

# Introducing a professional capabilities framework for social work in Aotearoa New Zealand

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## ABSTRACT

**INTRODUCTION:** This article discusses the findings from a project on enhancing the professional capabilities of newly qualified social workers. Existing capability and competence frameworks are reviewed, and components of a draft Aotearoa New Zealand Professional Capabilities Framework (ACPF) are outlined.

**METHODS:** This phase of the research programme began with a literature scan of five social work professional capability frameworks then used this information, data from earlier parts of the study, and a series of co-production workshops with key stakeholders to draft a professional capabilities framework for newly qualified and more experienced social workers.

**FINDINGS:** Analysis of the existing frameworks and data from the co-production workshops identified seven core values and 10 core capabilities to guide early-career and more experienced social work practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Professional capabilities frameworks can guide and inform the practice and learning of all social workers. Following further stakeholder engagement, especially with tangata whenua (Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand), it is strongly recommended that the Social Workers Registration Board considers the adoption or adaptation of the ACPF as an alternative to the current competence standards.

**KEYWORDS:** Professional capabilities; education; newly qualified social workers; competencies

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As in other jurisdictions, social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand operates in a highly political and contested terrain (Beddoe, 2018; Nash & Munford, 2001). Professional qualifications are situated within a regulatory context of benchmarks, policies and competence standards (Hunt et al., 2019). In recent years, criticism by public figures, including government ministers and the government-appointed Children's Commissioner, has stimulated debate within the profession about the readiness

of new graduates for practice. In addition, significant policy developments, including a substantive government review of child protection services (Ministry of Social Development, 2015), have also increased scrutiny of the roles and capabilities of social workers and the quality of their initial education. However, in the absence of relevant empirical evidence, there is a risk that debates about the nature and quality of social work education rely on unsubstantiated, anecdotal comments by

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policy actors. Consequently, social work education may become directed in ways that are less than optimal for the professional development of new social workers. In 2016, in response to these issues, the Enhancing Readiness to Practise (ER2P) research team were funded by Ako Aotearoa, a national tertiary education organisation, to carry out a three-stage project with a focus on the readiness to practise of newly qualified social workers.

### The study

The overall aim of the project was to co-develop, with the social work sector, an evidence-informed professional capabilities framework that could inform the design of curriculum and learning experiences, as well as continuing professional development opportunities, for social workers both before and after the point of qualification.

The 3-year project had three different phases. Phase one, conducted during 2016, focused on mapping the curriculum using documentary analysis to analyse the curriculum documents of the social work degree programmes recognised by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) (see Ballantyne et al., 2019a). Focus group discussions, in a sample of institutions, explored the main messages in curricula and perceptions of gaps (see Beddoe et al., 2018). This phase addressed the question: "What is the content of the current social work curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand and how does it relate to the ten core competencies of the SWRB?"

Phase two, conducted during 2017, used online survey and interview methods to study the readiness to practise of newly qualified social workers as perceived by graduates and managers (see Ballantyne et al., 2019b). This phase considered the question: "How well prepared are newly qualified social workers to enter professional social work practice and how is their learning being supported and enhanced in the workplace?"

The third phase, in 2018, began with a literature scan on professional capability frameworks (see Hay et al., 2019). Four social work and one social service interdisciplinary competence and capability frameworks from four jurisdictions (Aotearoa New Zealand, England, the USA and Canada) were reviewed. Following this, five workshops with 132 social work managers, field educators and practitioners were convened in Auckland, Hawkes Bay, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin. The purpose of the workshops was to co-produce a draft professional capabilities framework (see Ballantyne et al., 2022). Phase three aimed to answer the research question: "What are the professional capabilities, including cultural capabilities, we should expect of newly qualified social workers and of social workers working at beginning, and experienced, levels of practice?"

This article reports on the findings from this final phase of the project. Firstly, a summary of the key themes from the review of existing competency and capability frameworks are presented, after which components of the draft professional capabilities framework are outlined. Recommended future actions for key stakeholders conclude the article.

