Registering with the Social Workers Registration Board

Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro (SWRB). For social workers who trained outside New Zealand. Registration is mandatory here: you need it, and a practising certificate, before you can work.

YOUR REGISTRATION BODY

Social Workers Registration Board
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro (SWRB)

Checked against the Board's pages in November 2026. If anything here differs from what the Board says, the Board is right, and it makes every registration decision.

Every application is assessed individually, and the board makes every registration decision. The latest version, with questions that work out your likely route, is at ethicareresourcing.com/guides/new-zealand-registration-swrb. Ethicare never charges candidates. This is general information, not immigration advice.

Every route

Australian qualification pathway

An AASW-accredited social work degree.

Treated as equivalent to a New Zealand qualification: no qualification assessment, no English evidence. Competence assessment and provisional registration still apply.

Overseas qualification pathway, English already shown

Everyone else whose qualification or registration history meets the Board's English policy.

Your qualification is assessed individually. Your transcript or registration history stands in for an English test.

Overseas qualification pathway, with an IELTS test

Everyone else.

Your qualification is assessed individually, and you sit IELTS Academic: 7 overall and 7 in every part.

Not yet eligible

Less than 12 months' practice since qualifying.

The Board requires the practice first, on every pathway, and fees aren't refunded.

ROUTE 1 OF 5

YOUR LIKELY ROUTE

Australian qualification pathway

✓ A social work degree accredited by the Australian Association of Social Workers, and 12 months' practice since.

The Board treats AASW-accredited degrees as equivalent to a New Zealand qualification, so there is no qualification assessment and no English evidence to send. You still complete the competence assessment, and you start on provisional registration like everyone else.

The Board makes the final decision when you apply. Overseas applications can take more than six months.

The steps

1

Check the Board's requirements against your own history

Registered where you qualified, 12 months' practice since, intending to live and work here.

You need to be registered or licensed as a social worker where you qualified, unless that country has no system, in which case you explain why. South African-trained candidates: your SACSSP registration is the registration evidence the Board asks for.

2

Create a MySWRB account

Choose the Australian qualification pathway.

Everything is uploaded through MySWRB. The Board's documents checklist for the pathway is worth printing before you start.

3

Identity, references and good conduct

Certified ID, references, and police certificates or good standing from your current regulator.

Include every country you have lived in. The Board's "fit and proper" test looks at conduct and behaviour that could affect practice; declare anything relevant in full rather than leaving it to be found.

4

Your competence assessment

Competencies 3 to 10 of the Core Competence Standards, in your own words. NZ$1,012.

Use the Board's Overseas Competence Assessment form and its guidelines, with specific examples from your own practice. The Board screens submissions with an AI-detection tool; anything judged more than 10% AI-generated goes back to you to redo. Pay the fee, then tell your registration officer so the assessment can start.

5

Apply for registration

NZ$423, non-refundable. Send everything within six months or the fee is charged again.

The Board may come back for more or updated documents. There is no fixed timeframe; the Board says overseas applications can take more than six months, so don't resign or book flights on an expected date. You can start work only once you hold both registration and a practising certificate.

6

Your practising certificate

NZ$540 plus the NZ$219 disciplinary levy: NZ$759 for a full year. Most employers pay it.

The year runs 1 July to 30 June, with lower certificate fees for a part year (the levy is always the full NZ$219). With it you must do at least 20 hours of professional development a year and have regular professional supervision.

7

Within 12 months, the New Zealand competence assessment

Competencies 1 and 2: practice with Māori and with the diverse communities of Aotearoa.

Due within 12 months of your first practising certificate. Employers who recruit from overseas usually build the cultural induction in; ask how yours will support it. If nothing is done within two years, your registration may expire.

8 Move to full registration

After 2,000 hours of supervised social work in New Zealand. NZ$70 plus a NZ$1,012 competence assessment fee.

Your manager and professional supervisor confirm your hours on the Board's form. Overseas-qualified registrants also send the supervision agreement confirmation, a CPD record, a New Zealand Police vetting consent and anything your provisional approval letter asked for.

9 Your visa health and police checks

Separate from registration.

If you're an Australian citizen, you don't apply for a work visa. Separate from registration, for Immigration New Zealand. If you're coming for more than 12 months, expect a medical by one of its panel physicians and, in most cases, a chest X-ray, for everyone on the application, children included. The certificate must reach Immigration New Zealand within three months of being signed, and you'll need police certificates too. General information, not immigration advice: our visa guide.

ROUTE 2 OF 5

YOUR ROUTE

Not yet: the Board asks for 12 months' practice first

The Board requires at least 12 months of full-time-equivalent social work practice after you qualified, on every pathway, and says applicants who don't meet its requirements are unlikely to succeed. The fees aren't refunded. Build the experience first, then come back to these questions.

The Board makes the final decision when you apply. Overseas applications can take more than six months.

The steps

1

Build 12 months of full-time-equivalent practice

Social work practice after your qualification, wherever you are now.

Part-time work counts pro rata. Keep your job descriptions, dates and contracted hours: the Board asks for them in your CV.

2

Get registered or licensed where you are, if you can

The Board expects it, unless your country has no system.

Registration where you qualified is one of the Board's requirements. Where there is no register, you explain that in your application.

3

Start on your English evidence

A qualification taught in English in the UK, Ireland, South Africa or Singapore counts. Otherwise plan for IELTS Academic.

IELTS Academic at a test centre (not IELTS Online), 7 overall and 7 in each part, within the two years before you apply. One section can be retaken within 60 days, or two sittings within six months combined if neither has a part below 6.5. Check the Board's policy statement before you book.

4

Come back and answer the questions again

Once you have the practice behind you.

Your route and steps will be here, and you can save them to My Move.

ROUTE 3 OF 5

YOUR LIKELY ROUTE

Overseas qualification pathway, English already shown

✓ A social work qualification taught and examined in English in the UK, Ireland, South Africa or Singapore. And 12 months' practice since qualifying.

Your qualification is assessed individually against the New Zealand standard, and your English is shown by your transcript rather than a test. You start on provisional registration.

The Board makes the final decision when you apply. Overseas applications can take more than six months.

The steps

1

Check the Board's requirements against your own history

Registered where you qualified, 12 months' practice since, intending to live and work here.

You need to be registered or licensed as a social worker where you qualified, unless that country has no system, in which case you explain why. Your qualification has to be equivalent to a New Zealand social work qualification for a scope of practice, which is what the Board's assessment decides. South African-trained candidates: your SACSSP registration is the registration evidence the Board asks for.

2

Create a MySWRB account

Choose the Overseas qualification pathway.

Everything is uploaded through MySWRB. The Board's documents checklist for the pathway is worth printing before you start.

3 Your qualification assessment

The Overseas Qualification Assessment Form, your documents, and the NZ$635 fee.

Degree certificates, full academic transcripts showing subjects and results, evidence of your registration where you qualified (your registration certificate or practising certificate), a comprehensive CV covering your social work roles and professional development, and official translations of anything not in English. The fee isn't refunded, and paying it doesn't mean approval. NZQA assessments aren't accepted in its place.

4 Show your English

Your transcript shows a qualification taught and examined in English, so no test.

The Board accepts a social work qualification taught and examined solely in English in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Ireland, South Africa or Singapore. Your transcript is the evidence, and the Board may ask the institution to confirm it. A Registration Officer confirms it is enough, so read the policy statement and send what it asks for.

5 Identity, references and good conduct

Certified ID, references, and police certificates or good standing from your current regulator.

Include every country you have lived in. The Board's "fit and proper" test looks at conduct and behaviour that could affect practice; declare anything relevant in full rather than leaving it to be found.

6 Your competence assessment

Competencies 3 to 10 of the Core Competence Standards, in your own words. NZ$1,012.

Use the Board's Overseas Competence Assessment form and its guidelines, with specific examples from your own practice. The Board screens submissions with an AI-detection tool; anything judged more than 10% AI-generated goes back to you to redo. Pay the fee, then tell your registration officer so the assessment can start.

7

Apply for registration

NZ$423, non-refundable. Send everything within six months or the fee is charged again.

The Board may come back for more or updated documents. There is no fixed timeframe; the Board says overseas applications can take more than six months, so don't resign or book flights on an expected date. You can start work only once you hold both registration and a practising certificate.

8

Your practising certificate

NZ$540 plus the NZ$219 disciplinary levy: NZ$759 for a full year. Most employers pay it.

The year runs 1 July to 30 June, with lower certificate fees for a part year (the levy is always the full NZ$219). With it you must do at least 20 hours of professional development a year and have regular professional supervision.

9

Within 12 months, the New Zealand competence assessment

Competencies 1 and 2: practice with Māori and with the diverse communities of Aotearoa.

Due within 12 months of your first practising certificate. Employers who recruit from overseas usually build the cultural induction in; ask how yours will support it. If nothing is done within two years, your registration may expire.

10

Move to full registration

After 2,000 hours of supervised social work in New Zealand. NZ$70 plus a NZ$1,012 competence assessment fee.

Your manager and professional supervisor confirm your hours on the Board's form. Overseas-qualified registrants also send the supervision agreement confirmation, a CPD record, a New Zealand Police vetting consent and anything your provisional approval letter asked for.

11

Your visa health and police checks

Separate from registration.

Separate from registration, for Immigration New Zealand. If you're coming for more than 12 months, expect a medical by one of its panel physicians and, in most cases, a chest X-ray, for everyone on the application, children included. The certificate must reach Immigration New Zealand within three months of being signed, and you'll need police certificates too. General information, not immigration advice: our visa guide.

ROUTE 4 OF 5

YOUR LIKELY ROUTE

Overseas qualification pathway, English already shown

✓ Registered as a social worker for at least a year in the last five in England, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Australia or Canada. And 12 months' practice since qualifying.

Your qualification is assessed individually against the New Zealand standard, and your English is shown by your registration history rather than a test. You start on provisional registration.

The Board makes the final decision when you apply. Overseas applications can take more than six months.

The steps

1

Check the Board's requirements against your own history

Registered where you qualified, 12 months' practice since, intending to live and work here.

You need to be registered or licensed as a social worker where you qualified, unless that country has no system, in which case you explain why. Your qualification has to be equivalent to a New Zealand social work qualification for a scope of practice, which is what the Board's assessment decides. South African-trained candidates: your SACSSP registration is the registration evidence the Board asks for.

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4

Show your English

Your registration history stands in for a test.

At least one year's registration in the last five in England, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Australia, or Canada outside Quebec, where English is the official language and either it is your first language or the regulator required an English test. A Registration Officer confirms it is enough, so read the policy statement and send what it asks for.

5

Identity, references and good conduct

Certified ID, references, and police certificates or good standing from your current regulator.

Include every country you have lived in. The Board's "fit and proper" test looks at conduct and behaviour that could affect practice; declare anything relevant in full rather than leaving it to be found.

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Your visa health and police checks

Separate from registration.

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ROUTE 5 OF 5

YOUR LIKELY ROUTE

Overseas qualification pathway, with an IELTS test

✓ 12 months' practice since qualifying.

Your qualification is assessed individually against the New Zealand standard, and you show your English with IELTS Academic: 7 overall and 7 in every part, at a test centre, within the two years before you apply. You start on provisional registration.

The Board makes the final decision when you apply. Overseas applications can take more than six months.

The steps

1

Check the Board's requirements against your own history

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4

Sit IELTS Academic

7 overall and 7 in reading, listening, speaking and writing. At a test centre, within two years of applying.

IELTS Academic is the only test the Board accepts, and IELTS Online isn't. One section short? You can retake that section within 60 days, or combine two sittings within six months if at least one has 7 in every part and nothing is below 6.5. Half a band short in one section after that, and the Board may accept letters from two English-proficient supervisors. The Board verifies results with IELTS.

5

Identity, references and good conduct

Certified ID, references, and police certificates or good standing from your current regulator.

Include every country you have lived in. The Board's "fit and proper" test looks at conduct and behaviour that could affect practice; declare anything relevant in full rather than leaving it to be found.

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What it costs

Overseas qualification assessment	NZ$635, non-refundable. Not charged on the Australian qualification pathway.
Competence assessment, provisional registration	NZ$1,012
Registration application	NZ$423. Charged again if your documents don't arrive within six months.
Practising certificate, 12 months	NZ$540, plus the NZ$219 disciplinary levy: NZ$759. Lower certificate fees for a part year; the levy is always the full amount.
Provisional to full registration	NZ$70, plus a NZ$1,012 competence assessment
Certificate of good standing, for a regulator overseas	NZ$63. Digital copies are free.

From the Board's fees page, updated 1 May 2026 and checked 5 November 2026. The Board doesn't say whether its fees include GST. Practising certificate fees are for the 2026/27 year; registration fees have applied since 1 July 2024.

Questions people ask

YOUR ROUTE

Can I start work while my application is being assessed?

No. Social work is a protected profession in New Zealand, and you need registration and a practising certificate before you practise. There is no provisional arrangement that lets you begin and finish the paperwork afterwards, so registration is the first item in your sequence.

I trained in South Africa. Do I need an IELTS test?

Not if your social work qualification was taught and examined solely in English, which the Board accepts for South Africa along with the UK, Ireland and Singapore. Your transcript is the evidence. Your SACSSP registration is the registration evidence the Board asks for too.

I'm registered in Australia. Is there mutual recognition?

Not in the trans-Tasman sense. Australia has no statutory register for social work. If your degree is AASW-accredited you use the Australian qualification pathway, which skips the qualification assessment and the English evidence but keeps the competence assessment and provisional registration.

What does provisional registration mean for me?

You can practise as a social worker with a practising certificate, under professional supervision. Everyone starts there until they have completed 2,000 hours of supervised social work in New Zealand and any conditions in their approval letter, then applies to move to full registration.

YOUR APPLICATION

Which competencies do I write about?

Competencies 3 to 10 of the Board's Core Competence Standards before you register, in your own words with examples from your practice. Competencies 1 and 2, on practice with Māori and with New Zealand's diverse communities, come within 12 months of your first practising certificate.

Will the Board know if I used AI to write my assessment?

It checks. Since February 2025 the Board has screened competence assessments with an AI-detection tool, and anything judged more than 10% AI-generated is returned to you to rewrite. Write it yourself.

How long does it take?

The Board gives no fixed timeframe and says overseas applications may take more than six months. From our experience the biggest thing you control is how quickly you answer the Board's questions. Don't resign or set a date until your registration is confirmed.

Can I use my NZQA assessment instead?

No. The Board does its own qualification assessment and doesn't accept NZQA documents for it.

ETHICARE

Does Ethicare charge candidates?

No, never. If you're moving with us, ask whether your employer covers the practising certificate; most do.