Social Workers Registration Board
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Te Pou Tūhono | SWRB Education Standards

Contents

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

The Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) has set these Education Standards under Section 99(1)(i) of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003. They come into effect from 1 January 2026.

The standards are framed by pou as developed by the advisory rōpū that supported the review of the previous standards.

Signed on behalf of the Board:

Mike Munnelly
Chair

Pou Tokomanawa

Rangatiratanga | Governance

Ensuring the tohu | degree is built on a strong foundation.

Aligns with the SWRB value: Matatika

1.1 Compliance

The tertiary education organisation (TEO) will have governance structures to ensure ongoing compliance with the requirements of a Level 7 or above academic social work programme.

A TEO that is approved by the SWRB to deliver a prescribed qualification must:

a. comply with all SWRB education standards;

b. maintain accreditation and approval by New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) or Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP);

c. ensure that the approved programme meets the requirements for qualification at Level 7 or above, as defined by NZQA.

1.2 Autonomy

The academic unit has a clear identity and responsibility for delivering a social work programme within the TEO and:

a. maintains control of all aspects of the social work curriculum;

b. ensures the quality of all aspects of the curriculum delivery and monitors the quality of field education;

c. reflects the values, ethical principles, identity, and mana of social work;

d. ensures graduates meet the SWRB Core Competencies;

e. prepares ākonga for meeting the Fit and Proper criteria following graduation;

f. has a governance structure which facilitates collaborative relationships with partners while retaining programme autonomy.

1.3 Staffing

1.3.1 Social work academic staff requirements

Social work academic staff must:

a. be a registered social worker with full SWRB registration;

b. hold a current Practising Certificate;

c. have a minimum of five years as a registered practising social worker since qualifying;

d. 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;

e. 60% of academic staff must hold a social work Master's level qualification or higher;

f. leadership of the social work programme must be the responsibility of social work academic staff who have the authority and responsibility for professional decision making;

g. all social work theory, practice and skills – including the regulatory responsibilities of a registered social worker – must be taught by an academic staff member with relevant qualifications.

Exceptions to these requirements may be allowed, so long as they are in line with the guidelines. Exceptions must be approved by the Registrar.

1.3.2 Teaching by non-social workers

Any teaching on the programme outside the areas of social work theory, practice and skills may be undertaken by:

a. suitably qualified academic teaching staff from other disciplines;

b. community experts as part of programme teaching where the primary responsibility and accountability remains with an academic staff member.

1.3.3 Programme resourcing – staff numbers

The programme is sufficiently resourced with staffing numbers to ensure that:

a. there are sufficient qualified and experienced academic staff members to deliver the programme;

b. the number of ākonga admitted aligns with adequate staff resourcing;

c. adequate support is available to the field education provider from the TEO;

d. adequate support is available to ākonga on placement;

e. academic staff are active in scholarship and reflective practice and meet the TEO's requirements for research and/or rangahau | tangata whenua-determined engagement with research;

f. academic staff reflect diversity in skills and knowledge and include specialist and cultural expertise, including indigenous knowledge, with balanced workloads.

1.3.4 Programme resourcing – academic staff professional development

The TEO must provide opportunities to all social work academic staff members to build and maintain professional knowledge and practice skills and preserve the integrity of their professional identity by enabling them to:

a. keep up to date with current trends and issues in social work practice;

b. undertake and be supported in higher study (e.g. Master's and above) to qualification completion;

c. build and maintain skills in te reo, kaupapa, tikanga and mātauranga Māori;

d. maintain links with their respective communities, including but not limited to hapū/iwi, 'aiga, whaikaha/disability, LGBTQ+.

1.4 Programme delivery

1.4.1 Programme structure

Programme delivery draws on both social work expertise and interdisciplinary approaches.

a. Teaching of all social work specific theory, practice and skills components of the curriculum is carried out by social work programme academic staff members.

b. Input from other disciplines may draw from the following, including but not limited to the humanities, health sciences, social sciences and law.

c. The programme includes teaching of indigenous and cross-cultural knowledge and perspectives including but not limited to mātauranga Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

d. The programme supports and recognises specialist and cultural expertise contributions from community experts.

e. The academic unit must demonstrate that all ākonga have developed the competence and demonstrated the skills to practise as a graduated social worker eligible for registration with the SWRB.

f. The programmme includes a marae wānanga or a noho marae (overnight stay).

g. The programme ensures public safety and the provision of safe, ethical practice is prominent in the programme.

