



**Social Workers
Registration Board**
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Annual Social Worker Workforce Survey Report 2024

Spotlight Report: Social workers employed
by tertiary education organisations delivering
SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications

**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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Introduction – the SWRB’s Annual Social Worker Workforce Survey

Every year, the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) collects data from the social worker workforce through the Social Worker Workforce Survey. The purpose of the survey is to understand the composition of the current practising social worker workforce. Social workers are invited to share information about their role, experiences, opinions, and beliefs. The annual survey enables us to build an evidence base to support workforce planning for all social workers and associated decision-making.

This 2024 Spotlight Report sits alongside the Annual Social Workers Workforce Report 2024 and covers a subset of social workers from the survey sample who report that they are employed by one of the 18 tertiary education organisations (TEOs) that delivered SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications at the time of the 2024 survey.¹ The full list of TEOs who deliver prescribed social work qualifications can be found in Appendix 3. This report generally describes social worker survey respondents employed by these 18 TEOs as ‘survey participants employed by TEOs’.

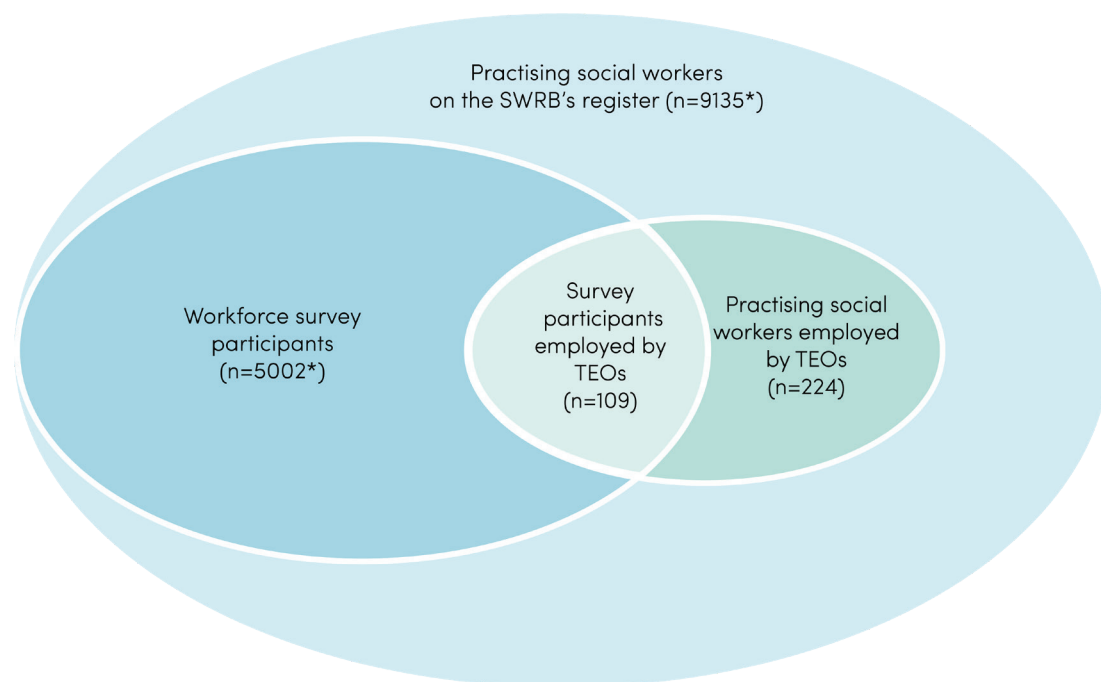
All social workers who renewed their Practising Certificates from May through to July 2024 were invited to participate in this survey. Out of a total of 8,354 who renewed their annual practising certificate on the SWRB’s register, 5,002 social workers submitted responses, representing a 60% response rate.

Using the same 2024 survey data, we have also published a Spotlight Report focused on social workers employed by Iwi-based/Kaupapa Māori organisations.² In addition, we have published three employer-based Spotlight Reports based on the 2023 survey, covering social workers who report being employed by Oranga Tamariki, health/hauora based organisations, and non-government organisations (NGOs). All these reports are available on our website.

The total number of survey respondents who reported that they are employed by one of the 18 TEOs delivering prescribed social work qualifications is 109 (or 2.2% of all survey responses). This closely aligns with the proportion of the full practising workforce of social workers employed by these TEOs (224 or 2.5% of all practising social workers as of 30 June 2024).

1 Note that this subset therefore excludes social workers employed by TEOs that do not offer prescribed social work qualifications.

2 https://swrb.govt.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/SWRB_Spotlight_Report_2025-Iwi_based_Kaupapa_Maori_workforce.pdf



*Register totals as of 30 June 2024; survey sample collected May to July 2024.

This Spotlight Report covers the same six core domains used in the 2024 Social Worker Annual Workforce Survey:

- workforce composition
- workforce sustainability
- knowledge and skill development
- employer support
- standing of the profession
- safety and conduct.

Examining the responses in each domain helps the SWRB as the occupational regulator of the social work profession to further our understanding of how registration supports public safety and supports our Lead Agency role for workforce planning for all social workers.

Some survey questions invited social workers to give feedback and reasons for their answers. These comments are used in relevant sections to reflect the social worker voice alongside statistical findings.

This Spotlight Report is intended for use by key decision-makers and those who work with TEOs to support ākonga on their learning journey to become registered social workers. It forms part of the evidence base used by the SWRB in its Lead Agency role for workforce planning for all social workers. More information about the scope and purpose of this role can be found in Appendix 2.

Summary of key findings

This Spotlight Report focuses on the social workers who report that they were employed by the 18 TEOs that deliver SWRB-prescribed qualifications at the time of the survey (May–July 2024). Throughout the report we have shortened the description of this group of social workers to refer to social workers employed by TEOs, so that the phrase ‘that deliver SWRB-prescribed qualifications at the time of the survey’ does not detract from the flow of the report.

- Social workers from all 18 TEOs are represented in the 109 responses to the 2024 survey. Most report their current role as tertiary education academic (70%), alongside a smaller proportion (17%) supporting tertiary education ākonga wellbeing.
- Social workers employed by these 18 TEOs represent 2.5% (224 in total) of the practising workforce.
- A higher proportion of social workers employed by TEOs identify as Māori (27%) and Pacific peoples (13%) compared to the full survey and the New Zealand population.
- Consistent with the full practising workforce, social workers employed by TEOs are predominantly female. Over a quarter (27%) are aged over 60 years, with less than 20% aged under 40 years.

Social workers delivering SWRB-prescribed social work qualification programmes are qualified and experienced

- Most survey participants employed by TEOs gained their registration with a New Zealand-prescribed qualification (83%). The proportion who registered with an overseas qualification was 15%, and 2% registered through the section 13 experience pathway.
- Three out of ten have been registered with the SWRB for five years or less (28%) which is less than the full survey (45%). A higher percentage (41%) have been registered for 11 or more years compared with the full survey (28%).
- Most (86%) describe themselves as ‘experienced’ or ‘advanced’ practitioners, with 10% identifying as ‘beginning’ or ‘developing’. Almost a third work at a national level and these tend to be social workers employed by universities.
- The most common fields of practice noted were social work education and research (70%), mental health (26%), and professional supervision (25%).
- Understanding legislation and policies affecting social work practice (39%), and social work practice with Māori (38%), were noted as areas for continuing professional development, followed by social work practice with ethnic and cultural groups (37%) and decolonisation and te Tiriti o Waitangi (35%).
- In common with the full survey, the most noted reasons for joining the social work profession include an interest in social justice, advocacy and welfare (78%), serving/working with and supporting whānau and community (68%), and making a positive difference to people’s lives (67%).

Workforce sustainability challenges noted for the profession

- Consistent with the full survey, 66% of social workers employed by TEOs note recruitment and retention as the biggest challenge for the social work profession, followed by deepening of social inequity (58%) and pay parity (50%).
- One in ten plan to leave the social work profession in the next five years (10%), compared to 13% of the full survey. ‘Costs of being a registered social worker’ followed by ‘high workload/burnout’ and poor pay and lack of professional support were the most noted reasons.
- More survey participants employed by TEOs also noted pay parity as a challenge for the social work profession (50%) compared to the full workforce survey (31%).

Social workers employed by tertiary education organisations report lower salaries

- Salary distribution for survey participants employed by TEOs is lower than among other employer types. Nearly one quarter (24%) reported a salary of less than \$80,000.
- At 19%, \$80,001–\$90,000 was the salary band most commonly reported by survey participants employed by TEOs. This peak occurs at a lower level than for social workers reporting other employer types.
- 30% reported earning \$100,001 or more annually. In comparison, 61% of social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki, and 57% of social workers employed in health-based organisations reported earning \$100,001 or more annually.
- Concern about salary distribution and pay parity was noted by survey participants employed by TEOs. Compared to the full survey, survey participants employed by TEOs considered that salaries provided less reason to join (2% compared with 7%), less reason to stay (6% compared with 19%), and created a bigger barrier to entering the profession (58% compared with 34%).

