



## Submission to Te Pūkenga on *Te Ata Māhina Bachelor of Social Work programme unification*

### INTRODUCTION

1. Thank you for the opportunity to submit on Te Ata Māhina Bachelor of Social Work programme unification consultation document.
2. As the professional body for social workers across Aotearoa New Zealand, we support the aspirations of this unified programme. The direction for social work education is perceived as admirable, as it is a further step towards decolonising social work education and practise in Aotearoa New Zealand. We applaud Te Pūkenga for this direction. We believe that the direction will be well supported by the social work sector.
3. There is, however, a general unease amongst our members and social work academics we have spoken to about this programme. Our view is that the programme is not yet quite right and requires further revision and development to ensure it fully embeds the aspirations of the programme to produce high-calibre future social workers. There are significant concerns held about the pace of development and intended implementation of this programme, with the target for commencement of delivery in semester 1 2023. We have heard from our members who are Te Pūkenga academics that they feel the engagement and consultation process has been rushed, which has led to the identified gaps in the programme. We feel that through further engagement and consultation, the programme will only be further strengthened. We understand the Tertiary Education Union hold similar concerns.
4. Furthermore, there is risk that this programme could shortly require further changes as it has been developed prior to the Social Work Registration Board (SWRB) finalising their revision of the Programme Recognition Standards (PRS). There is a risk that the programme may require further changes to ensure it aligns with the revised PRS.
5. We recommend a longer period of sector engagement and programme refinement, and that the timeframe for implementation is delayed to semester 1 2024. We have consistently heard from our members this would ensure a high-quality programme curriculum can be developed, rather than this being developed in a rush. Extending timeframes will also allow sufficient time for the preparation of a large amount of course material (such as assessments, lectures, resources, and identification of required reading materials), including allowing kaiako teaching the same courses throughout the country to work collaboratively to support the goal of a unified programme. Whilst we are eager for the aspirations of the programme to be implemented, on balance, we feel a delayed implementation timeframe will ensure ākonga receive excellent social work education.
6. It is relevant to note that there is an unresolved tension about the desire for national unification and consistency and allowing sufficient flexibility and localisation of content. The unified

programme does not appear to address this tension and has instead raised further questions around how unification can be realistically achieved whilst ensuring flexibility and maintaining autonomy and empowerment of the educators who will be delivering the programme. There also needs to be greater flexibility to ensure the programme is responsive to local needs.

7. Our social work educators across Aotearoa are highly skilled, creative, and passionate about social work and their subject areas; they routinely design courses and assessments meeting both the standards of the profession and the changing needs of their learners. There is strength in being part of a larger network and working alongside colleagues from across the motu.
8. We detail our specific concerns and recommendations below.

## DISCUSSION

### MĀTAURANGA MĀORI AND TE TIRITI O WAITANGI RESPONSIVENESS

9. We applaud how mātauranga Māori and responsiveness to te Tiriti is embedded through programme, as this builds upon known limitations which many providers have worked hard to correct in recent years.
10. The focus of the courses appears to be oriented towards ensuring tauwiwi have a solid understanding of te ao Māori. There is an assumption both tauwiwi and tangata whenua require the same courses. We wonder how Māori ākonga will experience this content (and if it may be superficial for them), experience cultural safety, and if they would benefit from different content to deepen their own knowledge of te ao Māori. We believe the curriculum could be strengthened through providing a focus on the importance and practice associated with allyship with te Tiriti by tangata Tiriti.
11. Whilst most papers include a focus on Te Tiriti responsiveness, some could do with further strengthening to explicitly include this as a lens for critical reflection and analysis such as Law and Ethical Decision Making and Organisational Contexts, given Māori are overrepresented as clients of social services.
12. We believe there is an exciting opportunity for Te Pūkenga to model true Te Tiriti partnership, through partnering tangata-ō te whenua and tangata-ō te Tiriti kaiako together in the teaching of all papers. This would require strategic planning to increase the number of tangata-ō te whenua kaiako. Whilst we fully support the aspirations of the programme, care must be taken to ensure the new approach does not place inequitable demands on tangata-ō te whenua and Pasifika kaiako. Inclusion of these papers is vital to achieving decolonisation of social work education, so there is need to ensure equitable distribution of resources and educators who can do justice to the intent.
13. We note graduate profile 3 (Māramatanga Ao Māori) states “graduates are capable of applying te reo Māori...”, yet not a single learning outcome mentions te reo Māori.
14. We note within the documentation the programme does not appear to have been designed in partnership with tangata-ō te whenua. To ensure Te Tiriti is embedded into the programme, there must be meaningful engagement and partnership with mana whenua. We seek reassurance from Te Pūkenga as to the processes that have been followed in this regard.

