

SOCIAL WORKERS REGISTRATION ACT: REVIEW:

RESPONSE: TANGATA WHENUA SOCIAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION

KŌRERO WHAKAWĀTEA:

SOCIAL WORKERS REGISTRATION ACT: 2003: [Social Workers Registration Act 2003 No 17 \(as at 01 July 2025\), Public Act Contents – New Zealand Legislation](#)

PATAI:

- We are keen to hear your perspective on anything that is working well or not working well in relation to the Act – particularly in relation to Mātauranga Māori approaches, and the important mahi of indigenous practitioners. For example:
 - How might the Act enable greater participation and recognition of indigenous practitioners?
 - Is there another way to recognise these practitioners?
 - What would that look like?
 - Do they need to be regulated?
 - What might the sector think?
- We're also keen to hear your thoughts on the future of social work and how the Act can support that.
- In terms of wider engagement, we'd welcome your suggestions on how we best gather views from your members. There are options to join one of the online hui or fill in the [Feedback Form](#), but there may be other ways that work better for tangata whenua social workers that you could help us with.

Link: [Have your say on the review of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 | SWRB](#)

PŪ KŌRERO: TE TIMATANGA:

MĀ TE RONGO, KA MŌHIO	Through listening comes knowledge
MĀ TE MŌHIO, KA MĀRAMA	Through knowledge comes understanding
MĀ TE MĀRAMA, KA MAHI	Through understanding comes practice
MĀ TE MAHI, KA MATATAU	Through practice comes competence.

SAFETY OF PROFESSION AND PRACTICE:

While the Tangata Whenua Social Workers Association recognizes the intent of the Act in protecting those who are the recipients of social work practice and the profession of social work itself, there is concern at:

- How 'safety' is defined and by whom.
- The perception that governs how regulation and standards are defined, applied and by whom.
- The presence and possible political challenge to He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a profession and in practice.
- The effect of political decisions on social work as a profession and as a practice. For example, the provision of supervision for social work practitioners and the opportunities for social work placements may be heavily influenced by capacity and capability, which in turn may be driven by the availability of pūtea and funding criteria.

SECTION 13: EXPERIENCE PATHWAY:

The phasing out of Section 13 could limit and constrain the potential for increasing workforce capability:

- The opportunity to acknowledge, value and facilitate registration for those kaimahi who are experienced in work that has the attributes and appearance of social work.
- The eligibility of academic qualifications that are not social work in name but are aligned to social work, to become registered social workers.
- While the extension of the Experience Pathway until 2028 is positive and acknowledges the value of our lived and practical experience, what is the long-term vision beyond 2028?
- How will the SWRB ensure that experienced indigenous practitioners who may not hold prescribed qualifications continue to have accessible and culturally responsive pathways that respond to and preserve identity and mana Motuhake, to registration permanently?
- Will this pathway evolve to better reflect tangata whenua / Māori concepts of ako (learning and teaching) and knowledge transmission?

COMPETENCE:

Beyond Compliance...

- While "Competence to practise social work with Māori" is a core standard, how will the SWRB ensure this moves beyond a tick-box exercise to genuine, deeply embedded cultural competence and capability across all registered social workers?
- What are the mechanisms for robust ongoing assessment of this competence, especially for non-Māori practitioners?
- How will this be measured beyond standard professional development?
- If tertiary institutions have the capability of granting *graduate competence*, how will their competence be assessed on an ongoing basis?

SCOPE OF PRACTICE:

As tangata whenua ākonga graduate, particularly from where wānanga and as ākonga from kura kaupapa enter tertiary studies, so the preference for the title of *social worker* to be changed may become apparent:

- Toi Ora Whānau practitioner or Whānau Ora practitioner for example. The huarahi āko incorporates the dual knowledges of tangata whenua kaupapa and social work understanding.

QUALIFICATIONS FROM COUNTRIES OUTSIDE OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND:

The orientation of social workers trained and qualified overseas to the uniqueness and diversity of working in Aotearoa New Zealand:

- Is the process of seeking registration through the pursuit of competence, especially Competence 1, sufficient for social work practitioners from different origins to navigate working with difference, diversity and complexity in Aotearoa New Zealand.

CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Continued Professional Development is about the social work profession and practice not about the organization.

- The organization determining the Continued Professional Development is often driven by pūtea and the perception of the required skill sets, influenced very often by risk.
 - ❖ The growth of skill and knowledge of the kaimahi and social work practitioner is then contained within the kaupapa of an organization, not a profession or a scope of practice.

SUPERVISION:

The importance and understanding of and accessibility to supervision is often determined by pūtea, capacity and organizational constraints. It is:

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- An opportunity to reflect on and critically assess one's practice.
- Not an opportunity for punitive action.
- Not an opportunity to review cases.
- A conflict of interest for supervision to be offered by a member of senior management who could use the supervision space to determine a person's progression within the workplace.
- A vital subject for schools of social work so that ākonga can understand the difference between competent and effective supervision and supervision that could be destructive rather than constructive to one's practice.