### Competence and capability frameworks

In common with other professions, social work education and practice is influenced at both international and local levels. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) is widely regarded as the voice of the social work profession at the global level and is recognised as such by the United Nations and the World Health Organisation. The international definition of social work, agreed by the IFSW (2014), provides a high-level description that has influenced local statements and definitions, including frameworks defining professional competencies and capabilities such as the Core Competence Standards (CCS) of the SWRB in Aotearoa New Zealand (SWRB,

2015). Professional and/or governmental regulatory bodies often use devices such as competence and capability frameworks to influence training and education standards and continuing professional development requirements.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of how different countries and regulatory bodies define and shape professional standards for newly qualified social workers, the ER2P team examined the contents of five separate frameworks or competency profiles (see Hay et al., 2019). Two frameworks were from Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence, 2017; SWRB, 2015), one from Canada (Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators, 2012), one from England (British Association of Social Workers [BASW], 2017) and one from the United States (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). Key elements of these frameworks are summarised below.

Three of the frameworks are described as *competence* frameworks and two as *capability* frameworks. The English Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) was the first to use the term *capability* in the context of social work education:

The move from the concept of competence to the concept of capability reflects the desire for social work education and development to move away from a mechanistic tick-box approach to a holistic approach and one which expects educators, students, and professional social workers to consider people's professional capabilities in a rounded way. It will help people identify areas for development. (The College of Social Work [TCSW], 2012, p. 2)

The interdisciplinary family and sexual violence workforce capability framework commissioned by the Aotearoa New Zealand Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence (2017, p. 7), also differentiated the two terms:

A competency framework sets the minimum standards of competence. A capability framework sets out how individuals and organisations need to adapt, grow, and continuously improve to achieve the highest standards of practice.

To an extent, the frameworks reviewed here reflect these distinctions. For instance, there are clear differences between the holistic, high-level approach taken by the English PCF and the detailed, measurable, and behavioural approach adopted by the Canadian Entry-Level Competency Profile (ELCP). However, this distinction breaks down when considering the competence framework designed by the US Council for Social Work Education as part of their Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). Despite using the term *competence*, the EPAS is one of the most high-level and holistic of all the frameworks reviewed. Indeed, Taylor and Bogo (2014) argued that "... the terms competencies, abilities and capabilities appear to be used interchangeably" (p. 1406) and go on to state that "... some would consider the EPAS competences to be a capability framework" (p. 1409).

### The five competency/capability frameworks

This section describes the purpose and structure of each of the five frameworks and the following section identifies cross-cutting themes. Please see the references for links to the full detail of each of the original frameworks.

#### 1. The Aotearoa New Zealand Core Competence Standards (CCS)

As the regulatory body for social workers and social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand, the SWRB maintains a set of 10 CCS used for all competence processes undertaken by the Board, including the recognition of education programmes and the provisional registration of new graduates (SWRB, 2015).

The development of the standards was influenced by the IFSW (2014) definition of social work and the practice standards of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW, 2014). The CCS are intended to specify core, minimum standards of practice for the social work profession rather than detail all the possible knowledge and skills required by social workers (SWRB, 2015). Each of the ten standards contains between four and six statements indicating how social workers should demonstrate the competence in question; there are a total of 45 of these statements (SWRB, 2015).

### **2. The English Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)**

The PCF, maintained by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW, 2017), was the most complex and comprehensive of the frameworks surveyed. The PCF sets out nine capability domains that social workers are expected to develop. Each domain includes a short descriptor, and then details the capabilities expected for that domain. Unlike any of the other frameworks, the PCF does not restrict itself to the capabilities required of newly qualified social workers but has separate capabilities for nine different levels of ability, ranging from students (there are four pre-qualifying levels) to expert social workers practising in the field. The PCF also deliberately refers to *capabilities* rather than *competencies*.

### **3. The US Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS)**

The EPAS were part of a broader report on accreditation standards for social work programmes (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). The EPAS identifies nine competencies, each of which includes a high-level descriptor followed by between two and five behaviours that represent observable components of the competence; altogether there are 36 behavioural indicators. One of the distinctive features of the EPAS is that four of the competencies (from six to nine)

refer to different parts of the social work process, giving the competencies a strong practice-related emphasis.

### **4. The Canadian Entry-Level Competency Profile (ELCP)**

The ELCP is a checklist of minimum measurable, profession-specific competencies which must be demonstrated for beginning social workers to receive registration (Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators, 2012). This emphasis on measurability means that the competencies are detailed and focused on specific behaviours or behavioural attributes. The section on professionalism, for example, details the regulatory requirements for individual tasks, such as conducting assessments, rather than considering the meaning of professionalism in a social work context.

The ELCP has six competency blocks, with 21 competency families and a total of 152 sub-competencies making it the most granular of the frameworks reviewed. Curiously, although the competencies include references to cultural factors and providing services in a culturally supportive manner, there is no reference to the nature of competent practice with First Nations peoples.