Social workers employed by tertiary education organisations are supported by their employers in a range of ways

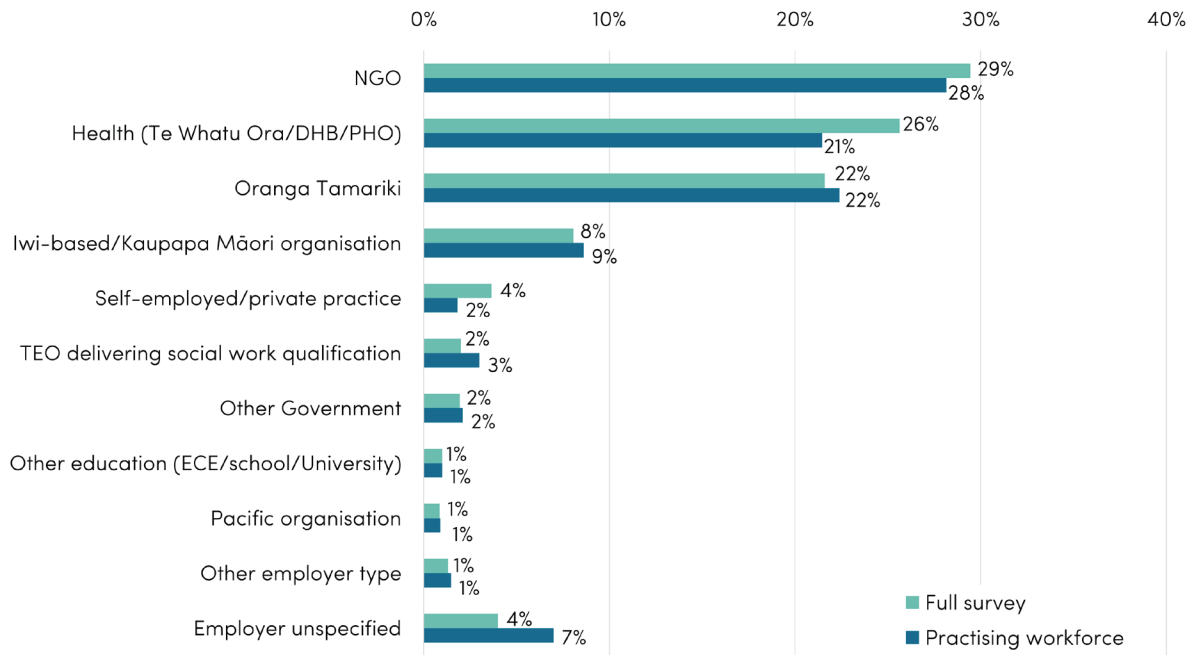
- The most common category of employer support that survey participants employed by TEOs said they received was professional reflective supervision (63%), followed by relevant training and skills development (55%).
- About 89% of survey participants employed by TEOs reported that their employers paid their registration fees in full or part. This is higher than the proportion in NGOs and health-based organisations.
- About 91% of survey participants employed by TEOs reported that their practising certificate fees were paid in full or in part. This is lower than for NGOs (96%), health-based organisations (98%) and Oranga Tamariki (100%).
- Social workers employed by tertiary education organisations were less certain that the standing of the profession has lifted since mandatory registration of social workers
- A lower proportion of survey participants employed by TEOs thought the social work profession was more respected since mandatory registration (39%), compared to the full survey (49%).
- 87% of social workers employed by TEOs reported that they were confident their employer had adequate policies and procedures in place to safely deal with serious issues with a social worker's practice and/or conduct. This is similar to the full survey response (91%).

Workforce composition – employer type

This Spotlight Report focuses on the survey participants who reported that they were employed by the TEOs delivering SWRB-prescribed qualifications at the time of the survey (May–July 2024).

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all survey participants by employer type. The 109 social workers employed by these TEOs represent 2.2% of all survey participants. This proportion of responses resembles the workforce distribution of practising social workers employed by TEOs in Aotearoa New Zealand (2.5% or 224 practising social workers).

Figure 1. Social workers by employer type 2024



Survey responses were received from social workers in all 18 TEOs that deliver SWRB-prescribed social work programmes. These 18 TEOs are listed in Appendix 3.

Section 1A: Workforce composition – Demographics

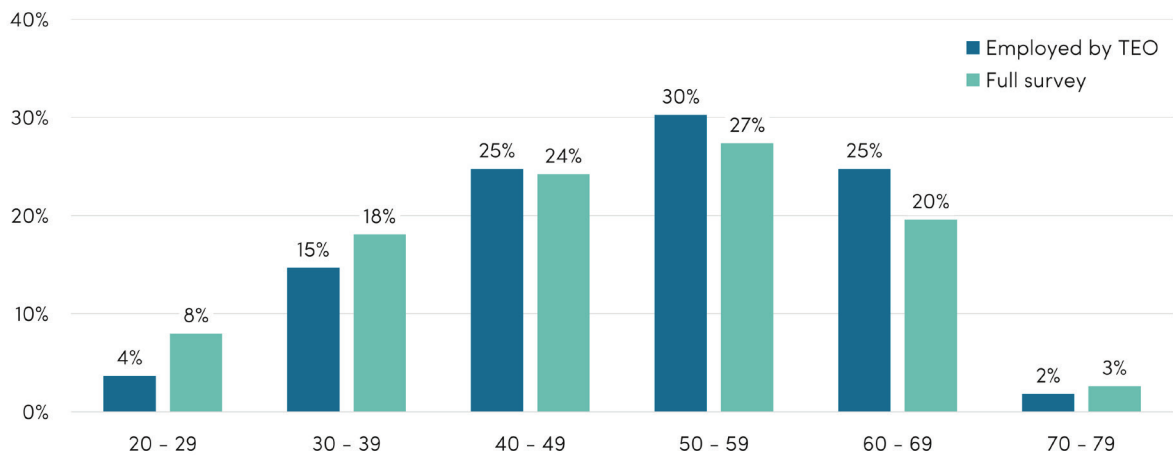
The demographic information provided by survey participants gives a picture of the current social worker workforce employed by TEOs delivering prescribed social work qualification programmes. This includes age distribution, gender, ethnicity, and geographic region.

The demographic profile of social workers employed by TEOs closely resembles the demographic profile of the full survey and of the active workforce of all social workers with a current practising certificate for the 2023/24 year, as shown in Appendix 1. This gives confidence that the results of this survey are representative of practising social workers employed by TEOs delivering SWRB-prescribed qualifications across Aotearoa New Zealand. However, it should be noted that the numbers of social workers in this subset of the workforce are small compared with the full practising workforce and therefore comparisons should be treated with caution.

1.1 Age

Figure 2 shows the distribution of social workers employed by TEOs across age groups. The workforce has a slightly different age distribution than the full survey, with fewer aged under 40 years (19% compared with 26%) and more aged over 60 years (27% compared with 23%).

Figure 2. Age group distribution 2024



1.2 Gender

The gender distribution for social workers employed by TEOs is consistent with the full practising workforce.

Figure 3. Gender distribution – survey participants employed by TEOs 2024

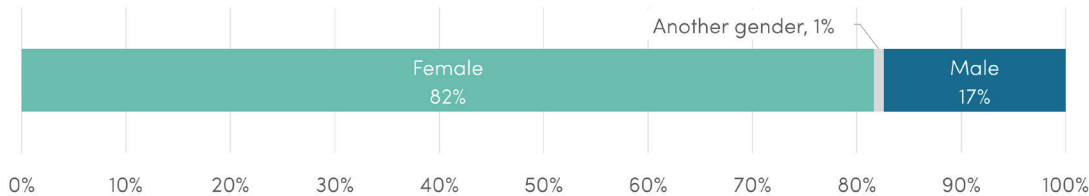


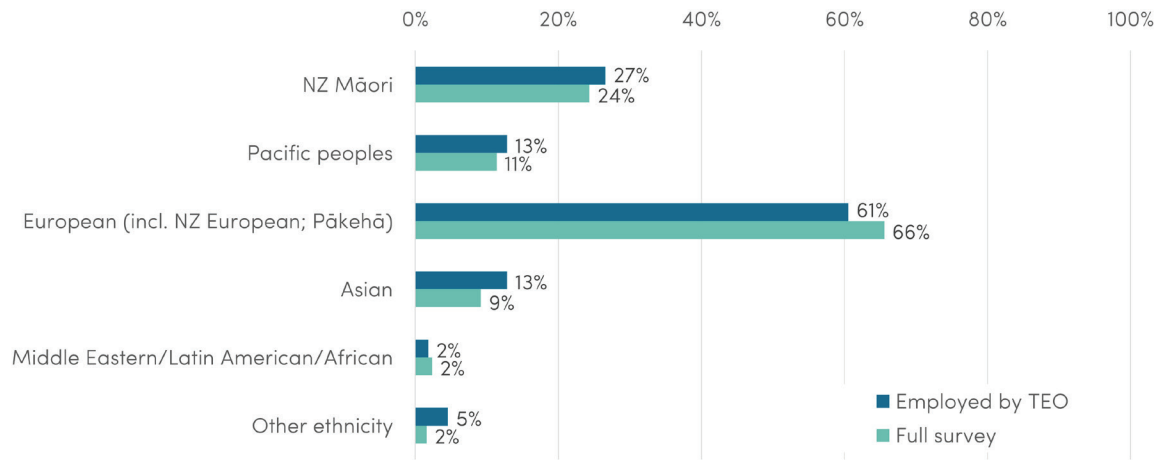
Table 1. Gender distribution 2024

Gender	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
Female	89	82%	4251	85%
Male	19	17%	728	15%
Another gender	1	<1%	11	<1%
Unspecified	0	0%	12	<1%
Total	109	100%	5002	100%

1.3 Ethnicity

61% of social workers employed by TEOs identify as NZ European and 27% identify as Māori. The proportions of social workers employed by TEOs identifying as Pacific peoples or Asian were both 13%. Figure 4 shows how these proportions compare to the full survey.

Figure 4. Ethnicity distribution 2024



Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

Table 2 compares the ethnic distribution of survey participants employed by TEOs to the full survey and the 2023 Census. This comparison shows that in 2024, survey participants employed by TEOs have a higher proportion of both Māori (27%) and Pacific peoples (13%) than the general population.

Table 2. Ethnicity distribution 2024

Ethnicity	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey		2023 Census
	Number	%	Number	%	%
Māori	29	27%	1218	24%	18%
Pacific peoples	14	13%	570	11%	9%
European (incl. NZ European/Pākehā)	66	61%	3280	66%	68%
Asian	14	12%	459	9%	17%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	2	2%	118	2%	2%
Other ethnicity	5	4%	80	2%	1%

Both Census and workforce survey data use 'total response' ethnicity calculations, allowing participants to identify more than one ethnic group. Totals will add to more than 100%.

