



PSA Submission

Social Workers Registration Legislation Amendment Bill

June 2023

About the PSA

The New Zealand Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) is the largest trade union in New Zealand with over 87,000 members. We are a democratic organisation representing members in the public service, the wider state sector (the district health boards, crown research institutes and other crown entities), state owned enterprises, local government, tertiary education institutions and non-governmental organisations working in the health, social services and community sectors.

The PSA has been advocating for strong, innovative and effective public and community services since our establishment in 1913. People join the PSA to negotiate their terms of employment collectively, to have a voice within their workplace and to have an independent public voice on the quality of public and community services and how they're delivered.

The PSA Social Workers Action Network (SWAN) is a forum for social work members to come together and organise around the issues facing our community and ensure that the unique needs of social workers are identified and responded to. The network aims to unify, inspire, inform, and advocate for social workers. SWAN has been invited to comment on the Amendment Bill and their views are integral to this submission.

The PSA is an affiliate of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (CTU), Public Services International (PSI) and Uni Global.

Our values

Solidarity - Kotahitanga

We champion members' interests with a strong effective voice. We stand together, supporting and empowering members, individually and collectively.

Social justice - Pāpori Ture Tika

We take a stand for decent treatment and justice. We embrace diversity and challenge inequality.

Integrity and respect - Te Pono me te Whakaute

Our actions are characterised by professionalism, integrity and respect.

Solution focused - Otinga Arotahi

We are a progressive and constructive union, constantly seeking solutions that improve members' working lives.

Democratic - Tā te Nuinga e Whakatau ai

We encourage participation from members. We aim to be transparent, accessible and inclusive in the way we work.

This submission

This submission is based on feedback from SWAN which comprises members working in social work across health, in the community, and in core public service agencies. Their views informed and are an integral part of this submission.

The **PSA supports the amendment of the bill** to extend the time that people have to qualify and register through the experience pathway by four years from 2024 to 2028.

PSA members believe that life and work experience is invaluable for social work. Members have chosen this pathway and some have decided to continue with a social work degree. Members also point out that marginalised population groups often face barriers to formal pathways of education. Extending the access to this pathway allows for greater diversity amongst social workers and access to the field of social work. Our members continue to highlight the fact that a shortage of social workers is very real and is illustrated by social work being added to the new immigration fast-track scheme/green list. Members also acknowledge that it takes a considerable amount of time to collate the required experience pathway documentation and evidence. Extending the timeframe will also help those who would have fallen short of the required experience timeframe up until now to gain registration. Members also noted that the process of applying for registration under the experience pathway gives and gave applicants a chance for self-reflection and self-awareness as well as recognition of the many years of social work delivered to those who need and needed support.

As one of our members highlights “we should not place barriers in the way of social work practitioners achieving registration.”

However, we would also like to mention a **few risks** that need to be considered and mitigated when extending the timeframe. Members have underlined that by extending the experience pathway those with a qualification do not feel sufficiently valued as qualified and registered social workers. Members also point to the risk that the profession might be undermined by not requiring formal qualification.

To mitigate these risks, members suggest that it would be worthwhile to consider an inclusive, alternative professional pathway into social work as a long-term solution rather than a short-term extension. Members suggest that the Social Worker Registration Board could support further study towards social work qualifications with a particular emphasis on frameworks that have tikanga Māori and indigenous models embedded.

The PSA would like to **acknowledge, value and underline the importance of all social workers' mahi** every day. Social workers play an essential part in improving people's lives by supporting social justice, equity, unity and cohesion in our communities. Social workers work with people to gain confidence and to address the problems they face in their everyday lives. They are invaluable. All future work related to social work must be based on the value they bring and the important role they play in our society in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Thank you for considering our submission.

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