



# 2025 Skills Matter Programme

Student feedback report for all funded courses

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## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and thank all students who completed the 2025 Skills Matter end-of-year survey. We also recognise the commitment of programme providers, Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Whitireia, Te Whatu Ora Waitaha Canterbury, The University of Auckland (UOA), the University of Otago (UOO), Massey University, and Te Whatu Ora Waitematā. Finally, we acknowledge Te Whatu Ora for funding and supporting the Skills Matter programme.

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PO Box 108-244, Symonds St, Auckland, New Zealand Web [www.tepou.co.nz](http://www.tepou.co.nz)

Email: [info@tepou.co.nz](mailto:info@tepou.co.nz)

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# Key highlights

## Programme Overview

The Skills Matter programme, managed by Te Pou on behalf of Te Whatu Ora, funds providers to deliver post-entry clinical vocational training for mental health and addiction clinicians. This report summarises feedback from students who completed an end-of-year survey about their course experiences.

## Survey Response

A total of 603 students were invited to participate in the survey, and 220 responded, giving a 36 percent response rate.

### Respondents profile

- The largest group of respondents were registered nurses (58 percent), followed by social workers (22 percent).
- Respondents were based across Aotearoa, with the highest proportion from Te Toka Tumai Auckland (22 percent).
- The cohort was ethnically diverse, and includes NZ European (41 percent), Asian (22 percent), Māori (19 percent), and Pacific peoples (14 percent).

## Key outcomes

### Impact of learning

- Most students expressed high satisfaction, with 89 percent agreeing the course was relevant and beneficial to their work.
- Confidence in clinical practice increased, from 25 percent before training to 78 percent after.
- Confidence in working with Māori rose from 41 percent to 72 percent, and confidence in working with tāngata whai ora and whānau increased from 33 percent to 83 percent.
- Almost all respondents (98 percent) agreed the programme increased their knowledge and skills.
- Eighty percent agreed that the learning enhanced their employment opportunities.
- Job satisfaction improved for 80 percent of respondents, and confidence in contributing to team discussions rose from 33 percent to 73 percent.

### Impact of funding

- While new graduate nurses employed by Te Whatu Ora are required to participate in the NESP programme, financial support still played a crucial role, with 75 percent of all respondents indicating they would not have been able to study without the Skills Matter funding.

- Students shared that this support eased financial pressure, allowed them to focus on their learning, and helped them balance work and study, while also contributing to better outcomes for tāngata whai ora.

#### Application of learning

- Almost all respondents (90 percent) agreed their course included adequate practical experience, 92 percent were able to integrate new skills into their mahi, and 85 percent shared their learning with colleagues, extending the impact beyond individual practice.
- Respondents shared their learning led to strengthened clinical confidence, professional growth and leadership, enhanced cultural responsiveness, improved outcomes for tāngata whai ora, personal growth and sense of support, and broader knowledge integration.

#### Challenges and facilitators

- Challenges remain, with 51 percent reporting difficulty balancing work, life, and study, and 46 percent saying clinical workload was too high to allow time for study.
- Students valued supervision, peer support, and culturally responsive teaching, and praised lived-experience sessions and practical learning opportunities.
- Areas for improvement include clearer communication on extensions and feedback, more flexible assessments, streamlined content, and enhanced accessibility through hybrid and regional options.

### Conclusion and future directions

The 2025 Skills Matter programme continues to strengthen Aotearoa's mental health and addiction workforce. High satisfaction, increased confidence, and improved knowledge highlight the importance of continued funding.

Future priorities include enhanced supervision and wellbeing support, embedding Māori models and tikanga, sustaining lived experience teaching, improving course flexibility, expanding hybrid delivery, supporting employers to provide study leave, and clear career pathways. Continuing the role of Te Pou in monitoring feedback and improving communication will ensure the programme remains responsive and impactful.

## Introduction

Enhancing health outcomes in Aotearoa relies on a strong, well-supported mental health and addiction workforce delivering high-quality, culturally responsive, and evidence-based care (Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, 2024). This work aligns with Target One of the Mental Health and Addiction Workforce Plan 2024–2027 (Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, 2025), which focuses on growing, supporting, and retaining a skilled workforce. The Skills Matter programme contributes to this target by expanding access to post-entry clinical training and strengthening workforce capability nationwide, in particular with the NESP programmes.

The Skills Matter programme, managed by Te Pou on behalf of Te Whatu Ora, funds providers to deliver post-entry clinical vocational training for mental health and addiction clinicians. Programmes combine clinical and academic learning to support new entrants as they transition into practice and enable existing practitioners to advance their skills in high-priority areas. Students can study while working, ensuring practical experience is gained alongside formal learning.

In 2025, Skills Matter funded courses delivered by Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Whitireia, Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand Waitaha Canterbury, The University of Auckland (UOA), University of Otago (UOO), Massey University, and Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand Waitematā. Funded programmes included:

- New Entry to Specialist Practice: Mental Health and Addiction Nursing
- Postgraduate Certificate in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
- Clinical Leadership in Nursing Practice
- Core Skills for Infant, Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Addiction
- Assessment and management of co-existing substance use and mental health
- New Entry to Specialist Practice: Allied Mental Health and Addiction

The Skills Matter programme has quality assurance processes in place to ensure providers deliver core programme components as intended. Students are invited to complete an end-of-year survey about their course experiences. This report presents a summary and analysis of survey findings for all Skills Matter-funded courses delivered in 2025, along with considerations for the future.

## Methods

The students were invited to complete a voluntary end-of-year survey at the end of the course (see Appendix A for survey questions). The survey consisted of both closed and open-ended questions which covered topics including:

- satisfaction with the programme
- support received for studying

- challenges during study
- opportunities to apply learning to practice
- career development
- results from training – knowledge, and confidence
- results from training – practice change.

Microsoft Excel was used to analyse quantitative data and MAXQDA software for qualitative data.

## Response rate

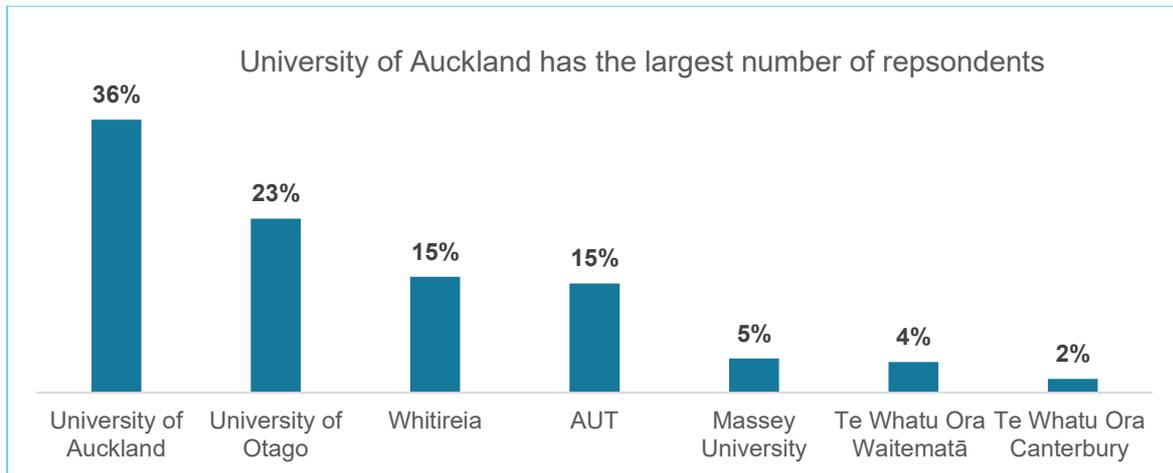
A total of 220 of 603 students responded to the online survey. This gave an overall response rate of 36 percent and a moderate level of confidence that respondents' views reflect all Skills Matter-funded students (see Table 1. for the breakdown of response rate by programmes).

Table 1. Survey responses number and response rate per programme

Course	No. of students by course	No. of responses by course	% of responses by course	% of total responses
<b>NESP Nursing</b>	313	87	28%	<b>40%</b>
<b>Postgraduate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy</b>	64	44	69%	<b>20%</b>
<b>NESP Allied</b>	97	37	38%	<b>17%</b>
<b>Core skills for specialist practice in infant, child, and adolescent mental health and addiction</b>	49	17	35%	<b>8%</b>
<b>Clinical leadership in nursing practice</b>	48	24	50%	<b>11%</b>
<b>Assessment and management of co-existing substance use and mental health</b>	32	11	34%	<b>5%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>220</b>		<b>100%</b>

The largest proportion of respondents were enrolled through the University of Auckland (36 percent), followed by the University of Otago (23 percent), Whitireia (15 percent), and Auckland University of Technology (15 percent) (see Figure 1 for details). This distribution reflects the higher number of students enrolled at the University of Auckland. See Figure 1 for detailed breakdown.