1.4 Disabilities

In 2023, the SWRB added a survey question about disability. This builds an understanding of how the workforce reflects the general population, and how social workers with a disability might be better supported to practise.

In 2024, 5% of survey participants employed by TEOs indicated that they have a permanent disability or long-term condition that affects their ability to carry out everyday activities. This represents a total of 6 survey participants. The corresponding figure for all survey participants is 5%.

1.5 Region

The geographic distribution of survey participants employed by TEOs is shown in Table 3. It should be noted that geographic distribution is based on social workers' residential addresses as recorded in the SWRB's register. This may not always reflect the regions where they work.

The geographic distribution of survey participants employed by TEOS is broadly similar to the geographic distribution of all practising social workers on the SWRB's register, with most working in the main centres of Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury.

Table 3. Geographic distribution 2024

Region	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
Northland	6	6%	252	5%
Auckland	32	29%	1445	29%
Waikato	6	6%	433	9%
Bay of Plenty	6	6%	380	8%
Gisborne	2	2%	78	2%
Hawke's Bay	6	6%	218	4%
Taranaki	1	<1%	140	3%
Manawatū-Wanganui	9	8%	294	6%
Wellington	11	10%	538	11%
Tasman	1	<1%	30	<1%
Nelson	4	4%	91	2%
Marlborough	1	<1%	42	<1%
West Coast	0	0%	32	<1%
Canterbury	18	17%	704	14%
Otago	6	6%	225	4%
Southland	0	0%	97	2%
Unspecified/International	0	0%	3	<1%
Total	109	100%	5,002	100%

Section 1B: Qualifications and role

This section describes the composition of social workers employed by TEOs by registration pathway, and time since registration. It includes information about these social workers' current role and employment situation, work setting and field of practice.

1.6 Pathway to registration and qualification level at registration

Most survey participants employed by TEOs gained their registration with an SWRB-prescribed New Zealand qualification (83%) (Figure 5). The remainder registered through the overseas qualification pathway (15%) or the s13 experience pathway (2%).³

Table 4. Pathway to registration 2024

Pathway	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
SWRB-prescribed NZ qualification	91	83%	4292	86%
Overseas-approved qualification (incl. Australia)	16	15%	586	11%
S13 experience pathway	2	2%	124	2%
Total	109	100%	5,002	100%

Of those survey participants who registered through the New Zealand qualification pathway, a higher proportion registered with a Master's qualification than the full survey (28% compared with 13%).⁴

Table 5. Qualification level at registration 2024

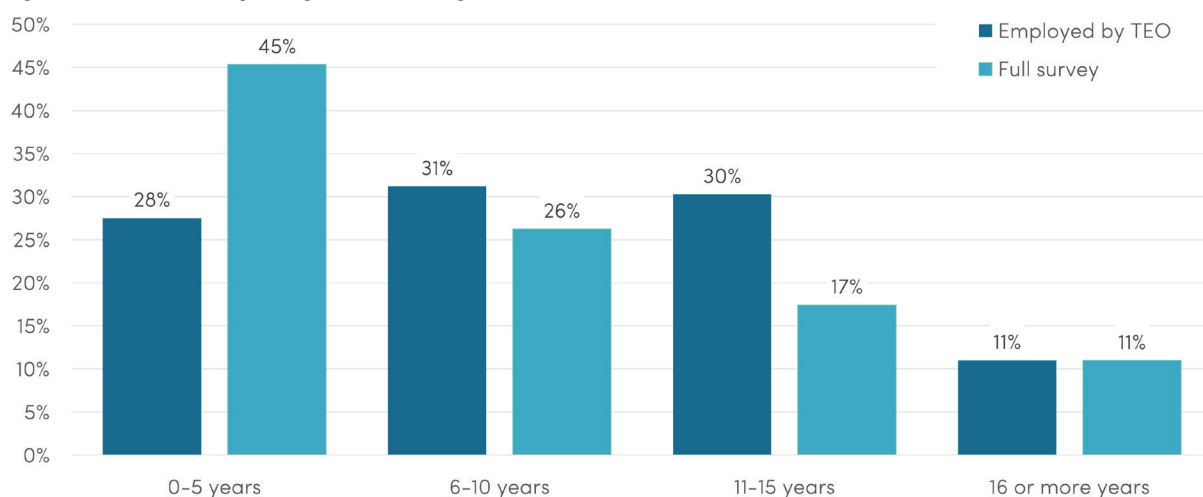
Tertiary qualification level at time of registration	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
1–6 Certificates/diplomas	12	13%	633	15%
7–8 Graduate certificates/diplomas/Bachelor's/Honours	54	59%	3096	72%
9 Master's	25	28%	542	13%
Unspecified/none	0	0%	21	<1%
Total	91	100%	4,292	100%

It is important to note that this table shows the qualification with which the social worker obtained registration and may not represent the highest level of qualification completed.

1.7 Years since joining the SWRB register

The proportion of social workers employed by TEOs who have been registered with the SWRB for 11 years or more is higher than in the full survey (41% compared with 28%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Years since joining the SWRB register 2024



³ <https://swrb.govt.nz/registration/experience-pathway-s13/>

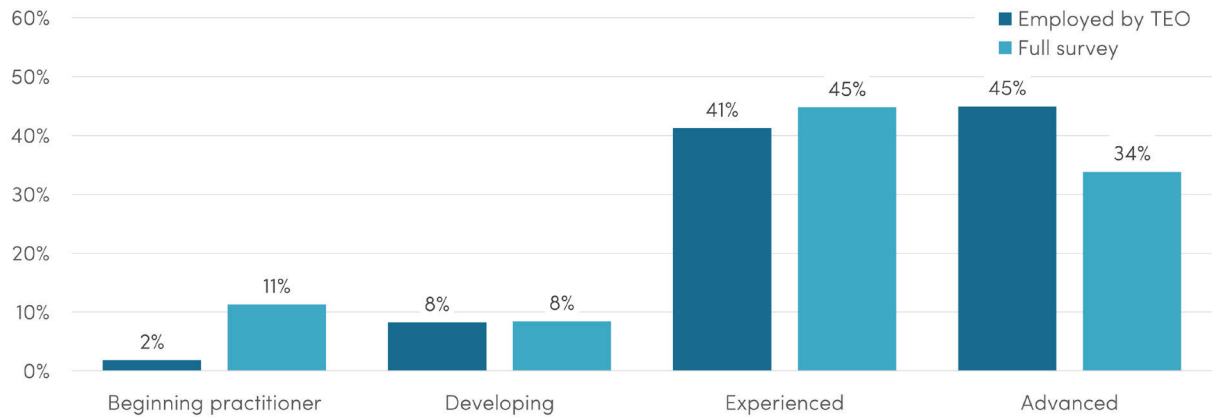
⁴ The SWRB's register includes a number of specific historic certificates and diplomas which were recognised in the time before registration became mandatory in February 2021.

Of those who registered in the last five years, a significant number registered when it became mandatory in February 2021. Some may have been practising for some time before this date.

1.8 Level of experience and responsibility

Social workers were asked to describe their level of experience and responsibilities. 86% of survey participants employed by TEOs described themselves as ‘experienced’ or ‘advanced’ practitioners (79% in the full survey) (Figure 6). 10% described themselves as ‘beginning’ or ‘developing’ practitioners (19% in the full survey).

Figure 6. Level of experience 2024



These findings indicate that social workers employed by TEOs are qualified and experienced, and a higher proportion have been registered for more than 10 years.

Over half (55%) of survey participants employed by TEOs described their responsibilities as including an academic lead or coordination role. Most survey participants employed by TEOs with academic lead or coordinator responsibilities had job titles such as lecturer or tutor. Those who managed their own caseloads reported working in roles relating to tertiary education student wellbeing rather than academic roles.

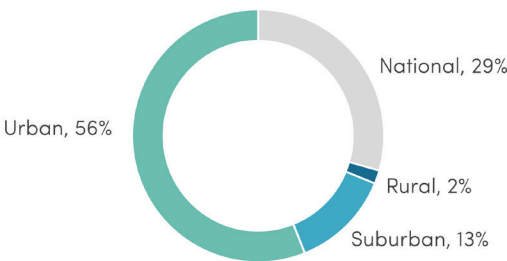
Table 6. Level of responsibility 2024

Level of responsibility	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
Academic lead/coordinator	58	55%	76	2%
Manage my own caseload	12	11%	3054	63%
Professional advisor	8	8%	206	4%
Team leader/line manager	7	7%	660	13%
Clinical lead/practice lead	4	4%	465	9%
General manager/director	2	2%	112	2%
Governance (e.g. Board member)	1	<1%	3	<1%
Chief executive	0	0%	18	<1%
Other	14	13%	300	6%

1.9 Current role – rural/urban, full-time/part-time

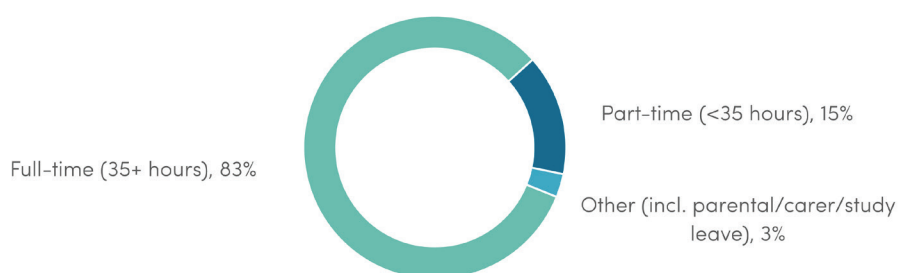
In 2024, most survey participants employed by TEOs reported working in urban (56%) or suburban areas (13%).

Figure 7. Population area of work 2024



A higher proportion than the full survey reported working at a national level (29% compared with 10%). Those who reported working at a national level tended to be employed in the university institutions. Most survey participants employed by TEOs work full-time (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Current work status 2024



In 2024, 83% of survey participants employed by TEOs reported working full-time (35 or more hours a week). 15% percent reported working part-time (less than 35 hours a week). In the full survey, 76% reported working full-time and 21% reported working part-time.

1.10 Work setting

Most social workers employed by TEOs (85%) reported their work setting as primarily in a tertiary education setting. This includes those working with an academic focus (68%) and those with a focus on student wellbeing (17%).

Table 7. Setting of current role 2024

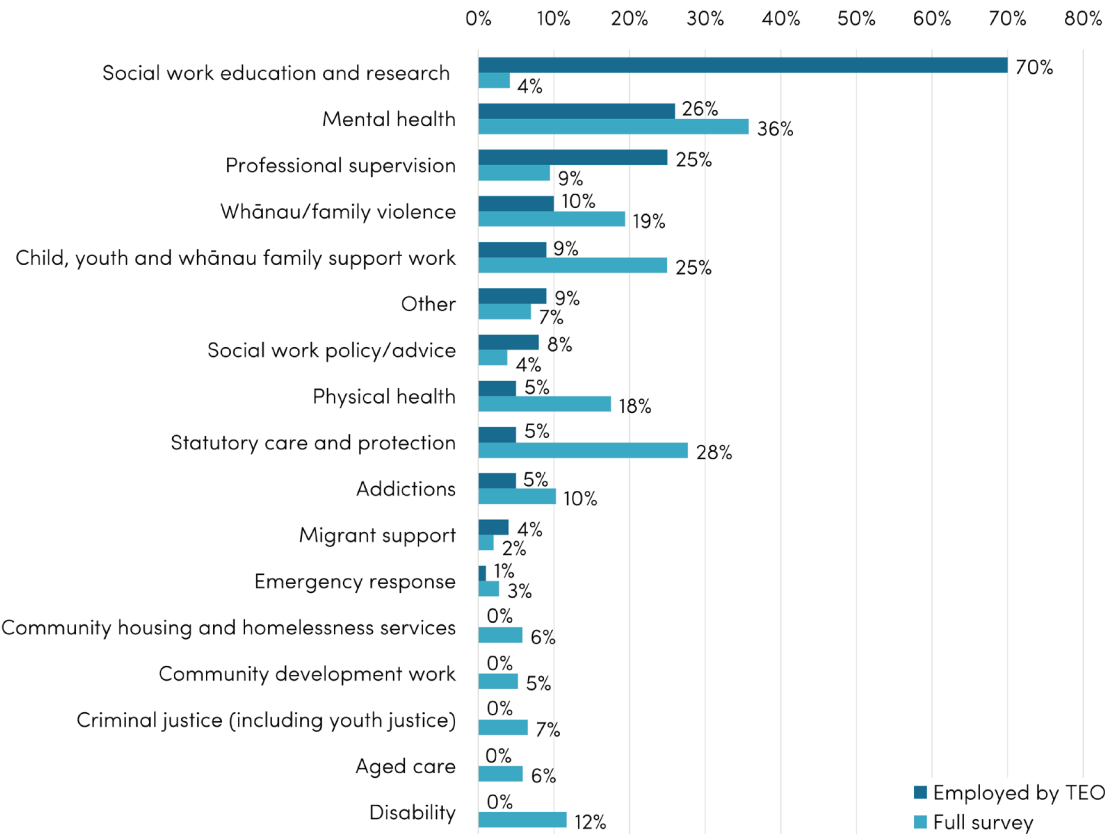
Main work setting	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
Tertiary education academic/educator	74	68%	93	2%
Tertiary education student wellbeing	18	17%	45	1%
Work from home/remotely	4	4%	201	4%
Primary health organisation	3	3%	282	6%
Iwi-based/Kaupapa Māori health and/or social services	2	2%	339	7%
Head/national office	1	<1%	101	2%
ECE/Primary/secondary school	1	<1%	154	3%
Pacific health and/or social services	0	0%	61	1%
Regional office	0	0%	414	8%
Hospital-based	0	0%	739	15%
Community-based/NGO	0	0%	1396	28%
Residential site		0%	430	9%
Other or not stated	6	6%	747	15%
Total	109	100%	5,002	100%

1.11 Field of practice

Survey participants were asked about the main focus or field of practice of their work. Multiple responses were allowed. Over two thirds (70%) of survey participants employed by TEOs reported that the focus of their work was social work education and research (Figure 9). A quarter (26%) noted a focus on mental health.

Providing professional supervision as a main field of practice was noted by a higher proportion of survey participants employed by TEOs (25%) than in the full survey (9%).

Figure 9. Field of practice 2024

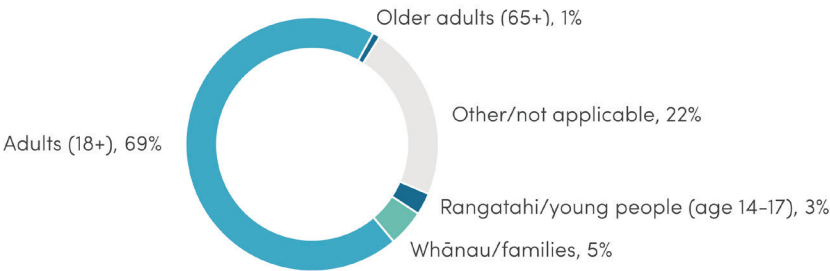


In 2024, a new question was added to the workforce survey to ask if a social worker’s current role was frontline/client-facing. Less than half of survey participants employed by TEOs (44%) described themselves as being in frontline or client facing roles, compared to 83% of the full survey.

1.12 Primary client group

When asked about their primary client group or focus of their practice, 70% of survey participants employed by TEOs identified adults aged 18 and over.

Figure 10. Primary client groups 2024



Section 2: Knowledge and skills development

This section includes survey results about social workers' knowledge and skill development. Gathering this information helps to better understand areas where social workers report that they need additional support and continuing professional development (CPD).

Although it is not the SWRB's role to deliver CPD for social workers, it is important to identify, support and understand the emerging needs identified by the workforce as part of the SWRB's guidance for professional standards and regulatory expectations, as well as for informing employers.

2.1 Continuing professional development (CPD) needs

Survey participants were asked which CPD areas would be helpful for furthering their knowledge and skill development. They were able to select as many options as applied to them.

The top four CPD areas identified as most helpful by survey participants employed by TEOs were: understanding legislation and policies affecting social work practice (39%), social work practice with Māori (38%), social work practice with ethnic and cultural groups (37%), and decolonisation and te Tiriti o Waitangi (35%).

In general, survey participants employed by TEOs noted different areas for development from social workers employed in other organisations. A lower proportion identified CPD in relation to working with whānau (6% compared with 24% in the full survey) and skills for managing complexity (31% compared with 41% in the full survey). A higher proportion identified CPD in relation to decolonisation and te Tiriti o Waitangi (35% compared with 23% in the full survey) and the use of technology (21% compared with 11%).

Table 8. Areas of CPD identified as most helpful 2024

CPD area	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
Legislation and policies affecting social work practice	43	39%	1674	33%
Social work practice with Māori	41	38%	2203	44%
Social work practice with ethnic and cultural groups	40	37%	2246	45%
Decolonisation and te Tiriti o Waitangi	38	35%	1147	23%
Professional supervisor training	35	32%	1321	26%
Skills for managing complexity	34	31%	2048	41%
Ethical practice/dilemmas	33	29%	1841	37%
Quality improvement and project work	24	22%	889	18%
Skills for conflict management	23	21%	1430	29%
Professional boundaries	22	19%	987	20%
Critical thinking	21	19%	1249	25%
Supporting students on field placements	20	18%	688	14%
Use of technology	20	21%	542	11%
Working with whānau living with addiction and substance misuse	16	15%	1325	26%
Activity reporting and use of data	14	13%	585	12%
Report writing	11	11%	769	15%
Working in partnerships	11	10%	717	14%
Working with whānau who have experienced family harm	7	6%	1188	24%
Case management	6	5%	677	14%
Other CPD	6	5%	99	2%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

Section 3: Workforce sustainability

This section explores factors related to the sustainability of the social worker workforce, including why people join and remain in the social work profession. The survey asks social workers about their plans for the next five years and their reasons for planning to leave the social work profession. Salary levels and distribution are also included as possible indicators of workforce sustainability.

3.1 Attraction into the profession

The top three reasons attracting survey participants employed by TEOs into the social work profession were an interest in social justice, advocacy and welfare (78%), serving/working with and supporting whānau and community (68%) and making a positive difference to people's lives (67%).

A higher proportion of survey participants employed by TEOs chose an interest in social justice, advocacy and welfare (78% compared with 68%). A lower proportion chose making a positive difference to people's lives (67% compared with 79%), and using their personal/lived experience to help others (30% compared to 37%). Otherwise, their reasons resembled those of the full survey.

Table 9. Reasons for joining social work profession 2024

Reason	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
An interest in social justice, advocacy, and welfare	85	78%	3388	68%
Serving/working with/supporting whānau and my community	74	68%	3496	70%
Making a positive difference to people's lives	73	67%	3929	79%
Sense of purpose	45	41%	2153	43%
Using my own personal/lived experience to help others	33	30%	1858	37%
To become part of a recognised profession	17	16%	857	17%
Career opportunities	17	16%	569	11%
A known need for social workers	12	11%	486	10%
Work flexibilities	9	8%	455	9%
Salary	2	2%	338	7%
Other	1	<1%	54	1%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

3.2 Retention within the profession

The most selected reason for staying in the social work profession was to make a difference to people's lives (72%) followed by supporting whānau and community (60%) (Table 10). The largest difference to the full survey was a smaller percentage selecting 'positive client relationships' (40% compared to 61%).

Salary was the least selected reason for staying, with only 6% selecting it compared to 19% for the full survey.