### **5. The Aotearoa New Zealand Family Violence, Sexual Violence and Violence within**

*Whānau Workforce Capability Framework (FVCF)*

The FVCF describes the values and capabilities which should be exhibited by all professionals, including social workers, working in the family and sexual violence sector in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence, 2017). It differs from the other frameworks as it relates to a specialist area of practice but with an interdisciplinary focus. In addition, the framework includes seven underlying principles or values expressed in te reo Māori and English. The FVCT

also specifies knowledge requirements and a description of what excellent practice looks like in each domain, a description of the actions or behaviours required in each domain, and a list of reflective practice questions for each domain.

### Key themes in the frameworks

Eight key themes were identified across the frameworks or—in the case of the first theme—were highlighted as critical to the unique context of Aotearoa New Zealand. The themes include social work with Māori, diversity, social justice, professionalism, critical reflection, advocacy and policy practice, ethics, and knowledge, skills, and processes. Each theme will be briefly discussed in turn.

#### 1. Social work with Māori

Although this theme was not, of course, one that was common across all the frameworks, it is included here because of its critical importance to social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. The SWRB CCS (SWRB, 2015) specify that social workers must be able to work effectively with Māori, including having an understanding of tikanga (customs and traditional values), te Tiriti o Waitangi, and how the historical and cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand impacts on social work with Māori people. The first competence standard emphasises the importance of *rangatiratanga* (leadership and self-determination), *whanaungatanga* (connection through shared experience, kinship and belonging), and *manaakitanga* (hospitality, respect, care for one another). Social workers must apply these principles so that their practice is respectful, mana-enhancing and culturally sustaining (SWRB, 2015). The principles were incorporated into the CCS as one of the outcomes of a broader review of social workers' competency to work with Māori commissioned by the SWRB (SWRB, 2016) and conducted by Tangata Whenua Voices in Social Work. The public output of this review is known as the Kaitiakitanga Framework (SWRB, 2016), so-called because:

Kaitiakitanga is about fulfilling the vital obligation for 'taking care of, protecting and safeguarding', undertaking its commitment to ensuring the constant pursuit of safe space respectfulness, absolute integrity and wellbeing in relationships, signposting how the practice of "tiaki" can be tracked and assessed. (p. 3)

As noted, the FVCF is founded on seven principles which are grounded in tikanga Māori, including the three principles mentioned above.

#### 2. Diversity

Diversity as a theme of competence or capability featured, broadly speaking, in all five of the frameworks. Human diversity is a far-reaching concept covering a range of facets of identity and experience. Reference to diversity is structured differently in each of the surveyed frameworks. For example, in the SWRB standards, aspects of diversity appear in one competence standard on *diversity and difference*, in another on *different ethnic and cultural groups*, and in the competence standard on *working with Māori* (SWRB, 2015). Social workers must understand how their own cultural background plays a role in their practice and must be able to reflect critically on their practice. They must always engage with others respectfully and ensure their practice is culturally relevant.

The English PCF includes a conceptualisation of diversity with links to intersectionality and forms of oppression. Practitioners should be able to appreciate how different people have varying experiences of marginalisation and alienation and be mindful of privilege and power. In the PCF, diversity includes race, disability, class, economic status, age, sexuality, gender and transgender, faith and belief (BASW, 2017).

In the US EPAS (CSWE, 2015), *competency two: engage diversity and difference in practice* requires practitioners to demonstrate

understanding of the importance of diversity and difference at all levels of practice. Social workers are to “present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences” and to self-regulate the extent to which any personal biases and values influence relationships with diverse clients and constituencies (CSWE, 2015, p. 7). The checklist approach in the Canadian ECLP reduces diversity to a set of factors to consider during the assessment process. For example, Canadian social workers must assess the impact of diversity factors such as sexual orientation on the client system (CCSWR, 2012).

According to the FVCF, practitioners should ensure their practice upholds the dignity, values and beliefs of all people, and their diverse cultural identities. Practitioners should have appropriate knowledge of difference between people and communities, not only so they can better understand differing and changing family dynamics, but to ensure they act in a sensitive and non-discriminatory manner. This framework uses an open-ended list of diversity factors including culture, ethnicity, belief, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability (Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence, 2017).

### **3. Human rights and social justice**

Human rights and social justice are evident in all five frameworks, including an awareness of internationally and locally accepted human rights standards, understanding of oppression and privilege and the effects they have on individuals and communities, and the promotion of self-determination and autonomy. In some frameworks, concepts of rights, justice and advocacy are folded into or indistinguishable from each other.