1.4.2 Distance programmes

Distance programmes must meet the following requirements:

a. They must include a minimum of 20 days in person teaching of social work skills over the course of the programme for the ākonga to develop competent practice.

b. The 20 days in person teaching must not be considered a replacement for field education or field education preparation requirements.

c. It remains the responsibility of the TEOs to assure the SWRB that distance ākonga have developed sufficient skills and competence to practise as a graduated social worker eligible for registration with the SWRB, with additional support as necessary.

1.5 Stakeholder engagement

The academic unit will have a community and stakeholder engagement plan and provide evidence which demonstrates that:

a. the community, including iwi/hapū, has been provided with opportunities to collaborate with the programme on matters relating to design, development, and delivery;

b. community/stakeholders will be representative of the diverse communities in which the programme is located;

c. a range of stakeholders have been engaged in design and review of the programme e.g. professional associations, health and social service providers, users of social services, communities, hāpori, students, employers and the TEO.

1.6 Quality assurance

1.6.1 Quality assurance policies, guidelines, and processes

The TEO must have quality assurance policies, guidelines, and processes for:

a. ākonga assessment;

b. internal and external moderation of the assessment of ākonga learning across all components of their qualification;

c. ākonga evaluation of courses and programme;

d. evaluation of academic staff members;

e. staff evaluation of courses and programme;

f. external peer review and assessment of curricula.

1.6.2 Annual reporting to the SWRB

The academic unit will report to the SWRB annually, through the annual social work education data return and the annual TEO's submission.

1.6.3 Confirmation of programme completion

The academic unit will provide annual confirmation of each graduate who has successfully completed the pre-registration programme qualification.

1.6.4 Managing issues affecting the programme

The academic unit will operate in a collaborative and timely manner with the SWRB in updating the SWRB of issues affecting the programme (e.g. staffing issues, factors impacting programme delivery).

Pou Tāhu

Mā mua ka kite a muri	*Those who lead give sight to those who follow*
Mā muri ka ora a mua	*Those who follow give life to those who lead*

Manaakitanga | The ākonga journey

Supporting the student to become a competent, capable social work graduate, endowed with mātauranga, an ambassador of their education provider.

Aligns with the SWRB value: Manaaki

2 Supporting the ākonga journey

The TEO and the academic unit ensure that all processes which support the ākonga journey from enrolment to graduation are mana-enhancing in order to produce graduates who are engaged through their ākonga journey. Graduates should be competent and fit to practise social work and therefore eligible to register when graduated in accordance with both section 6 of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 and section 47, which outlines the grounds on which the SWRB Board may find someone is not fit to practise social work.

2.1 Admission

2.1.1 Admission criteria

Admission criteria into the social work programme will:

a. address academic and professional suitability and include Police checks at admission under the Children's Act 2014 (noting that the Clean Slate principle does not apply – Criminal Records (Clean Slate) Act 2004, ss14,19);

b. require English language proficiency as per the TEO's admission policy, with support provided by the TEO as necessary to ensure that ākonga at graduation can communicate effectively for the purposes of practising as a social worker. Their ability to communicate in and comprehend English must be sufficient to protect the health and safety of the public as per section 47(2b) of Social Workers Registration Act 2003;

c. support the development of a diverse social work workforce;

d. ensure no applicant is discriminated against as per the Human Rights Act 1993.

2.1.2 Informing applicants about registration requirements

Before the applicant accepts a place on the programme, the TEO will provide sufficient information to ensure that the applicant can make an informed decision about their probable professional suitability for registration as a social worker. Knowledge of the SWRB's conditions for registration will be provided to applicants through:

a. course information prior to admission and across the length of the programme, including but not limited to:

- course aims and structure

- learning outcomes

- graduate profile

- assessment criteria

- attendance requirements

- examination rules

- regular police checks

- field placement requirements

- SWRB Fit and Proper Person Policy.

b. integration of the SWRB's regulatory requirements throughout the programme content, including but not limited to:

- SWRB Core Competence Standards

- SWRB Code of Conduct

- SWRB Fit and Proper Person Policy

- ANZASW Code of Ethics/Ngā Tikanga Mātatika

- SWRB registration process.

c. information on the policies and procedures which reinforce the SWRB's expectations for registration and practice:

- reviewing of ākonga progress annually to ensure ongoing academic suitability and fitness for registration and practice

- exiting ākonga who are not demonstrating academic suitability or fitness for registration and practice

- academic appeals processes

- providing targeted academic or other support in areas where barriers to ākonga retention and success are identified

- maintaining the mana of ākonga during the review and exiting process.

