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1. Definition of Continuing Education

"Continuing education is a lifelong professional development process that takes place after the completion of the pre-registration nurse education programme. It consists of planned learning experiences which are designed to augment the knowledge, skills and attitudes of registered nurses [and midwives] for the enhancement of nursing [and midwifery] practice, patient/client care, education, administration and research." (An Bord Altranaís 1994; Commission on Nursing 1998 6.11)

"The Commission on Nursing sees the need to develop and strengthen the availability of professional development for all nurses and midwives." (Commission on Nursing 1998 6.11)

The Commission distinguishes between continuing education on the one hand and in-service training and specialist training on the other. In this light it comments that "continuing education ... might consist of education on developments in nursing and the treatment of patient groups." (Commission on Nursing 1998 6.11)

2. Responsibility for Planning and Provision of Continuing Education

The prime responsibility for the provision and funding of continuing education lies with the health boards and in particular, with the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units. The role of the National Council is to provide additional funding in accordance with agreed criteria.

"In relation to continuing education, the Commission recommends that the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units would have responsibility for overseeing the detailed provision of continuing nursing and midwifery education within a health board area. Such provision would range from running day seminars within individual institutions, to supporting nurses and midwives to undertake specialist education and courses accredited by the National Council. These Units would also have a role in fostering nursing and midwifery research at Health Board level." (Commission on Nursing 1998 6.21)

Additional funds will be allocated by the National Council to the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units, in response to submissions received from them in the form of a plan for the provision of continuing education, in which the additional funding required from the National Council is clearly identified and justified.

"The Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units would submit development plans to the National Council when applying for additional development funding to support continuing nursing and midwifery education. These plans would be approved and funded by the National Council for up to three-year periods. Fees in respect of post-registration courses or bursaries to support students on post-registration courses would be paid by the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units according to the guidelines laid down by the National Council." (Commission on Nursing 1998 6.22)

The role of the National Council in relation to continuing education is to "support additional developments in continuing education by health boards and voluntary organisations." (Commission on Nursing 1998 6.14)

"The National Council will be funded through the Department of Health and Children to assist health service providers financially in the development of specialist training and continuing nurse education programmes. The National Council would support additional developments in continuing nurse education by health boards and voluntary organisations. The National Council could also retain some discretionary funding to contribute to the organisation of seminars on professional issues by other organisations." (Commission on Nursing 1998 6.17)

3. Criteria for the Allocation of Additional Support for Continuing Education from the National Council

The criteria for the funding of proposed programmes include the following -

- ▶ The programme will constitute a valuable learning experience and make a meaningful contribution to the professional development of the nurse or midwife involved
- ▶ The programme will contribute to the development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the nurse or midwife involved
- ▶ The programme will be part of the strategic development of the nursing and midwifery services provided in the area and as such relate to the needs of the service addressed within the service plan for the area and to health policy priorities
- ▶ The programme will enhance nursing and midwifery practice, patient/client care, patient/client education and/or the administration of nursing and midwifery practice
- ▶ The programme may be part of a programme designed to enhance nursing, midwifery and relevant health research
- ▶ Activities eligible for funding will include formal educational programmes, seminars, conferences, workshops and courses accredited by the National Council
- ▶ Priority will be given to programmes designed to enhance equity of access to educational opportunities and to provide development opportunities in areas that would not otherwise be viable or that would not be funded by other agencies.

4. Process for Approval of Additional Funding for Continuing Education by the National Council

All additional funding for continuing education provided by the National Council will be channeled through the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units. The process for approval will consist of the following steps -

1. Submission of plans by each of the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Units. The submission will include -
 - ▶ A description of the programmes for which funding is required
 - ▶ A description of the outcomes to be achieved
 - ▶ An outline of the method to be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme
 - ▶ A description of the method of reporting back to the National Council on the results of the programme
 - ▶ A detailed description of the costs involved and the funding required
2. Review and assessment by the Executive of the National Council of the plans submitted in line with the criteria outlined for the allocation of additional funding
3. Report on proposals for funding prepared by the Executive and submitted for approval to the National Council
4. Funding allocated to approved programmes

References:

An Bord Altranais (1994) The Future of Nurse Education and Training in Ireland. Dublin: An Bord Altranais.
Government of Ireland (1998) Report of the Commission on Nursing A Blueprint for the Future. Dublin: Stationery Office

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