The SWRB CCS refers to the principles of human rights, social and economic justice. The graduate social worker is expected to be able to promote the principles of human

rights and economic justice, specifically in understanding and advocating for human rights, economic justice and self-determination; understanding mechanisms of oppression and discrimination; and respecting the rights, dignity, values and autonomy of people (SWRB, 2015).

The English PCF requires that social workers recognise and adhere to the fundamental principles of human rights and equality, which are protected in national and international law, conventions, and policies. Social workers must understand the effects of oppression, discrimination and poverty, principles of social justice, inclusion, and equality. Further, they should recognise the impact of poverty and social exclusion and promote enhanced economic status for clients (BASW, 2017).

The EPAS framework requires social workers to *advance human rights and social, economic and environmental justice*. It also makes explicit reference to the interconnections between global oppression and human rights violations. The EPAS requires that graduate social workers be able to apply their understanding of justice to advocate for human rights and actively engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice (CSWE, 2015).

Similarly, the Canadian ELCP requires graduate social workers to *advocate for and engage in practices to further human rights and social justice* (CCSWR, 2012, p. 10). The framework emphasises the importance of a systemic understanding of poverty, oppression and discrimination and promotes client self-determination and autonomy. Social workers are also required to protect individuals from the undue influences and abusive use of power, to identify how a culture's structures and values may oppress, marginalise, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power and advocate for equitable access to resources and opportunities.

In the FVCF, human rights and social justice are directly woven into the framework's

list of core principles and are perhaps most closely encapsulated in the principle of *rangatiratanga* (Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence, 2017). Focusing on the specific legislation and human rights agreements which are relevant in any scenario is a further requirement for practitioners.

#### 4. Professionalism

All the frameworks surveyed refer to the importance of the concept of professionalism, although each adopts a different approach to how competencies or capabilities for professionalism are expressed. Three sub-themes could be discerned: professional conduct in general; working with other professionals and organisations; and self-management and self-care. Capabilities and competencies associated with *professional conduct* focus on attitude and behaviour, responsibilities, conflict management, accountability and the reputation and dignity of social work as a profession.

The SWRB CCS require that social workers be compassionate, empathetic and respectful, and that they seek to understand others. They also require that roles and responsibilities be attended to with care and diligence, that professional and personal boundaries are maintained, and that conflict is managed appropriately. Social workers are expected to represent the social work profession with integrity and acknowledge the power and authority attached to their role (SWRB, 2015).

In the English PCF, professional conduct includes characteristics and behaviours including presentation, demeanour, reliability, honesty, and respectfulness. The PCF recognises the importance of understanding the impact of self in interaction with others. Social workers are said to demonstrate professional conduct by taking responsibility for their conduct, practice, and continuing development. Social workers must also be able to consistently maintain personal and professional

boundaries, make use of supervision and act in ways that uphold the reputation of the profession (BASW, 2017).

Competence one of the EPAS combines standards of professionalism with ethical considerations, and specifically covers professional behaviour in terms of appearance, communication and engagement with technology (CSWE, 2015).

The FVCF framework requires that practitioners can work as part of an integrated team, that they understand their roles and responsibilities and that they can communicate effectively with all involved parties (Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence, 2017). Another important aspect of professionalism referred to by several of the existing frameworks is self-care and self-management, requiring social workers to recognise their own limits, to ask for help when they need it and to ensure they are coping with their work.

#### 5. Critical reflection

The practice of reflection, or critical reflection, is consistently included in all frameworks with different emphases and connections made to other competencies, capabilities, and practices. For example, reflection is frequently linked to the use of supervision, to continuing professional development, to the effective application of knowledge and skill, and, in the US EPAS framework, to upholding ethical practice.

The CCS includes applying critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments and, in other standards, notes the importance of supervision for social work practice. Graduate social workers are, for example, required to seek supervision or guidance where ethical dilemmas arise and engage in ongoing learning. In addition, the SWRB requires social workers to demonstrate critical reflection in relation to theories, models and approaches (SWRB, 2015). The FVCF encourages practitioners to continually integrate learning into

practitioner development and the document itself includes a series of reflective questions for practitioners after each domain (Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence, 2017).