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by course provider (220 respondents)



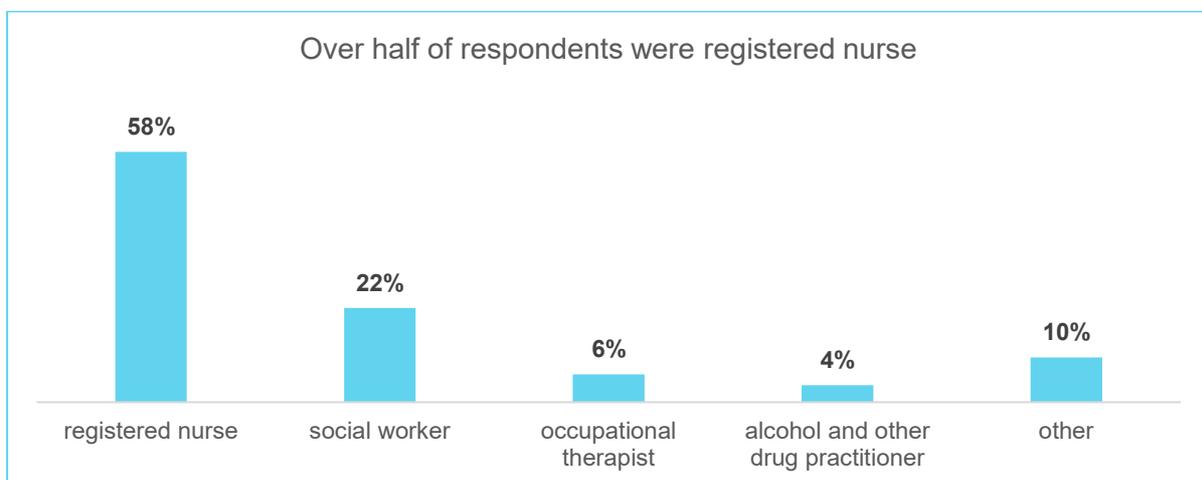
## Results

### Respondent profile

#### Professional roles

Over half of respondents (58 percent) were registered nurses, followed by social workers (22 percent), occupational therapists (6 percent), alcohol and other drug practitioners (4 percent), and others (10 percent). The 'others' category included psychologists, mental health clinicians, nurse educators, support workers, clinical leads, Kaiaarahi – Clinical Support, paediatricians, and doctors (Figure 2).

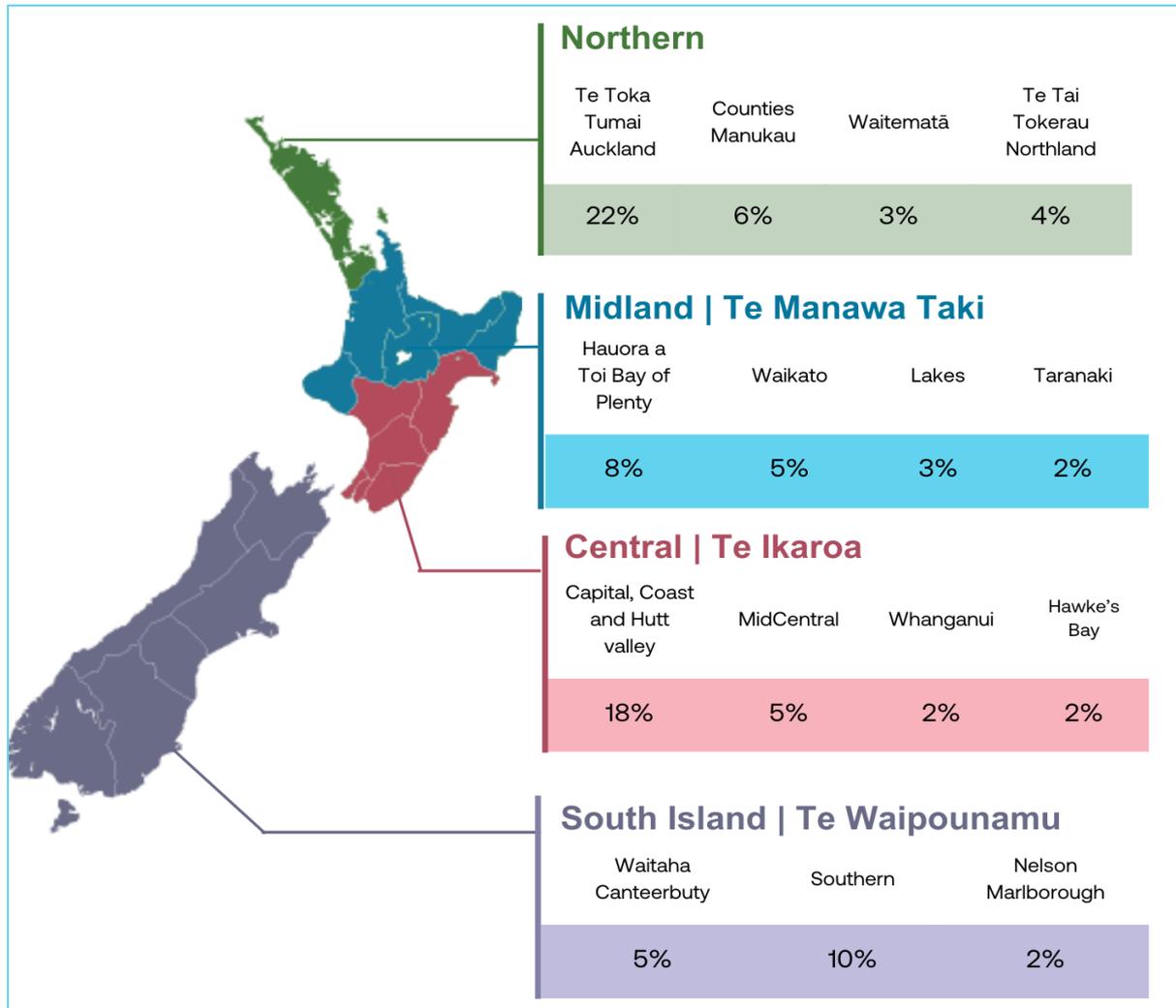
Figure 2. Respondents' professional roles (203 respondents)



## Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora region

Respondents were based across Aotearoa, with the highest proportion from Te Toka Tumai Auckland (22 percent), followed by Capital & Coast and Hutt Valley (18 percent), and Southern (10 percent). Participants could select multiple locations (See Figure 3 for further breakdown).

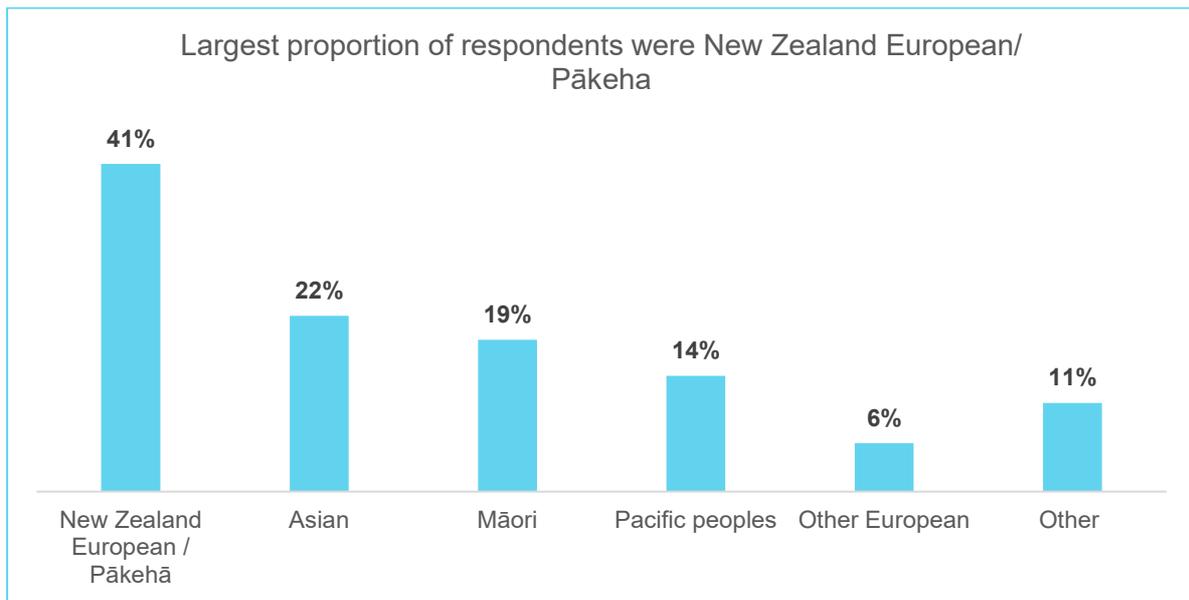
Figure 3. Respondents' work locations across Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora regions (203 respondents)



## Ethnicity

The majority of respondents were New Zealand European/ Pākehā (41 percent), followed by Asian (22 percent), Māori (19 percent) and Pacific peoples (14 percent) and other European (6 percent) and others (11 percent), which included African, Indian, American and Canadian (see Figure 4 for distribution).

