

# RESEARCH REPORT SERIES

**A Report on Teaching and Modelling  
Research Skills in a Classroom  
Setting: Social Work Students Using  
Their Learning and Experiences  
to Investigate the Link Between  
Modes of Learning Delivery and  
Social Work Core Competencies**

By Irene Ayallo, Nadia Mary Akbar, Faith Burgess, Ben Francis Celebrin, Melissa Jane Colmore, Jon-Teen Shaunessy Rae Davis, Manuel De Veyra Saso Jr, Stella Alex Dooms, Jane Failagi, Emma Siobhan Galvin, Renee Channele Hinemotu Greaves, Olivia Katherine Guthrie, Ashley Shamita Hindeshwar, Josephine Faaiu Toso Iefata, Mckayla Joy Kent-Ford, Brenda Ulaemamae Laulu, Tuteru Leavasa, Ciara Rose Leech, Pelelatino Eliza Malo, Jecheala Lynette Tala Masae, Farishta Michan Khel, Kalisha Gay Erina Moore, Leila Narayan, Desmond John Petelo, Gregory Maurice Robson, Jade Renee Russell, Tiras Jaran Josiah Lolohea Salt, Abdulkarim Ahmed Sayid, Ahmad Zia Sultani, Matthew Tasi, Kidist Worku Tegegne, Lisa Marie Frances Tomlinson, Kalofiana Mei Tonga Vea-Malakai, Tyler Ngahuia Wright and Courteney Daniela Yanez

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New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology

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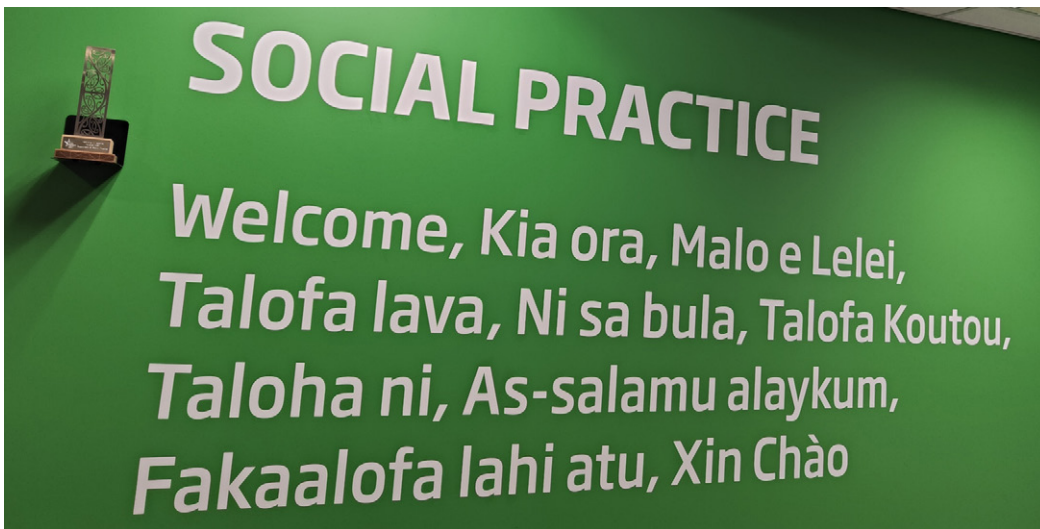


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# A Report on Teaching and Modelling Research Skills in a Classroom Setting: Social Work Students Using Their Learning and Experiences to Investigate the Link Between Modes of Learning Delivery and Social Work Core Competencies

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Top: Entrance of the Social Practice offices – text by Bachelor of Social Practice staff member David Haigh.

Left: Excellence Award in Teaching Kaupapa Māori, 2021.

# Executive Summary

In Semester 2 (July–November) 2022, Dr Irene Ayallo collaborated with the students in the Research Methods course in Unitec’s Bachelor of Social Practice to investigate the link between learning delivery modes and students’ ability to demonstrate the Aotearoa New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) core competencies (see Appendix 1). The aim of the project was to teach research skills and, simultaneously, critically analyse whether the shift in learning delivery due to the Covid-19 pandemic could impact the students’ future competencies as social workers in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. The report describes the research design process and presents a literature review, findings from data, and a discussion of the findings.

Findings from this research show that the learning environment within which social work education is delivered has changed significantly, provoked by the events during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Rethinking social work education delivery models is inevitable and required in this new environment. Carefully designed flexible delivery models, such as a mix of in-person and online (blended), would be most effective in safeguarding against and minimising learning disruptions without compromising quality. The most impactful delivery model for social work students is characterised by engaging and interactive content, practical activities and group work, increasing and checking retention, clear structure and guidelines, consistency, flexibility, and capability building for staff and students. The extent to which these can be achieved depends on addressing individual student and staff factors, and broader institutional resources, guidelines and policies.

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## Introduction

This research report presents the findings of a classroom-modelled research project investigating the possible impact of the shift in learning delivery due to Covid-19 on the students' ability to demonstrate the required core social work competencies in the future. Between March 2020 and early August 2022, schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, including tertiary institutions, were in government-directed Covid-19 lockdowns. This was accompanied by school closures and, for most, a move to fully online learning. Although some normality returned after the last lockdown was lifted in August 2022, students and staff continued to observe many challenges, mainly regarding student attendance and engagement. Given the nature of social work education, traditionally delivered in person, in a physical setting, and requiring a high level of physical engagement, the class sought to investigate their own experiences of the shift in learning delivery against the core competencies of a newly qualified social worker in Aotearoa. Most of this cohort started their degree in February/March 2020, and we were only in class physically for four weeks before the country went into lockdown.

One of the expected outcomes of the Research Methods course is that, on successful completion, students can apply basic qualitative and quantitative research methodology and methods to investigate a topical issue within the field of social work. This research was evidence of meeting this learning outcome. The report outlines the background of the study, the research process, and the data-collection outcomes. Key findings are reported, along with recommendations for improving teaching practice.

## Background

The Covid-19 pandemic challenged traditional social work education delivery modes, particularly in-person or physical presence. The move to online learning during the lockdowns and hybrid learning (a combination of online and physical delivery) after the lockdowns required a shift in the delivery of social work courses linked to meeting professional standards, including the core competencies. As of 2023, the Research Methods course is a compulsory Level 7 course taught in the third year of the four-year Bachelor of Social Practice programme (BSP) at Unitec. It is one of the 30 courses in the programme that, before Covid-19, had been delivered fully in person (physically). A primary outcome of this Research Methods course, offered every year in the second semester, is to equip future social workers with research skills to enable them to develop and implement a research project relevant to social practice (see Appendix 2).

The course content and assignments are designed to support students in meeting the course's learning outcomes. For instance, one out of the three assignments in the course requires students to interpret and report a given set of research data. In 2022, considering the attendance and engagement concerns raised by staff and students, the class and the lecturer (Irene

Ayallo) discussed and agreed on the benefit of collaboratively designing and collecting primary data for this assignment. Notably, most of this cohort started their degree in February/March 2020, and we were only in class physically for four weeks before the country went into lockdown. At the time of the course, the students were in their third year of social work qualification, with only a year left in the programme until they could be newly qualified social workers expected to demonstrate the Aotearoa New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) core competencies. These students had experienced the shift to remote and online learning; because of the lockdown, most of their Year Two courses and some Year Three courses were primarily delivered online. Accordingly, this cohort had the relevant experiences to inform future teaching practice, considering the enduring impacts of Covid-19 on learning delivery in education sectors and social work requirements. Additionally, students are expected to demonstrate the knowledge and application of research methodologies and methods at the end of the Research Methods course. Simultaneously, the class used their real-life experience to analyse and demonstrate the design and application of a research process – from defining the problem to data collection, analysis and reporting.

The reported perspectives are based on all the students' experiences of courses taught during this period (February/March 2020) until 2022 (when this class research was conducted). The research design refrained from comparing the effects on individual courses, to prevent conflict of interest and avoid bias. This was also beyond the scope of this assignment-based research. For instance, students were advised not to mention individual courses or lecturers in their survey responses. Course evaluations were conducted separately by the institution. Instead, this research aimed to provide an overall picture of the impacts, considering the expectation that these soon-to-be newly qualified social workers would have the necessary competencies to practice social work after these experiences.

