



Circular 37/2003

7 July 2003

Chief Executive Officer  
Each Health Board/ERHA

Each Public Voluntary Hospital  
Outside ERHA

Each Mental Handicap Agency  
Outside ERHA

Director  
Each Nursing and Midwifery  
Planning Development Unit



DEPARTMENT  
OF HEALTH AND  
CHILDREN  
AN ROINN  
SLÁINTE AGUS LEANAÍ

Quality and Fairness  
A Health System for You

## **Implementation of the Healthcare Support Certificate FETAC (NCVA) Level 2**

I am directed by the Minister for Health and Children to refer to the introduction of a national programme of training for health care assistants. The report of the working group on *Effective Utilisation of Professional Skills of Nurses and Midwives* (DoHC, 2001) recommended the introduction of a course accredited by the Further Education and Training Awards Council/National Council for Vocational Awards (FETAC, NCVA) at level 2, namely, the Healthcare Support Certificate.

### **1. Duration of Initiative**

It has been decided that the course will be available in all health board areas from September 2003. This Circular will be reviewed in twelve months in light of developments during this period.

### **2. Eligibility**

The scheme is open to employees of the public health service, who are employed as health care assistants, and are directly involved in the delivery of care to patients/clients within a nursing context.

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The selection criteria for undertaking this course is the responsibility of employers. Principles for the selection of applicants on to the Healthcare Support Certificate training programme are set out in **Appendix 1**. Those applying for a place on the Healthcare Support Certificate course must be actively engaged in the role of health care assistant.

### **3. Modules Covered by Initiative**

A list of modules covered by this initiative is set out in **Appendix 2**. Modules not included on the list are outside the scope of this initiative and no funding will be made available by the Department to cover such modules.

### **4. Work Commitment**

Individuals who undertake the course are required to give a written undertaking to their employing agency that they will continue to work in the public health service for a minimum period of 12 months after they complete the course. A specimen Form of Undertaking is attached at **Appendix 3**. Every form of undertaking should be witnessed by a member of staff designated by the health service employer.

### **5. Aim**

The aim of this course is to provide a national education and training qualification for health care assistants. The Healthcare Support Certificate training programme for health care assistants has been developed to provide all participants with the necessary education and training to work as health care assistants.

### **6. Scope**

The Healthcare Support Certificate is the core level qualification in preparing health care assistants to assist nurses in the delivery of patient care. Newly appointed health care assistants must commit to complete the course. The health care assistant performs this role under the direct supervision and guidance of a registered nurse. The registered nurse retains overall responsibility for patient care and the health care assistant is accountable to the registered nurse.

### **7. Management and Administration**

The overall implementation of the programme is the responsibility of the Director of the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units. The Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Unit is required to maintain records in relation to those undertaking the Healthcare Support Certificate training programme. These records must include:-

- Name
- Employee number/reference
- Place of employment
- Date of commencement and date of completion of the course

Each trainee should be informed that this information will be forwarded to the Department of Health and Children.

The Centres of Nursing Education are central to the organisation and co-ordination of the Healthcare Support Certificate training programme. The Centres of Nursing Education will be responsible for the administration and delivery of the course with appropriate support and direction from the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units. It is recommended that the "model of good practice" from the University of Ulster be used by all course co-ordinators. The "model of good practice" is attached at **Appendix 4**.

### **8. Funding**

Funding will be allocated by the Department of Health and Children on the basis of a per capita amount, such amount to cover all costs incurred in the delivery of the programme. No funding will be provided for repeat module(s) or units of study.

Prior to the commencement of the programme each year, each health board/authority should submit a programme schedule to the Department of Health and Children, setting out the commencement dates and proposed numbers of participants in respect of each course. Approval of the Department of Health and Children must be obtained before the commencement of the course.

### **9. Further Information**

Any queries in relation to this Circular should be addressed to Ms. Maeve Hickey or Ms Caitriona Mason of the Department's Nursing Policy Division who can be contacted at (01) 6354056/6354057.