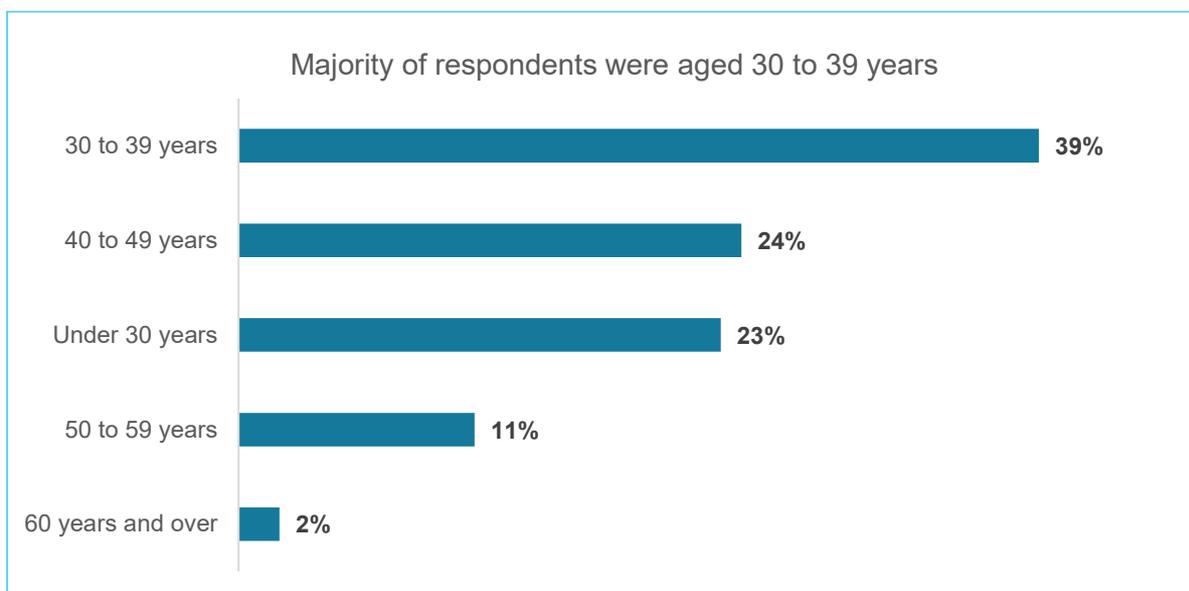
Figure 4. Respondents' ethnicity (202 respondents)



### Age distribution

Respondents varied in age, with the largest group aged 30–39 years (39 percent), followed by 40–49 years (24 percent), under 30 years (23 percent), and 50 years and older (13 percent). See Figure 5.

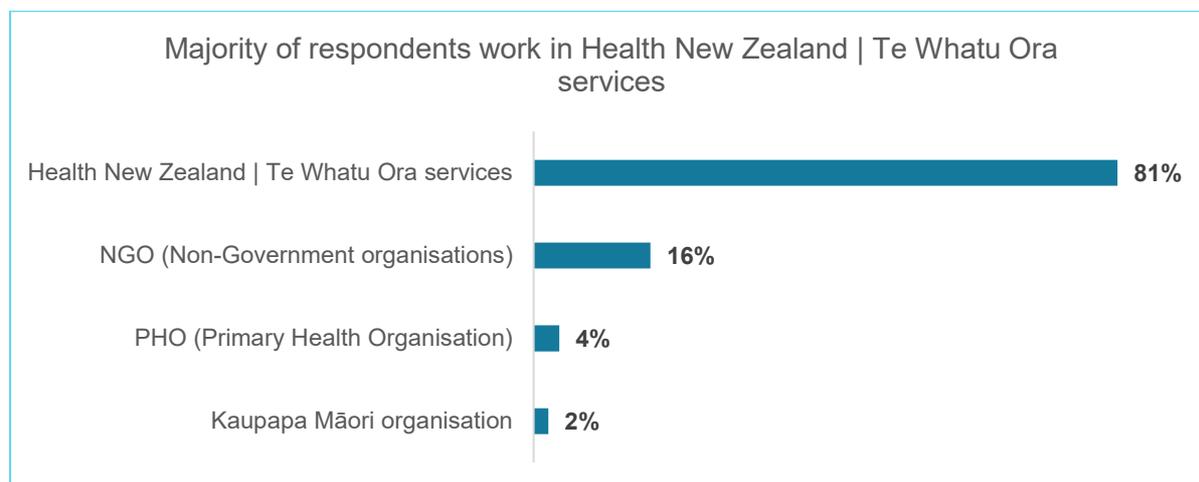
Figure 5. Respondents by age group (201 respondents)



## Employment settings

Most respondents (81 percent) worked in Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora services, with smaller proportions in NGOs (16 percent), PHOs (4 percent), and Kaupapa Māori organisations (2 percent) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Employment settings of respondents (198 respondents)



## Applying learning to practice

The majority of respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction with their course, with 89 percent reporting they were satisfied overall. An equal proportion (89 percent) agreed that the course content was relevant and applicable to their current work, highlighting the strong alignment between training and professional practice.

Figure 7. Percentage of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with course satisfaction and relevance to their work (218 respondents)

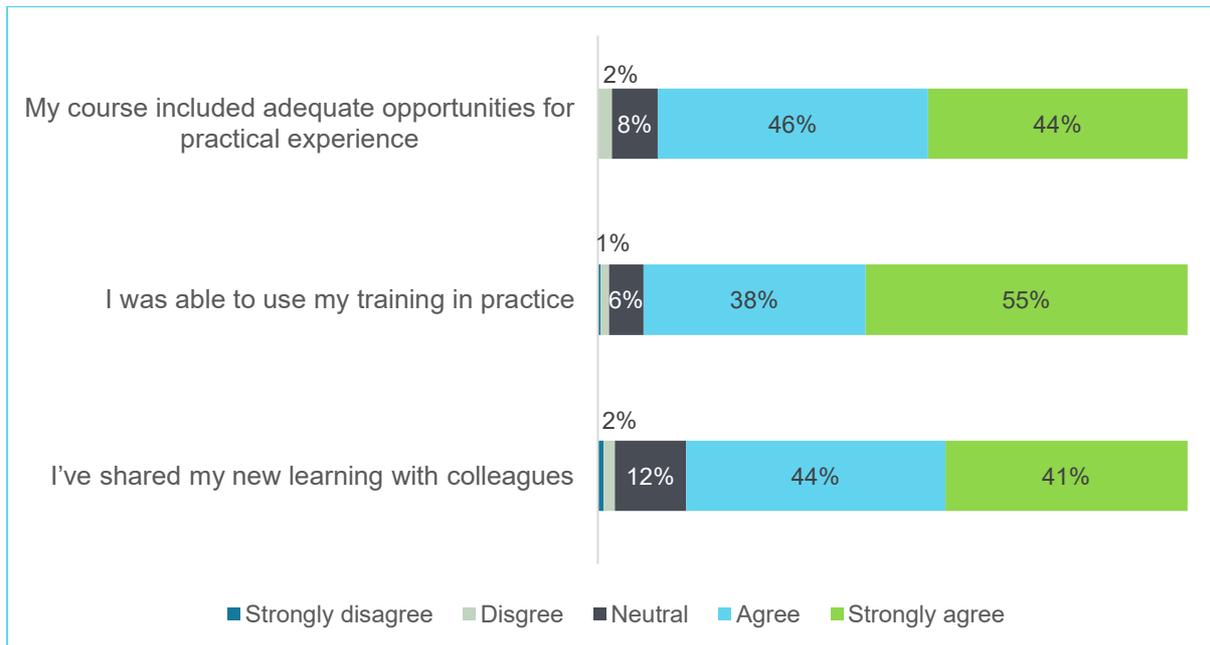


## Opportunities to apply learning to practice

Respondents rated statements on opportunities to apply learning in practice. Ninety percent agreed the course provided adequate practical experience, 93 percent were able to apply

the training in their work, and 85 percent shared their learning with colleagues (see Figure 8 for a detailed breakdown).

Figure 8. Respondents' rating on opportunities to apply learning in practice (207 respondents)



## Impact of programme

Respondents shared how their learning has impacted them and their mahi. This feedback is summarised under six key themes.



Strengthened clinical confidence



Professional growth, leadership, and career advancement



Enhanced cultural responsiveness and holistic practice



Improved outcomes for tāngata whai ora



Personal growth, and sense of support



Increased knowledge integration and broader perspective

## Strengthened clinical confidence

Participants consistently described increase in clinical confidence, improved assessments, formulation, use of therapeutic tools (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, talk therapy), and the ability to work safely with complexity. Many felt more assured in their clinical decision-making and day-to-day practice. Some examples from respondents:

“I feel so much more confident and have theory, skills and knowledge to draw on. I have developed group psychoeducation sessions and utilise CBT in individual work. My colleagues and team have observed huge development in my practice.” - Postgraduate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy student

“Improved confidence in self and the mahi I do. Allows me to guide others in our practice.” - Assessment and management of co-existing substance use and mental health student

“It has opened my eyes to the difference I can make, and given me confidence to advocate and encourage tāngata whai ora and their whanau to challenge medical opinions”- NESP student

“Increased confidence. Regrouped and revised skills I had 'shelved' during the years of my alternative nursing career.” - NESP student

This is reflected in respondents' ratings of confidence in clinical practice before and after their courses, showing an increase of more than threefold, from 25 percent before the training to 78 percent after the training. See figure 9.

Figure 9. Percentage of respondents rating themselves as confident or very confident in clinical practice before and after training (204 respondents)



## Professional growth, leadership, and career advancement

The programme enabled participants to step into senior roles, develop leadership confidence, pursue postgraduate study, carry out research, and progress towards advanced scopes like DAPAANZ membership and Nurse Practitioner pathways.

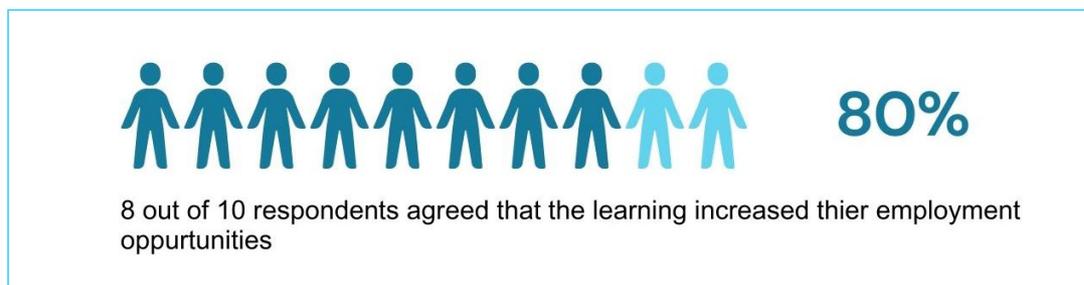
“Completing the clinical leadership program has enabled me to step into a more senior role at mahi with ease and confidence.” -Clinical leadership in nursing practice student

“The program has given me the confidence to advance in my career path to becoming a fully accredited clinician.” - Assessment and management of co-existing substance use and mental health

“It has given me the skills to carry out research, appraise it and improve the way we deliver care.” -Clinical leadership in nursing practice student

This positive feedback is reflected in survey ratings, with 80 percent of respondents agreeing that learning increased their employment opportunities.