PAYMENT OF FIELDWORK PLACEMENTS:

There have been consistent requests by schools of social work and agencies themselves for fieldwork placements to be funded but not by the ākonga themselves. The reasons are as follows:

- Fieldwork placements are an essential component of any social work programme, integrating theory with practice.
- It is vital for ākonga to gain experience in the workplace before employment as newly qualified social work practitioners and kaimahi.
- The experience can only be gained by being in organizations both government and non-government that are involved in the delivery of social services and therefore the opportunity is both real and often confronting.
- The funding of fieldwork placements would enable organizations to pay for cover as staff are released to support the ākonga while on fieldwork placement. Capability and capacity are therefore addressed accordingly.

SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK: TERTIARY QUALIFICATION:

How qualification is determined influences how people are attracted to the mahi, the preparation of people for the mahi and associated expectations and the retention of people in the mahi itself.

- A four-year degree is too demanding on ākonga, especially those who already have familial obligations, which tends to be ākonga older in age.
- The older ākonga tend to have life experiences, which are invaluable to the learning journey and the mahi that they will ultimately be doing.
- If the tertiary qualification was three years, then the fourth year could be fieldwork placement, an internship, which could be paid.
- The payment of ākonga would help to ease financial burdens, while gaining work experience. The balance between theory and practice, the development of micro skills and the understanding of competence would enhance the confidence of a newly qualified kaimahi and social work practitioner.

- The facilitation of kaiako and senior social work practitioners in rotating within the tertiary environment and social services sector would invigorate the learning space with currency of skill, authenticity of the reality of work and the necessity for self-care. Kaimahi and social work practitioners, particularly tangata whenua are notorious for the lack of consideration around self-care.
- The utilization of experienced and possibly retired kaimahi and social work practitioners, could boost workforce capacity, enable specialisms as micro-credentialing opportunities and support ākonga in post-graduate studies.

SELF CARE:

The sustainability of kaimahi and social work practitioners is dependent on how they look after themselves and how they are looked after in the workplace.

- The importance of self-care is a learnt behaviour because it competes with people's sense of obligation and commitment.
- Organizations must not hold individual kaimahi and social work practitioners to account for systemic issues. Practice and process are two distinct and therefore very different considerations. One must not be fused with the other. Both contribute to how self-care is viewed and valued.
- Schools of social work need to emphasize and model self-care, if they do not already do so, so that ākonga grow to appreciate and value their self-worth.

SOCIAL WORKERS REGISTRATION ACT: 2003:

- **CRITERIA FOR REGISTRATION**
- **PROCESS OF REGISTRATION**
- **EXPENSE OF REGISTRATION**

The Tangata Whenua Social Workers Association gave due consideration to the current Act and would like to offer the following:

Obligations to Māori / Tangata Whenua:

- In Section 100 there is no mention of He Whakaputanga or Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The Social Workers Registration Board (the Board):

- If the membership of the Board is not reflective of tangata whenua both in knowledge, skill and physical presence then how can the Board adjudicate justly on cases of competence, eligibility and complaints.
- If the membership of the Board is not represented equally then the tangata whenua member(s) run the risk of being outnumbered numerically when and if voting occurs.

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Response:

Language:

- Does the use of certain kupu words in the Act, such as *certain*, imply a process of selection which may entail a bias in perception and that bias could be representative of a dominant position.
 - ❖ The inclusivity of difference or the necessity to adjudicate collaboratively may not be integral to the process of exercising the notion of *certain*.

Competence:

- How is the state of competence determined and by whom and is there a bias as to the perception that governs the 'how', which could also be indicative of the prevailing perception?
- How is feedback offered to a portfolio that exemplifies competence, given the intent is to grow awareness and understanding of competence.
 - Is being able to recite and or know one's pepehā an indication of competence, particularly in relation to Competence 1?
 - ❖ Is this criterion simply the bias of an assessor and not mindful of the tiakitanga of the person from whom the pepehā originates. Therefore there is a choice not a necessity.
- How is the competence of the assessor assessed? For example, if schools of social work can attest to graduate competence, how is their competence to do this mahi determined and in an ongoing capacity?

Disciplinary Processes:

- How will disciplinary processes fully understand and appropriately respond to cases involving culturally distinct practices or breaches that may stem from a different worldview than a Western one?
- Are there sufficient tangata whenua / Māori representatives and cultural advisors within the disciplinary tribunal to ensure equitable and culturally informed processes?
- The notion of identity becomes instrumental in perception and process, which the Association argues, are influential in the practice that emanates. Therefore, do disciplinary processes recognise the influence of both perception and process in how discipline is viewed, the criteria of where discipline is warranted and the application of discipline itself as a process.

The Act's changes mention supporting a "diverse and representative social worker workforce."

- What concrete strategies are being put in place to address systemic barriers to formal education and training that disproportionately affect tangata whenua / Māori and Pasifika students?

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- How will the SWRB actively support the retention and achievement of tangata whenua / Māori and Pacific students in social work programmes?

Mauriora!