

# Is it time to reconsider professional development and continuing education for social workers twenty years after registration in Aotearoa New Zealand?

This last issue for 2022 is a general issue, however, there is a linking theme of social work education and learning through many of the articles. Articles address specialist post-qualifying education (Staniforth & Appleby, 2022), professional capabilities (Ballantyne et al., 2022), student work student hardship (Hulme-Moir et al., 2022), cultural competency (Ide & Beddoe, 2022), reflective conversations (Giles et al., 2022), and social worker participation in research degrees (Doebel, 2022). Engagement in continuing professional development and higher education is crucial to maintaining a critical perspective and ensuring our contribution to knowledge building.

For most social workers in Aotearoa, formal education stops at the point of qualification for registration. Participation in ongoing formal education has been reported as low for several decades (Beddoe, 1999, 2013; Beddoe & Duke, 2013; Beddoe & Henrickson, 2005). In a review of the first continuing professional development audit conducted by the Social Workers Registration Board, Beddoe and Duke (2013) expressed the following concerns:

There was little evidence of CPD being a planned activity linked to career goals, despite this being an expectation of both the SWRB and ANZASW. Few social workers mentioned plans to access further training or engage in further education. Not counting those undertaking an initial qualification in social work, participation in further and higher education was low in the sample group. (p. 47)

Registration had been expected to deliver better support for professional social work. With it, increased access to continuing education and greater respect for social work as a discipline was expected to be developed (see Hunt 2016, 2017). Beddoe (2013) reported research where Aotearoa New Zealand social workers were hopeful that the arrival of professional registration appeared to have created a stronger sense that demands for CPE were legitimised and that they would be able to access more funding and support for further education.

Our professional bodies must do more to develop support for post-qualifying education for social workers. Anecdotally and logically, the cost of postgraduate education creates a significant barrier for most, and employers are very reluctant to support social workers to undertake further education, even training in professional supervision. The impact of registration on Aotearoa New Zealand on social workers' continuing education is an under-researched topic. Further exploration is needed to examine whether the high hopes for a better-educated profession that were heralded with the advent of registration in 2003 have been realized. This issue makes a contribution to our understanding of social work education across several dimensions. We hope to see more contributions about social workers' continuing education and development in 2023.

Working with diversity is a central aspect of social work practice and, as reported by Ballantyne et al. (2022) in their article, is recognised across jurisdictions as a core competence or capability expected of social

workers. Anita Gibbs (2022) is well-known in Aotearoa for her research in the area of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), and in this issue contributes an article that offers both contemporary understandings of FASD, and findings from her research which focus on best practice for working in the justice system with rangatahi and youth living with FASD. Her research contributes to an important and growing scholarship on the effectiveness of justice systems, and in particular, the adversity experienced in the courts and prisons by those living with disabilities such as FASD.

Gibbs sought to understand more deeply the knowledge about FASD held by professionals working in the justice field, and the analysis of her interviews in this article offers substantial insight into the day-to-day realities for the young people, their families and the professionals supporting them. Overwhelmingly participants assert that people living with FASD should not enter the justice system and that training about the dynamics of this disability is essential. It is clear from this research that disability structures continue to discriminate against those living with FASD, and that human and disability rights are not upheld.

In “Get ready ... get set ... go! A new entrant programme for social workers in mental health” Barbara Staniforth and Jo Appleby explore the Aotearoa New Zealand post-qualifying New Entrant Specialist Programme (NESP), where social workers gain additional knowledge and skills in mental health. Staniforth and Appleby utilised semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of five social workers who had participated in the programme. They found that the programme built social worker skills and confidence and reduced their sense of isolation from other social workers as they joined multidisciplinary teams. This programme and one in child and adolescent mental health are the only fully funded post-qualifying programmes for social workers. As noted earlier, the paucity of social work participation continues to challenge the profession in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In “Social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand: A difficult journey for student caregivers”, Kirsten Hulme-Moir, Liz Beddoe, Allyson Davys, and Allen Bartley offer a full, compassionate account of the experience of students who have caregiving responsibilities while undertaking social work study. This research sits in the context of a wider study looking at the financial and social well-being of social work students. The findings are reported creatively and with some urgency. Aligned with principles of social justice, it highlights the significant disadvantage experienced by mostly older women who balance a range of caregiving and financial responsibilities.

A key finding from this research was a recognition of the strong motivations typically behind aspirations to study social work and the role these play in the experience of being a student. The passion for helping others and the conviction of social justice are strengths to draw on during times of hardship but may get in the way, initially, of fully exploring the practical and emotional pressures of social work study.

Participants in the study describe chronic hardship as a result of the pressures and structures specific to social work study. The authors challenge social work educators and regulators to rectify these problems. In particular, they recommend a review of the funding structure for social work placements and barriers created by student allowance policies. They recommend increased flexibility, promotion of self-care practices, and provision of professional resources that will carry students beyond study and into future practice.

Continuing with the notion of social work competence, in “Attitude or skills? Cultural competence development within an Aotearoa New Zealand bicultural framework”, Yayoi Ide and Liz Beddoe ask questions specifically about cultural competence. This research explores how contemporary social work students and practitioners in Aotearoa understand culture

and how it plays out in their practice. It also recommends how cultural competence can be best developed and sustained.