Figure 10 Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed the learning increased their employment opportunities (207 respondents)

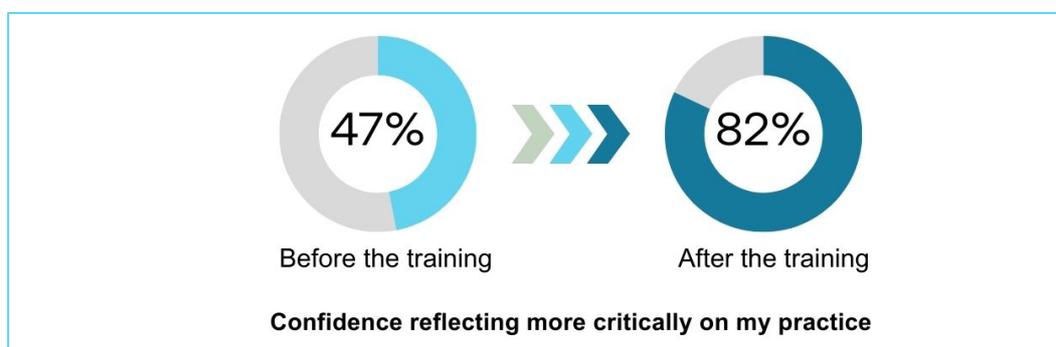


It also reflected in increased learners’ confidence in contributing meaningfully to team discussions, which more than doubled, from 33 percent before training to 73 percent after. Similarly, confidence in critically reflection on own practice rose from 47 percent to 82 percent, representing 1.7 times increase. See Figures 11 and 12.

Figure 11. Percentage of respondents rating themselves as confident or very confident in contributing more meaningfully to team discussions before and after training (204 respondents)



Figure 12. Percentage of respondents rating themselves as confident or very confident in reflecting more critically on their practice before and after training (204 respondents)



## Enhanced cultural responsiveness and holistic practice

Respondents shared their developing cultural responsiveness, deeper understanding of Māori models and tikanga, and greater ability to deliver person centred, holistic, recovery-focused care.

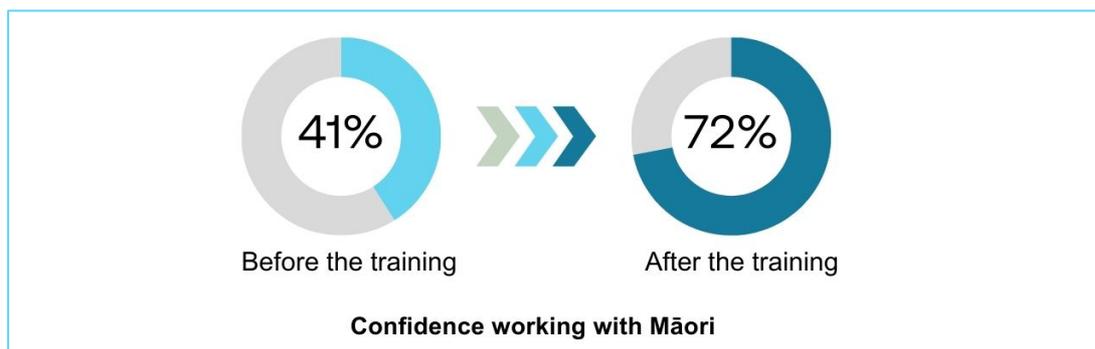
“This programme has strengthened my skills and confidence, helping me provide better, more culturally responsive care in my mahi.” NESP student

“It has been very helpful for clinical practice especially working with Māori population as an immigrant and because we see a number of young Māori I am better equipped with tikanga and models I can use through this course.” - Core skills for specialist practice in infant, child and adolescent mental health and addiction student

“It has shown a different perspective rather than using the biomedical model and looking at patient care using a holistic approach.” - NESP student

This growth is reflected in confidence rating for effectively working with Māori, which increased by 1.7 times, from 41 percent before training to 72 percent post training.

Figure 13. Percentage of respondents rating themselves as confident or very confident on working with Māori before and after training (204 respondents)



### Improved outcomes for tāngata whai ora

Respondents shared increased capability and cultural safety translated directly into deeper therapeutic relationships, greater trust, and improved outcomes for tāngata whai ora and their whānau. They described being able to create safer, more empowering spaces and apply learnings directly to practice. Examples include:

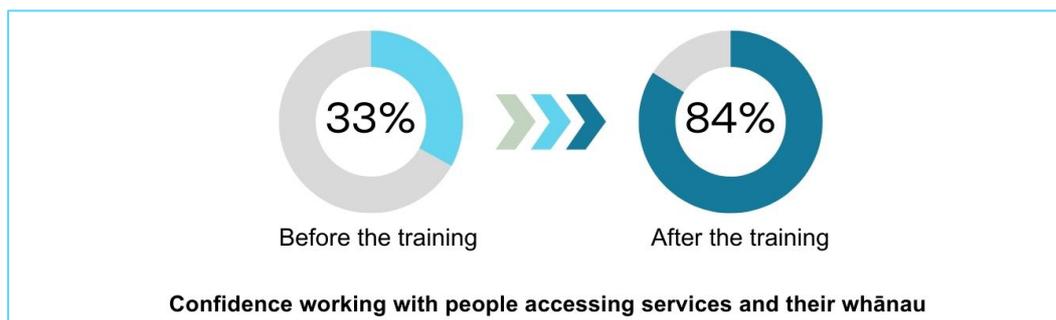
“In my mahi with rangatahi I have noticed stronger connections forming. There is more trust, more honesty, and more hope in the room. Because I have grown, I can hold space for them in a way that is safer, more compassionate, and more empowering.” - NESP student

“I have applied the teachings directly into my practice and have had great outcomes with tāngata whai ora so far. The CBT approach is quite different to how I would normally practice structurally. This has been a massive change for me which is awesome. Of the 6 tāngata whai ora I practiced CBT on (for this course), all achieved their goals. So yeah, impact.” - Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy student

Improvement in clinical skills and safe (including culturally safe) application with whai ora and whanau, also improvement in supporting my colleagues to practice more safely and effectively, as determined by the whai ora and whānau we serve. - Clinical leadership in nursing practice student

This impact is reflected in confidence ratings for working effectively with people accessing services and their whānau, which increased 2.5 times, from 33 percent before training to 83 percent after.

Figure 14. Respondents rating themselves as confident or very confident before and after their training in working with people accessing services and their whānau (204 respondents)



Confidence working safely also rose, from 51 percent to 83 percent representing a 1.6-fold increase.

Figure 15. Respondents rating themselves as confident or very confident before and after their training in working safely (204 respondents)



## Personal growth, and sense of support

Participants experienced higher motivation, renewed passion, improved wellbeing, reduced isolation, and a strong sense of support and whanaungatanga. Financial support eased stress for some, enabling focus on study and family.

“Great improvements, increase practice confidence and more passion in doing what I am doing”- NESP student

“It has given me the skills and knowledge in both my work and personal life to support others with mental health challenges.” - NESP student

“Excellent. Given me confidence and felt supported. Accessed direct supervision and feedback for the first time in my career.” - Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy student

“This course has connected me with other like-minded colleagues and new friends that have been supportive, encouraging and happy to share their knowledge and

experiences. Knowing we will be there to support each other in our career journey is amazing.” - NESP student

**Increased knowledge integration and broader perspective**

Participants reported seeing their role differently, integrating new knowledge with previous experience, and expanding their understanding of recovery, leadership, systems, and holistic care.

“The programme stimulates my thinking and encourages me to know more about my day-to-day work. Despite the programme being very demanding of my time, I've enjoyed every part of it.” - Clinical leadership in nursing practice

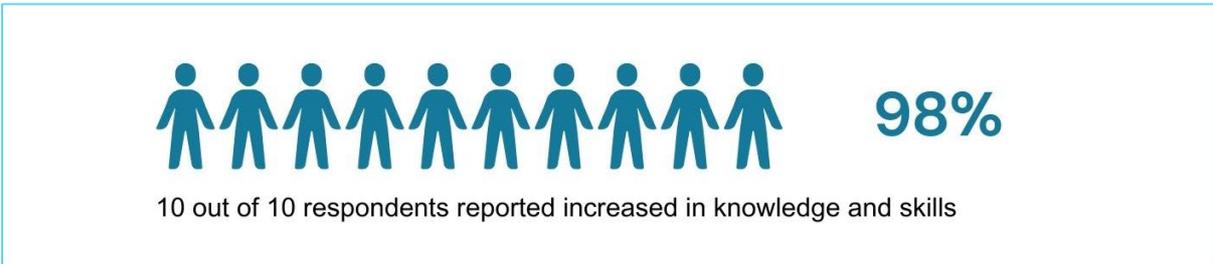
“Broadened my knowledge base, revisited areas I have previously studied and forgotten and given me confidence as I moved into a more clinical role.” - Core skills for specialist practice in infant, child and adolescent mental health and addiction

“I feel I am able to see things I couldn't see before.” - NESP student

“It has equipped me with sufficient knowledge to deliver care in a person centred way that is culturally safe.”- NESP student