The English PCF requires that qualifying social workers are knowledgeable about, and can apply principles of, critical thinking. In doing so, they can identify, evaluate and integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence for effective practice (BASW, 2017). These sources of evidence include practice evidence, reflections from their own practice experience, understandings from service user and carer experience, together with research-based, organisational, policy and legal knowledge. Interestingly, the English PCF also makes reference to creativity and curiosity as integral components of social work practice (BASW, 2017).

The American EPAS framework requires social workers to use reflection practice situations (CSWE, 2015). Supervision and consultation are recommended to guide professional judgements and decision-making. While all the frameworks refer to the use of research in enhancing and guiding practice, the EPAS is the only one to make this an explicit, high-level requirement. The Canadian framework also includes a competency grouping that emphasises the link between reflective practice, professional development and supervision. Broadly, they are required to engage in reflective evaluation of practice as well as participate in professional development and contribute to the development of others (CCSWR, 2012).

### **6. Advocacy and policy practice**

Most of the frameworks reviewed include references to the advocacy role of social workers (although the English PCF assumes the social work task is to link service users to independent advocacy services), and all the frameworks expect social workers to be competent in understanding and being able to influence or change social policies.

Advocacy and policy-related work are also included within the SWRB's framework in three separate competences that echo the IFSW's global definition of social work:

- Competence standard four: *promote the principles of human rights and social and economic justice,*
- Competence standard five: *engage in practice which promotes social change, and*
- Competence standard eight: *promote empowerment of people and communities to enable positive change.*

The English PCF briefly mentions the value of independent advocacy in their *Rights and Justice* domain but does not specifically consider advocacy on the part of social workers. As above, it does discuss the importance of maintaining human rights standards, but does not discuss the role of social workers in advocating for those rights.

The EPAS framework refers to social worker's competence to offer advocacy for human rights and social justice at micro, meso and macro levels. Different aspects of advocacy work are included in competency three: advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice and this is extended further in competency five: engage in policy practice which delineates a clear expectation that social workers understand, evaluate and advocate for policies that advance human rights and different avenues of justice (CSWE, 2015).

Advocacy is also referred to more obliquely in the Family Violence and Sexual Violence framework and the Canadian ELPC. The principle of *rangatiratanga* in the FVCF includes the concept of advocacy as well as the need to make safe spaces for victims of family and sexual violence and their family members (as well as perpetrators), which could certainly come under a more general advocacy domain. In the Canadian ELPC, advocacy is not emphasised in any general way, but is mentioned in three



separate sections: ethics, service delivery and improving practice and policy (CCSWR, 2012).

### **7. Ethics**

Professional ethics for social work practice is included in all the sources, both specifically in professional conduct, and more generally relative to a wider ethical basis for action and ongoing assessment of what is ethical in specific circumstances. Other than the FVSV framework, which has an interdisciplinary focus, the documents all refer to specific codes of ethics and codes of conduct that apply in their local jurisdictions. The FVCF does include a domain on collective action which addresses the responsibility of practitioners and agencies to maintain the safety of their clients. This could certainly be considered a primary ethical standard, especially in responsible sharing of information and managing interactions between perpetrators and victims (Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence, 2017).

The CCS includes a competence that connects legal and ethical practice, and this requires that social workers follow any applicable codes of conduct and ethics, for example, the ANZASW Code of Ethics. Social workers need to be able to identify and manage ethical conflicts, seeking guidance where necessary. Social workers should be able to recognise and respond appropriately to any conflicts of interest, understand relevant legislation, policies and systems which govern practice and perform any required statutory duties. Clients' rights to privacy must be upheld and they should be informed of any required disclosures of their information. Social workers are also required to keep clear and accurate records of their practice and decision-making (SWRB, 2015).

Domain two of the English PCF is dedicated to values and ethics encompassing professional guidelines and the management of specific client values and beliefs. Much

like the other frameworks, social workers are required to follow professional ethical guidelines and relevant legislation. They are also required to recognise the ways in which their own values and beliefs affect their practice, and to manage competing values, reflecting on any ethical dilemmas with guidance and support. Clients and their families and carers must be actively included in decision-making and ethical discussions, where possible, and in a respectful manner (BASW, 2017).

Competency one of the American EPAS document connects ethics with professionalism, requiring social workers to demonstrate ethical and professional behaviour. This competency refers to the local code of ethics, law and regulations, ethical decision-making models, ethical research practice and the ethical use of technology.

Applying ethical standards is the first of the six competency blocks of the Canadian ELPC and includes a thorough section on ethics, ethical and legislative guidelines, protocols for action in specific situations and ongoing evaluation of decisions from an ethical standpoint (CCSWR, 2012). As with the rest of the document, this section is very detailed and offers a checklist of requirements for practice rather than a set of guiding philosophies.

