. What will be required in the TEOs annual submission to the SWRB?

A. The intent of the Annual Submission is to enable a retrospective overview of the TEO's operation without creating undue additional work for the academic unit. Most of the information below should be readily available as it will have already been produced as part of BAU for the previous year. Our intent is to streamline processes and avoid asking for information TEOs have already supplied. The SWRB may request current or most recent information in the following or the equivalent to:

- Annual Programme Report
- Annual Monitor's report (internal and/or external)
- Programme Graduate Profile
- Field Education Handbook
- Stakeholder meeting minutes
- Academic Board (or equivalent) notification of programme change/s
- Staffing changes
- Exceptions to the Education Standards:
 - Placement - where a student has one or more placements in their place of work
 - Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – where RPL has been used for any current students
 - Selection policy and processes – where there have been acceptance or refusal of students with e.g. historical convictions
 - Any other relevant information on the current student cohort e.g. changes in student achievement, enrolment numbers, observation plans as in a research or rangahau placement, or exceptions to any other Standard.

Other information may be supplied by the TEO or requested by the SWRB, as necessary.

Additional data such as enrolment and yea data will be sourced directly from TEC and the SWRB will add that to the annual environmental scan of each TEO.

Q. When will each TEO's annual monitoring submission be due?

A. We will work with individual TEOs to arrange a timetable that is mutually suitable

Q. Will there be social workers on every Prescription and Monitoring panel?

A. Yes.

Q. Will there be tangata whenua on every Prescription and Monitoring panel?

A. Yes.

Q. What are the skills to be represented on each Prescription and Monitoring panel?

A. Panels will be constituted to ensure inclusion of social work, tertiary education, te ao Māori, regulatory, and evaluative experience.

Essential panel membership

In addition to evaluative, monitoring and regulatory experience, the following expertise will be required on each Prescription Monitoring Panel (PMP):

- SWRB Panel Lead (leading the SWRB process)
- Social work education (a registered social worker with social work academic experience)
- Tangata whenua/Te Ao Māori

Additional panel membership

Panels may also include one or more of the following for additional regulatory and/or educational evaluative experience and expertise:

- Non-social work academic/educator

- International social work academic
- An academic staff member from the same TEO but from a different discipline
- Employer of social workers and/or field work placement provider
- Recent social work graduate (less than 5 years since qualification).

Panel members are likely to bring expertise from more than one area. The SWRB is conscious of responsibly managing costs to TEOs so will always aim to use the fewest panel members necessary to provide the required expertise. Additional panel members will only be used when required and the SWRB will explain why they are included in the panel. International social work academics will only be included in panels if they are already expected to be in Aotearoa New Zealand and have a current New Zealand practising certificate.

Q. Who will see the SWRB prescription reports when they have been approved by the Board?

A. A letter accompanying the SWRB report will be provided to the TEO's Senior Executive:

- Chief Executive/Vice-Chancellor
- Director/Deputy or Pro Vice-Chancellor responsible for Teaching and Learning/Education
- Relevant Dean/Head of School/ Faculty
- Programme manager or leader.

The SWRB will recommend the report is tabled at the TEO's Academic Board.

The SWRB will move towards publishing anonymised collated reports which will be available to the sector and the public.

Q. How will the SWRB handle the information gathered on each TEO?

A. The Board will receive the full report destined for the TEO, with an explanatory cover letter. The report will be approved and signed off by the Board Chair.

The letter and the completed report will be sent in electronic form to the TEO by the Registrar.

Information from each TEO will be aggregated and anonymously collated into a report which will be made available on the SWRB website.

Q. How can we contact the staff involved in education at the SWRB?

Email: education@swrb.govt.nz

Phone: 0508 797 269

EDUCATION STANDARDS

1.3.1(c) Social work academic staff must have a minimum of five years as a registered practising social worker since qualifying

The SWRB is aware of the pressures for TEOs around hiring staff and ensuring field education placements are staffed with appropriately qualified staff. While the five-year requirement for academic staff may make it difficult to recruit qualified staff, the Board has identified that there are risks in having academic staff with less experience and does not want to compromise standards around the staff leading programme delivery.

The SWRB supports the sector through raising awareness of the issues facing educators with the Minister, TEC and other avenues, including workforce information and the funding issues arising from the existing model of funding for social work programmes.

It is possible that there may be exceptions. Some academic staff may be taken on without having the minimum years of practice or completed qualification. To meet standard 1.3.1 (c), the TEO will need to inform the SWRB Registrar and provide the plan for assisting the staff member/s to achieve the required standard as part of the TEO's annual submission. A record of exceptions will be kept by the SWRB on the TEO's file.

1.3.1(d) Social work academic staff must hold a relevant Master's level qualification OR hold a Bachelor of Social Work degree AND currently be undertaking a Master's qualification or higher to completion AND have demonstrable, relevant and suitable professional social work experience specifically to take account of Section 100 of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 or other areas of cultural expertise including that of Pacific people

Section 100 is specifically named here in supporting the participation of Māori social workers into teaching roles. The Board recognises that the previous standard referenced both s100 and s101 of the Act. This standard does not name S101 which primarily identifies the need to have mechanisms in place to seek the views of Pacific people and other cultural groups and does not relate to employment.

The SWRB acknowledge that there is a need for employing educators who bring significant knowledge and experience from Pacific and other cultural contexts but may not be fully qualified. Where TEOs need to employ practitioners with cultural expertise related to S100 or S101 who may not hold the relevant qualifications or practice experience, approval from the Registrar may be sought with an explanation of the circumstances and mitigating factors, including the provision of the TEO's professional development plans for the incoming staff member.