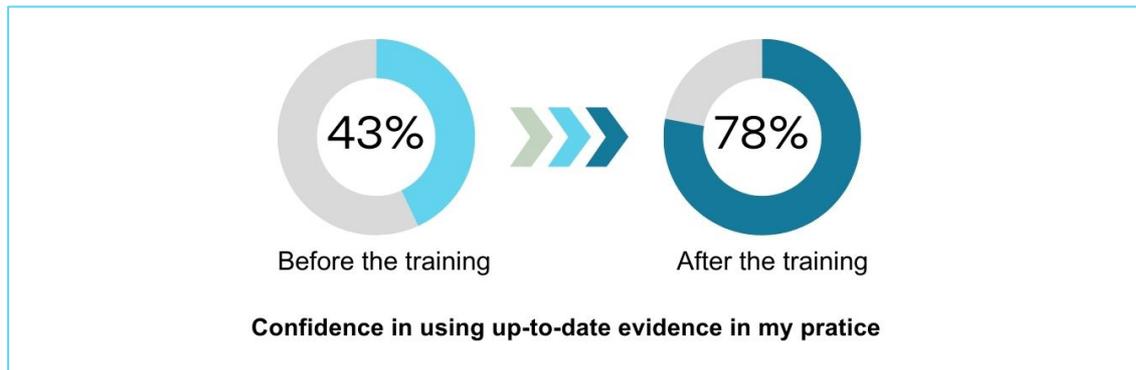
This growth was evident in their ratings, with almost all respondents (98 percent) agreeing that learning opportunities increased their knowledge and skills (see figure 16).

Figure 16. Respondents who agree or strongly agree that their knowledge and skills increased



Further, confidence in using up-to-date evidence in practice also improved, rising 1.8 times, from 43 percent before training to 78 percent after training (see Figure 17).

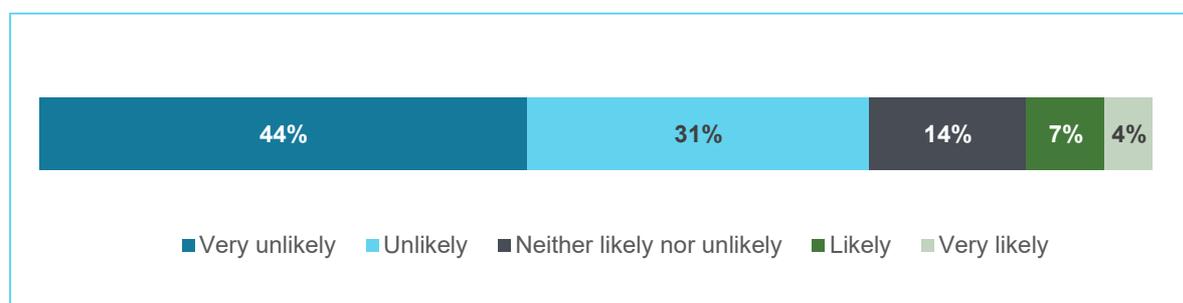
Figure 17. Respondents rating themselves as confident or very confident before and after their training in using up-to-date evidence in their practice



## Impact of the Skills Matter funding

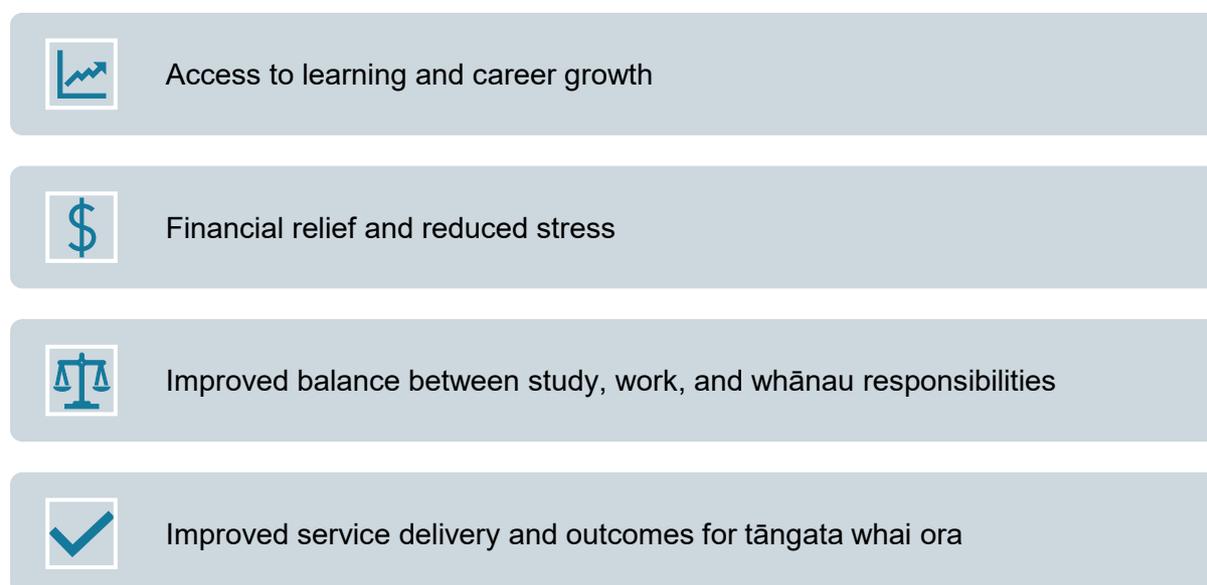
While noting that the NESP nursing programme is mandatory for Te Whatu Ora employed nurses, a majority of respondents (75 percent) were unlikely to take the course or learning without the funding, while 14 percent were neutral and only 11 percent were likely to take the learning without grant.

Figure 18. Respondents' likelihood to take the course without the grant (212 respondents)



Respondents were also asked about the difference the funding of the Skills Matter programme made for them and the people they support. Many expressed gratitude and positive appreciation for receiving support. Comments included “huge difference”, “great support”, “very helpful”, and “big support and provided a better opportunity, exposure and experience”. The responses are summarised under four main themes (see Figure 19).

Figure 19. Impact of grant



## **Access to learning and career growth**

Respondents shared that the funding programme enabled access to study, improved confidence in their practice, and supported both leadership development and future pathways. Examples include:

“I strongly believe that this support made it possible for me to aim high and finish my postgraduate diploma. I have found continuing my education to be an excellent adjunct to support work balance, career progression, peer learning and understanding my qualities to improve my skills and delivery of care. I have found studies to be replenishing and provides an opportunity to feel skilful in an area where acuity and complexity is on the rise.” - Clinical leadership in nursing practice student

“Funding made it possible. I cannot state how amazing this programme was, and it has deepened my knowledge base and skills. As a result of that my confidence has increased which leads to better interactions with tāngata whai ora. Win win all round!” - Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy student

“Without this crucial support, staffing shortages in mental health services would be even more severe, creating an environment that would discourage nurses from working in this specialty.” - Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

## **Financial relief and reduced stress**

Many respondents shared that the funding of the Skills Matter programme was the main reason they applied, allowing them to fully engage in study without financial pressure. The support removed structural and financial barriers that would have otherwise limited access to professional development. For some, it covered essential costs such as travel and accommodation; for others, it compensated for a lack of employer-supported professional development. Some examples are:

“Outstanding as I am able to take this course without stress and gain lots of knowledge, experiences and become more confident to support people” – NESP student

“As there was little to no financial support through my employer this year, I would have seriously considered to not enrol in this year's course. Receiving this grant allowed me to complete this course without the financial worry and fully focus on the

course content.” - Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy student

“This grant was the main reason I applied for this course, it meant that I was able to engage without the financial pressure. Also, I work for a kaupapa Māori organisation which backed me 100% to engage in this programme.” – Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy student

“Due to my contract and funded position, I was not allocated PD allowance in my role, this fund enabled me to complete my post graduate diploma without having worries about how I could fund it myself. This grant has enabled me to further my study and learn new ways to support my ever-evolving tāngata whai ora”- Clinical leadership in nursing practice student

### **Improved balance between study, work, and whānau responsibilities**

The funding of the Skills Matter programme supported respondents to maintain a healthy balance across work, study, and whānau responsibilities. It enabled continued wages while studying and reduced personal and financial strain. Some comments include:

“I have been having incredible success with clients by using CBT. I have a very young family and would not have been able to access the course without it.” – Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy student

“It enabled me to continue receiving my full wages from work, which provided crucial financial support. As a result, I was able to cover my rent, care for my children, and manage our personal expenses more comfortably. The grant helped reduce financial stress and allowed me to focus more effectively on my education and family responsibilities.” – NESP student

### **Improved service delivery and outcomes for tāngata whai ora**

Respondents emphasised that the funding of the Skills Matter programme not only supported their ability to study but also directly improved the quality of care they provide. By gaining new skills, knowledge, and confidence, respondents felt better equipped to support tāngata whai ora, tamariki, and whānau. Some examples are:

“Ability to enhance my practice therefore enhance quality of care support towards tāngata whai ora.” – NESP student

“This helped me to enrol in the course wherein my skills improved and I could serve my tamariki and their whānau better.” – Core skills for specialist practice in infant, child and adolescent mental health and addiction

“I am a more confident, skilled, compassionate, connected provider of care and support. I understand my role and theirs better. I have a better understanding of best practice, in a speciality that has a lot of grey areas” – NESP student

## Overall experience

### Experience with the programme and provider

The respondents shared rich insights about their experiences with the programme and providers. Many described the programme as valuable for their professional growth, highlighting supportive teaching, high-quality facilitation, and the opportunity to build strong peer networks. Most indicating they would recommend the programme to others. Respondents offered constructive suggestions to further strengthen programme design and delivery.