## COURSE CONTENT

15. We believe the Graduate Profile Outcomes capture the essence of what it means to be a social worker.
16. However, we are concerned as to whether these outcomes are fully reflected in the learning outcomes and the indicative course content. We are concerned there is limited focus on some core areas which are central to social work in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. For example, mental health and addictions; care and protection; sexual violence; social determinants of wellbeing and health; trauma; suicide; and poverty. It can be assumed that such topic areas will be interwoven throughout papers, such as the 'wellbeing' papers; however, there is risk that without explicitly contextualising these topics, setting explicit learning outcomes, and providing foundational skills and knowledge, learners will be unable to link these issues and apply the relevant skills associated with them to practice.
17. We are also concerned that some topic areas are introduced too late in the curriculum, such as family violence and the concept of rangatiratanga in practice only featuring from third year. Family violence is an incredibly complex issue which learners would benefit from being introduced to early on as it may help consolidate and contextualise other content.
18. Content relevant to working with migrants and refugees, working with LGBTQIA+, the global context and international practice approaches, social work leadership and management, community development and eco or sustainable social work is either inadequate or entirely missing from the indicative curriculum. Ensuring that learners are gaining skills which are increasingly relevant to the Aotearoa New Zealand context, for example as our migrant communities grow larger and climate change is having a greater impact, futureproofs this programme and ensures it is translatable to the international practice setting, reflecting IFSW's global standards of education<sup>1</sup>.
19. Some content appears to have been inserted in an ad hoc manner and we question the overall value it brings to the programme as structured. We believe there needs to be a rethinking of the generic approach to the grouping and naming of papers to ensure that the papers group relevant content and scaffold ākonga appropriately. This is particularly evident in the 'understanding wellbeing' courses, which feel like a conglomerate of various topic areas and practice approaches which are disjointed and crowded. They also miss some foundational concepts such as death and dying. We wonder what value teaching specifically on the NASC service brings and would recommend this is generalised out to psychosocial assessment and care coordination in health. Additionally, including green social work as a content area within 'Working with Diversity' does not feel like a natural fit and we recommend that green social work is instead included within content around eco/sustainable social work within a more relevant paper such as understanding wellbeing.
20. Furthermore, there is insufficient (and at times completely absent) attention paid to some of the central principles of social work. There is an inadequate focus on analysis of the structural and social aspects of social work practice, including human rights, inequity, social justice, and social policy. For example, the term human rights is not mentioned in a single course summary. Similarly, there is a singular paper titled Social Justice and Social Policy located in the final year of the programme – we feel this is much too late and the learning outcomes do not sufficiently reflect the knowledge required in this area.

---

<sup>1</sup> IFSW. (2020). Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training. Retrieved from: <https://www.ifsw.org/global-standards-for-social-work-education-and-training/#:~:text=The%20main%20objectives%20of%20the,by%20the%20IFSW%20and%20IASSW.>

21. In summary, we believe a careful reconsideration the course content is required to ensure that ākongā will have the necessary skills and knowledge to be social workers.

## COURSE STRUCTURE

22. Our primary concern regarding course structure is the lack of pre or co requisites for any of the courses. In practice, this means that courses could be delivered in any order, no matter their year. This is simply not practical to achieve consistency as it would mean every course is required to be designed in isolation from each other rather than providing a scaffolding of knowledge and skill which is built upon year by year. It would also disadvantage students who may transfer providers during their study in accessing a consistent and coherent course structure.
23. We can only assume that applying pre and co requisites are intended given courses appear tiered in title and content (e.g. Whānau and family 1, 2 & 3), however we would like it noted that pre-requisites are essential to ensure learners are acquiring and linking the right knowledge base and practice skills prior to placements.
24. We note that the programme applies the minimum standards for field education as currently set by SWRB. Some subsidiaries introduce field education or orientation to social work practice much earlier in the course to support with the scaffolding of knowledge. There is an argument that including opportunities for field placement throughout all years of study will support consolidation of theory, knowledge, and skills. We would like to see the possibility for placements to be structured like teachers and nurses who generally complete incremental blocks across the duration of the programme, through including short observation weeks during the first 2-years of the degree programme.
25. Finally, we strongly recommend that a review process is built into the programme implementation. Within the consultation document there is no reference to evaluation or review which is essential to ensuring the programme is achieving its intended outcomes. We recommend that this review is scheduled one year following implementation, at the end of the first cohort and then at a regular ongoing interval. Social work is a profession which is highly responsive to changing global, political, and societal conditions and as such, the education needs for those entering the profession continue to evolve as contemporary issues emerge. It is important that social work education continues to reflect this responsiveness in course design and content which can only be achieved via regular review.