A higher proportion of the survey participants employed by TEOs noted career growth opportunities than in the full survey (28% compared to 21% overall).

Table 10. Reasons for staying in social work profession 2024

Reason	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
Making a difference to people's lives	79	72%	3968	79%
Serving/working with/supporting whānau and my community	65	60%	3373	67%
Varied nature of the role	53	49%	2853	57%
Continuous learning/professional development	47	43%	2036	41%
Positive client relationships	44	40%	3052	61%
Being part of a profession	42	38%	1664	33%
Career growth opportunities	33	28%	1041	21%
Positive working environment	24	22%	1531	31%
Peer support	18	16%	1153	23%
Culturally safe environment	12	11%	904	18%
Salary	6	6%	937	19%
Other reason	7	6%	52	1%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

3.3 Barriers to entering the profession

Over half of all survey participants employed by TEOs identified salary (58%) and balancing work and personal life (53%) as barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession (Table 11). Just under half noted that the complex nature of social work was a barrier (45%). A higher proportion of survey participants employed by TEOs identified salary as a barrier than the full survey (58% compared with 34%). Hours of work were also more commonly cited as a barrier (33% compared with 21%).

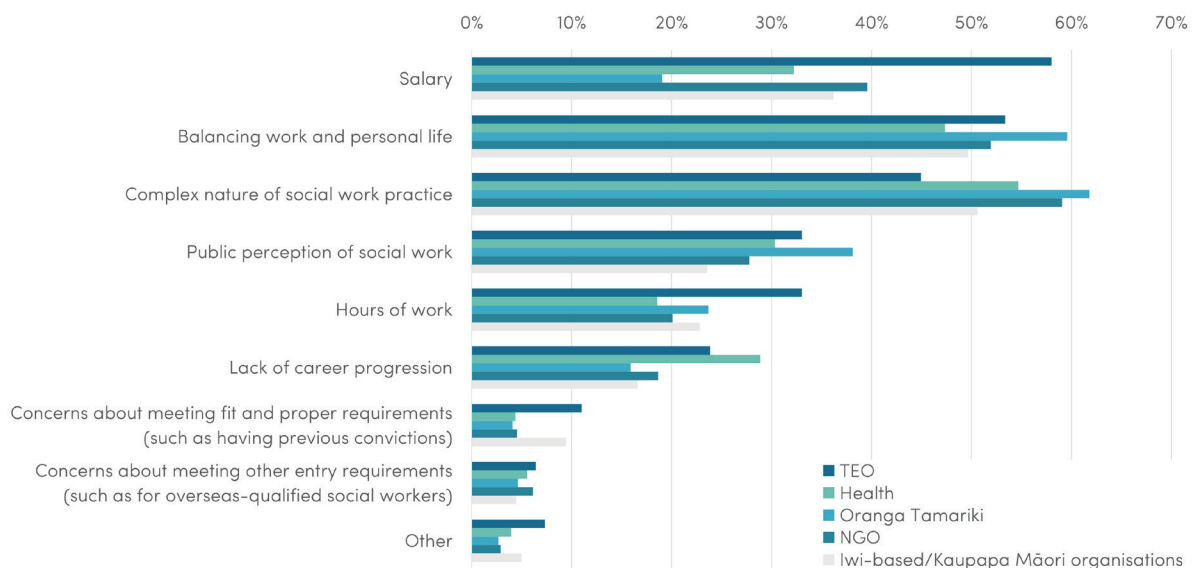
Compared to the full survey, a lower proportion of survey participants employed by TEOs identified the complex nature of social work practice and public perceptions of social work as barriers to entering or re-entering the profession. Identified barriers were otherwise similar to findings in the full survey.

Table 11. Barriers to entering or re-entering social work profession 2024

Barriers to entering or re-entering profession	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
Salary	63	58%	1680	34%
Balancing work and personal life	58	53%	2590	52%
Complex nature of social work practice	49	45%	2833	57%
Public perception of social work	36	33%	1560	31%
Hours of work	36	33%	1055	21%
Lack of career progression	26	24%	1021	20%
Concerns about meeting fit and proper requirements	12	11%	244	5%
Concerns about meeting other entry requirements	7	6%	265	5%
Other	8	7%	187	4%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

Figure 11 compares responses regarding barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession between survey participants employed by TEOs and those employed by the four largest employer types.

Figure 11. Barriers to entering or re-entering social work profession – by main employer types 2024

3.4 Five-year plan for staying in the profession

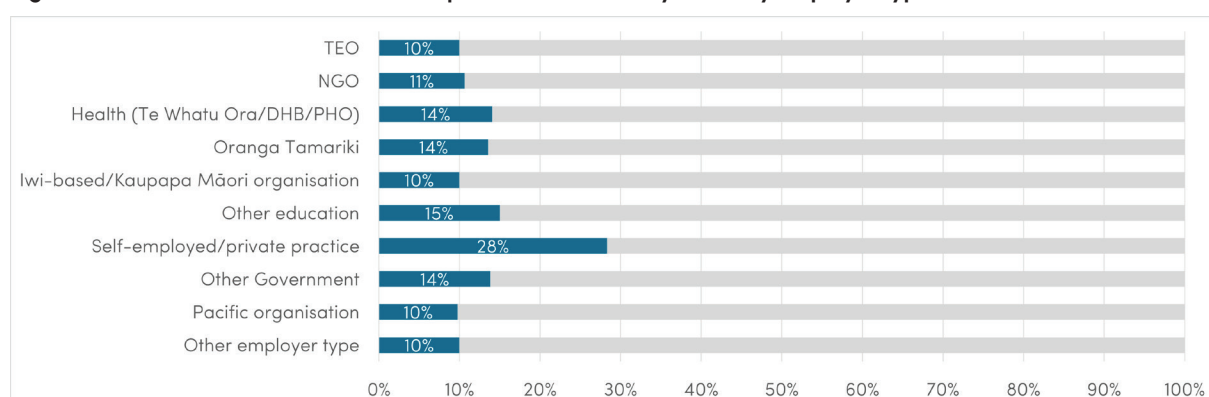
76% of survey participants employed by TEOs planned to remain in the social work profession over the next five years (Table 12). 10% planned to leave the profession in the next five years. Extrapolated out to the full practising workforce of social workers employed by TEOs, this would indicate a potential loss of about 25 social workers from these organisations over the next five years.

Table 12. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years

Are you planning to leave the social work profession in the next five years?	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
No	80	76%	3511	73%
Yes	10	10%	622	13%
Don't know/prefer not to say	15	14%	645	13%

Due to the small number of participants in this spotlight subset, and to ensure participants remain anonymous, this section does not include a detailed breakdown of data for social workers' plans and reasons for leaving the social work profession in the next five years.

The proportion of survey participants employed by TEOs who intend to leave the profession (10%) is comparable to those employed by NGOs, Pacific organisations and Iwi-based/Kaupapa Māori organisations (Figure 12).

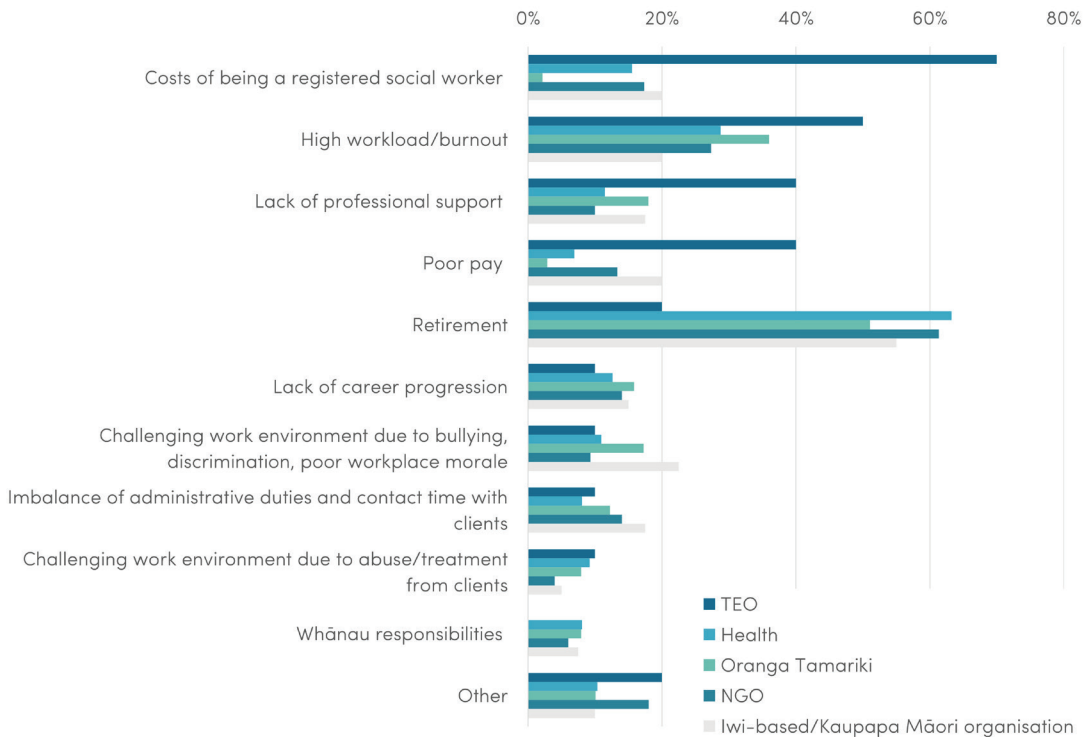
Figure 12. Plans to leave the social work profession in next 5 years – by employer type 2024

3.5 Reasons for leaving the profession

Due to the small number of participants in this spotlight subset, detailed analysis of results for those who intend to leave the profession needs to be interpreted with care. Those who intend to leave the profession in the next five years cited reasons including the costs of being a registered social worker, high workload or burnout, poor pay and lack of professional support. In contrast, retirement was the most common reason given in the full survey.