2.2 Selection

2.2.1 Applicant selection

Selection of applicants into the social work programme will:

a. support the development of a diverse social work workforce;

b. remove barriers to admission for otherwise suitable applicants;

c. manage sharing of information with stakeholders with sensitivity and integrity;

d. maintain confidentiality of applicant's private information.

2.2.2 External engagement in selection

The selection of applicants into the social work programme may involve iwi, community partners, stakeholders and/or agencies.

2.2.3 Recognition of prior learning (RPL) or equivalent process

The TEO's policies regarding credit transfer and RPL will:

a. be clearly articulated and transparent and be determined by the TEO and the social work programme lead;

b. require at the postgraduate level a content review of the candidate's previous degree(s) and of their relevant prior experience;

c. only apply to field education where sufficient evidence has been provided;

d. be deemed sufficiently rigorous to demonstrate that all aspects of a programme have been met to the satisfaction of the RPL panel;

e. remove barriers to admission for otherwise suitable applicants.

2.3 Information provision and communication

2.3.1 Personal support for ākonga

Ākonga are informed of and have access to personal support available to them while on the programme and during field education, including:

a. ākonga wellbeing services such as health and counselling, cultural, spiritual, disability, learning and academic support including library, pastoral care, financial advice and campus recreational activities;

b. opportunities for referral to appropriate services which may be provided externally;

c. information about access to devices, data and learning support for the use of technology;

d. an awareness of the TEO's policies and procedures for identifying and supporting the academic, professional and practice development of ākonga.

2.3.2 Communication with ākonga

Ākonga are informed:

a. of expectations for their own participation in and contribution to the programme;

b. that their ongoing success in the programme will be annually assessed in conjunction with the academic unit;

c. that ākonga may be exited from the programme where unsuitability to practice against the SWRB fitness to practise criteria and/or a breach of the Code of Conduct is indicated;

d. that the TEO's academic staff will confirm that individual ākonga have completed all course requirements of the qualification to the SWRB Board who will decide whether an applicant is suitable for registration;

e. that ākonga have opportunities to be represented within decision-making processes.

Pou Tūārongo

Tūngia te ururua, kia tupu whakaritorito te tupu o te harakeke

Clear the undergrowth so that the new shoots of the flax will grow

Kaitiakitanga | Curriculum and field education

Ensuring the curriculum is sound and comprehensive.

Aligns with the SWRB values: Māia and Mahitahi

3.1 Knowledge and skills

The TEO's curriculum will be designed and delivered to ensure that the graduate achieves the core knowledge, skills, processes, and values required to practice as a regulated professional in any setting in Aotearoa New Zealand as per the SWRB General Scope of Social Work Practice. This will be embodied in the TEO's Graduate Profile information.

3.1.1 Mātauranga Māori

The curriculum must reflect and embed tangata whenua, ā iwi, indigenous and cultural world views. These world views contribute to the development of interpersonal skills, self-awareness and self-care, social and emotional competence, and appropriate professional conduct. The curriculum must:

a. evidence engagement with community partners, including iwi, to support ākonga to access knowledge, characteristics, and diversity of ā iwi and local communities and to have opportunities to learn about local initiatives, practice, and context;

b. provide a transformative understanding of colonisation and privilege when working alongside tangata whenua and mana whenua as the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand.

3.1.2 Knowledge

Upon graduation, the graduate must have:

a. an understanding of core social work theory and knowledge, practice and skills;

b. an understanding of the requirements of the SWRB Core Competence Standards and SWRB Fit and Proper Person Policy required for registration as a social worker under the Social Workers Registration Act 2003;

c. knowledge of He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni | The Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand and understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, setting out the relationship between Māori and the Crown, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi rights;

d. an understanding of the historical, political, socio-legal and power relationships that have shaped and continue to shape social work in Aotearoa New Zealand;

e. an ability to critique the relationship between tangata whenua and tangata Tiriti;

f. an understanding of colonisation/decolonisation and privilege when working with Māori and tangata whenua as the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand;

g. an understanding of indigenous and other contributions to social work in the form of cultural, theoretical, practice and research/rangahau expertise;

h. an understanding of the colonisation, migration and social structures of Pacific peoples;

i. an understanding of migrant and refugee experiences which may include war, poverty, environmental displacement, and detainment;

j. an understanding of social determinants and the intersectionality of personal identity through the lenses of gender, sexuality, disabilities, spiritualities and other diversities;

k. an understanding of human development across the lifespan;

l. an understanding of the privacy principles and the need to work within the Privacy Act 2003;

m. knowledge of statutory responsibilities and legislation applying to the delivery of social work practice, including but not limited to the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, the Mental Health Act 1992, the Children's Act 2014 and other related legislation;

n. an understanding of the impact of discrimination and the principles of collective responsibility, gender equity and social justice;

o. an understanding of the importance of professional supervision in managing the complexities of social work practice, including cultural supervision;

p. an understanding of their regulatory obligations and contributions to the social work profession.