### Programme value in professional growth

Courses were generally seen as well-structured, balanced, and professionally delivered. Participants reported the programme as transformative and highly valuable for career progression and reported gain in confidence, clinical skills and leadership capability.

“It was a fantastic 10 months. I got amazing exposure to the NZ health practices and improved my confidence to work within the new atmosphere.” – NESP student

“Best two years of study of my life that has opened so many more doors for me in Health.” – Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy student

“A highly supportive and stimulating set of courses. The lecturers are well respected in their fields and offered more than what I had expected for postgraduate study. It has provided professional growth and given me a sense of achievement and more self-respect of my own clinical skillset. I feel empowered.” – Clinical leadership in nursing practice student

“I completed a leadership paper with a quality initiative which my group sent to our appropriate leaders. This was an excellent 'assignment' which yielded real-time outcomes and the opportunity to put into action a change that we have found possible with the experiences we have had in our careers.” – Clinical leadership in nursing practice student

## Supportive teaching and facilitation

Tutors and lecturers were praised for being approachable, knowledgeable, and responsive. Lived-experience educators were particularly valued. Peer connections provided mutual support and networking opportunities.

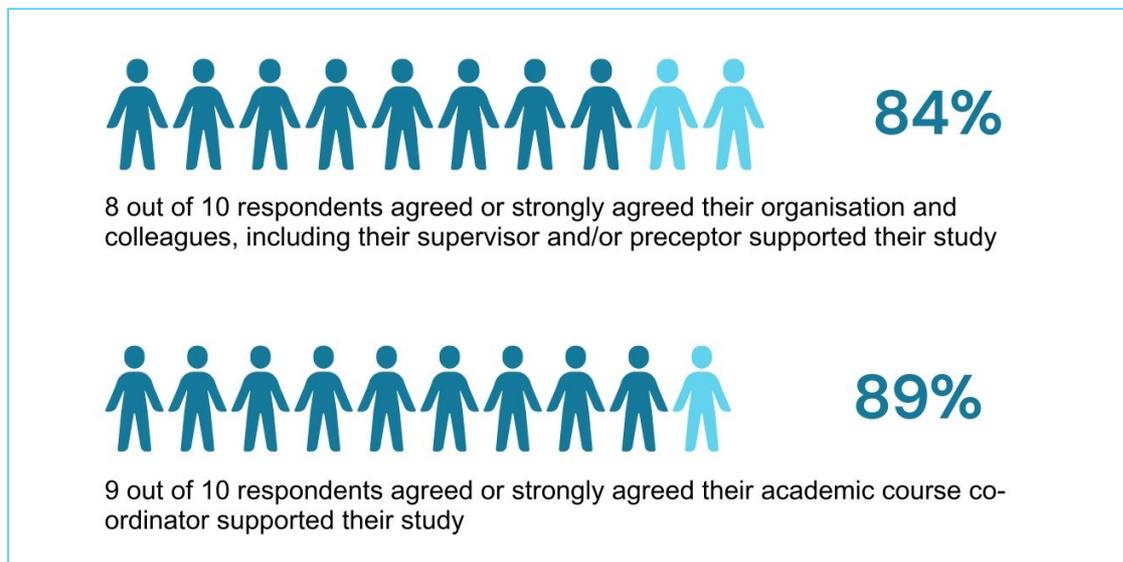
“Thoroughly enjoyed, the lecturers were approachable, responsive and supportive of my academic journey this year.” – Clinical leadership in nursing practice student

“Lecturers were awesome and supportive!!! Content of teaching was good.” – NESP student

“I really enjoy the classes delivered by the tutors with lived experience. They are awesome, engaging and have a wealth of knowledge to share.” – NESP student

This is also reflected on their rating on support for their study with 84 percent agreeing their organisation and colleagues including their supervisor and preceptor supported their study and 89 percent agreeing their academic course co-ordinator supported their study.

Figure 20. percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed they received support during their study (212 respondents)



## Positive learning environment with access to resources

Respondents shared they experienced safe and inclusive space with great facilities and learning materials for supporting their academic success. Some examples include:

“Manaaki every step of the way, providing study time, flexibility in my practice as well as fully supportive of me personally and professionally.” – Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy student

“Professional but also real, unique in their tailored approach but attentive in adaptations in learning styles.” – Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy student

“Great course, very balanced, amazing faculty, compassionate.” – NESP student

“The mentors have been helpful and great. The university library has a lot of access to journals and books which was also very helpful.” – Core skills for specialist practice in infant, child and adolescent mental health and addiction

## **Peer connection**

The course provided great opportunity to connect with other professionals working in other settings.

“Connecting with other professionals working in different settings was an opportunity to cross-pollinate ideas and share our practice experiences.” – NESP student

“Great to be able to connect with other MH professionals across the motu” – Core skills for specialist practice in infant, child and adolescent mental health and addiction

## **Improvement on delivery design and communication**

Some respondents highlighted stress from heavy content in short timeframes, need for extra study days, and preference for more face-to-face learning. Few experienced challenges around communication with the providers and some suggested revisiting programme structure and assessment methods.

“This is not a sustainable programme. Organisers need to revisit and restructure the delivery considerably. Rather than packing and relaying all types of training our way, they really need to ask what is essential to help us settle as new graduates into our new roles.” – NESP student

“Communication with tutors was slow or they did not reply at all. The zoom sessions felt unproductive and more a tick box for the course. Some tutors running the zoom

sessions were doing it while driving in a car which felt unprofessional.” – NESP student

“Assignment feedback was not delivered on time I had colleagues receive grades back weeks before I did. I did not receive feedback in time to apply this for my last assignment.” – NESP student

“The staff were very knowledgeable and friendly however appeared to be under a lot of pressure themselves and it was hard to get feedback or time outside of lectures to talk to them. As I work full time I couldn’t speak to them for the offered office hours.” – Assessment and management of co-existing substance use and mental health

“Improvement needed in communication, sometimes when applying for extensions myself and others wouldn’t hear back.” – Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

## Experience with the employer

Most respondents described their employees as supportive, providing flexibility and encouragement. Some respondents highlighted challenges with workload, lack of dedicated study time and limited career progression opportunities and sometimes withdrawn support from management resulting from organisational constraints.

### Supportive employer and team

Most respondents shared high levels of support from their employer, managers and colleagues, including, flexibility, study leave, encouragement, and practical assistance. Some examples shared by respondents are:

“My experience with my employer has been very positive and supportive. Throughout my involvement in the program, my employer has shown understanding and flexibility, particularly in accommodating my study commitments. Their support has made it easier to balance work, education, and family responsibilities.” – NESP student

“Helped me apply for funding and supported me to reduce to working so I could cope with the study and new job stress.” – NESP student

“My employers and colleagues were absolutely fantastic. They were actively seeking appropriate clients that I could practice CBT with and utilise for both video and written assignments. They also ensured I was free to attend all lectures,

tutorials and block weeks.” – Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

“My Line manager has been very supportive of my studies this year and allowed time off work to attend courses.” – Assessment and management of co-existing substance use and mental health

“My manager was supportive in ensuring my work, life balance was maintained as well as it could be. She was also key in delegating other colleagues to support projects I was involved with to take some pressure off.” – Clinical leadership in nursing practice

### **Challenges with workload and balancing study**

A common issue was managing heavy workloads alongside study commitments, with limited ability to reduce caseloads or allocate dedicated study time. Examples include:

“Employer were supportive, however workload remained high due to ongoing high referral numbers and limited staff.” – NESP student

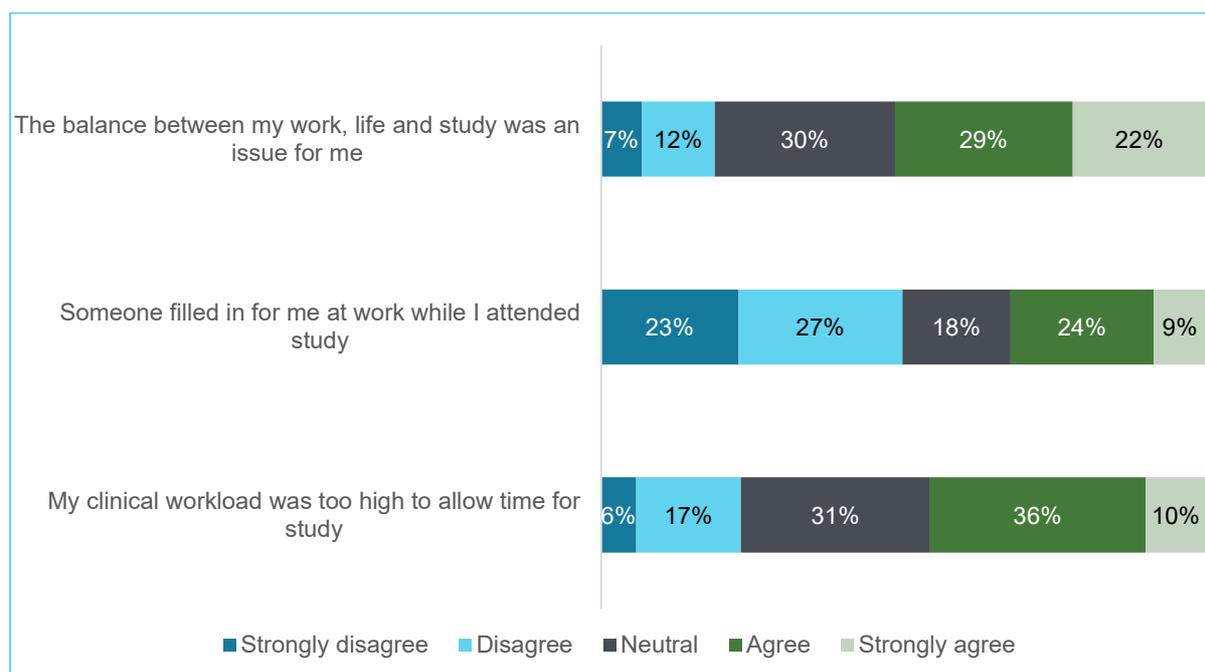
“They supported my studies but had no reduction to my work in order for me to have a work life, study balance.” – Clinical leadership in nursing practice

“It has been difficult at times due to short staffing to practice the learning to the best of my ability” – NESP student

“Very difficult balancing a research project with a full time Charge Nurse Manager role.” – Clinical leadership in nursing practice

This is also evident in their ratings on challenges experienced during the study, with 41 percent agreeing that the balance between work, life and study was an issue for them, half of the respondents (50 percent) disagreed that someone filled for them while they attended study and 46 percent agreed their clinical workload was too high to allow time for study. See Figure 21 for further breakdown.