Eugene Lennon  
Nursing Policy Division

## Appendix I

### **Principles for the selection process of applicants for the Healthcare Support Certificate**

The following principles apply for the selection of participants for the Healthcare Support Certificate:-

- Information in relation to the course content, delivery and assessment methods to be made available to all potential applicants.
- All potential applicants to be notified of the application date and process for application.
- Internal advertisement of the course should occur in a reasonable timeframe before the selection process and course commences.
- Selection criteria for the course should be decided on before the course is internally advertised. These criteria should be made clear to potential applicants by way of advertisement.
- Selection criteria for entry onto the course must be fair and equitable.
- Applicants are to be informed of the outcome of the selection process in reasonable time before the start of the course.

## Appendix 2

### Healthcare Support Certificate Modules

FETAC (NCVA) Level 2 will be awarded to a candidate who reaches the required standard in modules whose total value are at least eight and which include:

- 5 Vocational modules (including three mandatory and two elective modules)
- 2 General Studies Modules (one of which must be Communications)
- 1 Work Experience module.

#### Vocational Modules (Mandatory)

Care Skills	D20163
Care Support	D20164
Safety and Health at Work	D20165

#### Vocational Modules (Elective Choose 2)

Human Growth and Development	D20032
Anatomy and Physiology	D20001
Child Development	D20005
Caring for Children (0-6 years)	D20159
Caring for Children in Hospital	D20171
Intellectual Disability Studies	D20169
Operating Department Care Skills	D20168
Maternity Care Support	D20167
Palliative Care Support	D20170
Rehabilitation Support	D20172

#### General Studies Modules (Mandatory)

Communications	G20001
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#### General Studies Modules (Choose one)

Team working	G20034
Nutrition	C20140

Personal effectiveness in the Workplace G20033  
Social Studies G20031  
Occupational First Aid D20174  
Customer Service D20151

**Work Experience Module (Mandatory)**

Work Experience W20008

**Locally Developed Modules**

Modules may be developed locally where a course provider wishes to respond to local needs and a relevant FETAC (NCVA) module is not available. FETAC guidelines must be adhered to if developing a module. The Department of Health and Children must also approve and sanction locally developed modules before delivery.

### Appendix 3

#### Specimen Form of Undertaking in respect of The Payment of Course Fees

I, the undersigned , of \_\_\_\_\_(address)  
intend to pursue the national training programme for health care assistants,  
leading to the award of Healthcare Support Certificate.

In return for my course fees being paid for me by \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of health service employer), I hereby undertake to continue to work in  
the Irish public health service for a period of not less than twelve months after  
the completion of the course.

I understand that I shall be liable to repay the course fees to  
\_\_\_\_\_(name of health service employer) if (a) I discontinue the  
course or otherwise do not complete the course within the timeframe, or (b) I  
cease working in the public health service within a period of twelve months  
after the completion of the course.

Signed by \_\_\_\_\_

In the presence of \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4

### MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

#### PRE-COURSE ARRANGEMENTS

- ▶ The course co-ordinator should ensure that they have all necessary information from FETAC (NVCA) well in advance of the beginning of the course, including dates and times of all FETAC (NCVA) orientation/study days.
- ▶ The course co-ordinator should liaise closely with FETAC support staff to overcome any problems and to clarify relevant issues before the course commences.
- ▶ The course co-ordinator should select and confirm the team of tutors who will teach on the course in advance of the course beginning.
- ▶ The course co-ordinators should liaise with ward managers to select clinical assessors in appropriate areas within the clinical areas in advance of the beginning of the course.
- ▶ When clinical assessors have been identified, course co-ordinators should meet with them either individually or as a team to brief them on what will be expected of them. Clinical assessors should also be given an overview of the course, details on all modules, and details of the modules that they will be involved in and what that involvement will be. Any potential problems should be raised and if possible resolved. If it is necessary to meet with clinical assessors individually, this should be arranged before the beginning of the course.
- ▶ Ward managers should be briefed and given information relating to the course prior to the course commencing. They should be informed that it will be necessary to make other staff on the ward aware that the course is running and that there will be a clinical assessor and trainee(s) from the course based in the ward. Ward managers should also be briefed as to the nature of informing patients about the course and the presence of trainee(s) on the ward if this is deemed appropriate.
- ▶ Appropriate teaching rooms and facilities for the course should be identified and booked when the timetable for the course is completed.
- ▶ Internal advertisement of the course should occur in a reasonable timeframe before the course commences.
- ▶ Selection criteria for entry onto the course must be fair and equitable.
- ▶ The course co-ordinator should ensure that all parties are sent as much information as possible about the course. This information should include:
  - start date of the course;
  - course timetable;
  - what will be expected of the trainee on the course;