### **8. Knowledge, skills, and processes**

Although each of the frameworks highlights capabilities and competencies that require knowledge and skills to be applied, these are usually implied or articulated in relation to each statement of competence or capability. The exception to this is the English PCF which includes a separate domain for knowledge and another for skills and interventions; and, to an extent, the CCS.

In the CCS, reference to knowledge and skills is generally assumed in each of the competences. Core competence six is the exception to this, where social workers

are expected to understand and articulate social work theories, indigenous practice knowledge, other relevant theories, and social work practice methods and models (SWRB, 2015). This reference to indigenous practice knowledge is unique and important for social work practice that embraces biculturalism and recognises responsibilities to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In other competences, the ability to access and evaluate multiple sources of knowledge is valued, including technological and research-based knowledge, and the ability to transfer this knowledge into practice (SWRB, 2015). The CCS also require that social workers understand human behaviour, can apply their knowledge of different social work theories and models in practice, and are able to critically reflect on this process (SWRB, 2015).

The English PCF takes a more explicit approach to the specification of knowledge and skills. Domain five of the PCF is headed “knowledge” and social workers must learn and apply relevant knowledge from social work practice and research, other relevant fields, and from the experience of service users. The skills and interventions domain specifies that social workers must draw on knowledge to support individuals, families, and communities and to promote independence and enable progress (BASW, 2017). In contrast, an integrated approach is taken in the EPAS whereby:

Each competency describes the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that comprise competency at the generalist level of practice, followed by a set of behaviours that integrate these components. (CSWE, 2015, p. 7)

Although the EPAS does not include separate competences on knowledge or skills, it does make explicit reference to four steps in what is widely accepted as the process of social work (Watson & West, 2016), and expresses these steps as four of their nine competences, giving the overall framework a very strong and recognisable practice-related foundation.

The Canadian ELCP does not have a high-level statement of knowledge or skills, but the 152 sub-competencies are expressed in a very detailed, technical skills-related format. For example, in relation to the global competency family “gather pertinent information by systematic questioning and regarding the nature and degree of problem”, there are nine sub-competencies including, for example, interviewing clients to gather information from the clients' perspective regarding the nature and degree of a problem (CCSWR, 2012).

The FVCF incorporates many skills related to family violence practice in the form of checklists and evaluative questions intended to guide practice and minimise risk of further harm. In the FVCF, there is an emphasis on practitioners needing to understand risk factors and to be proactive and safe in seeking information (Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence, 2017).

Although there were similarities in the content of the frameworks, each was structured differently and expressed at different levels of detail. There were also some unique features in each of the frameworks including competence for working with indigenous people in the CCS; the specification of nine different levels of capability in the English PCF, progressing from entry level to expert levels of practice; the articulation of a set of underlying principles or values in the FVCF that permeated all of the capabilities; and the clear emphasis on practice articulated in the four stages of the social work process included in the EPAS.

### **The Aotearoa New Zealand Professional Capabilities Framework**

Underpinned by the evidence from the first two stages of the project including literature scans (Ballantyne et al., 2019a, 2019b), a review of five existing competence and capability frameworks (Hay et al., 2019), and a series of five stakeholder co-production workshops (Ballantyne et al., 2022), the ER2P

team agreed on several design principles for the creation of a professional capabilities framework.

The research team also consulted our project advisory group which included Tangata Whenua Voices, employers and other key stakeholder organisations.

The first was that, following the approach of the FVCF (Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence, 2017), a set of values expressed in te reo Māori (Māori language) and with descriptions in English would be outlined. The values represent the bicultural heart of the framework and are clear enough to be understood by any student, social worker, or service user. The values drafted for the co-production workshops were well received with minor amendments made to the descriptors and—responding to the suggestion of several workshop groups—the inclusion of one additional value: Wairuatanga. The final values were subsequently requested for adoption in the revised version of the ANZASW Code of Ethics (ANZASW, 2019).

Secondly, influenced by the English PCF (BASW, 2017), we wanted a framework that focused on different levels in the professional development of a social worker. Given time and funding constraints, we proposed drafting three levels: newly qualified social worker (NQS); first year of practice or after one year of supervised practice (preferably as part of an assisted and supported first year of practice); social worker or on attainment of two to three years of supervised practice. Following feedback from the workshops the NQS level was drafted and then projected additional indicators for the first year of practice and social worker levels were included.