Figure 21. respondents rating challenges during their study (208 respondents)



## Gaps in organisational support

Some respondents experienced limited support from the management and difference in support across the regions.

“My employer didn’t have a coordinator, so was difficult to get set up for study. Other Te Whatu Ora regions supported their kaimahi much better and had systems in place. My team leader and clinical lead were supportive, but I had no coordinators for study.” – NESP student

“I do not feel that management understand the program well.” – NESP student

“It has been a difficult journey, and the support was not as evident as how I hoped it would have been during the programme.” – NESP student

“I was also not given any time off for study outside 2 of the 3 mandatory study days as the contract didn’t specify a minimum amount of study days, just stated something vague like that we would be supported to meet course requirements therefore none were granted.” – Clinical leadership in nursing practice

## Career progression and future opportunities

Few respondents expressed concerns about limited pathways for advanced roles, despite employers supporting study. Some examples include:

“I am enjoying my workplace; however, I am increasingly being told there is little to no room for career development here outside of being an ACN.” – Clinical leadership in nursing practice

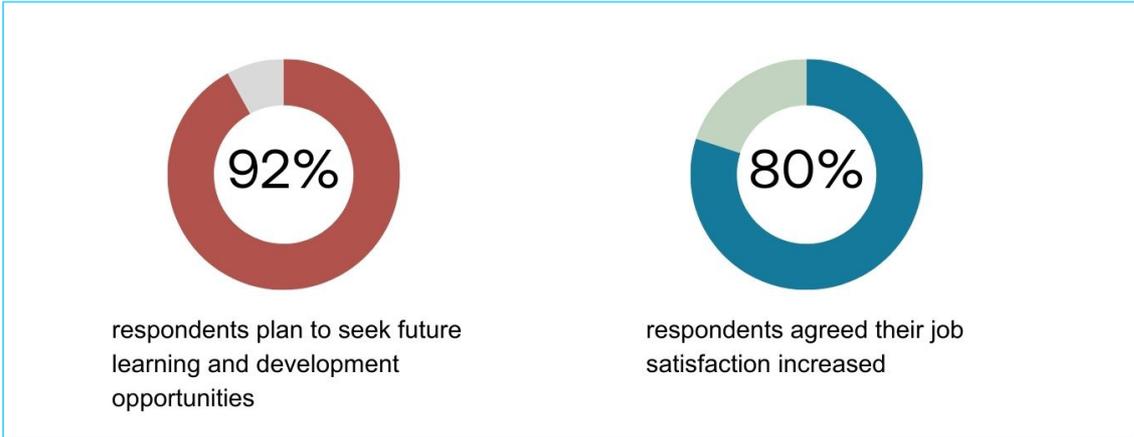
“The employer is unwilling to support me into a nurse practitioner role within the DHB. I have one year left before the NP practicum year and I'm unsure where I will do this. When I started on this journey, the employer said that they would support me into the NP role. This has changed recently, and it has been very difficult to have productive conversations about my future within the DHB.” – Clinical leadership in nursing practice

“I started masters study with a goal of becoming an NP; this is because there is a significant shortage of psychiatrists and also sometimes a bias towards less contemporary prescribing and less holistic care which I am to address - however any discussions around NP pathway have been discouraging, citing a lack of funding which is disappointing. Te Whatu Ora also appears to be moving away from CNS roles which is also disappointing as these roles are where I perceive the most positive change to practice could be initiated from” – Clinical leadership in nursing practice

## Career development

Respondents rated statements related to career development positively. Most (92 percent) indicated plans to pursue future learning and development opportunities, and a majority (80 percent) agreed that their job satisfaction had increased.

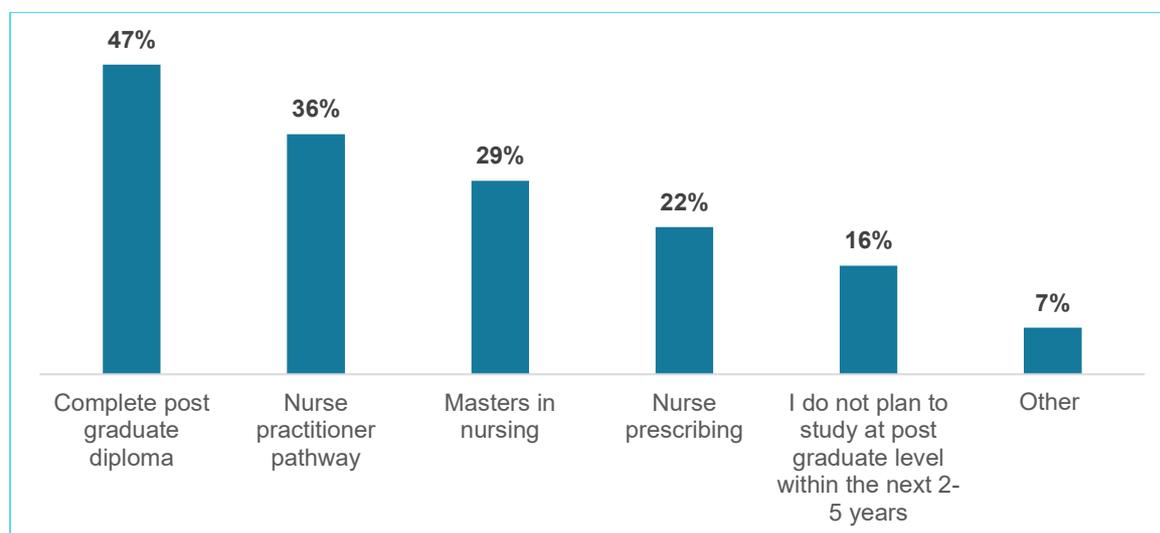
Figure 22. Respondents' ratings on career development (207 respondents)



NESP students were also asked about pathways they are interested in over the next five years. Nearly half (47 percent) expressed an intention to complete a postgraduate diploma, while 36 percent were interested in the Nurse Practitioner pathway. Additionally, 29 percent

planned to undertake a master’s in nursing. A smaller proportion (7 percent) selected other options, which included medical school, Health Improvement Practitioner roles, and areas such as Indigenous Studies, Māori health, and health policy. See Figure 23.

Figure 23. NESP students rating the interested pathways for the next five years (134 respondents)



## Students' feedback comparison between 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025

Overall, the findings indicate a positive trend in students' satisfaction with the course. Satisfaction with the course remains high despite a slight decrease from 94 percent in 2024 to 89 percent in 2025. This level is still considered strong and reflects continued positive experiences. Meanwhile, job satisfaction has slightly increased to 80 percent in 2025, suggesting that the course continues to contribute to workplace confidence and engagement. (see Table 2).

Table 2. Students' satisfaction comparison between 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025

Students' satisfaction	2021 students (N=225)	2022 students (N=212)	2023 students (N=217)	2024 students (N=246)	2025 students (N=218)
Overall, I was satisfied with the course	92%	91%	88%	94%	89%
My job satisfaction has increased	80%	73%	85%	76%	80%

The work-life-study balance has been decreasing over the years, with 51 percent of respondents indicating issues with balancing work, life, and study. The decrease in work-life-

study balance issues for 2025 students can be mainly attributed to the reduced workload compared to previous years. The high workload in earlier years likely contributed to the challenges in balancing these aspects.

In 2025, there was a decrease in the percentage of students reporting a high clinical workload affecting their studies (46 percent). This improvement can be attributed to the support students received from course providers and employers. However, it is important to note that work-life-study balance remains an ongoing challenge, as more than half of the students still reported facing difficulties in this area.

Table 3. Challenges during study between 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025

Challenges during study	2021 students (N=225)	2022 students (N=212)	2023 students (N=217)	2024 students (N=246)	2025 students (N=208)
The balance between work, life, and study was an issue for me	65%	85%	58%	56%	51%
My clinical workload was too high to allow time for study	57%	73%	56%	47%	46%

## Conclusions

The 2025 Skills Matter programme continues to play a critical role in strengthening Aotearoa’s mental health and addiction workforce. This report summarises the survey results for all courses funded through the Skills Matter programme in 2025. There were six different courses delivered by seven tertiary and Te Whatu Ora organisations.

Of the 603 students invited to take part in the survey, 220 responded, generating a response rate of 36 percent. across all programmes. Most respondents (58 percent) were registered nurses, followed by social workers (22 percent), with more than half under 40 years of age. Ethnic diversity included New Zealand European (41 percent), Asian (22 percent), Māori (19 percent), and Pacific peoples (14 percent).

