

National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery

# Guidelines for Health Service Providers for the Selection of Nurses and Midwives who might Apply for Financial Support in seeking Opportunities to pursue Further Education



*National Council for the  
Professional Development  
of Nursing and Midwifery*

*An Chomhairle Náisiúnta d'Fhorbairt  
Ghairmiúil an Altranais agus  
an Chnáimhseachais*

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## Introduction

The National Council has a statutory role in providing guidelines for health service providers for the selection of nurses and midwives who might apply for financial support in seeking opportunities to pursue further education. Many service providers have policies in place to support further education. These guidelines outline best practice in relation to the selection of nurses and midwives applying for financial support in seeking opportunities to pursue further education.

Continuing education is critical to the nursing and midwifery workforce to ensure skills and competencies are available to support service delivery. Nurses and midwives should be supported to engage in continuing education in an equitable, fair and transparent manner. Equally nurses and midwives who have engaged in continuing education should endeavour to implement knowledge gained and impart learning to others.

Further education should enable nurses and midwives to enhance their skills and knowledge in order to provide competent care which will support the delivery of a quality service in an interdisciplinary context – an approach that underpins our current Health Strategy, *Quality and Fairness* (DoHC 2001). To this end each health service provider should actively support and encourage participation by nurses and midwives in pursuing further education.

Currently there are no statutory guidelines in relation to funding for continuing education. The Department of Health and Children issue circulars from time to time in relation to specific initiatives or directives. Funding for further education is disbursed from the Department of Health and Children to the health boards on an annual basis. Health boards should ensure equitable access to regional continuing education funding.

### **Further education can be described as follows:**

- Regional courses organised by health boards
- Courses organised in-house
- Conferences
- Formal academic study
- Professional development.

# Policy - Continuing Education Funding

Each health service provider should have a policy on applying for funding for further education. This policy should form part of that organisation's handbook, be available to all staff and be provided as part of an orientation/induction programme. The policy should reflect any Department of Health and Children circulars regarding further education funding and study leave. The policy should detail:

- the application process
- the contact person and
- where any documentation related to the application process can be obtained.

Engaging in further education is best achieved through the formulation of a learning contract between the individual and the employer through the personal development planning process. Ideally, applications for funding should reflect an education needs analysis. This could be an agreed process between corporate learning at health board level, directors of the nursing and midwifery planning and development units, the centres of nurse education and the directors of nursing and midwifery. The education needs analysis should be linked with the service planning process. Service providers should utilise processes for evaluating the impact of continuing education.

Application for funding should occur through a formal process and an application form should be used. However, this should not take away from local flexibility in relation to continuing professional development.

## **Health service providers should detail the following in their policies:**

- Criteria for funding for further education
- Eligibility
- Payment of fees
- Study and exam leave
- Guidelines for line managers
- Application form and learning contract.



## Criteria for Funding for Further Education

The following criteria for approval of further education should be applied:

- Appropriateness of the proposed further education to the organisation and to the individual and how it supports the service plan
- Utilisation of a transparent, equitable selection process
- Equitable distribution of further education participation among staff
- Consideration of how the learning opportunity will benefit the service delivery
- Consideration of the cost effectiveness of the course.

## Eligibility

The policy should clearly identify which nurses and midwives are eligible to apply for funding for further education.

## Payment of Fees

The amount of funding available for formal academic study should be stated. The timing of release of funds should also be outlined. All related expenses should be agreed locally.

## Study and Exam Leave

The study and exam leave should be outlined for:

- Certificate and diploma level courses
- Post-registration bachelors' and masters' degree courses
- Doctoral degrees.

## Guidelines for Line Managers

The policy should outline the line manager's role in relation to further education. The line manager should ensure that:

- There is fair and equitable distribution of nurses and midwives undertaking further education
- Release of staff for further education is balanced with service need. This should be identified within the service plan



- A record is maintained of all further education undertaken and this is noted in the individual personnel files and updated on information systems.

## Application Form

The application form should fully explore the aims and objectives of the education programme and ensure that these are aligned with personal, professional and organisational goals. The timeframe should be stated as to when an applicant can expect to hear the outcome once an application is submitted. The director of nursing/midwifery or their designated officer should have responsibility for approving applications and learning contracts.

The following should be sought within the application form:

- Details of the proposed further education
- How further education fits with personal development plan
- A learning contract.

## Learning Contract

Applicants and their line managers should be aware of and agree to any preconditions that may apply to a successful application in gaining funding for further education. The learning contract should outline:

- How the proposed further education activity supports the mission of the organisation
- How the proposed further education activity supports the organisational objectives
- How the proposed further education activity supports the service plan
- What contribution the further education will make specifically to the immediate work area
- How the individual will undertake to ensure their further education is updated in personal portfolios and on organisational information systems
- Agreement by participants that their learning be transferred to the workplace by the provision of appropriate feedback to managers and colleagues and the contribution of best practice in the workplace by applying knowledge and skills gained during further education.

## References

Department of Health and Children (2001) *Quality and Fairness – A Health System for You*. Stationery Office, Dublin.

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