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Circular 10/2005

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To: HR Director
each HSE Area

Director
each Nursing & Midwifery Planning & Development Unit

Sponsorship for Public Health Service Employees wishing to train as Nurses

I wish to refer to the initiative introduced in 2002, by the Minister for Health and Children namely the sponsorship scheme for eligible, suitable and experienced public health service employees wishing to train as nurses.

As you are aware, the Nursing Policy Division of the Department of Health and Children has previously been responsible for the funding of the nursing degree programme, including the sponsorship programme. However, from 1st January, 2005 the Health Service Executive (HSE) has been responsible for all funding matters in respect of the degree programme and the sponsorship initiative.

The Department of Health and Children is currently providing assistance to the HSE on funding issues relating to the degree programme and both organisations are working closely together during the transition period to ensure the smooth transfer of functions.

Details of this sponsorship scheme have been revised and are set out in the following paragraphs.

Number of Sponsorships

- 1 A minimum of 40 sponsorships will be available this year (2005). The number of sponsorships available is currently under review with the intention of possibly increasing the number of places available this year. You will receive further correspondence in this regard in due course. The maximum number of sponsorships available in each functional area of the Health Service Executive, based on the number of nursing training places in each such area, is as follows:

HSE- Northern Area, Eastern Regional Area, East Coast Area and South Western Area	15
HSE - Midland Area	2
HSE - Mid-Western Area	3
HSE - North Eastern Area	3
HSE - North Western Area	3
HSE - South Eastern Area	3
HSE - Southern Area	7
HSE - Western Area	<u>4</u>
Total	40

- 2 The number of sponsorships to be awarded each year by each functional area of the HSE cannot exceed the number approved by the HSE National Director of Human Resources.

Eligibility

- 3 The sponsorship scheme is open to employees in the Irish public health service, such as health care assistants and ward attendants, **who are directly involved in the delivery of care to patients/clients within a nursing context.**
- 4 Applicants must have at least **two** years relevant service in the Irish public health service on the 1st day of January of the year in which they apply for sponsorship, and must qualify as a Mature Code Applicant for a place on the Pre-registration Nursing Degree Programme under the system operated by the Central Applications Office (CAO) on behalf of the Higher Education Institutions. They may be employed on a full-time or part-time basis, either in a permanent or temporary capacity. Where employed on a part-time basis, they must have been working an average of not less than 15 hours per week.
- 5 Neither is the sponsorship scheme open to public health service employees who:-
 - (a) are currently undertaking a pre-registration nursing education programme, or
 - (b) have withdrawn from a pre-registration nursing education programme within the five-year period immediately preceding

their application for sponsorship, or

(c) have deferred the acceptance of a place on a pre-registration nursing education programme from a previous year.

Application to CAO

- 6 An eligible employee intending to apply for sponsorship must first of all make a formal application through the Central Applications Office (CAO) as a Mature Code Applicant, for a place on the Pre-registration Nursing Degree Programme at one of the thirteen Higher Education Institutions that are involved in the delivery of the programme. The CAO Handbook and Application Form are available from the CAO. The Nursing Careers Centre's information booklet *Nursing A Career for You*, obtainable from An Bord Altranais, 31/32 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2, contains valuable information including details of all the nursing training places available throughout the country.
- 7 An employee may only apply for sponsorship to undertake a nursing degree in the area of nursing (general, psychiatric or mental handicap) in which his/her employing agency is predominantly involved.
- 8 In order to be eligible for sponsorship, employees who have applied through the CAO as Mature Code Applicants must successfully pass the written assessment test and interview administered by the Nursing Careers Centre (NCC) of An Bord Altranais, and be offered a place on the Pre-Registration Nursing Degree Programme. Mature Code Applicants who are called for interview by the NCC are notified of the result of their interview and of their performance in the written assessment by the end of June. Employees intending to apply for sponsorship should send a copy of that notification to the Director of the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Unit of the HSE in whose functional area they are working within one week of receiving such notification.

Applications for Sponsorship

- 9 Applications for sponsorship from eligible employees who are offered a place by the CAO on the Pre-registration Nursing Degree Programme should be addressed to the Director of the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Unit for the HSE in whose functional area the employee is working. Such applications should be made immediately i.e. within one week following receipt from the CAO of an offer of a place on the Pre-registration Nursing Degree Programme and should be accompanied by a copy of the offer.

Award of Sponsorships

- 10 Subject to the following paragraphs, sponsorships within the approved complement (see paragraph 1 above) may be awarded by each functional area of the HSE to applicants employed in its functional area who have successfully passed the written assessment test and interview carried out by the Nursing Careers Centre and who have been offered a place by the CAO on the Pre-Registration Nursing Degree Programme.
- 11 The first applicants to be considered for sponsorship are those who receive an offer of a place by the CAO in Round Zero in early August. Each Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Unit should draw up an order of merit list of such applicants employed in its functional area on the basis of their scores at the written

assessment carried out by the NCC. (This score is given in the notification referred to in paragraph 9 above.) Sponsorships within the approved complement should be awarded to those placed highest in the order of merit, provided of course that they satisfy the criteria set out in this circular. The relative positions of applicants with equal scores on the order of merit list should be determined by reference to the length of their respective relevant service in the Irish public health service. The Nursing Careers Centre will confirm the written assessment scores of applicants for sponsorship upon request from the Directors of the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units.