## PROGRAMME ADMISSION CRITERIA

26. We have some concerns about some of the programme specific admission requirements:
- a. **Proof of Immunisation status:** should only be required at the time of placement if a student has identified interest in applying for a health-related placement *which requires this*. Requiring all students to provide proof of immunisation status prior to acceptance onto the programme is discriminatory.
  - b. **Health evidence requirements:** this requirement feels very invasive and disproportionate to the level of risk. A declaration of health conditions or disabilities (existing or acquired throughout the programme) which may impact upon participation in programme (and therefore require reasonable adjustments) or prevent professional registration should be the expectation – not a general declaration provided by a health professional for all

students. If information indicates there may be concerns in this area, then further health related checks may be appropriate.

- c. **Evidence of computer literacy via level 3 computer course:** computer literacy for any individual who has achieved university entrance should be assumed. Requiring a course may discriminate against mature students who may not feel confident in their computer abilities. Instead, reasonable adjustments should be made via offering student support services, the level of computer literacy required in the social work profession is not high.
- d. **Requiring students to hold a current full drivers' licence by commencement of placement:** we wonder if this is a necessary requirement for all students and should instead be approached on a case-by-case basis. There are many barriers to obtaining drivers' licences (for example finance) and so this requirement may be unequitable. For those students who do not hold a full drivers' license, we would hope that identification of placements which do not require a drivers' license may be possible rather than being a barrier to programme entry.

## CONCLUSION

- 27. Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit on Te Ata Māhina Bachelor of Social Work programme unification consultation document. We support the general aspirations of the Graduate Profile Outcomes, and that Te Tiriti is located at the centre of this programme. We fully embrace the progress towards decolonising social work education and believe this programme is heading in the right direction. Our members are excited about the future of social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- 28. However, we have heard from our members there is currently a general unease with the programme in its current form, and the programme would be further strengthened through greater consultation and engagement. We have identified some significant gaps within the programme (for example, not including human rights). We feel that with more time and consultation, we would be able to provide stronger recommendations to further strengthen this programme. Our aspiration is that Te Pūkenga is delivering a magnificent social work degree.
- 29. We have heard from our members that kaiako have not sufficiently been engaged in and consulted in the development process to date. For example, we are aware of at least one institution reportedly having no representation in the working groups. Similarly, ANZASW has had limited input into the development of this programme to date. Te Pūkenga subsidiaries are members of the International Association of the Schools of Social Work (IASSW). The Global Standards for Social Work Education, jointly developed by IASSW and the International Federation of Social Workers states: *"Schools retain close and formal relationships with representatives and key stakeholders of the social work profession, including regulators and national and regional associations of social work practice and education."*<sup>2</sup> We look forward to being able to continue to partner together with Te Pūkenga to support with the development of excellent future social workers.
- 30. On balance, whilst we are eager for the new direction of social work education to commence as soon as possible, we do not support the timeframes for delivery in Semester 1 2023. We support the calls from our members for further consultation and engagement to ensure the programme will deliver high-calibre graduates and to address the concerns identified in the programme to date. Unfortunately, this means we recommend the delivery of the unified degree is delayed until 2024. This will allow for:

---

<sup>2</sup> IFSW. (2020). Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training. Retrieved from: <https://www.ifsw.org/global-standards-for-social-work-education-and-training/#1sharedunderstanding>

- a. Changes to be made to the course content and structure;
- b. Greater consultation and engagement with kaiako, ākonga, the wider social work profession, and the social services sector;
- c. Partnership with mana whenua to ensure the programme is developed in accordance with Te Tiriti obligations;
- d. The SWRB to complete their revision of the Programme Recognition Standards, and for the unified degree to fully incorporate these from the outset;
- e. Human resource strategic planning, including possible recruitment, to ensure there are kaiako with the right skills and knowledge; and
- f. The collaborative development of high-quality course materials (such as assessments, lectures, identifying reading material) by kaiako across courses, without placing undue workloads on kaiako.

31. Given the importance of this piece of work for the future of the social work profession in Aotearoa we would like to work closely with you in refining and implementing the unified programme to ensure it achieves our shared aspirations to decolonise social work education and practice and produce professionally skilled social workers.

## ABOUT ANZASW

The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) is the professional association for social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. We have over 3,600 members who work throughout the community in both statutory social work and community social work settings. We advocate on behalf of members for social change and justice.

### Contact details

If you have any questions or require any clarification about this submission, please contact:

Braden Clark  
Kaiwhakahaere Chief Executive  
ANZASW

Bronwyn Larsen  
Senior Policy Analyst  
ANZASW