Overall, students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the Skills Matter programme, with 89 percent of respondents reporting that courses were relevant and beneficial to their practice. Students described gains in clinical confidence, cultural responsiveness, and leadership capability, leading to improved outcomes for tāngata whai ora and whānau. Support from lecturers, tutors, coordinators, employers, and whānau contributed to an enriching learning experience. The Skills Matter funding was critical, with 75 percent of respondents unlikely to have studied without it. While feedback was largely positive,

challenges remain around balancing work, life, and study, timely communication, and ensuring cultural responsiveness.

Overall, the findings demonstrate how the Skills Matter programme is supporting Target One of the Mental Health and Addiction Workforce Plan 2024–2027, particularly through NESP as a mechanism to grow the workforce, strengthen clinical capability, and support retention. Continued investment in Skills Matter, including NESP pathways, will remain critical to achieving national workforce goals and meeting future service demand.

## Future considerations

Positive feedback highlights the importance of continuing and strengthening the Skills Matter programme. To further enhance its impact, collaboration between employers, education providers, and Te Pou is essential to create a supportive environment that fosters professional growth and wellbeing. Students valued supervision, peer support, and culturally responsive teaching, and praised practical learning and lived-experience sessions. They also called for clearer communication on extensions and feedback, more flexible assessments, streamlined content, and improved accessibility through hybrid options. Supportive employers and flexible work arrangements were linked to success. Strong support systems, cultural safety, and clear communication remain central to reducing stress and enabling achievement.

### Considerations for providers

1. Provide ongoing supervision and peer support groups to help students feel connected and confident. Make wellbeing resources easy to access and include practical tips for managing stress and balancing work, study, and life.
2. Enrich learning by providing professional development for tutors, integrating tikanga and Māori models throughout programmes, strengthening Māori supervisor networks, and actively promoting opportunities within Māori communities.
3. Create impactful learning experiences by streamlining content to focus on essentials, maintaining consistency in assessments, aligning placements with learning goals, and offering flexible assessment options to support success.
4. Continue to champion lived-experience perspectives by sustaining and expanding co-designed sessions that foster inclusivity and deepen understanding.
5. Improve accessibility by providing accessible venues with parking, communicate arrangements early and offering hybrid and regional options to strengthen participation and peer connection.
6. Improve communication with students around extensions, assessments and feedback to minimise stress.

## **Considerations for employers**

1. Offer flexible hours and study leave to help employees balance work, study, and personal responsibilities. This reduces stress and supports successful course completion.
2. Formalise agreements for paid study time and workload adjustments during peak assessment periods.
3. Having supportive managers and colleagues led to positive experiences and success. Encourage regular conversations between managers and staff about study needs and challenges
4. Outline career progression routes into advanced roles such as Nurse Practitioner or specialist clinician positions.
5. Share wellbeing resources and offer initiatives that reduce stress, such as EAP services or peer support groups.

## **Considerations for Te Pou**

1. Continue collecting and analysing student feedback to identify trends and make iterative improvements that keep programmes responsive to evolving needs.
2. Work with employers to formalise study support agreements, promote flexible work arrangements, and encourage mentoring partnerships to strengthen workforce capability.
3. Actively promote Skills Matter opportunities through sector networks and communities to attract diverse learners and address workforce gaps.

## References

Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora. (2025). *Mental Health and Addiction Workforce Plan 2024–2027 (2025 refresh)*. <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz>

Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora. (2024). *Mental health and addiction workforce plan 2024–2027*. <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz>

## Appendix: Student survey



Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

### Post-entry clinical training evaluation

**Skills Matter is a workforce development programme within Te Pou. Skills Matter funds programme providers to deliver post-entry clinical training to the mental health and addiction nursing and allied health workforces on behalf of the Te Whatu Ora .**

#### About this survey

**You're invited to complete this survey. We're interested in finding out more about your experience of the programme and the factors that supported or hindered your training. We're also interested in any benefits you experienced as a result of the training. This information will be used to improve the delivery of the training programmes funded by Skills Matter and will help us evaluate the overall Skills Matter programme. We really welcome and value your feedback.**

**You are under no obligation to complete the survey and you do not have to answer a particular question if you do not wish to do so. All the information you provide will be kept confidential and will only be used for improvement and evaluation. Only summary results will be reported and you will not be personally identifiable in any reports.**

#### Instructions

**Please tick the box that is most relevant to you or write your answer in the space provided. The survey should take about ten minutes to complete.**

\* 1. Which organisation provided your course?

- Te Whatu Ora Waitematā
- Te Whatu Ora Canterbury
- AUT
- University of Auckland
- University of Otago
- Massey University
- Whitireia

\* 2. Which programme or course were you enrolled in?

- New entry to specialist practice: mental health and addiction **nursing**
- Postgraduate Certificate courses in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
- New entry to specialist practice: **allied** mental health and addiction
- Core skills for specialist practice in infant, child and adolescent mental health and addiction
- Clinical leadership in nursing practice
- Assessment and management of co-existing substance use and mental health



### Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

3. Please choose one of the following options. What are you planning to become?

- I do not plan to study at post graduate level within the next 2-5 years
  - Nurse prescribing
  - Complete post graduate diploma
  - Nurse practitioner pathway
  - Masters in nursing
-



### Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

3. Please choose one of the following options. What are you planning to become?

- I do not plan to study at post graduate level within the next 2-5 years
- Nurse prescribing
- Complete post graduate diploma
- Nurse practitioner pathway
- Masters in nursing



Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

**We'd like to ask you about your training experience. There are no right or wrong answers—please tick the response that is best for you.**

4. Satisfaction with training?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Overall I was satisfied with the course	<input type="radio"/>				
The course content was relevant to my work	<input type="radio"/>				



## Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

### We'd like to know about the factors that supported your study.

#### 5. Support for your study

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My organisation and my colleagues, including my supervisor and/or preceptor, supported my study	<input type="radio"/>				
My academic course co-ordinator supported my study	<input type="radio"/>				
My whānau and friends supported my study	<input type="radio"/>				
If needed, I was able to access support to apply for the travel and accomodation grant	<input type="radio"/>				



## Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

### We'd like to know about any challenges you faced during your study.

#### 6. Challenges during study

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My clinical workload was too high to allow time for study	<input type="radio"/>				
Someone filled in for me at work while I attended study	<input type="radio"/>				
The balance between my work, life and study was an issue for me	<input type="radio"/>				



## Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

**We'd like to know if you have had the opportunity to apply your learning.**

### 7. Opportunities to apply learning to practice

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My course included adequate opportunities for practical experience	<input type="radio"/>				
I was able to use my training in practice	<input type="radio"/>				
I've shared my new learning with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>				



## Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

**We'd like to know about the links between the training and your career development.**

### 8. Career development

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I plan to seek future learning and development opportunities	<input type="radio"/>				
My study has helped to increase my employment opportunities	<input type="radio"/>				
The opportunity to study influenced my decision to stay working in mental health and addiction	<input type="radio"/>				
My knowledge and skills have increased	<input type="radio"/>				
My job satisfaction has increased	<input type="radio"/>				



## Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

We are very interested in any benefits from the clinical training programmes.

### 9. My confidence about clinical practice

	Not confident	A little confident	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very confident
<b>After the training</b>	<input type="radio"/>				
Before the training	<input type="radio"/>				

### 10. My confidence working with people accessing services and their whānau

	Not confident	A little confident	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very confident
<b>After the training</b>	<input type="radio"/>				
Before the training	<input type="radio"/>				

### 11. My confidence working with Māori

	Not confident	A little confident	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very confident
<b>After the training</b>	<input type="radio"/>				
Before the training	<input type="radio"/>				

### 12. My confidence in contributing more meaningfully to team discussions

	Not confident	A little confident	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very confident
<b>After the training</b>	<input type="radio"/>				
Before the training	<input type="radio"/>				

### 13. My confidence in practicing safely

	Not confident	A little confident	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very confident
<b>After the training</b>	<input type="radio"/>				
Before the training	<input type="radio"/>				

14. My confidence reflecting more critically on my practice

	Not confident	A little confident	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very confident
<b>After the training</b>	<input type="radio"/>				
Before the training	<input type="radio"/>				

15. My confidence in using up-to-date evidence in my practice

	Not confident	A little confident	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very confident
<b>After the training</b>	<input type="radio"/>				
Before the training	<input type="radio"/>				



## Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

### 16. What is your current role?

- Occupational therapist
- Social worker
- Alcohol and other drug practitioner
- Registered nurse
- If other, please specify

### 17. What Te Whatu Ora region do you work in? (Please tick as many boxes as you need)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auckland                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Northland         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bay of Plenty                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Southern          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Canterbury                       | <input type="checkbox"/> South Canterbury  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Capital & Coast                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Hauora Tairāwhiti |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counties Manukau                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Taranaki          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hawkes Bay                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Waikato           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hutt Valley                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Wairarapa         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lakes                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Waitematā         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Midcentral                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Whanganui         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nelson Marlborough               | <input type="checkbox"/> West Coast        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure or other (please specify) |  |

### 18. Please tick if you work in ....

- ... a Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand districts
- ... an NGO
- ... a PHO
- Other (please specify)



## Skills Matter end of programme evaluation 2024

### About you

19. Which ethnic group(s) do you belong to? (tick all that apply)

- Māori  Asian  
 Pacific  New Zealand European  
 Other (please specify)

20. What is your age range?

- Under 30 years  50 to 59 years  
 30 to 39 years  60 years and over  
 40 to 49 years