The study found that practising social workers drew on cultural self-awareness from, and being led by, the lives and expectations of those they work alongside, and taking a critical approach to practice, acknowledging power relationships. This approach aligns with the current literature cited in this article about how cultural competence is achieved—rather than drawing primarily on cultural knowledge and skill, social workers are encouraged to consider the relational aspects of diversity and the impact of power and oppression in the practice relationship. The study also highlights the uniqueness of Aotearoa’s bicultural or Te Tiriti o Waitangi-based environment, recognising how the development of cultural competence sits within a primary focus by the profession on the competence to practise social work with Māori.

How competence to practise social work is defined and measured sits in a contested and rapidly evolving space. To maintain relevance therefore, existing standards must be scrutinised and reviewed. In “Introducing a professional capabilities framework for social work in Aotearoa New Zealand”, Neil Ballantyne, Liz Beddoe, Kathryn Hay, Jane Maidment, Shayne Walker and Caitlin Merriman report on the third phase of a larger research project which had, as its overall aim, the development of a professional capabilities framework for social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. Previous phases have explored the current social work curriculum and examined the readiness to practise of newly qualified social workers.

The final phase reported in this article focuses on the competence standards or professional capabilities expected of both beginning and experienced social workers. It begins with a thematic analysis of existing standards across several jurisdictions; it then describes the co-development process undertaken in Aotearoa with key

stakeholders and concludes with a proposed draft capability framework. The work undertaken in the co-development groups was unique, beginning with establishing a set of design principles that were subsequently adopted by ANZASW in 2019 as its new *Code of Ethics*.

The findings of this study are a comprehensive and important contribution to the social work profession in Aotearoa, and the authors hope the Social Workers Registration Board will, after consultation with Tangata Whenua, be ready to adapt or adopt the framework proposed as a result of this project.

In a Commentary, “Mandatory reporting: ‘a policy without reason,’” Emily Keddell explores the recommendation to introduce mandatory reporting from the recent report into the case of Malachi Subecz, a child killed by his caregiver. Keddell argues that there are unintended consequences of this policy if adopted as it will likely flood the system with low-risk cases making identification of higher-risk cases more difficult. Keddell outlines other potential harms of a mandatory reporting policy including its potential to exacerbate inequities for Māori. Rather, we should develop a strong focus on prevention and devolution.

This issue includes two Viewpoint pieces. In “The wildest dreams and the Asian gaze”, Ai Sumihira notes the inspiration of an article by Came et al. (2022) which led her to explore how Asian women are faring in Aotearoa New Zealand concerning health. In a viewpoint that is part personal reflection and part discussion of the intersection of race and gender in health inequalities, Sumihira observes that, where she stands as an Asian woman in 2022, “feels like an intersection of delicately woven connections and history”. She makes a case for better health services for Asian women so that health outcomes improve.

In “Stepping into the unknown: Reflections and learnings from the journey from social worker to researcher”, Stefanie Doebel explores

her journey through her postgraduate education which culminated in a PhD. Doebel notes that many social workers have skills and experiences that could be well suited to a research environment, but that research is often seen as daunting. She identifies a set of misconceptions about doing research and hopes that her reflection might offset the barriers and encourage other social workers to pursue research opportunities.

In a Practice Note, “From a conversation with Honourable Nanaia Mahuta: Social workers reflect on expertise and skills for contributing to policy and political processes” Rebecca Giles, Fariya Begum, Shane Kennard (Ngaati Hikairo (ki Kaawhia Moana) and Ngaati Maniapoto, Verusha West-Pillay and Alannah Gregan describe the learning that developed from a visit from a cabinet minister in the Aotearoa New Zealand government. The Honourable Nanaia Mahuta (Waikato-Tainui, Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Manu; Minister of Foreign Affairs and Local Government and Associate Minister for Māori Development and local Member of Parliament (MP) for Hauraki-Waikato) met with students of the Wintec qualifying social work programme and a group of social work practitioners for a two-hour conversation. Participants were able to interact with, and closely observe, a senior cabinet minister who works in politics at local, national, and global levels. This became a very rich experience where personal, cultural, and political aspects of the minister’s life were highlighted in important conversations.

Giles et al. met later to reflect on the event and reported that this collaborative, reflective conversation between social workers from different fields provided an opportunity for renewal, connection and to gain depth of understanding of the meeting with the minister they had shared and why it had impacted them so positively. This very useful practice note draws parallels between the skills of a senior politician and everyday social work practice, particularly Te Tiriti o Waitangi awareness and commitment, appreciation of complexity and connectedness and a future focus.

Finally, Lynsey Ellis reviews *Out of the Shadows: The Role of Social Workers in Disasters*, edited by Angie Bartoli, Maris Stratulis, and Rebekah Pierre.

We take this opportunity to acknowledge the many contributions made to the journal over 2022. The editorial collective comprises:

**Neil Ballantyne**

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Kia hora te marino  
Kia whakapapa pounamu te Moana  
Kia there te kārihirohi  
I mua i tō huarahi

May peace be widespread  
May the sea glisten like greenstone  
And may the shimmer of light  
Guide you on your way

**Meri Kirihimete me te Hape Nū Ia**

**Liz Beddoe and Deb Stanfield**

For the editorial collective

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