Figure 13 shows that the most common reasons for leaving the profession as reported by social workers employed by TEOs differs from those employed by the four largest employer types. As noted earlier, the small number of participants in this spotlight subset means analysis of results for those who intend to leave the profession needs to be interpreted with care.

Figure 13. Reasons for leaving the social work profession in next 5 years – by main employer type 2024



3.6 Salary distribution

Figure 14 compares the distribution of salaries for survey participants employed by TEOs to the full survey. Participants gave their full-time equivalent (FTE) salary when answering this survey question.

Salary distribution for survey participants employed by TEOs was lower than among other employer types. Nearly one quarter (24%) of survey participants indicated a salary of \$80,000 or less (Table 13).

Figure 14. Salary distribution – by employer type 2024

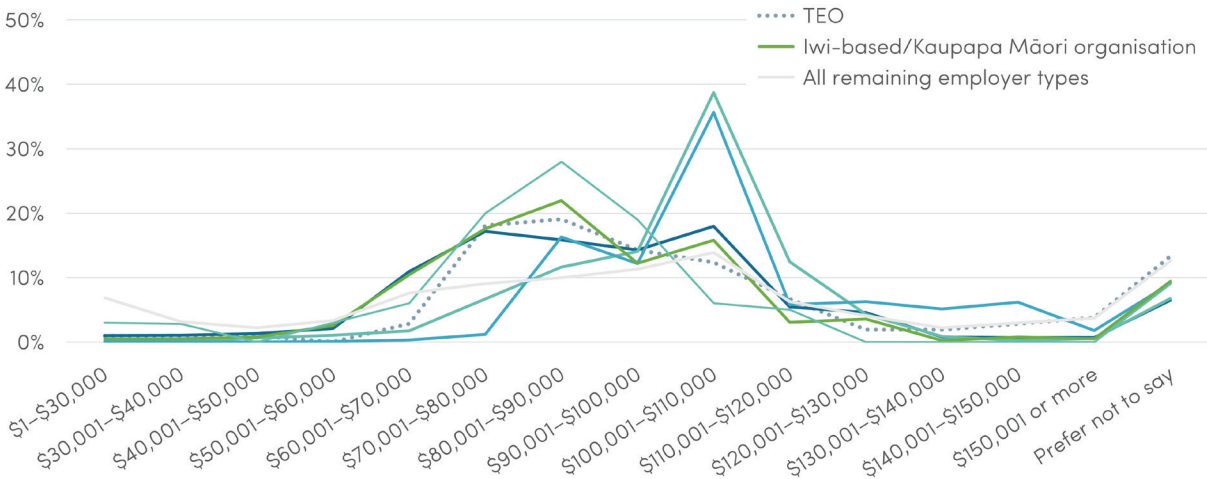


Table 13. Salary distribution 2024

Salary band	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
\$1–\$30,000	1	1%	50	1%
\$30,001–\$40,000	1	1%	40	1%
\$40,001–\$50,000	1	1%	43	1%
\$50,001–\$60,000	0	0%	75	2%
\$60,001–\$70,000	3	3%	269	6%
\$70,001–\$80,000	19	18%	490	10%
\$80,001–\$90,000	20	19%	718	15%
\$90,001–\$100,000	15	14%	640	13%
\$100,001–\$110,000	13	12%	1256	26%
\$110,001–\$120,000	7	7%	349	7%
\$120,001–\$130,000	2	2%	221	5%
\$130,001–\$140,000	2	2%	89	2%
\$140,001–\$150,000	3	3%	98	2%
\$150,001 or more	4	4%	61	1%
Prefer not to say/unspecified	14	13%	391	8%

In 2024 the distribution of salaries across the full practising workforce shifted up to a 'peak' category of \$100,001–\$110,000. For survey participants employed by TEOs, the most common salary band was \$80,001–\$90,000, selected by 19%. This salary peak occurs at a lower level for social workers employed by TEOs, than for social workers reporting other employer types except for those employed in other education or Iwi-based/Kaupapa Māori organisations.⁵

A combined total of 30% of survey participants employed by TEOs reported earning \$100,000 or more. By comparison, the proportion of social workers reporting earning \$100,000 or more employed by Oranga Tamariki (61%) and health organisations (57%) was twice as high, while a similar proportion were earning above this level among NGOs (30%).

Salary was noted as a barrier to entering and remaining in the social work profession by a higher proportion of survey participants employed by TEOs than the full survey.

3.7 Biggest challenges for the profession

Social workers were asked what they think the biggest challenges for the social work profession are now, and in the immediate future. Two thirds of survey participants employed by TEOs noted recruitment and retention of social workers as the biggest challenge (66%), followed by deepening of social inequity (58%) and pay parity (50%) (Table 14). These three challenges were selected by a higher proportion of survey participants employed by TEOs than in the full survey. The largest difference compared to the full survey was in pay parity (50% compared to 31% in the full survey).

Table 14. Challenges for the social work profession now and in the future 2024

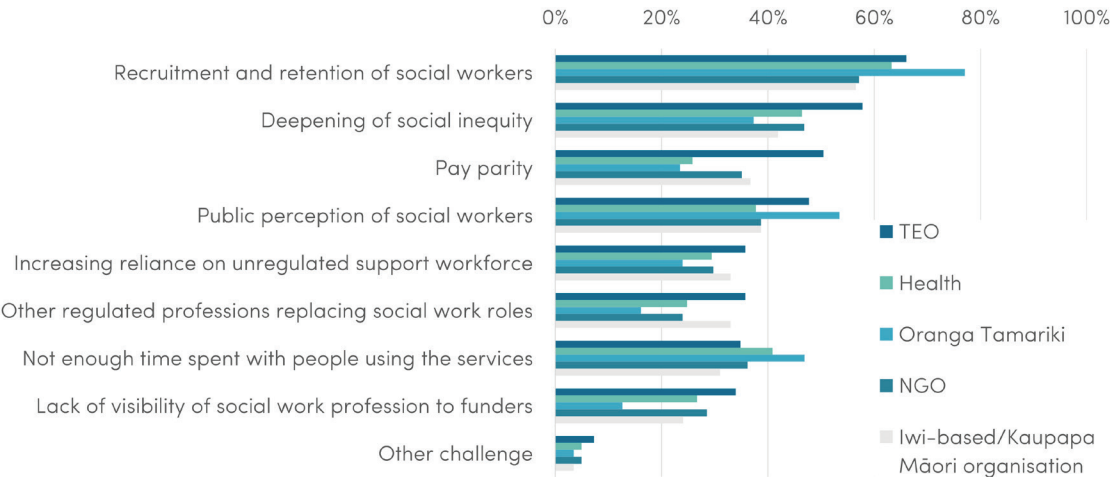
Challenges	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
Recruitment and retention of social workers	72	66%	3166	63%
Deepening of social inequity	63	58%	2183	44%
Pay parity	55	50%	1528	31%
Public perception of social workers	52	48%	2106	42%
Increasing reliance on unregulated support workforce	39	36%	1482	30%
Other regulated professions replacing social work roles	39	36%	1187	24%
Not enough time spent with people using the services	38	35%	1967	39%
Lack of visibility of social work profession to funders	37	34%	1179	24%
Other challenge	8	7%	220	4%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

⁵ 'Other education' refers to education institutions other than TEOs delivering SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications, such as primary and secondary schools.

Figure 15 compares challenges reported by survey participants employed by TEOs with those employed by the four largest employer types (NGOs, health-based organisations, Oranga Tamariki and Iwi-based/Kaupapa Māori organisations). A higher proportion of survey participants employed by TEOs highlighted pay parity, deepening of social inequity, and other regulated professionals replacing social work roles as challenges facing the profession than those employed by the four largest employer types.

Figure 15. Challenges for the social work profession now and in the future 2024 – by main employer type



Section 4: Employer support

This section describes results from survey questions about the support provided to social workers by their employers, for their social work practice, and financial support for the payment of registration and Practising Certificate fees.

4.1 Employer support for social work practice

The most common categories of employer support noted by survey participants employed by TEOs were professional reflective supervision (63%) and training and skills development, (55%).

In both areas, survey participants employed by TEOs reported lower levels of employer support than social workers employed in other organisations (Table 15).

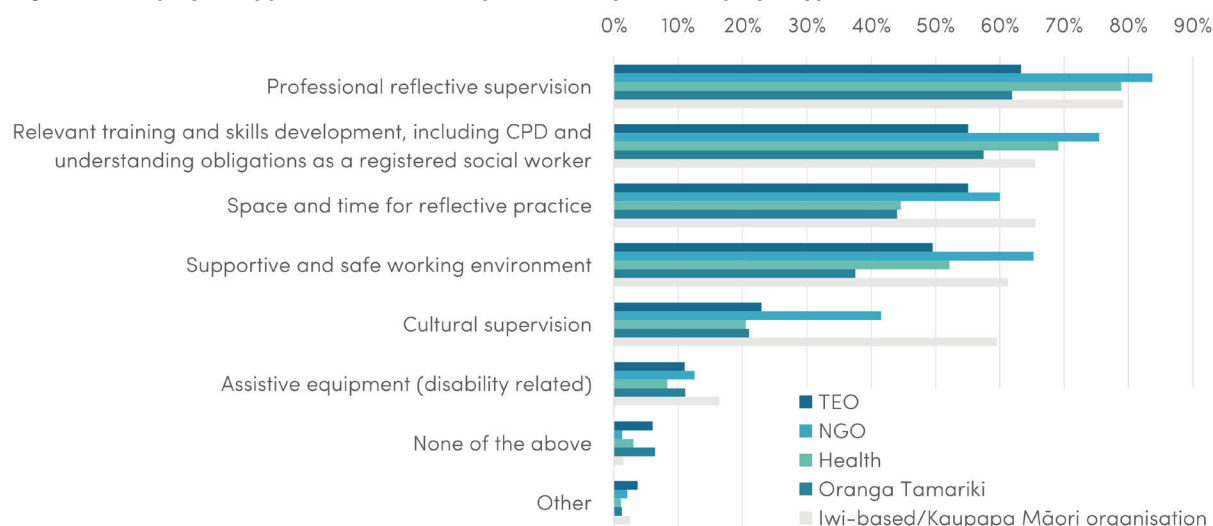
Table 15. Employer support for social work practice 2024

Employer support	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
Professional reflective supervision	69	63%	3659	73%
Relevant training and skills development, including CPD and understanding obligations as a registered social worker	60	55%	3240	65%
Space and time for reflective practice	60	55%	2501	50%
Supportive and safe working environment	54	50%	2584	52%
Cultural supervision	25	23%	1524	30%
Assistive equipment (disability related)	12	11%	542	11%
None of the above	6	6%	236	5%
Other	4	4%	125	2%

Participants could select more than one response, so totals exceed the number of survey participants.

