

28 May 2026

Kieran O'Donoghue

**By email:** [fyi-request-34598-e4615aef@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-34598-e4615aef@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Tēnā koe Professor O'Donoghue

#### **Information request – KO260504**

Thank you for your email dated 4 May 2026. In your email, you referred to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)'s "Plan Guidance for providers submitting Investment Plans for funding from 1 January 2027", which at Page 70 (Appendix B) says:

*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.*

You asked us "What advice (formal or informal, including verbal advice conveyed in meetings or briefings) was given from SWRB (secretariat and Board) to TEC to inform or approve the statement in Appendix B, as noted above?"

Please find **attached** a PDF (12 pages) containing two email chains between the TEC and the SWRB. In these emails, the SWRB and the TEC discuss the SWRB's decision in 2025 (effective 1 January 2026) to remove the requirement that prescribed social work qualifications be at least four years' long (full time) if they are an undergraduate bachelor's degree, or at least two years' long (full time) if they are a postgraduate master's level degree. I note that at Page 6 of the PDF, some information has been redacted to protect the confidentiality of advice by officials to Ministers (Official Information Act 1982, Section 9(2)(f)(iv)).

The SWRB did not advise or encourage the TEC to prioritise funding for the delivery of three-year Bachelor of Social Work degrees. The emails attached to this response show the nature of the engagement between the two agencies: the SWRB provided factual information about its prescription decisions, and the TEC sought confirmation of the status of particular qualifications. Neither of those things constitutes advice about how TEC should allocate funding.

The SWRB's role in relation to social work qualifications can be divided into three facets:

1. The SWRB sets Education Standards (Social Workers Registration Act 2003, Section 99(1)(i)).

2. The SWRB prescribes social work qualifications (Section 5B).
3. The SWRB registers applicants who have completed a prescribed social work qualification and meet the other mandatory criteria for registration (Section 6).

The SWRB and TEC maintain an ongoing working relationship, as would be expected between agencies with shared interests in the supply and quality of social work education. The SWRB is designated by Cabinet as the lead agency for social work workforce planning, and TEC is the principal funder of tertiary education providers delivering social work programmes. In that context, it is appropriate and normal for the two agencies to share information, check factual accuracy, and flag relevant developments. When TEC sought SWRB's confirmation of the status of the Bethlehem Tertiary Institute qualification, SWRB provided factual information about its prescription decision - as it would for any provider. That exchange did not constitute advice to TEC about how it should prioritise funding, and TEC's funding decisions remain TEC's alone to make.

When the SWRB is considering whether to prescribe a given social work qualification, it must evaluate whether the qualification and the Tertiary Education Organisation (TEO) offering it comply with the SWRB Education Standards. The SWRB's prior Education Standards (the "Programme Recognition Standards – June 2021") excluded any undergraduate qualifications that were shorter than four years' long (full time) and any postgraduate qualifications that were shorter than two years' long (full time). This meant that the SWRB would not and could not prescribe shorter qualifications. However, the SWRB's introduction of the current Education Standards removed this exclusion. This means that the SWRB now can prescribe shorter qualifications, if they comply with the Education Standards.

In December 2025, the SWRB received a request for details about how it had made this decision. The SWRB responded in January 2026, and its response was published on the public "FYI" website: <https://fyi.org.nz/request/33133-revised-social-work-education-standards-2026-qualification-length-and-programme-design#incoming-137694>. This matter was also discussed in the article you coauthored in January 2026 ("Social work education under pressure: Access, workforce sustainability and the limits of acceleration").

The SWRB's role and the TEC's role in relation to social work qualifications are fundamentally different. The SWRB sets the standards that social work qualifications should meet, prescribes those qualifications that meet those standards, and registers applicants who have completed those prescribed qualifications. The SWRB does not promote some prescribed qualifications over others, nor does it encourage or advise the TEC to fund particular qualifications. It does liaise with the TEC and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority in a general sense to promote the smooth delivery of social work education in New Zealand.

**Further information**

We are happy to discuss any aspect of this response further if that would be helpful. Please contact the SWRB by email at [office@swrb.govt.nz](mailto:office@swrb.govt.nz), or by post at Social Workers Registration Board, PO Box 3452, Wellington 6140 (attention Legal Team). You have the right to seek a review of our response by the Ombudsman. Information about the Ombudsman can be found at <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz>.

Ngā mihi nui



Lucas Davies

**Legal Services Manager**

**Social Workers Registration Board**