- 12** If sponsorships are still available to be awarded following Round Zero, the procedure outlined in paragraph 11 should be repeated in respect of applicants for sponsorship who receive an offer in the next round. If necessary, the procedure should be repeated in each subsequent round of offers until such time as all available sponsorships are awarded or until there are no applicants left.

- 13** **An employee may only be awarded sponsorship to undertake a nursing degree in the area of nursing (general, psychiatric or mental handicap) in which his/her employing agency is predominantly involved.**

Satisfactory Employment Record

- 14** In order to qualify for sponsorship, an applicant must have a satisfactory service record. As part of the selection process the Directors of the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units will obtain verification of satisfactory service record from the applicant's employer.

Service Commitment

- 15** Successful applicants for sponsorship will be required to give a written undertaking to their sponsoring public health service employer that they will

(a) immediately register as nurses with An Bord Altranais following successful completion of the four-year nursing degree programme, and

(b) work as nurses for that particular employer for a period of five years immediately thereafter (see paragraph 20 below in relation to service commitment required of part-time employees).

In exceptional circumstances, all or a portion of the five-year nursing service commitment may, with the prior agreement of the public health service employer concerned, be given in the employment of an alternative Irish public health service agency.

Third Level Fees

- 16** A sponsored employee who already holds a primary degree is not covered under the Department of Education and Science free fees initiative and will be required to pay her/his own third level fees. A sponsored employee who commenced, but did not complete, an undergraduate programme within the last five years will be required to pay the third level tuition fees in respect of the academic years in question. A sponsored employee who is required to repeat any element of the programme will also be required to pay her/his own third level fees.

Retention of Salary

- 17 A public health service employee who is sponsored in accordance with the terms of this circular will remain on the payroll of her/his public health service employer. S/he will retain her/his existing substantive salary throughout the four years of the nursing degree programme, and will continue to be entitled to normal incremental progression up to the maximum of that scale. Sponsored employees will not receive any extra remuneration during the rostered year of the nursing degree programme other than premium payments where appropriate.

Part-time Employees

- 18 Part-time employees who are awarded sponsorship will be required to become full-time employees for the four-year duration of the nursing degree programme. Following successful completion of the programme, they may, with the prior agreement of their employer, revert to working part-time (provided the part-time work is not less than half-time).

Annual Leave

- 19 Sponsored employees shall retain their annual leave entitlements throughout the four years of the nursing degree programme. However, annual leave may only be taken outside of academic semesters and allocated clinical time.

Availability for Work

- 20 Sponsored employees will be required to work during all periods outside of academic semesters, except when they are on annual leave or undertaking supernumerary clinical placements as part of the nursing degree programme.

Repeat Year

- 21 A sponsored employee who is required to repeat a year of the nursing degree programme must remain in employment with her/his public health service agency for that year, working in her/his substantive grade, with the exception of time required for theoretical instruction, clinical instruction or examinations. The sponsorship arrangement in relation to salary and fees will be discontinued for the duration of the repeat year but will recommence after the employee has successfully completed the repeat year. However, salary will be paid in respect of time actually worked for the agency during the repeat year.

- 22 An employee who does not remain in employment during a repeat year will have her/his sponsorship terminated and will be required to repay all moneys received under the sponsorship. Such repayments shall be made to the public health service agency where s/he was employed.

Repayment of Salary

- 23 A sponsored employee who does not remain in employment with the sponsoring employer during the period of the degree will have her/his sponsorship terminated and will be required to repay salary and fees as outlined in paragraph 26 below.
- 24 A sponsored employee who fails to honour her/his written undertaking to work as a nurse for her/his employer for a period of five years immediately following successful

completion of the nursing degree programme and registration with An Bord Altranais shall be required to repay to that employer on a pro-rata basis the value of the salary received by her/him during (a) academic semesters, and (b) all supernumerary clinical placement periods outside of those semesters.

Discontinuation or Non-Completion

- 25 A sponsored employee who discontinues or otherwise does not complete the programme will

(a) if remaining in employment with the sponsoring employer be required to repay to that employer all third level fees paid on her/his behalf, and

(b) if not remaining in employment with the sponsoring employer be required to repay to that employer on a pro-rata basis the value of the salary received by her/him during

(i) academic semesters, and

(ii) all supernumerary clinical placement periods outside of those semesters, and

(iii) all third level fees paid on her/his behalf.

Funding of Sponsorship

- 26 The Health Service Executive will provide funding via each Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Unit to cover the cost of public health service employees who are sponsored in accordance with the terms of this circular. This will be done on receipt by the Nursing Policy Division of the Department of Health and Children of details of the full year cost of implementing the initiative. These details should be submitted as close as possible to the start of the academic year but in any event not later than 1 November. (These funding arrangements will apply to the current financial year only. You will be notified of the funding arrangements for 2006 onwards in due course).

Review of Sponsorship Scheme

- 27 The sponsorship scheme will be kept under review.

Closing Date for Applications to CAO

- 28 The closing date for the return of completed application forms to the CAO is the **1st February** of the year in which the applicant wishes to commence the Pre-registration Nursing Degree Programme.



John Magner
A/National Director of Human Resources