Lower levels of employer support in a range of areas for survey participants employed by TEOs was also evident when compared with other main employer types (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Employer support for social work practice – by main employer type 2024

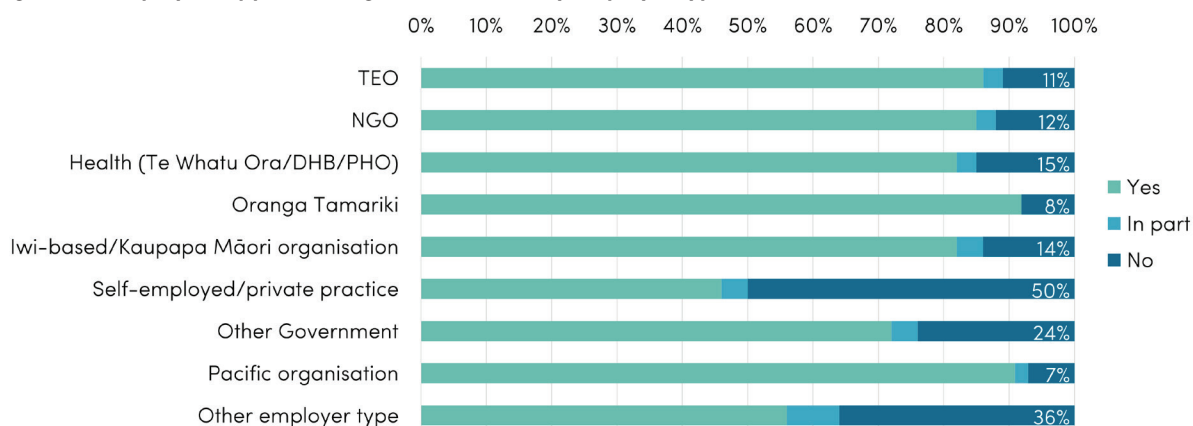


4.2 Employer support for fees

Costs associated with being a registered social worker include the initial registration fee and the cost of a Practising Certificate, which is renewed annually. The survey asked social workers if their employer pays these fees in full, in part, or not at all.

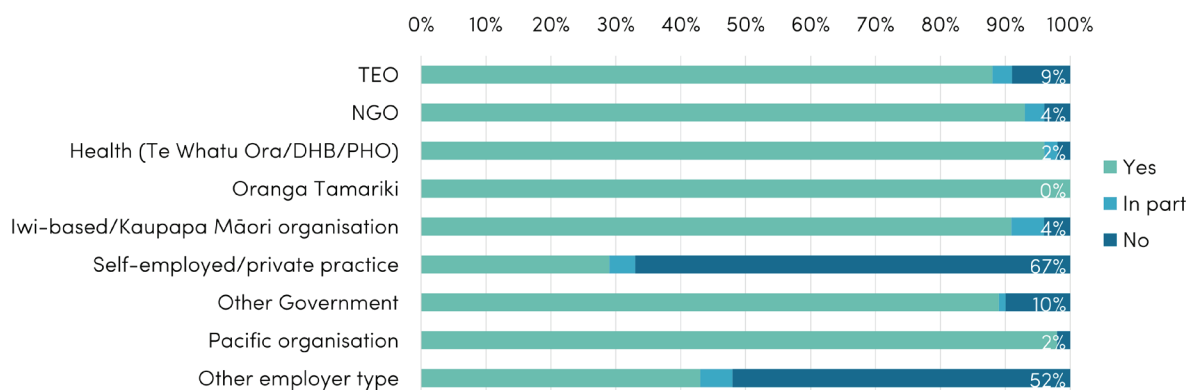
89% of survey participants employed by TEOs reported that their employers paid their registration fees in full or part. This is similar to the proportion employed by NGOs and slightly higher than those employed by health-based organisations or Oranga Tamariki (Figure 17).

Figure 17. Employer support for registration fees – by employer type 2024



91% of survey participants employed by TEOs reported that their Practising Certificate fees were paid in full or in part by their employer. This was lower than those employed by other employer types such as NGOs, health-based organisations or Oranga Tamariki (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Employer support for Practising Certificate fees – by employer type 2024



Section 5: Standing of the profession

This section explores social workers’ views on how mandatory registration and media coverage have impacted the respect, trust and confidence in the social work profession.

5.1 Impact of registration on the profession

Mandatory registration came into effect in February 2021. In the years since, the SWRB’s workforce survey has asked social workers if they thought the profession was more respected since the introduction of mandatory registration. 39% of survey participants employed by TEOs thought the profession was more respected, 32% said it was ‘in part’, and 28% believed it was not (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Belief that profession is more respected since mandatory registration – survey participants employed by TEOs 2024

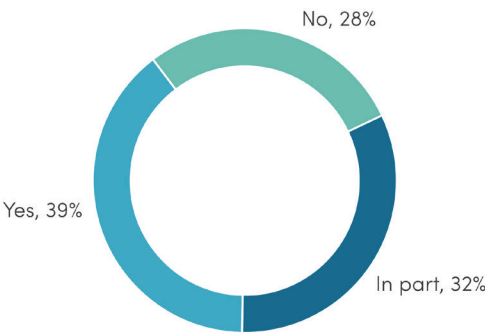


Table 16. Belief that profession is more respected since mandatory registration 2024

Profession is more respected since mandatory registration	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	39	39%	2037	49%
In part	28	32%	1371	33%
No	32	28%	713	17%

Survey participants were asked to explain what the effect of mandatory registration had been on the profession. Reasons given included a belief that registration provided assurance to the public.

Society’s knowledge that all social workers must be registered gives members of the public peace of mind and a safety net which perpetuates respect for some social workers.

Māori social worker

Several of those who answered ‘no’, pointed out that there is still uncertainty or a lack of awareness of registration and the way that the social work profession is portrayed in public has impacted on the level of respect. Additionally, some suggested that the benefits of registration were yet to be realised within the profession.

I believe there is still a lack of clarity around who needs to be registered and who doesn’t. The benefits of professionalisation have not yet impacted the quality of training, resourcing of services, or support for the workforce. So, the profession still looks the same from the outside.

Pākehā social worker

5.2 Impact of media on trust and confidence in the profession

Survey participants were asked about the impact that media coverage relating to social work has had on public trust and confidence in the social work profession. Most survey participants employed by TEOs thought that media coverage had a negative impact (22% extremely; 67% somewhat negative).

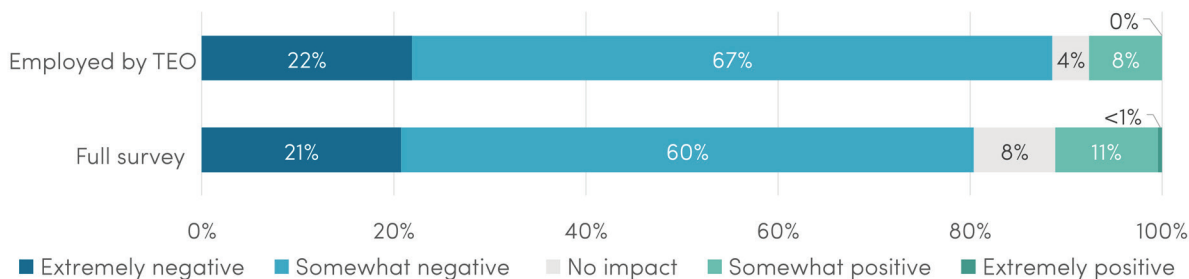
There has been a slight shift in how the social work profession is viewed but the negative views and assumptions are the same which is reflected in social media and the news, etc.
Pacific peoples social worker

Others noted challenges for the profession within the context of the wider tertiary education sector.

Social workers are negatively portrayed in the media and sometimes these cases have merit. Pay equity helped. There are also vocational systems with a hierarchy and unfortunately social workers are close to the bottom and so their knowledge and expertise is received in the same manner.
Pacific peoples social worker

The proportion of survey participants employed by TEOs who consider that trust and confidence in the social work profession has been negatively impacted is similar to the full survey (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Beliefs about impact of media on trust and confidence in social work profession 2024



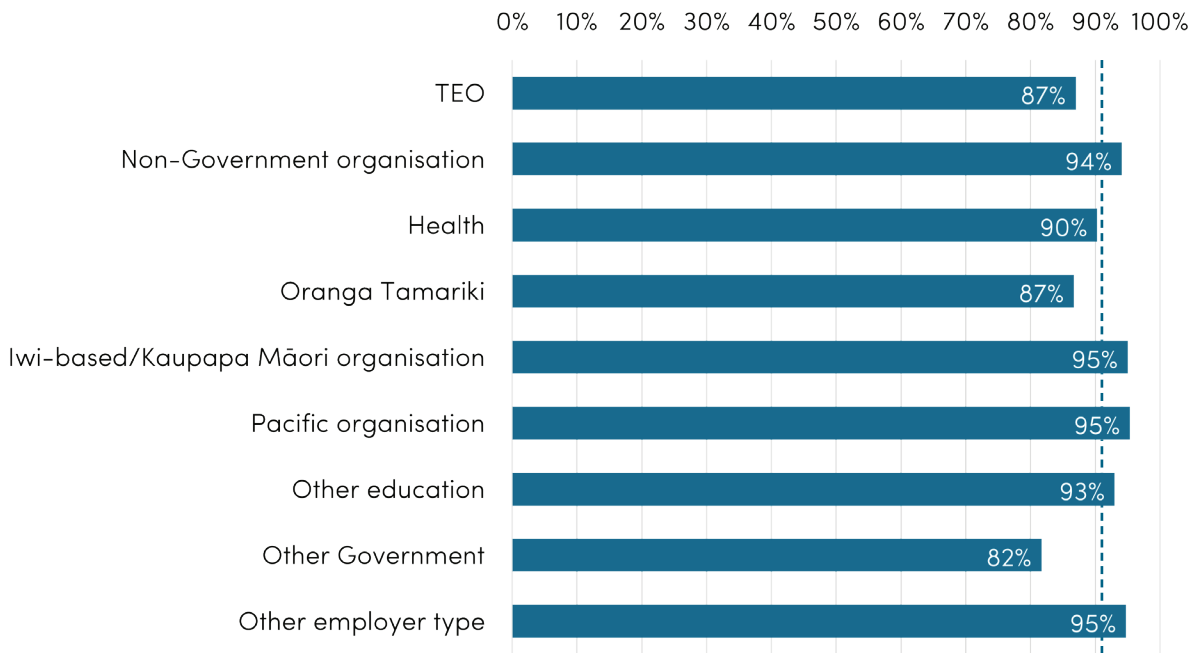
Section 6: Safety and conduct

A focus for the workforce survey in the past two years has been on safety and conduct for social workers. Specifically, social workers were asked about their confidence in their employer’s policies and processes for dealing with serious issues with a social worker’s practice and/or conduct, and whether they would report practice and conduct issues to the SWRB.

6.1 Confidence in employer’s policies and processes for practice and/or conduct issues

Most (87%) survey participants employed by TEOs said they were confident their employer had adequate policies and procedures in place to deal with serious issues with a social worker’s practice and/or conduct appropriately and safely. This was a slightly lower proportion than in the full survey (91%; dashed line in Figure 21).

Figure 21. Confidence in employer to deal with serious practice/conduct issues – by employer type 2024



Of those who did not feel confident in their employer’s ability to deal with serious practice and/or conduct issues, some felt that their employer was not aware of the specific requirements for the social work profession, or that their employer’s existing policies and requirements were different to those for registered social workers.

6.2 Raising concerns with the SWRB

Almost all (95%) of survey participants employed by TEOs said they would raise concerns with the SWRB about another social worker’s practice and/or conduct where it wasn’t possible to resolve with their employer. Among those who said they would not, some said they did not feel safe or supported in the process, and some were concerned about the possibility of being seen as a whistleblower.

Closing comments

This Spotlight Report seeks to shine a light on the social worker workforce employed by tertiary education organisations that deliver SWRB-prescribed qualifications. These social workers are a critical component of the social worker workforce, delivering education and supporting social work ākonga on the New Zealand qualification pathway to becoming registered social workers.

The SWRB appreciates and acknowledges the social workers who shared their time and feedback in 2024, achieving the highest response rate since the survey began (60%), and a sample that closely matches the demographic profile of the workforce. This gives us high confidence that the results in this report reflect the reality and diversity of all practising survey participants employed by those TEOs offering SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications and enables us to build on our evidence base to support workforce planning and decision-making in the social work sector.

We welcome feedback, comments and suggestions on ways to improve this survey or specific topics that might be useful to explore in the future.

Appendix 1

Survey sample and data representativeness – comparing social workers employed by TEOs to the full practising workforce

This appendix compares the TEO survey participant demographics with the full practising TEO workforce (224) and the total practising social worker workforce (9,135) to better understand the representativeness of the results. The aim is to show that broad results shown in the survey can be generalised to what is occurring across the wider practising TEO social worker workforce.

‘Practising’ workforce includes all social workers on the SWRB register with an active practising certificate (PC) as of 30 June 2024.

Table A1. Age distribution of social workers employed by TEOs compared to practising workforce 2024

Age group	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Practising TEO workforce		Full survey		Full practising workforce
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	%
20–29	4	4%	8	4%	399	8%	9%
30–39	16	15%	40	18%	904	18%	21%
40–49	27	25%	51	23%	1212	24%	24%
50–59	33	30%	56	25%	1369	27%	25%
60–69	27	25%	59	26%	980	20%	18%
70–79	2	2%	10	4%	131	3%	3%
80 or older	0	0%	0	0%	1	<1%	<1%
Unspecified	0	0%	0	0%	6	<1%	<1%
Total	109	100%	224	100%	5002	100%	100%

Table A2. Gender distribution of social workers employed by TEOs compared to practising workforce 2024

Gender	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Practising TEO workforce		Full survey		Full practising workforce
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	%
Female	89	82%	178	79%	4251	85%	85%
Male	19	17%	44	20%	728	15%	15%
Another gender	1	<1%	1	<1%	11	<1%	<1%
Unspecified	0	0%	1	<1%	12	<1%	<1%
Total	109	100%	224	100%	5002	100%	100%

Table A3 shows the survey distribution by ethnicity compared to the most recent census of the Aotearoa New Zealand population (2023). This shows that 2024 survey participants, and the practising workforce of social workers has a higher representation of Māori and Pacific peoples than the general population. Unfortunately, there are no holistic data that show the exact number and characteristics of those who access social worker services, so it is difficult to compare the workforce with the ‘client’ population. However, having a high proportion of Māori and Pacific social workers in the workforce employed by TEOs is an encouraging trend for supporting population wellbeing across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Table A3. Ethnicity distribution of social workers employed by TEOs compared to practising workforce 2024 and 2023 Census

Ethnicity	Survey participants employed by TEOs	Practising TEO workforce	Full survey	Full practising workforce	2023 Census
Māori	27%	24%	24%	25%	18%
Pacific peoples	13%	10%	11%	12%	9%
European (incl. NZ European/Pākehā)	61%	64%	66%	63%	68%
Asian	13%	9%	9%	10%	17%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	2%	4%	2%	4%	2%
Other ethnicity	5%	2%	2%	1%	1%

Both Census and the workforce survey use ‘total response’ ethnicity calculations, allowing participants to identify more than one ethnic group. Totals will add to more than 100%

Table A4. Geographic distribution of social workers employed by TEOs compared to practising workforce 2024

Region	Survey participants employed by TEOs		Full survey		Full practising workforce		2023 Census
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	%
Northland	6	6%	252	5%	464	5%	4%
Auckland	32	29%	1445	29%	2733	30%	33%
Waikato	6	6%	433	9%	755	8%	10%
Bay of Plenty	6	6%	380	8%	719	7%	7%
Gisborne	2	2%	78	2%	160	2%	1%
Hawke's Bay	6	6%	218	4%	387	4%	4%
Taranaki	1	1%	140	3%	232	3%	3%
Manawatū-Wanganui	9	8%	294	6%	471	5%	5%
Wellington	11	10%	538	11%	1004	11%	10%
Tasman	1	<1%	30	<1%	55	<1%	1%
Nelson	4	4%	91	2%	175	2%	1%
Marlborough	1	<1%	42	<1%	68	<1%	1%
West Coast	0	0%	32	<1%	60	<1%	1%
Canterbury	18	17%	704	14%	1287	14%	13%
Otago	6	6%	225	4%	388	4%	5%
Southland	0	0%	97	2%	167	2%	2%
Unspecified/International	0	0%	3	<1%	10	<1%	–
Total	109	100%	5002	100%	9135	100%	100%

Table A5. Employer type – Full survey compared to practising workforce 2024

Employer type	Full survey		Practising workforce	
	Number	%	Number	%
Non-government organisation (NGO)	1453	29%	2571	28%
Health (Te Whatu Ora/DHB/PHO)	1282	26%	1962	21%
Oranga Tamariki	1081	22%	2045	22%
Iwi-based/Kaupapa Māori organisation	415	8%	821	9%
TEOs	109	2%	224	2%
Other education*	79	1%	132	1%
Self-employed/private practice	183	4%	306	3%
Other Government	97	2%	192	2%
Pacific organisation	43	<1%	97	1%
Other	66	1%	135	1%
Unspecified	186	4%	650	7%
Total	5002	100%	9135	100%

*Other than TEOs delivering prescribed social work courses, for example, employed in school-based education.

Appendix 2

The SWRB's role as Lead Agency for workforce planning for all social workers

As Lead Agency for workforce planning for all social workers, the SWRB's vision for its lead agency function is to support Aotearoa New Zealand to have enough social workers with the right skills, knowledge, and competencies in the right place, at the right time and at the right cost, to support New Zealanders to lead happier, healthier and more productive lives.

We work together with employers, as well as sector organisations, government agencies, funders, education and training providers, taking a cross-sectoral, strategic and collaborative relationship-based approach. We collect and analyse social worker and employer information and provide insights and evidence for others to use in their workforce planning and development activities.

The SWRB's role to date has focused on building knowledge on trends, developing robust evidence and developing relationships to better understand the workforce challenges we are facing.

The SWRB was designated its role as Lead Agency for workforce planning for all social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand by the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee in 2020.

Appendix 3

List of TEOs delivering SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications as at the time of the 2024 survey (May–July 2024)

- Ara Institute of Canterbury
- Bethlehem Institute Limited
- Eastern Institute of Technology
- Manukau Institute of Technology
- Massey University
- Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology
- NorthTec
- Open Polytechnic
- Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology
- Unitec
- Te Wānanga o Aotearoa
- Te Wānanga o Raukawa
- University of Auckland
- University of Canterbury
- University of Otago
- University of Waikato
- Whitireia
- Wintec