- contact details for course co-ordinator, teaching staff and clinical assessors;
  - details of the trainee's work placement;
  - details of the modules that will be undertaken on the course;
  - how the course works in terms of assessment;
  - information on FETAC (NCVA);
  - the duration of the course.
- ▶ There should be active involvement of students, practitioners, patient representatives, and employers in course planning.

## TROUBLESHOOTING DURING THE COURSE

- ▶ The course co-ordinator should meet with all tutors either individually or as a team to brief them on what they will be teaching and assessing. They should also be provided with assignment briefs and what will be expected of them in terms of quality provision. Any potential problems should be raised and if possible resolved. If it is necessary to meet with tutors individually, this should be arranged before the beginning of the course.
- ▶ Dates, times and venue should be arranged for the team of tutors to meet periodically throughout the course.
- ▶ Dates, times and venue should be arranged for the team of clinical assessors to meet periodically throughout the course.
- ▶ The course co-ordinator should make the tutors and clinical assessors aware of the dates, times and venue of the orientation/study days and staff should attend these where possible.
- ▶ The course co-ordinator should make it clear to the tutors and clinical assessors that he/she can be contacted whenever necessary.
- ▶ The course co-ordinator should meet the trainees as a group on the first day of the course to welcome them and to answer any queries that arise.
- ▶ The course co-ordinator should liaise with FETAC (NCVA) throughout the course to resolve any problems that arise.
- ▶ The course co-ordinator should meet periodically with tutors to ensure everything is running smoothly and to resolve any problems that may arise.
- ▶ The course co-ordinator should visit clinical assessors on the wards periodically throughout the course to resolve any potential problems and provide support where necessary.
- ▶ There should be trainee-staff liaison committees where concerns can be raised and addressed.
- ▶ A studies mentor system should be introduced to provide support and encouragement to trainees.
- ▶ There should be a course committee meeting every three months. This course committee should include representatives of all the major stakeholders involved

in the course including course co-ordinators, clinical assessors and teaching staff.

### **PRE-EXTERNAL EXAMINER**

- ▶ Assignments and deadlines should be made clear to the trainees by the relevant teaching staff. As far as possible these deadlines should be spread out across the training period.
- ▶ Feedback on assignments and assessments should be given to trainees by teaching staff and clinical assessors within a reasonable timeframe and should be as detailed as the FETAC (NCVA) guidelines permit.
- ▶ Course co-ordinators should ensure that they have all the necessary information from FETAC (NCVA) on the external examiner and should brief the relevant staff well in advance of this event. As FETAC (NCVA) specifies a period of time in which the external examiner could arrive and not a specific date, course co-ordinators and relevant staff should be prepared well in advance.
- ▶ There should be a mock internal examination board before the main board.
- ▶ The external examiner should attend the main examination board.
- ▶ External examiners should sample course work across a number of sites.

### **POST COURSE EVALUATION**

- ▶ Annual reviews of the programme should take place.
- ▶ A system of placement audit should be undertaken to evaluate the quality of the clinical learning environment.
- ▶ At the end of the course, course co-ordinators and other relevant staff should make the trainees on the course aware of when their results will be available and how they will receive them. Trainees should also be given an opportunity to speak to the course co-ordinator about any outstanding issues relating to the course.
- ▶ At the end of the course, all staff, teaching and clinical, should be briefed on the outcome of the course and the overall results of the class.
- ▶ To help identify actual or potential quality problems, data should periodically be collected on:
  - Employer feedback;
  - Entry Qualifications of Students;
  - Student Results;
  - Student Attrition.