Notably, the programme management team and Unitec's academic quality team worked closely with regulatory and accreditation bodies to ensure the programme was delivered within the approved parameters, such as the prescribed contact hours for each course. The institution (Unitec) also initiated support programmes, such as hardship support for students without digital devices or internet connection, to manage the disruptive changes. The course lecturers had regular meetings and worked closely with the students' learning-support team to identify struggling students and provide wraparound support to keep them engaged or re-engaged with their courses. An evaluation of whether or not these were adequate was not a focus of this study.

Nevertheless, this study showed that supporting social work students in building practice competencies entails a complex interaction between the curriculum, teaching pedagogies, teachers and students, and institutional factors.

The Research Methods course 2022 sought to explore whether the change in learning delivery, primarily the limited physical presence, would impact students' ability to meet the SWRB core competencies upon programme completion. Accordingly, students participated in their learning process, building research skills and, simultaneously, a self-evaluation of



meeting the core competencies following the Covid-19 pandemic. The course lecturer created the final research design with input from all 36 students enrolled.

Due to the nature of social work, particularly the fact that social workers often work with some of the most vulnerable individuals and groups, it is a highly scrutinised profession (Beddoe, 2018; Beddoe et al., 2018). In Aotearoa New Zealand, this has resulted in significant policy developments and reviews that, among other issues, have increased scrutiny of the roles and capabilities of social workers and the quality of their initial education (Beddoe et al., 2018). In addition, because of the vast scope of social work, many stakeholders have a legitimate interest in the readiness of newly qualified social workers. This interest is often heightened when a social-work-related phenomenon, such as malpractice, attracts media, public and political attention (Beddoe, 2018). Such events frequently lead to considerable debates and interest in social workers' education and capabilities (Beddoe et al., 2018). The impacts of Covid-19 on the education sector, particularly on pedagogy and learning delivery at all levels of schooling in Aotearoa, are now well documented (Salesa, 2023; Smart et al., 2021). In professions that traditionally require a high level and prescribed amount of physical engagement during the education stage, many have wondered whether the effect of Covid-19 lockdowns would impact the new graduates' capabilities in these fields (Crisp et al., 2021; Jaquier et al., 2020; Morley & Clarke, 2020). Therefore, evaluating the link between modes of education delivery during and after Covid-19 and readiness to practice is paramount. This course-modelled research provides some empirical evidence towards this discussion. Evidence was gathered with soon-to-be newly qualified social workers.

## Research Design and Data Collection

In March 2023, the lead author consulted with the Deputy Chair of the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC) to check whether this class-based research, primarily aimed at improving practice, required formal ethics approval. Publication of the findings was approved during this consultation on the condition that the class consented to this and that the publisher agreed to this, too. Permission and consent were sought from all parties. A literature review was undertaken using the Unitec library and databases. The class chose participatory action research as the preferred methodology (Ayallo, 2012). Data was collected using anonymised online qualitative questionnaire surveys.

The class considered several qualitative methodologies taught in Weeks 4 and 5 of the course, and agreed that the study be designed following participatory action research (PAR) principles. Specifically, these included collaboration (between the lecturer and the students as the participants with lived experiences), storytelling (participants sharing their lived experiences), reflexive critique (students – also participants – analysing their responses in the form of Assignment 3), and transformation (agreeing that their

perspectives be shared in the form of a publication as a contribution to improving the delivery of social work education post-Covid-19). This final report is an amalgamation of the students' analysis submitted as Assignment 3. The lecturer (lead author) reviewed all 36 submitted assignments alongside the data collected to produce this final report. Accordingly, all students who completed and submitted this assignment, and responded to the survey, are listed as co-authors.

In Week 7 of the course, as part of teaching the use of questionnaire surveys as a data-collection method, the class, with the guidance of the lecturer, developed a survey questionnaire with 21 questions, following a narrative inquiry format (Connelly & Clandinin, 2012). Students in the class were divided into groups, six people in each group. The required questions for the survey were categorised into four broad areas, namely, demographic, descriptive, evaluative and solution questions. Groups were assigned one of these areas and asked to develop at least three questions. The lecturer then re-checked these to ensure clarity before collating the final list of questions (see Appendix 3). The questionnaire was created using Google Forms, and the link was distributed to the class through Moodle (the official Unitec online teaching platform). Data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Labra et al., 2020).

While the most critical aspects of this class-modelled research involved jointly negotiated agreements to align with the chosen methodology and ensure power sharing and decision making, other power dynamics were identified and managed as well as possible. For instance, the lead researcher was also the course lecturer. The research project was still a learning tool (case example) as much as it was a forum for the soon-to-be social workers to share their lived experiences of social work education in the Covid-19 environment. Accordingly, in addition to constantly asking for feedback, some intentional steps were taken to manage the power dynamics between the students and the lecturer. For instance, after collating the final list of questions based on the ones the students had provided, the lecturer returned the questions to the students for feedback before developing the Google Form. Other data-collection methods, such as interviews, would have been equally appropriate. However, anonymity was important to the students; hence, the anonymous online-survey questionnaire method. After the completion of the first draft of the report, a message was sent to all students who were enrolled in the course (through the class representative) requesting a response to two issues – whether they wanted their names included or excluded, and to contact the lead author if they wanted to review the draft document.

Direct quotes from participants are used throughout the report to honour the voices of those who engaged in this research project.

The following section presents significant literature accessed from Unitec databases.

# Literature Review

## COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH TO SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Generally, a competency-based approach (CBA) is characterised by specific skills, knowledge and behavioural requirements that enable a person to perform their job successfully (Ballantyne et al., 2022). In the social work context, many observe that competency-based education was prompted by the challenge for the profession to demonstrate the adequacy of its practitioners. Beddoe (2018) comprehensively recounts how social work has struggled to find a distinctive space in Aotearoa New Zealand. There is growing emphasis on accountability, accompanied by other measures such as state licensing (registration) and increased attention to a Code of Ethics (Social Workers Registration Board, 2023a). 'Competency', defined as a 'fit and proper person', a state of fitness for a situation or purpose, has become a keyword in social work vocabulary (Beddoe et al., 2018). Accordingly, social work educators have the demanding task of assuring the adequate professional performance of their graduates through curriculum and content delivery (Social Workers Registration Board, 2023a). Education providers are expected to equip students to translate core social work values into practice, and have foundational knowledge and skills (Beddoe et al., 2018). For instance, social work education designed on the CBA typically begins by concentrating careful attention on the outcomes of the educational process, such as those outlined in the New Zealand Qualification Framework (Social Workers Registration Board, 2023a). These are then developed in the context of programme-specific goals linked to professional competencies (graduate profile) and measurable learning outcomes for each course in the programme. In Aotearoa, qualifying social work programmes undergo a Programme Recognition Standards (PRS) review every five years. This review is undertaken by the SWRB, mandated by the Social Workers Registration Act (SWRA) 2003, to ensure that social work education providers meet the principles under the Act and enable graduates to meet professional standards for entry into the profession (Social Workers Registration Board, 2023a).

In research and literature, there are diverse opinions on whether a CBA in social work education is effective (Ballantyne et al., 2022). For instance, a three-phased project undertaken in Aotearoa, the Enhance R2P project, argued for a professional capabilities framework (PCF) instead of a CBA. Using data collected through documentary analysis and a World Café approach, the project found and argued that CBA can be tick-box and mechanistic (Ballantyne et al., 2022). It does not provide a staged approach to practice development, whereby a practitioner can assess current capabilities and identify the next steps for learning and professional development. The recommended PCF allows for this movement and a holistic view of professional development (Ballantyne et al., 2022; Beddoe et al., 2018). Two facts remain despite the many changes and debates in Aotearoa New Zealand's social work education space: education is at the heart of the professionalisation of social work, and social work education remains a site of struggle (Ballantyne et al., 2019; Beddoe, 2018). As of 2023, the Bachelor of Social Work programme

offered at Unitec is recognised, as it meets the expectations and criteria the SWRB sets regarding the core competencies and curriculum (Social Workers Registration Board, 2023b). In summary, the core competencies highlight the importance of social work with Māori, diversity, ethics, social work theories, skills, professionalism, critical reflection, policy, advocacy, social justice and processes (Ballantyne et al., 2022).

Research has been identified as an undervalued but essential tool for the busy social worker in literature and practice. Research is often either ignored by most social workers or, at best, treated as an add-on or specialty (McLaughlin, 2007). However, a research-minded perspective has been shown to contribute to providing the most informed professional support needed by the people social workers engage with, especially the most vulnerable within society (Corby, 2006; Joubert & Webber, 2020; Munford, 2020), for instance, in exploring whether interventions are making a difference, either positively or negatively. Accordingly, research is critical for the continuous reflective practice that informs good social work practice. To this end, teaching research in the social work education curriculum is necessary, founded on the observation that “social work practice is more likely to be effective when social workers can draw on and evaluate previous research” (D’Cruz, 2014, p. 2).

## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

The spread of the Covid-19 virus saw a global response to the outbreak in 2020. Aotearoa New Zealand initially adopted a Zero Covid policy, with a strong focus on minimising the spread of the virus. The approach resulted in periods of nationwide lockdown. Schools at all levels were identified as high-risk areas and directed to only deliver learning remotely during these lockdowns (New Zealand Government, 2022). Social work education was no exception, with a rapid shift to fully online learning.

Literature and research from across countries show that the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted social work education in several ways, in both the field and the classroom (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). The most significant was the move to virtual teaching, such as on Zoom or other online platforms. Social work is a profession founded on competencies, and developing these is complex. Building competencies requires specific knowledge and skills, along with overarching interpersonal, professional and social skills such as self-awareness and reflexivity. Students must also learn to link theory and practice, or real-life situations (Ballantyne et al., 2019). Field education or practicum courses are the signature pedagogy for ensuring this link, whereby students spend a prescribed number of hours within a social work organisation or agency engaging with the practical world of the practice setting. However, several in-person practice opportunities are often embedded in social work courses (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). Physical distancing measures were implemented in many countries to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, disrupting the ability to offer this in-person training that has traditionally been utilised and shown to be most effective in building social work competencies. Most taught courses were delivered remotely and virtually. Also, in most

cases, students could not continue the practicum courses (Crisp et al., 2021; Glubb-Smith & Roberts, 2020; Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). Like many social work education programmes globally, the BSP programme at Unitec had to unexpectedly transition 2020 courses online and redesign them for online delivery. In Aotearoa, this continued until early 2022.

Amid these changes and disruptions to student learning about social work practice, there have been other realities for students related to social and economic hardships (Serhan & McLaughlin, 2020). For instance, several social and economic difficulties social work students face in the Aotearoa context have been brought to the fore (Glubb-Smith & Roberts, 2020). Most of these realities existed before the pandemic. However, as in other areas of society, the pandemic amplified pre-existing social inequalities (Serhan & McLaughlin, 2020). It is now well established that the impacts of disasters are often disproportionately experienced by people already disadvantaged and marginalised in other areas (Crisp et al., 2021). A reflection on social work education in Aotearoa during the pandemic observed that for most students, whānau (family) was frequently their priority. For caregivers with primary responsibilities for children and other family members, the demands of home schooling and the family's needs added pressures, such as access to the internet and sharing devices to log into online sessions or complete assignment tasks. Many social work students have historically built a tight-knit community through face-to-face learning, providing a tangible sense of security for many. Being separated and connecting only online challenged this sense of security (Glubb-Smith & Roberts, 2020; Jaquier et al., 2020). Similar findings were observed in an Australian-based study (Crisp et al., 2021).

Remote learning is not new to social work education and has existed in varied formats for many years (Crisp et al., 2021; Goldingay et al., 2020; Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). However, its effectiveness in building competencies required in practical settings has been widely discussed and debated (Crisp et al., 2021; Knowles, 2007; Lee et al., 2019; Levin et al., 2018). Many argue that building most social work competencies requires practice learning and opportunities for students, which enable the teacher to assess how learners demonstrate the theoretical frameworks and concepts. Through tools such as role plays, group work and simulation, social work educators can observe and provide feedback, coach practical skills and guide students' reflection on practice (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). Accordingly, even in programmes designed to be delivered remotely, there is often a prescribed degree of face-to-face contact (Crisp et al., 2021; Goldingay et al., 2020). However, there is also evidence that there are no significant differences in students learning social work practice skills when in-classroom modes are compared with online modes (Davis et al., 2019; Okech et al., 2014).

Levin et al. (2018) found that despite the increased use of technology in social work education, educator's concerns about the effectiveness of online learning versus traditional teaching remain unchanged, especially related to more practical courses. In the cited study, faculty reported that online learning is less effective than in-person learning in teaching elements such as reflecting on the self and building relationships between practitioners and clients (therapeutic alliance). Knowles (2007) observed additional e-learning challenges for social work education and grouped them into four categories.

*Pedagogical challenges* include building and managing online relationships (between instructors and students, and between students), teaching methods, and redesigning the curriculum to fit the online environment. *Professional challenges* include digital equity (students' equal access to digital devices and internet connection), ethics, and professionalism in an online environment. *Faculty challenges* include professional development on technology and online platform use, access to technology support for teachers, workload, and time needed to develop new material. *Administrative challenges* include programme structure and academic policy to match the online environment. Notably, these concerns were documented pre-pandemic. Nevertheless, based on these findings, the conclusion is that virtual social work education delivery requires additional resources and support for students and staff, and leadership, and pedagogical alignment unique to a practice profession (East et al., 2014).

Some post-pandemic feedback has been gathered from students experiencing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. While this shows varied findings, most indicate that students prefer in-person classes. For instance, in a survey conducted by the American Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) with 3564 students on their perception of the effects of the pandemic on their learning, 80% indicated that they preferred in-person learning. The survey showed that 61% of participants learned less through online teaching (Council on Social Work Education, 2020). A study with 122 social work students in the United States showed similar findings, with over half of the participants indicating that in-person learning was their preferred format. They reported low retention of course concepts in online classrooms. At the same time, they appreciated the flexibility of online learning, specifically the ability to learn while attending to other life matters (Smoyer et al., 2020). These findings raise the question of how to effectively address the challenges identified to prepare staff and students for social work practice when online learning is the only, or could be an additional, medium for course delivery. Arguably, during the pandemic, students received less 'practice' (as traditionally defined in social work education), while the communities needed (and continue to need) more practical assistance from social workers (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). Nevertheless, several researchers have highlighted the opportunities presented by Covid-19 concerning developing or revising modes of social work education delivery in a manner that does not compromise students' education and simultaneously prepares them for the practical social work setting. Social work education also needs to respond to disasters (Crisp et al., 2021; Jaquier et al., 2020; Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020; Morley & Clarke, 2020; Smoyer et al., 2020). Crisp et al. (2021) observed that the pandemic "presented us with a live experiment where the possibilities of online social work skills development could be tested" (p. 1846). Many of these studies recommend using mixed learning strategies, including "active learning, synchronous and asynchronous strategies, and a strong teacher presence" (Crisp et al., p. 1847). Student factors also influence whether these strategies are successful, including their experience with online environments, and personal social and economic circumstances (Lawrence & Abel, 2013).

# Presentation of Findings

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

There were 36 students enrolled in the 2022 Research Methods course. Thirty-four students responded to the survey, a 94% response rate. All respondents were domestic students. The class was ethnically diverse, with most identifying as Pasifika (38%), Pākehā (32%) and Māori (24%). Other ethnicities represented included African, Middle Eastern, Indian, Fijian Indian, Pakistani, Asian and Afghani. The numbers were small, and therefore suppressed to anonymise respondents. Students could tick more than one ethnicity from the seven options provided. Consequently, it is possible that these respondents also identified with other ethnicities. Most participants (73%) were below 34 years old, and 27% were 35 years and above. According to lifespan development, 90% of the class would be considered early or young adults (18–40 years). Most respondents (91%) were enrolled full time, completing four papers per semester and eight papers each year; 71% of the respondents indicated they were employed alongside studies. Many stated they had to work to support themselves and their families financially. Of the employed respondents, 44% worked part time, 21% were casual employees, and 15% worked full time. For anonymity reasons, data did not capture their area of employment. All participants except one indicated that they had other pressing responsibilities (something that required a significant amount of time) alongside studies. The most described responsibilities included work; looking after children or elderly, sick or disabled members of the family; church commitments; and community or cultural commitments. As described below, the learning delivery mode most utilised correlated with the student's other responsibilities outside of study.

## THE MOST UTILISED AND MOST PREFERRED MODE OF LEARNING DELIVERY

Participants were asked two sets of questions to gather information on the most used and preferred mode of learning delivery during the period after the pandemic. First, the class was asked about the learning delivery mode they had used the most in the last 12 weeks and across all their courses. They chose from three options: Online, In-person, or Both. Half of the class (50%) indicated that they had mostly been to class in person during this period, 32% used both, and 18% mainly accessed courses online. Those who chose the option 'Both' were asked to provide more information on how this occurred. Most stated that attending class in person was their priority. However, when and if a situation arose that was beyond their control, then online/Zoom was preferred. A common statement was:

*I have attended class, but for the days I could not come in, I will watch the class session live or catch up on the content in the evening.*

Family responsibilities, work and illness were the main reasons for non-regular attendance. As two students state below:

*I attend class in person when I can. However, I will attend virtually if my children are sick or I cannot attend class on some days. On rare occasions, I can only watch recorded class sessions. I avoid the third as often as possible.*

*I try to attend in-person learning as a first choice, but when family require my support or my wellbeing/health is impacted, online learning is a beneficial option to stay caught-up in class.*

There was an agreement among participants that in-person classes were still the ideal; for instance, that these would be their priority if circumstances allowed. For example, one student stated:

*In-person learning is preferred when possible, but the constraints of Covid have meant online learning is necessary or even, at times, chosen over in-person teaching. Because of my often-erratic schedule, attending all classes is difficult, so recording the lectures means I stay caught-up if I cannot always attend.*

Secondly, based on their experiences during this time, students were asked about their preferred learning delivery mode, which could differ from the one they had utilised the most during the same period. Of the 34 respondents, 47% selected 'Both', 35% chose 'In-person' learning, and 18% selected 'Online' learning. As described above, the learning delivery mode most utilised correlated with the student's other responsibilities outside of study. The reasons for their choice were also linked to what they indicated to have worked well or not worked well for each of these learning delivery modes.

#### AREAS OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES FOR EACH OF THE LEARNING MODES

The class was asked what worked well regarding the learning mode they utilised the most and what could have worked better. Data on this highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of these learning delivery modes. Overall, data across the three delivery modes shows that flexibility, structure, connectivity, technological capability for students and staff, focus and retention of content, interactivity of sessions, and personal circumstances played significant roles in whether students considered these modes to work.



**TABLE 1. SAMPLE VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF ONLINE LEARNING.**

Learning delivery mode	What worked well	What did not work well
Online delivery	<p><i>I was able to multitask while watching the lectures.</i></p> <p><i>Zoom works well for me as we can speak or chat if we have any questions, so we are still interacting.</i></p> <p><i>Another advantage of online learning is reduced financial costs. Online education is far more affordable as compared to physical learning.</i></p> <p><i>If I cannot attend somehow, I can still have access to what is being taught in class, so I do not miss out.</i></p> <p><i>Online learning does work for me as I feel more at peace learning in the space of comfort. I have been struggling with some things ... So, being able to learn within my home is helpful. I can also rewind Zoom recordings or have something to return to if I missed or forgot something, especially for assessments.</i></p> <p><i>What works for me when fully online is many breaks and not being online too much; I also like breakout groups, as they encourage discussion and reflection of what is being taught ...</i></p>	<p><i>Staring at the screen for long hours was difficult. I could not concentrate ...</i></p> <p><i>... being distracted at home and not fully paying attention via Zoom ...</i></p> <p><i>I also found it hard to participate in class due to the lecturer not being able to keep an eye on the chat and teach simultaneously, which is understandable ...</i></p> <p><i>Online learning certainly has allowed me more flexibility with my schedule. I do not find it as engaging, though.</i></p> <p><i>I found it quite challenging to understand some of the content, and not having someone next to you to ask what something meant became quite distressing.</i></p> <p><i>Fully online does not work for retention.</i></p> <p><i>The difficulties can be the wi-fi not connecting properly or hearing issues. Sometimes, sharing screens can be challenging, but patience is key.</i></p> <p><i>... the most common technical issues of online learning are always a problem (cannot hear the class/lecturer, cannot see what needs to be seen, etc.).</i></p>

*Summary of online learning:* The responses above show that the flexibility provided by online learning was advantageous, especially for students managing other pressing responsibilities such as family and work. The flexible nature was also appreciated by students who mentioned that they were dealing with an illness, such as anxiety and depression. It was cost saving for those experiencing financial hardship, as they did not have to drive to campus. However, this mode was observed not to work well when there was too much distraction at home, and when experiencing difficulties with connection and technology. Teacher capability was also a factor for some, such as their ability to navigate and manage the online platform.

**TABLE 2. SAMPLE VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF IN-PERSON LEARNING.**

Learning delivery mode	What worked well	What did not work well
In-person delivery	<p><i>I like face-to-face learning as it allows for personal rapport-building. I like asking for clarification and getting an instant response.</i></p> <p><i>What works well for me is that the lecturer is more accessible in person than online.</i></p> <p><i>There is more engagement, and you can hear what is asked and answered. It is easier to ask questions and for the lecturer to respond accordingly.</i></p> <p><i>In-person learning has helped me form a tight circle of friends who help keep me motivated, and I can bounce ideas off.</i></p> <p><i>I like participating and engaging in a classroom setting – less distraction.</i></p> <p><i>Speaking to informative PowerPoints worked for me because I retained the lecture better, making it easy to reflect on the PowerPoints and what was said in class.</i></p> <p><i>I like in-person learning because it is better for my dyslexia, as it requires visual, oral and movement, like writing notes to help me comprehend content.</i></p>	<p><i>What does not work for me is the transportation to class because I am always stuck in traffic, which usually makes me late ...</i></p> <p><i>I enjoy in-person lectures; however, the last year has been challenging in person as class numbers are so small, leading to fewer questions and discussions by the class.</i></p> <p><i>The disadvantages are that if you are sick or your family is sick, you will have to miss the class and miss out on learning.</i></p> <p><i>Structured classes work well – long breaks, waffling, and lots of interrupting the lecturers with conversation irrelevant to the learning.</i></p>

*Summary of in-person learning:* The ability to build relationships, give and get immediate feedback and responses to queries, the clear delineation between school and home, and focus were some of the many advantages identified for in-person learning. Some of the benefits of online learning (see Table 1) were also some of the weaknesses identified for in-person learning. For instance, lateness to class if they were stuck in traffic and missing out on content if a student or family member was sick. Other areas for improvement include small class numbers, which hindered good discussions, and unstructured lectures.

**TABLE 3. SAMPLE VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF 'BOTH' (IN-PERSON AND ONLINE) LEARNING.**

Learning delivery mode	What worked well	What did not work well
Both (in-person and online)	<p><i>Blended learning worked well because I could watch my recorded classes after long shifts at work. This helps a lot.</i></p> <p><i>Coming to class has helped me through discussion and asking questions ... I find it very helpful when classes are recorded because I can refer to them if I have missed something.</i></p> <p><i>I like the idea of online learning when needed, for example, if I am unwell or have to stay home to care for others.</i></p> <p><i>Blended learning works well for me. If my children are sick, I can still learn online and be present for my children.</i></p> <p><i>It is very flexible, so I can watch Zoom or be present in class while working if I have work or some other commitment.</i></p> <p><i>Both work best for me, because if I need to ask questions directly in person, it would be the best fit, but to finish off work or if I cannot go in, the online option is there.</i></p>	<p><i>I find blended learning hard because it interrupts my routine. At uni, I can focus solely on university and get into a good routine and time-management skills. Unlike when I do uni through Zoom, it throws me off balance, and I fall behind.</i></p> <p><i>What does not work well for me is that it is too flexible, and if people are not present in class, then to catch up for group work or try to discuss what they have missed, etc.</i></p> <p><i>It was very messy and sometimes confusing as the common algorithm in this is that, sometimes, half the class would get information told on Zoom. Those in person may have been told something different, which sometimes would be very confusing.</i></p> <p><i>I prefer the consistency of being in the same space every day and being familiar with the class environment.</i></p>

*Summary of 'Both':* Like online learning, most respondents appreciated the flexibility provided by combining online and in-person learning. They could manage many responsibilities, stay home when needed, and attend in-person classes when circumstances allowed them to. However, for some, it affected their routine, as there was no indication of when they needed to be in-person and when they could be online. Although some liked the flexibility, too much flexibility was considered a disadvantage linked to some peers' poor attendance and lack of engagement. Some participants observed that there had been some inconsistencies between messages delivered in-person and online, which made the blended delivery difficult.

Further data analysis showed that the delivery mode played a minimal role in active participation and engagement. The responses did not show a significant variation, such as whether active participation depended on the mode of delivery. However, the reasons for active participation or the lack thereof were the same as those provided for their preferred delivery mode (Question 7). Their responses are described below.

#### PERSPECTIVES ON ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING DELIVERY MODE

In Question 8, the class was asked about the degree of participation, irrespective of the learning mode utilised or preferred during this period. The options were as follows: 'very little', 'irregular/sporadic', 'active', 'I come and go', and 'none'. The reason for this was to compare whether 'active participation' varied with each of the learning delivery modes. Of the 34 respondents, 53% stated that they were somewhat active ('I come and go'), 32% were active, and 16% indicated that they were sporadic ('irregular/sporadic'). Most of those who chose 'active' said that the modes they had utilised the most were 'In-person' and 'Both' (50–50). Participants who chose 'I come and go' utilised all the learning delivery options, with 78% choosing either 'In-person' or 'Both' and 22% using 'Online'. Those who indicated they had been 'irregular/sporadic' mainly chose 'Both' and 'Online'. None of them utilised the in-person learning mode. Overall, the majority, a combination of those who actively and somewhat actively ('I come and go') participated, used both 'In-person' and 'Both'.

#### PERSPECTIVES ON WHAT MAKES A COMPETENT NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKER

Before inquiring about learning modes and the set SWRB competencies, the research gathered participants' views on the skills and knowledge required (based on individual views) of a social work student upon completing their qualification. Their responses were ranked to provide insight into the skills and knowledge that were most critical to them. As illustrated in the figure below, respect, diversity and inclusivity were mentioned 16 times, followed by cultural competency (12 times).

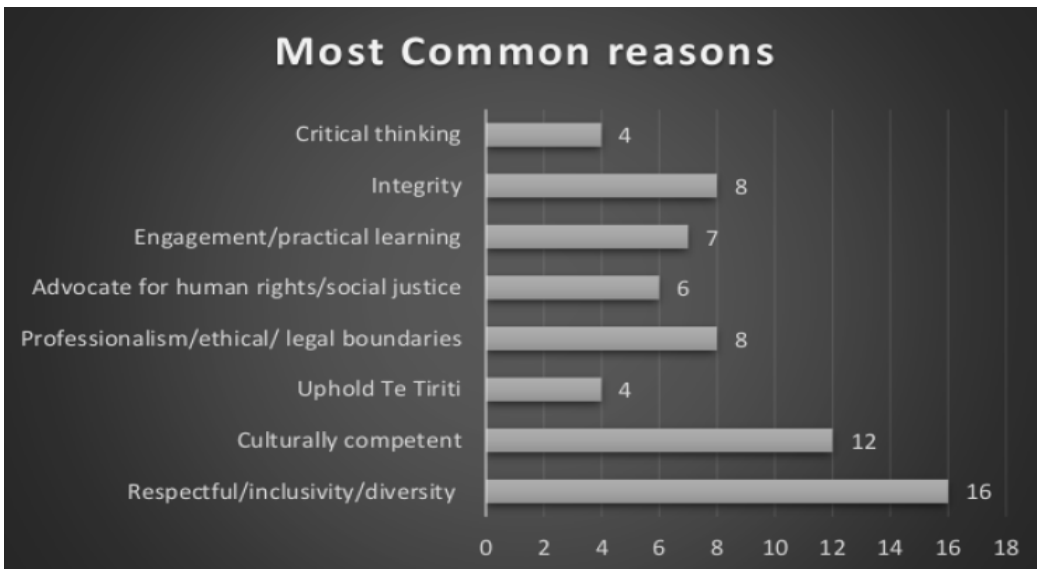


Figure 1. Ranking of participants' views on the skills required by a competent social worker.

In the next theme, data also shows that the highly and medium-ranked skills and knowledge are also linked to the core competencies that most participants mentioned could only be taught through in-person delivery.

#### LEARNING DELIVERY AND SWRB CORE COMPETENCIES

The final set of questions (14–20) gathered participants' perspectives on learning delivery modes and their role or lack thereof in building the SWRB core competencies (CCs). The responses provided an in-depth perspective on several issues, such as participants' views on which learning modes were most effective for building CCs, and areas of development for each learning option considering the CCs. A significant number of the respondents, 60%, indicated that, ideally, all CCs were best taught in person. However, they also stated that some CCs required in-person learning more than others. For instance, the CCs about working with Māori, diversity and inclusivity, respect, communication, collaboration and professionalism could only be taught (effectively) in person (and with regular attendance). The more theory-based CCs could be taught using a mixed framework. None of the participants mentioned a specific CC that could be explicitly learned online. The rest of the participants, 40%, stated that most skills required to build the competencies could be effectively taught through a blended learning mode or using mixed frameworks. Most noted the changing times, which required an update of the social work education curriculum and delivery, and that the effective building of CCs was not solely dependent on the delivery mode. Student, teacher and curriculum factors all played significant roles. Samples of the responses are provided in Table 4.

In the first category of questions, students were asked to indicate which CCs could only be taught using a specific learning delivery mode, to provide some comparison. The two options compared were 'Online' and 'In-person'.

**TABLE 4. SAMPLE VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE LEARNING DELIVERY MODES AND CORE COMPETENCIES.**

Learning delivery mode	Core competencies	Sample responses
The best mode to teach – ‘Online’	None – specifically	<p><i>No. Many skills CAN be learnt online – but none can ONLY be taught online.</i></p> <p><i>No, I believe whatever skills that can be learned online can also be learned in class, if not even better in class, but being mindful of what has been happening lately, online learning is a big help to people like me who cannot always attend class due to outside commitments.</i></p> <p><i>No, you cannot build relationships or grasp the full meaning of what is being taught.</i></p> <p><i>These competencies cannot be learned online because you need to grasp their significance or applicability online, because most of us are by ourselves at home.</i></p>
The best mode to teach – ‘In person’	<p>Most, but not all</p> <p>Examples: Competence 1 Competence 2 Competence 3 Competence 7 Competence 9 Competence 10</p>	<p><i>I believe ... these can only be learned in person in a classroom setting. My reason is that when we studied the core competencies and had our lecturer break down each one, we got a chance to feel the emotions in the room and observe how everyone was reacting, and we understood the importance each one has within the field.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, all of them as they require engagement to understand their concepts and how to apply them fully.</i></p> <p><i>Because it is 2022, anything can be learned online, but if one competency were only understood in person, it would be 1. Competence to practise social work with Māori. I believe this because it revolves around maintaining relationships. I think what comes to mind is the phrase Kanohi ki te kanohi, which means ‘face to face’, which emphasises communicating and being there.</i></p> <p><i>Not at all; learning comes in all shapes and forms. Conversation helps build competency in these values, and those conversations can happen online, in person, on lunch breaks, in reading/watching content or in group settings.</i></p> <p><i>In-class learning prepares you to be a social worker because you must speak in front of people and collaborate.</i></p>
Use of ‘Both’ deliveries	Varied responses	<p><i>It was challenging. I only remembered a little information, even when writing notes during the online sessions. If I sat in class and wrote no notes, I still remembered more than being in a Zoom class.</i></p> <p><i>I think this all depends on individual learning styles and commitment levels. I have learned a lot online ... I prefer online learning as I have a lot going on, but I know I learn better in class, so I try to balance and do both when possible. Lectures are awesome and always available for us students whenever we need help, so that would be one of my highlights. The respect the lecturers show us students is a great example for us to go out into the field and show the same respect to others we work with. Some difficulties will only be with me, trying to balance work, home and uni, but at the same time, this should prepare me for the field as my personal experience hopefully will help someone else.</i></p> <p><i>Am I competent in the sense that I can work alongside families and people as a social worker? I do not think Zoom online learning hinders people’s ability to work collaboratively with others or gain a sense of empathy. The hindrance may be that I need to balance things better and manage my time to be more efficient with assessments.</i></p> <p><i>The rigidity of in-person classes mirrors the workplace. In-class dynamics also reflect workplace dynamics.</i></p> <p><i>A difficulty ... in learning everything online ... would be working on emotions for me – depending on the severity of the future client’s situation.</i></p>

## AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT: LEARNING DELIVERY MODES

In the final set of questions, participants were asked to comment on areas that could be improved for each of the three learning delivery modes, considering the CCs required of a new social work graduate. The areas identified are tabulated below, with sample comments from participants for comparison. The common areas identified included ensuring that class and content are engaging and interactive, and have clear structure and guidelines, consistency, and capability building for staff and students on technology use.

**TABLE 5. SAMPLE VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT FOR EACH LEARNING DELIVERY MODE.**

Online learning	In-person learning	Blended
<p><i>Zoom over Echo360 – can chat back-and-forth and includes group work.</i></p> <p><i>Interactive content: There needs to be a lot more engagement online. I understand it is hard for lectures to cater to people online and in person, but if we go entirely online, lessons need to be interactive to give students more reason to join/participate. Some content would also have to be adjusted as some content does not deliver well through Zoom or Echo (content with triggers, etc.).</i></p> <p><i>Shorter sessions: Different timetables/timings shorter classes with more engaging and interactive classes.</i></p> <p><i>Clear guidelines on engagement and relationships: There would need to be more rules and expectations around engagement (i.e., cameras on, being involved in discussions).</i></p> <p><i>Capability development: ‘How to’ online teaching and online learning courses for lecturers and students.</i></p> <p><i>Regular checks: I think regular tests check in with students to see if the information has been comprehended well. Not academic tests but rather casual tests to see where everyone is sitting in terms of learning.</i></p> <p><i>Access to online learning resources: Ensuring that all social work graduates have access to a device and the internet to access online learning.</i></p>	<p><i>Synchronous recording: Recordings of every class are helpful in case students are sick and cannot come in.</i></p> <p><i>Interactive class material and activities: More tutorials done at earlier times, more group work, discussions, and interactive lectures. Class activities linked to the lectures given.</i></p> <p><i>Practical work: Better ways to engage and excite students to attend class. Interactive learning styles. Perhaps off-site visits to facilities or organisations. Things that keep students interested and wanting to show up. Incentives.</i></p> <p><i>Motivation and morale: I think there would need to be some work around motivating students to return to classes and engage.</i></p>	<p><i>Improve technology: The microphone systems for online learning could be improved because some class input is lost due to the sound not being picked up.</i></p> <p><i>Clear course structure and timetable: If blended mode were to happen, then the course outline structure would need to be strong to make it easier for students to organise themselves.</i></p> <p><i>Capability to facilitate both: The morale would have to be stronger to engage both online and in-person learners simultaneously ... You could say classes are currently operated in a ‘blended mode’, and I do not think it works very well. Class sizes are small, and those online have little to no interaction with each other or the class.</i></p> <p><i>Revise courses: Specific classes could be done online (classes where there is less group work) or consider people’s upcoming timetables.</i></p> <p><i>More practical work: More exercises, group work, and home assignments for the students to compensate for the gap of needing to be present in in-person learning.</i></p> <p><i>Equal access: To ensure everyone gets fair treatment of learning and required support.</i></p> <p><i>Regular checks: Regular informal check-ins to see where students are tracking in terms of class work/assignment prep, etc. Having a date when drafts for essays, etc. need to be in so lecturers can check and give feedback before final submission.</i></p> <p><i>Consistency: Improvements between the information taught in person and online. Ensure the lecturers make the same information available in both places and easy to access online.</i></p>

## Discussion of Findings

To practise social work in Aotearoa New Zealand, newly qualified graduates must demonstrate the core competencies outlined by the SWRB (Beddoe et al., 2018; Social Workers Registration Board, 2023b). Developing these competencies requires the complex interweaving of specific skills and knowledge alongside other overarching competencies, such as self-reflection and self-awareness (Ballantyne et al., 2022; Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). Social work education, including the curriculum, pedagogies and policies, and educators, plays a significant role in supporting students to learn and build these competencies (Ballantyne et al., 2019; Beddoe, 2014, 2018; Beddoe et al., 2018). Although there is an ongoing debate about the most effective learning delivery model for social work education, significant evidence shows a preference for face-to-face or physical in-person classroom learning, which has been regarded as the ‘traditional’ mode by staff and students (Goldingay et al., 2020; Knowles, 2007; Lee et al., 2019; Levin et al., 2018; Price Banks

& Vergez, 2022). The 2020–22 nationwide lockdowns and physical-distancing protocols to prevent the spread of the coronavirus challenged this 'normality' in several ways, specifically the shift to remote and online learning and a substantial increase in self-directed learning. In social work education, this raised concerns that students would leave tertiary education less qualified and less competent to practice social work without the 'conventional' degree of face-to-face and physical-presence pedagogy (Council on Social Work Education, 2020; Crisp et al., 2021; Kenny, 2022; Mathias, 2022; Morley & Clarke, 2020; Smoyer et al., 2020).

According to the data gathered in this research, the participants, who are also soon-to-be newly qualified social workers, negated this assumption. Based on their views on what makes a competent social worker, they disagreed that they would be less skilled and knowledgeable to practice social work upon completing their qualification. Furthermore, although considered ideal, in-person delivery was not a primary factor in learning and building the required CCs. Findings show that, irrespective of the delivery mode, the most impactful delivery is characterised by engaging and interactive content, practical activities and group work, ways of increasing and checking retention, clear structure and guidelines, consistency, flexibility, and capability building for staff and students. These findings align with research conducted post-Covid-19 (Drea, 2021; Jack, 2023; Kourgiantakis et al., 2020). The research also highlighted the realities, including many pressures outside of study, that social work students face. These were explicitly mentioned as challenges to regular in-person attendance and the main reasons for preferring a delivery mode with a level of flexibility. Before the pandemic, these challenges had been highlighted in research, often contributing to non-completion of qualification, poor attendance and adverse mental health outcomes (Cox et al., 2022; Hulme-Moir et al., 2022; Meadows et al., 2020).

Accordingly, most participants chose blended (online and in-person) as their preferred learning delivery mode in the post-Covid-19 environment. It is evident from the data that most students experienced difficulties with fully online learning. In addition to access to connectivity (wi-fi) and digital devices, distraction in the home environment and the limited or lack of technological capability for students and staff were identified as barriers. Accordingly, targeted training was suggested as an area of improvement. Nevertheless, some participants noted that online learning improved their technological skills and strengthened their independent learning skills. Additionally, online learning also enables students to go back and review class content, which means they are not missing out. Therefore, it is a promising option, but not alone (Brown, 2022; Gad, 2023; Kenny, 2022; Mathias, 2022). Participants were also critical of some aspects of in-person learning. For instance, poor attendance impacted classroom discussions. In some cases, it was observed that the lectures lacked structure, were less interactive and were not engaging. This could discourage students from prioritising in-person delivery because they perceived no difference between what they learned in person and online (Gerritsen, 2023). Therefore, they recommended revising course content delivered in person to make it more interactive, engaging and better structured. Because of attendance issues, many suggested that flexibility must be monitored and clearly defined to maintain routine, consistency and

engagement. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that effective use of blended delivery (online and in-person) requires addressing both student and staff factors (East et al., 2014; Knowles, 2007; Lawrence & Abel, 2013). Findings show that for any delivery mode, but online especially, the capability and skills of the facilitator (teacher) are linked to improving interaction, engagement and participation in the learning environment. The curriculum must also be revised to align with the learning environment, such as shorter sessions for online learning. However, the extent to which these can be achieved depends on broader institutional resources, guidelines and policies; for instance, quality technology and equipment for online learning, fair workloads for staff, and accessible training for staff and students (Jeffrey et al., 2012).

## Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that the social work education environment has changed since 2020 because of Covid-19. The ongoing debate about the most effective model for delivering social work education, considering the nature of the profession and the competencies required to practice, has been brought to the fore. The issue is even more prominent in contexts such as in Aotearoa New Zealand, where the dominant perspective is that the competencies required for social work practice are best taught in a physical classroom and face to face. This perspective was challenged by the sudden shift to remote and online learning, and the many challenges students and staff faced after the mandated lockdowns were lifted. The new learning environment has highlighted that building competencies to practice social work requires more than a prescribed social work curriculum. It entails a complex relationship between the curriculum, pedagogies, students, teachers and institutional factors. Overall, the data shows that rethinking social work education delivery models is inevitable post-Covid-19 (Crisp et al., 2021; Fronek et al., 2023). Carefully designed flexible education delivery models with technology integration would be most effective in the current unpredictable environment to safeguard and minimise learning disruptions.

Some limitations concerning the reported findings need to be considered. First, this was a class-modelled study within a specific course, meaning it had to be designed within the scope of approved learning outcomes and content. Therefore, it cannot provide information covering and explaining all variables determining whether students would have the required competencies to practice social work. Second, the study was based on the experiences of social work students who, because of Covid-19, did not have the experience of a 'usual' (14 weeks in a non-Covid-19 environment) face-to-face delivery at Unitec. They were in class for only four weeks before the mandated lockdowns. Also, the students had no experience with the core competencies in practice. Therefore, the findings and conclusions from these participants can only be cautiously generalised to all social work students and learning delivery models in social work education. Generalisations should be made



with caution.

Despite these limitations, the study's findings provide experience-based information showing that the learning environment within which social work education is delivered has changed significantly since February 2020, highlighting the importance of critically rethinking social work education delivery models. The mix of teaching (the study being part of a course) and experience (of the social work students) provides confidence that the findings are representative of some of the key people in the field of social work, namely social work educators and future front-line social work practitioners, which attests to the study's relevance. The overview of literature and research from other countries and social work education contexts allows for some comparisons, demonstrating the topical nature of the issue. The findings from this study may benefit programmes and lecturers in designing practical and contextual learning delivery models in the 'new normal' learning environment.

## Recommendations

Based on the above findings and discussion, the following 'thoughts for the future' (recommendations) are offered for social work education providers to consider:

- This research was conducted before qualification completion. It would be interesting to investigate the views of these students in actual social work practice environments. Further research with newly qualified social workers who graduated post-Covid-19 is recommended.
- Courses that already do, such as Unitec's BSP, should continue to provide class recordings. However, this should be consistent throughout courses in the programme, such as using the same platform. The findings show that this is beneficial for revision and catching up with content, considering the many pressing responsibilities that most students juggle with their studies. Improving this requires access to quality technology equipment and targeted training for staff and students.
- To provide a level of monitored flexibility recommended by the participants, revise course content and structure to include a mix of in-person and online delivery. This is based on participants' observations that the learning varies in each course (linked to CCs). While some courses and their content do not require weekly in-person attendance, some do. The delivery of these courses could be revised accordingly, and the revised schedule and structure clearly communicated to students in advance. This might also address the attendance issue identified by the participants.

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# Appendix 1. Social Work Registration Board Core Competencies

## THE SWRB TEN CORE COMPETENCE STANDARDS

A competent social worker must demonstrate:

### 1. Competence to practise social work with Māori

The social worker demonstrates this competence by:

- demonstrating knowledge of the Treaty of Waitangi, te reo Māori and tikanga Māori;
- articulating how the wider context of Aotearoa New Zealand both historically and currently can impact on practice.
- Te Rangatiranga: Maintaining relationships that are mana enhancing, self-determining, respectful, mindful of cultural uniqueness, and acknowledge cultural identity.
- Te Manaakitanga: Utilising practice behaviours that ensure mauri ora with a safe space, being mana enhancing and respectful, acknowledging boundaries and meeting obligations.
- Te Whanaungatanga: Engaging in practice that is culturally sustaining, strengthens relationships, is mutually contributing and connecting, and encourages warmth.

### 2. Competence to practise social work with ethnic and cultural groups in Aotearoa New Zealand

The social worker:

- acknowledges and values a range of world views including divergent views within and between ethnic and cultural groups;
- understands that culture is not static but changes over time;
- demonstrates awareness and self-critique of their own cultural beliefs, values, historical positioning and how this impacts on their social work practice with their clients from other cultural backgrounds;
- critically analyses how the culture and social work approaches and policies of their employing organisation may compromise culturally safe practice;
- demonstrates knowledge of culturally relevant assessments, intervention strategies and techniques;
- engages with people, groups and communities in ways that respect family, language, cultural, spiritual and relational markers.

3. Competence to work respectfully and inclusively with diversity and difference in practice

The social worker:

- demonstrates knowledge of diversity between and within different cultures, including ethnicity, disability, social and economic status, age, sexuality, gender and transgender, faiths and beliefs;
- demonstrates sufficient self-awareness and is able to critically reflect on own personal values, cultures, knowledge and beliefs to manage the influences of personal biases when practising;
- can respectfully and effectively communicate and engage with a diverse range of people.

4. Competence to promote the principles of human rights and social and economic justice

The social worker:

- understands, has a commitment to, and advocates for human, legal and civil rights, social and economic justice, and self-determination;
- understands and challenges mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and also has the knowledge, skills and an understanding of how to appropriately leverage those which enhance power and privilege;
- respects and upholds the rights, dignity, values and autonomy of people and creates an environment of respect and understanding.

5. Competence to engage in practice which promotes social change

The social worker:

- critically analyses policies, systems and structures and understands how they impact on people, groups, communities and wider society;
- advocates the need for social change to provide equity and fairness for all;
- collaborates with others to generate new knowledge that will contribute to the improvement of peoples' lives, communities and wider society;
- contributes to policy making to make systems and structures responsive to those who use them.

6. Competence to understand and articulate social work theories, indigenous practice knowledge, other relevant theories, and social work practice methods and models

The social worker:

- demonstrates a critical understanding of specific social work theories and other relevant theories and integrates this into bicultural social work practice;
- demonstrates an understanding of human behaviour and integrates this into social work practice;

- demonstrates an understanding of and is able to utilise a variety of social work practice methods, models and interventions whilst drawing upon a wider theoretical framework;
- critically reflects on practice and utilises relevant theories and methods of practice.

7. Competence to apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgements

The social worker:

- can distinguish, appraise and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including new information and communication technology, research-based knowledge and practice wisdom;
- engages in research-informed practice and practice-informed research;
- demonstrates the ability to work autonomously and make independent judgements from a well-informed social work position and seeks guidance when necessary;
- demonstrates effective oral, written and electronic communication.

8. Competence to promote empowerment of people and communities to enable positive change

The social worker:

- is compassionate, empathetic and respectful and seeks to understand others to adequately assess their needs;
- demonstrates resilience and the ability to manage interpersonal conflict and challenges that arise in social work practice;
- facilitates and promotes clients' active participation in decision making;
- effectively collaborates and engages with others and works in partnership with clients to gain access to resources;
- reflects on their own social work practice to enable people to realise their potential and participate in their communities.

9. Competence to practice within legal and ethical boundaries of the social work profession

The social worker:

- adheres to the SWRB Code of Conduct, any workplace code of conduct and the professional Code of Ethics;
- identifies and manages ethical dilemmas and issues that arise in practice and seeks supervision or guidance;
- recognises and responds appropriately to actual or potential conflicts of interest;
- demonstrates an understanding of relevant legislation, policies and systems which govern practice and performs any statutory duties with diligence and care;



- upholds the right to privacy and confidentiality of personal information and informs clients of the situations where the information may need to be disclosed;
- keeps clear and accurate records and ensures these records are made at the same time as the events being recorded or as soon as possible afterwards.

10. Represents the social work profession with integrity and professionalism

The social worker:

- demonstrates active promotion and support of the social work profession, acts with integrity and ensures accountability;
- attends to professional roles and responsibilities with diligence, timeliness and care, acknowledges that social work positions carry power and uses authority responsibly;
- behaves in a professional manner, maintains personal and professional boundaries and is accountable for all actions and decisions;
- knows the limits of their own practice and experience, practices appropriate self-care and seeks advice where necessary;
- actively participates in supervision, continual professional development and career-long learning.

(Social Workers Registration Board, 2023b)

## Appendix 2. Research Methods course descriptor (NZQA-approved version)

CSTU7917: Research Methods					
Course number:	CSTU7917	Level:	7	Credits:	15
Main programme:	Bachelor of Social Practice			Compulsory	
Pathway(s):					
Requisites / Restrictions:	Nil				
Other programmes:					
NZSCED field of study:		Delivery mode:			

Hours directed:	Hours in the workplace:	Hours self-directed:	Total learning hours:
63		87	150

### OUTCOME STATEMENT:

This course enables students to explore an area of interest for the literature and to participate in the development and implementation of a research project of relevance to social practice. Issues of cultural competence and kaupapa Māori research perspectives and processes contribute to all learning outcomes. CSTU7919 Research Practicum runs alongside this course and the first two learning objectives are achieved during Research Methods, and last two within Research Practicum.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES:

On successful completion of this course students will be able to:

1. Critically examine research literature relating to a chosen question or hypothesis within the field of social practice, including Māori, Pacific and Indigenous methodologies.
2. Demonstrate the application of kaupapa Māori principles within a research methodology and method designed to research a social practice priority.
3. Demonstrate in a practical exercise an understanding of the culturally appropriate use of basic quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis.

### LEARNING AND TEACHING:

Lectures, reading assignments, tutorials, in-class exercises, practical work, data analysis, presentations, group discussions, self and peer assessment in formative assessment only.

### TOPICS:

Historical, philosophical and cultural underpinnings of research paradigms, methodologies (qualitative, quantitative, mixed, participatory action research, Māori, Pacific and indigenous), methods (interview, focus group, case study,

questionnaire, survey, card sort, observational), experimental design, research ethics, research praxis, interview process, research analysis (thematic, semiotic, statistical), tools of analysis (analysis software – e.g., Excel, SPSS).

**ASSESSMENT:**

Weighting	Nature of assessment	Learning outcomes
35%	Partial literature review: Describe and justify a chosen research topic within the field of social practice (1500 words)	LO 1
30%	In a group presentation present a research methodology reflecting kaupapa Māori principles and a method that could be applied to a social practice priority	LO 1, 2
35%	Analyse and apply a culturally appropriate interpretation to qualitative and quantitative data sets related to a social practice research priority (1500-2000 words)	LO 1, 3

## Appendix 3. Survey questions

Research Title: Social Practice Students' Perspectives on the Correlation Between Ako Delivery and Competency Requirements in Future Practice as a Social Worker

Kia ora CSTU7917 students,

As part of an assessment for this class (Assignment 3), we are collectively conducting research on the above topic using the Participatory Action Research methodology and online-survey questionnaire method.

This research study is provoked by the growing concerns and debates among some social work educators and practitioners, asking whether social practice graduates who did not attend in-person lectures regularly will have achieved the competencies required to enter this crucial and demanding profession.

As future social work graduates who have experienced in-person and online learning periods, your voices are critical in this debate. Therefore, you are invited to respond to this anonymous online survey of 22 questions on this topic.

Thank you for completing the survey, and we are looking forward to your analysis of this data as part of your Assignment 3. If you have questions about the survey, please email your lecturer – Dr Irene Ayallo (iayallo@unitec.ac.nz).

*Please complete the survey by November 1, 2022, at 11.30 am.*

*NB: Please remember that this is a research survey on a topic, not a 'feedback' survey on a particular course, etc.*

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS: PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS THAT WILL TELL US A BIT MORE ABOUT YOU

1. Which ethnic group or groups do you identify with? Tick all that apply (Māori, Pasifika, NZ European [Pākehā], Asian, African, Indian, Middle Eastern, Other [specify]).
2. What is your age (18–24; 25–34; 35–44; 45–54; 55–65; 65+)?
3. What is your enrolment status at Unitec? Part-time student; full-time student.
4. Are you currently in employment alongside studies? Yes; no.
5. If you are currently employed, what is your employment status? Full-time; part-time; casual.
6. Please tell us about any other pressing responsibilities (that require a significant amount of time) that you have alongside study. For example, do you have family, community, cultural, or church responsibilities? Tell us more about the nature of these responsibilities, i.e., what are you required to do?
7. In the last 12 weeks of Semester 2, which of these modes of learning have

you utilised the MOST? Online/Zoom; in-person; both (give more details how).

DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS: PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS THAT WILL TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR LEARNING EXPERIENCE DURING THE LAST TWO YEARS AND YOUR PREFERRED LEARNING MODE.

1. How would you describe your participation in learning/class in the last years? Very little; irregular/sporadic; active; I come and go; none.
2. Please explain your response above (Question 8). For example, if you choose active, what does that look like? If you choose sporadically, what does that look like?
3. Please tell us about your experience of fully online learning, i.e., what works well for you? What does not work well for you? And why?
4. Please tell us about your experience of fully in-person lecture learning, i.e., what works well for you? What does not work well for you? And why?
5. Please tell us about your experience of blended learning (combination of online and in-person classes), i.e., what works well for you? What does not work well for you? And why?
6. Based on your experience, which mode of learning works best for you, i.e., online (Zoom/Echo 360); in-person; blended; or none (please specify)?
7. Based on your experience, please tell us why the chosen delivery above (Question 13) works well for you. Please give us some reasons, i.e., that you have learnt a lot while online, etc.

EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS: PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS THAT WILL TELL US MORE ABOUT THE LEARNING MODE EXPERIENCE VERSUS THE EXPECTATIONS OF MEETING THE SWRB CORE COMPETENCIES

1. Based on what you have learnt in the programme, what are the most critical skills required of a graduate social worker/practitioner? For example, in reference to the SWRB core competencies: <https://swrb.govt.nz/practice/core-competence-standards/>
2. In your view, looking at the SWRB core competencies, are there skills and knowledge that can ONLY be learnt through regular in-person class mode? Please explain your response.
3. In your view, looking at the SWRB core competencies, are there skills and knowledge that can ONLY be learnt through online (i.e., Zoom) class mode? Please explain your response.
4. Thinking back to Questions 7 and 14 (your preferred delivery mode during the last two years) and looking at the SWRB core competencies, how do you think it has (or is) preparing you to be a competent social practitioner? What are some highlights? What are some difficulties?

SOLUTION QUESTIONS: PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS THAT WILL TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR VIEW OF WHAT WORKS WELL, WHAT DOES NOT WORK WELL AND HOW THESE CAN BE IMPROVED.

1. If social work education was to occur fully online (i.e., Zoom or Echo 360 only), what things need to be done/improved, so that future social work graduates fully meet the SWRB competency requirements?
2. If social work education was to occur fully in person (i.e., in class only), what things need to be done/improved, so that future social work graduates fully meet the SWRB competency requirements?
3. If social work education was to occur in blended mode (i.e., both in person and online), what things need to be done/improved so that future social work graduates fully meet the SWRB competency requirements?
4. Any final or additional comments on supporting future social practice students to effectively meet the competencies required in future social work practice?

Thank you for all your responses. These will be collated by the lecturer and downloaded for your analysis (Assignment 3). For details of Assignment 3, please refer to the descriptor on Moodle: <https://moodle.unitec.ac.nz/mod/folder/view.php?id=385163>