3.1.3 Skills

Upon graduation, the graduate must have the skills to:

a. integrate into their practice the SWRB Core Competence Standards, demonstrating an ability to practise in accordance with the standards and the fit and proper requirements of a registered social worker.

b. integrate social work theory, research and practice to a level enabling them to practise as a graduated social worker;

c. work across the breadth of social work settings, with core skills as described in the SWRB General Scope of Social Work Practice;

d. work within laws and regulations to discharge their statutory responsibilities;

e. prepare for, engage, interview and work with individuals, whānau/families, carers, groups, iwi and communities to assess their needs and circumstances;

f. plan, implement, review, and evaluate strengths-based social work practice, delegations and interventions with individuals, whānau/families, groups, iwi, and communities;

g. assess and manage risk to individuals, whānau/families, carers, groups, and communities through assessments (both oral and written) of both risk and potentiality;

h. assess and manage risk to self and colleagues when working with individuals, whānau/families, carers, groups, and communities;

i. manage and be accountable, with professional supervision and support, for their own social work practice within their organisation;

j. engage with clients to represent, protect, and advocate for human, legal and civil rights, social and economic justice, and self-determination;

k. engage in inter-professional collaboration to facilitate the needs of clients, communities, and other professionals;

l. demonstrate competence in writing (especially report writing), current and emerging technology, and oral presentation skills;

m. critically reflect on theory, skills and practice and demonstrate critical thinking in dealing with diverse people and networks;

n. self-reflect and utilise professional supervision effectively;

o. engage with issues of sustainability that actively support an understanding of community development, wellbeing of communities, and a commitment to environmental justice;

p. act in accordance with the minimum professional standards of integrity and conduct that apply to registered social workers and to the social work profession in general as per the SWRB Code of Conduct.

3.1.4 Commitment to continuing professional development (CPD)

Ākonga are actively and regularly engaged in evaluating their own professional development, ensuring that:

a. they understand the importance of CPD to their development as a professional social worker;

b. they record and evaluate their own progress;

c. their academic suitability, fitness for registration and practice development are self-assessed throughout the programme, with any issues of concern addressed as they arise;

d. the professional development experiences they have with the public have safety as the primary consideration;

e. they understand that their own professional development is enhancing the wider profession.

3.2 Purpose of field education

Field education placements enable ākonga to apply social work knowledge, skills, processes, and values in real-world employment and practice settings, and to demonstrate capability to meet the fitness to practice requirements for SWRB registration.

Field education will be delivered through a collaboration between the TEO, the field education provider, and registered social workers in the field education practice setting. Ākonga will be placed in an authentic social work employment environment where they learn through active engagement in purposeful social work tasks delivering social work services.

3.2.1 Field education placements

Field education placements must provide opportunities for the ākonga to:

a. integrate social work theory, research and practice approaches and mātauranga Māori world views within at least two different practice contexts;

b. work with diverse peoples, cultures and perspectives;

c. learn to engage and assess people and situations, plan, carry out, review and evaluate social work practice;

d. interact with other professionals, both regulated and unregulated and associated agencies;

e. learn self-reflective skills in a professionally supervised environment in order to self-assess and set personal learning goals against the SWRB General Scope of Practice, the SWRB Core Competence Standards and the SWRB Code of Conduct;

f. demonstrate ethical and professional conduct.

Exceptions may be applied through discussion with the SWRB Registrar.

3.2.2 Competence development in field education placements

Field education placements provide opportunities for the academic unit to:

a. obtain feedback on ākonga direct practise of social work skills and their understanding of the SWRB Code of Conduct and the ANZASW Code of Ethics;

b. make a final assessment against the SWRB Core Competence Standards and the SWRB Code of Conduct to identify probable professional suitability for registration.

3.3 Field education placement requirements

The TEO will identify and coordinate a minimum of two education field placements for ākonga in the final two years of the programme. Coordination of field education, including placement allocation and final assessment of ākonga competence is the responsibility of an academic staff member in the social work programme.

3.3.1 Field education length

Field education placements will:

- total a minimum of 900 hours across 120 to 150 days

- be the equivalent of at least three (3) days per week.

3.3.2 Field education conditions

Field education placements must meet the following conditions:

- One placement must be for a minimum of the equivalent of 375 hours/50 full-time days.

- A police check will be completed prior to the first field education placement.

3.3.3 Expectations for placements at place of work – different settings

Ākonga may undertake two placements at their place of work in exceptional circumstances, as long as they:

- are exposed to two differently structured settings with significantly different experiences e.g where the organisation holds multiple contracts

- have a different supervisor for each setting.

This will be notified by the TEO to the SWRB Registrar.

3.3.4 Expectations for placements at place of work – depth of experience

For ākonga who are placed within their current employment organisation, the field education experience must:

a. provide a significantly different social work experience to their regular employment and/ or to any previous placement within the same agency with opportunities for significant new learning;

b. include learning goals related to integrating new skills and knowledge;

c. ensure there is a written and agreed upon plan in place for external supervision, the management of the dual role of employee and ākonga, and observations of practice;

d. ensure ākonga are provided with the opportunities to experience different practice contexts and approaches.

3.3.5 Suitability of field education providers

The programme will have an effective process for assessing and monitoring the field education provider's suitability for providing field education experiences, integrating fitness for registration requirements and previous ākonga evaluations and/or feedback. Field education placement selection must ensure that each placement has:

a. adequate numbers of appropriately qualified and/or experienced staff;

b. a field educator of no less than three years of social work registration since qualifying and with a current Practising Certificate, who will provide professional supervision as necessary;

c. opportunities for ākonga to gain experience in social work practice, theories and frameworks;

d. policies to protect public safety, and a process for ākonga to be orientated to these;

e. health and safety and HR policies and procedures are in place, as well as a plan for ākonga to be orientated to these.

3.3.6 Field education supervision

All ākonga undertaking field education must have reflective field education supervision for a minimum of one hour per week or pro-rata equivalent if undertaking part-time placement.

a. Each placement must include field education supervision from a registered social worker;

b. Line management supervision must also be provided where field education supervision is provided external to the placement provider;

c. Additional supervision can be individual, group, cultural, peer, kaupapa, online;

d. Observations of ākonga practice will not be considered a replacement for supervision;

e. The academic unit provides formal preparation for new field supervisors to orientate them to the requirements of the social work programme;

f. The academic unit offers ongoing support and education to experienced field supervisors.

3.3.7 Field Education Handbook

The TEO must provide the field education placement provider with a Field Education Handbook which details:

a. the field education placement process for:

- attendance requirements

- orientation to the practice site and organisational expectations

- orientation and agreement with organisational policies and procedures

- an individual learning plan with goals

- an observation plan

- a supervision plan which includes:

  - line management supervision

  - professional supervision by a registered social worker

b. up-to-date documentation on:

- SWRB Fit and Proper Person policy

- SWRB Code of Conduct

- SWRB General Scope of Practice

- SWRB Core Competence Standards

- ANZASW Code of Ethics.

c. guidance to ākonga and field education providers on how to manage ākonga HR-related issues, especially leave, during the field education placement which:

- supports ākonga to manage attendance at funerals or tangihanga, or other unplanned leave such as sick leave

- ensures ākonga are able to undertake replacement hours to complete field education requirements.

3.4 Field education placement management and evaluation

A partnership approach between the academic unit and the field education provider will support ākonga learning and support consistency in learning and assessment processes between placements and placement providers.

3.4.1 Documented agreement and processes

The academic unit will have a process for assessing a field education provider's suitability for providing field education experiences.

A documented agreement between the academic unit and the field education provider will outline:

a. processes for communication between the academic unit's field placement coordinator and the placement supervisor;

b. expectations for timely information on issues pertaining to ākonga that negatively impact their field education placement experience including:

- ākonga attendance

- ākonga wellbeing

- ākonga safety

- incidents of public safety involving ākonga

- concerns about ākonga fitness to practise for registration purposes.

c. information on support available for the placement supervisor from the academic unit

d. any relevant information related to the ākonga;

e. a process for ākonga evaluation of their field education experience;

f. a process for the academic unit and the placement provider to evaluate the field education experience against both the SWRB requirements and the academic unit's requirements;

g. a process in place to ensure clients/whānau give informed consent for any services provided by ākonga.