

Circular 1 / 2002

10 January 2002

Chief Executive Officer
Each Health Board/ERHA

Chief Executive
Each Public Voluntary Hospital
outside the ERHA

Chief Executive
Each Mental Handicap Agency
outside the ERHA

DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH AND
CHILDREN
AN ROINN
SLAINTEAGUS DEANA

Sponsorship for Public Health Service Employees wishing to train as Nurses

I am directed by the Minister for Health and Children to refer to the announcement made by him on 1 November last that a new sponsorship scheme for eligible, suitable and experienced public health service employees wishing to train as nurses would be introduced in 2002 to coincide with the implementation of the four-year pre-registration nursing degree programme.

Details of this sponsorship scheme are set out in the following paragraphs.

Number of Sponsorships

- 1 Up to 40 sponsorships nationally will be available each year. The maximum number of sponsorships available in the functional area of each Health Board/ ERHA, based on the number of nursing training places in each such area, is as follows:

Eastern Region	15
Midland Health Board	2
Mid-Western Health Board	3
North Eastern Health Board	3
North Western Health Board	3
South Eastern Health Board	3
Southern Health Board	7
Western Health Board	4
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- 2 The number of sponsorships to be awarded each year by each Health Board/ERHA cannot exceed the maximum available within its functional area, as set out in paragraph 1 above.

Eligibility

- 3 The sponsorship scheme is open to Irish public health service employees, 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 five year's 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 The sponsorship scheme is not open to public health service employees who hold the State Enrolled Nurse (SEN) qualification. A separate scheme of grant assistance is available to SENs under the terms of Circular 9 /2001.
- 6 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

- 7 An eligible employee intending to apply for sponsorship must first of all make a formal application through the Central Applications Office (CAO), Galway, as a Mature Code Applicant, for a place on the Pre-registration Nursing Degree Programme at one of the thirteen Higher Education Institutions that will be involved in the delivery of the Programme. The CAO Handbook and Application Form 2002 is 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.
- 8 In order to be eligible for sponsorship, employees who have applied through the CAO as Mature Code Applicants must successfully come through the written assessment test and interview administered by the Nursing Careers Centre, and be offered a place on the Pre-Registration Nursing Degree Programme. Mature Code Applicants who are called for interview are notified of the result of their interview and of their performance in the written assessment by the end of June. At that stage, 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 for the Health Health/ERHA in whose functional area they are working.

Applications for Sponsorship

- 9 Applications for sponsorship from eligible employees who are offered a place on the Pre-registration Nursing Degree Programme should be addressed to the Director of the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Unit for the Health Board in whose functional area the employee is working. In the case of the Eastern Region, applications should be addressed to the Director of the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Unit of the Eastern Regional Health Authority. Such applications should be made immediately (within one week) following receipt 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 Health Board/ERHA to applicants employed in its functional area who have successfully come through the written assessment test and interview and who have been offered a place 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 in Round Zero in early August. Each Health Board/ERHA 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. (This score is given in the notification referred to in paragraph 8 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 their length of relevant service in the Irish public health service. The Nursing Careers Centre will confirm the written assessment scores of applicants for sponsorship upon request to it by 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, whichever is the sooner.
- 13 An employee may only be awarded sponsorship to undertake a nursing degree programme 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. Verification of this must be obtained from the applicant's employer.

Service Commitment

- 15 Successful applicants for sponsorship will be required to give a written undertaking to their 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 thereafter (see paragraph 17 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 a different Irish public health service agency.

Retention of Salary

- 16 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

- 17 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 (so long as the part-time work is not less than half-time), but they will be required to give five year's nursing service to that employer. In exceptional circumstances, with the agreement of that employer, all or a portion of such service may be given in the employment of a different Irish public health service agency.

Annual Leave

- 18 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

- 19 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

- 20 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. Salary will only be paid in proportion to time actually worked for the agency during the repeat year. The sponsorship arrangement will be discontinued for the duration of the repeat year but will recommence after the employee has successfully completed the repeat year.
- 21 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

- 22 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 following successful completion of the nursing degree programme 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.

Funding of Sponsorship

- 23 The Department will provide funding to each Health Board/ERHA 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 a completed costing sheet in the form set out in Appendix 1. This should be submitted as close as possible to the start of each academic year.

Review of Sponsorship Scheme

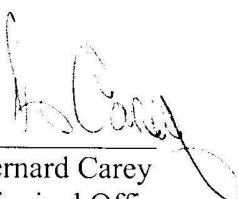
- 24 The sponsorship scheme will be reviewed by the Department in the light of experience in its first year of operation.

Queries from Personnel Departments

- 25 Any queries from Personnel Departments in relation to this Circular should be addressed to Ms Susan Reilly or Ms Sandra Walsh of the Department's Nursing Policy Division who can be contacted at (01) 6354064/6354055.

Closing Date for Applications to CAO

- 26 The closing date for the return of completed application forms to the CAO is 1 February 2002. Accordingly, your co-operation in ensuring that this Circular is immediately brought to the attention of all relevant personnel in your agency would be greatly appreciated.



Bernard Carey
Principal Officer
Nursing Policy Division

Appendix 1

List of Employees in Health Board / ERHA area sponsored under terms of Circular 1/2002

Name and Address of Employee	Grade	Point on Salary Scale and Incremental Date	Name and Address of Employer	Particulars of Nursing Degree Programme being pursued (please indicate General, Psychiatric or Mental Handicap programme and name of Higher Education Institution)

Signed by Director of the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Unit:

Date: