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Ref: OI-26-00343

29 April 2026

Kieran O'Donoghue
Professor of Social Work
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Tēnā koe Kieran

Thank you for your request, received on 02 April 2026, for information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

You requested the following:

Please supply the following information under the Official Information Act (OIA) regarding the TEC Plan Guidance For providers submitting Investment Plans for funding from 1 January 2027. The information I am interested in concerns social work qualifications and the advice that was given to or received, or informed the statement in Appendix B, page 70 that states "For social work going forward, we will prioritise funding for delivery of the three-year Bachelor of Social Work recently accredited by the Social Worker Registration Board (SWRB) over the four-year programme, consistent with our wider priorities for health provision."

Specifically, I am requesting:

- 1. What advice was used to inform the statement in Appendix B, page 70 that states "For social work going forward, we will prioritise funding for delivery of the three-year Bachelor of Social Work recently accredited by the Social Worker Registration Board (SWRB) over the four-year programme, consistent with our wider priorities for health provision."*
- 2. Who (individuals or bodies) was this advice received from, and given to?*
- 3. Please supply all communications relating to this advice. Including the following:*
 - Advice and analysis: any briefings, reports, Cabinet papers, memos, or internal analyses relating to this decision*
 - Any educational, workforce, or economic analysis used to support this prioritisation*
 - Consultation and engagement: records of consultation with the Social Workers Registration Board, ministries, universities, professional bodies, or sector groups*
 - Any feedback received from stakeholders regarding programme length or structure.*
 - Correspondence: communications (emails, memos, meeting notes) between TEC and other agencies (including the SWRB, Ministry of Education, or other government bodies) relating to this matter.*



- *Decision making rationale: any documents outlining the policy rationale for prioritising the three-year BSW over the four-year programme*
- *Any consideration of impacts on postgraduate qualifying SW pathways and programme length: provide relevant communications, modelling and analysis.*
- *Impact and risk analysis: any assessments of the potential implications for workforce supply, quality of training, or sector capacity.*

Background on TEC's decision to prioritise funding for the three-year degree

On 23 January 2026, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) contacted the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) requesting a meeting to discuss the SWRB's approval for delivery of a recently accredited three-year Bachelor of Social Work. The meeting was to discuss approval from a TEC funding perspective, namely in respect to the differences between the new three-year degree and the four-year degree.

In the meeting with SWRB on 26 January 2026, it commented on the benefits of the three-year degree itself, highlighting the shorter length and increased flexibility of placement requirements as vital changes for addressing student retention and course completion issues. This is consistent with the TEC's wider investment priorities for health education.

This information was relayed to the TEC's responsible Deputy Chief Executive (DCE) as part of regular health education verbal updates they receive. Upon receiving this update, the DCE was interested in highlighting the three-year Bachelor of Social Work as an investment priority in our Plan Guidance for 2027, given its strong alignment with wider TEC investment priorities for health education. TEC then met with the SWRB on 13 February 2026 to discuss the intended Plan Guidance wording about prioritising investment in the 3-year Bachelor of Social Work over the four-year bachelor's degree. SWRB endorsed TEC's intended wording.

After this meeting, the wording was finalised and approved by the DCE for inclusion in TEC's Plan Guidance for 2027. The decision from the TEC to overtly signal prioritisation of the three-year Bachelor of Social Work over the four-year programme was made in recognition of the three-year programme's consistency with TEC's wider priorities for health education, namely that the programme supports flexible and innovative learning delivery and supports student retention and course completion. It is important to note that growth in the social worker workforce continues to be a priority area under Health New Zealand's Health Workforce Plan, which in turn means social work qualifications remain an investment priority for TEC. Although the TEC seeks to prioritise investment in the three-year bachelor's degree, the four-year programme will continue to be funded by the TEC where there is funding available.

Your request for information

I am also releasing the information referenced in the attached table.

In accordance with the Official Information Act, I am withholding some information in the released documents. Redactions are clearly marked in the documents, with the following reasons for the redactions, as applicable:

- personal contact details of officials, under section 9(2)(a) – to protect the privacy of natural persons, including deceased people.

TEC does not hold any internal advice or analysis, briefings, reports, Cabinet papers or memos relating to this decision. Therefore, I regret I am unable to provide you with this information for the following reason:

- Under section 18(e) - that the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist.

I am satisfied, in terms of section 9(1) of the Act, that the need to withhold the information referred to above is not outweighed by other considerations that render it desirable, in the public interest, to make the information available.

Review rights

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tim Fowler', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Fowler
Chief Executive
Tertiary Education Commission

Information released under the Official Information Act (1982)

Item No	Document Type	Title	Release
1	Email trail	Urgent advice re approval of new social work qualification - between TEC and SWRB	Released with information withheld under 9(2)(a)
2	Email trail	Urgent advice re approval of new social work qualification – internal TEC with some SWRB	Released with information withheld under 9(2)(a), 9(2)(f)(iv)
3	Email trail	MSD report _Opportunities to increase entry into the social worker workforce_ added to Minister Reti weekend bag - internal TEC	Released with information withheld under 9(2)(a), 9(2)(b)(ii)
4	Email trail	RE_ Tertiary Education Commission Investment Plan Guidance 2027 - between TEC and SWRB	Released with information withheld under 9(2)(a)