1.3.1(d) Social work academic staff must hold a relevant Master's level qualification OR hold a Bachelor of Social Work degree AND currently be undertaking a Master's qualification or higher to completion AND have demonstrable, relevant and suitable professional social work experience ...

1.3.1 (e) 60% of academic staff must hold a social work Master's level qualification or higher

Relevant academic staff qualifications are

- a base qualification through a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), an equivalent prescribed social work Bachelor qualification or another SWRB-recognised social work qualification, plus a Masters or PhD in a related topic **OR**
- a Bachelor's qualification in a related topic and a Masters in Social Work.

If there are five staff in a TEO, three will need to hold a Masters. If there are two holding a Masters and one working towards a Masters, please contact the SWRB to identify the professional

development pathway for the staff working towards a Masters. This will be noted as an exception and a record will be kept by the SWRB on the TEO's file.

1.3.1(g) Staffing

The SWRB want the bar set high for educators to ensure that the best possible teaching staff are in place in critical subject areas. TEOs will identify how the teaching of social work theory, practice and skills, including the regulatory responsibilities of a professional social worker is covered in the annual TEO submission to the SWRB, identifying what each academic staff member is teaching along with their qualifications. A record will be kept on file by the SWRB Education team.

1.4.1 (f) What about those who can't manage a Noho Marae (overnight stay)?

It is important that a Noho is included in every programme. The Marae wānanga criteria allows for those who cannot stay overnight to be present during the day, and if circumstances require, go home overnight.

1.4.2 The minimum of 20 days face to face for distance learning has been retained.

The Board consider this a minimum and hope that TEOs will provide more than 20 days to distance students especially those who may need more help. The SWRB will take the opportunity to investigate whether this is sufficient such as through the employer and educator surveys, and with academic staff and students when undertaking visits. This applies to both Bachelor and Masters qualifications.

1.6.3 Why is providing annual confirmation of each graduate who has successfully completed the pre-registration programme qualification mandatory now?

Currently TEOs do provide confirmation of the students who have completed the pre-registration programme, competence and fitness to practice and certify that they are fit for registration. The form is sent to the Deputy Registrar and assists in registration processes. However not every TEO completes the confirmation and it is critical that SWRB receives this assurance from TEOs as part of the registration process.

2.2.3 Recognition of Prior Learning

Where institutional RPL processes are robust and align with the SWRB Education Standards, it will be possible to RPL field education in certain circumstances. This may for example apply if the applicant is coming from a practice setting (work) or overseas where the TEO will use a portfolio approach to evidence the alignment of experience with the programme expectations.

Evidence of robust RPL practices for such assessment will be part of the TEO's annual submission to the SWRB.

3.1 Knowledge and Skills

This standard links social work education to registration. Social work programmes are a vocational programme in a mandatory environment, where the expectation is that most graduates will apply for registration, so the emphasis is on graduating students who are fit and proper and will uphold public safety. The Board emphasises the link between mandatory registration and the responsibility of TEOs to prepare students for registration and deliver graduates who meet registration expectations.

Educators are not responsible for determining suitability for registration as this sits with the SWRB.

3.3.1 and 3.3.2 Field Education Placement arrangements

TEOs will make transition arrangements for field education placement hours to suit their individual circumstances. Discussion can take place with the SWRB if assistance is needed in facilitating transition plans. Transition arrangements can be reported on in the annual TEO submission to the SWRB.

3.3.3 Two placements in a place of work:

A need for flexibility around in-work placements has been identified in instances where e.g. NGOs or iwi organisations have multiple contracts, allowing for different placement experiences within the same organisation. Where placements are in large organisation with multiple contracts, notification that two placements are being undertaken in the same place of work will be provided to the Registrar with a description of the significant differences in roles. This will mitigate risk and provide assurance that the placements are significantly different.

Information on placements would be provided in the TEO's annual submission.

A record of exceptions will be kept by the SWRB Education team.

3.3.5 Supervision on field education placement

It is critical that students are supervised by experienced professionals. SWRB do not currently have any mechanism by which to assess a person's competence to be a professional supervisor other than years of experience and would prefer to err on the side of length of experience as one measure of competence to supervise.

Years of practice: It was noted that the previous five-years of practice since registration requirement for field education staff would significantly reduce the number of available placements, making it difficult to deliver programmes. This has been amended to 'no less than three (3) years of registration since qualifying'.

Who is the supervisor? A field educator who is a registered social worker can now provide professional supervision as necessary.

3.3.6 Field education supervision

Field education supervision is a teaching and learning rather than supervision of practice. Therefore the two appear as separate roles: a) that the line manager is supervising the teaching and learning aspects of the placement, and b) that ongoing supervision is provided outside the field education experience as the registered social worker does not need to be working at the placement itself. Group or other supervision can then add to and enhance the teaching and learning experience.

At the end of the placement, one person (usually the person overseeing the placement or the field educator) must sign off each ākongā following individual sessions supervising the teaching and learning aspect of the placement.

3.3.7 Observation plans

It is expected that every ākongā in on a field education placement will be observed in some way e.g. if a research or rangahau placement, or a resource development placement, then presentation of the research or rangahau, or the resource developed, and the learnings. This will be evidenced as an exception in the annual TEO submission to the SWRB.

3.4.1 Assessing a field education provider's suitability

Safety of the public, the students and the client require that TEOs ensure that ākongā are in safe and suitable placements as part of their institutional due process, guided by each TEO's policies. This will be evidenced in the annual TEO submission to the SWRB.