Thirdly, and in common with all the existing frameworks, the Aotearoa New Zealand PCF was not designed as a comprehensive list of all the knowledge, skills, and attributes of social workers, but highlighted core capabilities. The intentional use of *capabilities*, as opposed to *competencies*, was informed by the previous

definitions that emphasised a holistic and dynamic approach wherein continuous improvement is sought. The capabilities were limited to 10 and included a capability descriptor and several behavioural indicators for each of the three levels. In common with the EPAS framework, each capability is holistic and describes the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that comprise the capability. The behavioural indicators signal observable components of the capabilities. The strong practice emphasis of the EPAS which included the four steps in the social work process, engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation, was agreed by the workshop participants and the ER2P team.

Finally, unlike the English PCF, the Aotearoa New Zealand PCF (APCF) is firmly focused on the transition from NQS to professional practitioner status, and the three levels build on each other. As social workers progress through the three levels, their capability becomes integrated and enhanced and this is expressed in the framework by using fewer, higher-level indicators. The full capabilities framework is publicly available (see <https://ako.ac.nz/our-community/ako-aotearoa-news/new-professional-capabilities-framework-innovative-development-in-social-work-education-for-aotearoa/>) and three of the 10 capabilities are outlined below so readers can understand the structure of the framework.

### **CAPABILITY ONE: Te Ao Māori | The Māori World**

Social workers are capable of understanding the historical and present effects of colonisation on tangata whenua as the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand. Social workers understand and work to promote the principles and articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand society) and work with whānau, hapū and iwi to maintain relationships that are mana-enhancing. Tau iwi social workers are respectful of Te Ao Māori and recognise when it is appropriate to seek cultural guidance, supervision and advice from cultural advisors.

**CAPABILITY TWO: Kanorau | Diversity**

Social workers understand how the power dynamics of diversity and difference lead people to experience marginalisation, stigmatisation, oppression and exploitation. Social workers understand how different forms of diversity intersect to shape human experience and the identities of people. Social workers demonstrate self-awareness and are capable of reflecting on how their own experience, personal values and biases impact their work. Social workers are capable of advocating with, or on behalf of, oppressed peoples and of analysing and challenging all forms of injustice and oppression including exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

taking actions to protect and advocate for human rights including civil, political, environmental, economic, social and cultural rights. Social workers recognise the impact of social structural factors on the lives of people—such as poverty, racism, poor housing and social exclusion—and are capable of working with people at micro, meso and macro levels to prevent stigmatisation and promote social change. They understand the global interconnections of oppression and human rights violations and are knowledgeable about theories of human need, social justice and strategies to promote social, economic and environmental justice and human rights. Social workers promote strengths, agency, hope and self-determination.

**CAPABILITY THREE: Manatika | Social justice**

Social workers understand the sources of social inequity and are capable of

**Conclusions and recommendations**

The draft Aotearoa New Zealand Professional Capabilities Framework (APCF) evolved from a comprehensive

Table 1. Capable Social Workers Can:

NQSW	FIRST YEAR OF PRACTICE	SOCIAL WORKER
1.1 Explain how colonisation, historically and currently, impacts the wellbeing of tangata whenua and the nature of social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.	1.7 Make active use of cultural supervision to improve understanding of Te Ao Māori, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to improve confidence and capability to work effectively with tangata whenua.	1.10 Act independently and with confidence to challenge the practice of agency workers and others that undermine commitment to advancing the wellbeing of tangata whenua.
1.2 Maintain relationships that are mana-enhancing, self-determining, respectful, mindful of cultural uniqueness and acknowledge cultural identity.	1.8 Reflect critically on agencies commitment to Tiriti o Waitangi and commitment to advancing the wellbeing of tangata whenua.	
1.3 Use practice behaviours that promote mauri ora by ensuring safe space, acknowledging boundaries and meeting obligations.	1.9 Demonstrate improvements in knowledge and skill in te reo and tikanga Māori.	
1.4 Engage in practice that is culturally sustaining, strengthens relationships, is mutually contributing and connecting and encourages warmth.		
1.5 Demonstrate beginning knowledge and skill in te reo Māori.		
1.6 Demonstrate beginning knowledge and skill in tikanga Māori.		

Table 2. *Capable Social Workers Can:*

NQSW	FIRST YEAR OF PRACTICE	SOCIAL WORKER
2.1 Display openness to learning about diversity and difference and recognise service users as experts of their own lived experience.	2.5 Make active use of professional supervision to improve confidence and capability to respond to diversity and challenge oppression.	2.7 Demonstrate leadership in improving organisational and/or governmental policies to increase responsiveness to diversity and difference and to challenge oppression.
2.2 Reflect critically on personal values, culture, knowledge and beliefs and show awareness of the influence of bias in decision-making.	2.6 Promote diversity and difference by, where appropriate, challenging assumptions, organisational cultures, practices and policies.	
2.3 Communicate and engage respectfully and effectively with diverse groups of people.		
2.4 Critically analyse how organisational cultures, practices and policies may limit effective responses to diversity and difference.		

process involving multiple methods, including a literature scan, a review of five existing competence and capability frameworks and a series of stakeholder workshops. It attempts to synthesise the best of the frameworks reviewed with a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and bicultural practice, the latter being reflected in its values and capabilities. The development of the APCF was preceded by, and built upon, two prior project phases where the social work curriculum was mapped (Ballantyne et al., 2019b), and the readiness to practise of graduates as perceived by front-line managers and by graduates themselves was evaluated (Ballantyne et al., 2019c). Taken together, the three project phases make the development of the APCF one of the most evidence-informed social work frameworks in the world. Having said that, one of the limitations of our study during phase one that may have influenced the outcomes in the final phase was the fact that the two wānanga-based programmes declined to take part in the study. In effect, this meant that the deep commitment to Mātauranga Māori approaches to social work reflected in their programmes were not represented in project data during phase one and therefore absent from the project taxonomy.

We recognised this limitation in Ballantyne et al. (2017):

... within the social work education community in Aotearoa New Zealand there is more than one worldview and epistemological perspective to consider. It is not the intention of this project to develop a taxonomy that reflects Te Ao Māori in its deepest sense, or to fully represent indigenous ways of knowing or kaupapa Māori pedagogy. That could only occur in a taxonomy that was expressed entirely in Te Reo Māori and led by tangata whenua researchers. What we do intend to do is to include those terms in Te Reo Māori that express key educational concepts and indigenous practice models included in the curriculum documents of our participating social work programmes. (pp. 21–22)

In addition, as we know from studies of evidence-informed policy in other domains, even with a perfectly representative knowledge base, evidence alone is insufficient to achieve change (Cairney, 2018). To be effective, this framework needs to be widely supported and endorsed by key stakeholders—especially the most powerful stakeholders.

Table 3. Capable Social Workers Can:

NQSW	FIRST YEAR OF PRACTICE	SOCIAL WORKER
3.1 Describe the framework of human rights and freedoms and the New Zealand and international laws, conventions and protocols that underpin it.	3.6 Make active use of professional supervision to improve confidence and capability in promoting social, economic and environmental justice and human rights.	3.8 Show leadership in promoting organisational transparency and political accountability with regard to social justice and human rights.
3.2 Explain the dynamics of power and privilege in Aotearoa New Zealand and the forms of inequity that result from them.	3.7 Take practical steps and actions that result in the protection and promotion of the rights of service users.	
3.3 Advocate for and protect human rights including civil, political, environmental, economic, social and cultural rights.		
3.4 Understand how legislation and policy can advance or constrain people's rights and makes appropriate use of the law to protect or advance rights and entitlements.		
3.5 Promote the strengths, agency, hope and self-determination of people.		

As noted, the values delineated in the framework were later adopted by ANZASW as the core values in a revised professional code of ethics (ANZASW, 2019; Ballantyne et al., 2022) and the new code was commented on favourably by Banks (2021) who noted its distinctiveness and that it was “[s]tructured in terms of values and principles, the values are based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and include reference to qualities of character as well as behaviours and actions” (p. 122). In other words, the professional association recognised and embraced the value of the framework.

However, in a profession where educational outcomes are closely regulated by governmental stakeholders, the SWRB and their core competence standards mandate educational outcomes. The APCF, and all three of the ER2P project reports, were submitted for inclusion in a proposed governmental review of social work education. At the time of writing, the SWRB is currently reviewing their educational programme requirements and the competence standards. We strongly recommend that the SWRB considers the adoption of the APCF, or an adaptation of the framework, as an alternative

to the current competence standards. Further collaborative work with industry stakeholders, especially tangata whenua stakeholders, to review and develop the framework would ensure its continuing relevance. If adopted, the framework could become a significant educational focal point for the initial education of social workers and their continuing learning and development.

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