

Voluntary Bonding Scheme Terms and Conditions for Midwives 2023

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Voluntary Bonding Scheme (the Scheme) is a practical initiative run by Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand (Te Whatu Ora) to encourage newly qualified health professionals to work in the communities and specialties that need them most, and to retain essential health professionals in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- 1.2 The Scheme is targeted to new graduates in eligible professions (and General Practice medical trainees) who are starting their career, with the aim of incentivising them to work in eligible hard-to-staff communities or specialties. Those accepted to the Scheme can become eligible for payments in the first three-to-five years of their career, to help repay their student loan or as top-up income.
- 1.3 To be eligible to register for the Scheme and qualify for payment(s), you must:
- be a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident ¹ at the time you make an application for payment;
 - have completed your final year of study in 2022 (or early 2023²) for your undergraduate qualification for your profession at an accredited New Zealand Training Institution (clauses 1.11 to 1.13);
 - be registered, or be eligible to be registered with the Midwifery Council of New Zealand - Te Tatau o te Whare Kahu;
 - have commenced working, or intend to start working, in the profession for which you have trained and intend to do so for at least three and up to five years;
 - work in a hard-to-staff community as per the eligibility criteria for midwives (clauses 4.2 to 4.7) for at least three and up to five years; and
 - comply with all other terms and conditions of the Scheme.
- 1.4 Involvement in the Scheme involves four phases:
- Registration of Interest
 - confirmation of place on the Scheme
 - participation (employment)
 - applications for payment.
- 1.5 **In order to be eligible for payment**, you must register for the Scheme, have your place on the Scheme confirmed and meet the Scheme's Terms and Conditions during the participation phase. **You must also apply for payment within twelve (12) months of becoming eligible for payment, under the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme.** Te Whatu Ora strongly encourages you to apply for payment no later than six months after becoming eligible to apply under the Terms and Conditions.
- 1.6 Te Whatu Ora also recommends that you check your progress while participating in the Scheme (by contacting us via email at vbs@health.govt.nz), particularly:
- at the three, four- and five-year points after registering for the Scheme, and
 - if you change employers, communities, practice type, take parental leave or extended leave.
- 1.7 You will not be eligible for any payment from the Scheme if you do not complete at least three full years (36 months) on the Scheme, in accordance with these Terms and Conditions.

¹ For the purposes of the Scheme, Permanent Residents include those who hold a NZ Permanent Resident Visa, or a Returning Residents Visa (with no expiry date for travel).

² some undergraduate midwifery programmes (such as AUT) conclude early in the year. If you complete undergraduate requirements in 2023, before the VBS registration period closes, you may register in 2023. If you complete later in 2023, it is anticipated that you will be eligible to register for the 2024 intake. If you have any queries, please contact us at vbs@health.govt.nz.

- 1.8 The Scheme is a voluntary process and you, not Te Whatu Ora, are responsible for any employment decisions you may make based on your intended participation in the Scheme, including decisions about working in hard-to-staff communities.
- 1.9 You are responsible for notifying Te Whatu Ora of any change of postal address, email address or other contact details in a timely manner.
- 1.10 There are limited places available on the Scheme. Where eligible Registrations of Interest exceed the number of places available on the Scheme, a selection process will be conducted. This is not subject to appeal.

Education Prerequisites

- 1.11 You must:
- have completed, in 2022 (or early 2023³), the requirements of an undergraduate training programme for Midwifery from the list of accredited institutions below (clause 1.12) AND
 - be eligible to be registered with the Midwifery Council of New Zealand - Te Tatau o te Whare Kahu
- 1.12 Accredited training institutions for midwifery are:
- Auckland University of Technology
 - Ara Institute of Canterbury
 - Otago Polytechnic
 - Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington
 - Waikato Institute of Technology.
- 1.13 Registrants who gained their base professional qualifications from an overseas training institution in 2022 and who meet the registration requirements of the Midwifery Council of New Zealand - Te Tatau o te Whare Kahu may be considered for the Scheme on a case-by-case basis, if they meet all other eligibility criteria and other Terms and Conditions of the Scheme. This will be assessed prior to confirmation of a place on the Scheme.

Definition of a Graduate

- 1.14 Eligible graduates are those who completed their studies in towards their undergraduate degree in 2022 and can provide evidence of having done so (if requested by Te Whatu Ora), irrespective of the date of their graduation ceremony.

2. Registration of Interest

- 2.1 In order to be a participant on the Scheme, you must successfully register your interest and be confirmed on the Scheme.
- 2.2 To register your interest, you must complete the online Registration of Interest form. This involves providing information to show that you meet, or intend to meet, the eligibility criteria of the Scheme. The Registration of Interest period is typically six weeks in duration. You are responsible for ensuring that you register during this period. Entries outside this period will not be considered. It is your responsibility to ensure that you successfully register for the Scheme and obtain an email from Te Whatu Ora confirming this.

³ some undergraduate midwifery programmes (such as AUT) conclude early in the year. If you complete undergraduate requirements in 2023, before the VBS registration period closes, you may register in 2023; if you complete later in 2023, it is anticipated you will be eligible to register in the 2024 intake. If you have any queries, please contact us at vbs@health.govt.nz.

- 2.3 Completing a Registration of Interest does not guarantee a place on the Scheme. The purpose of the Registration of Interest process is to provide information about your future work plans so that you can be considered for one of the places on the Scheme.

3. Confirmation on the Scheme

- 3.1 There are limited places on the Scheme. Successfully registering your interest for the Scheme does not guarantee you will be confirmed on the Scheme.
- 3.2 A separate process will be conducted by Te Whatu Ora (following consideration of your Registration of Interest) to formally confirm you on the Scheme. You will be advised in writing whether your Registration of Interest has been confirmed.
- 3.3 There are limited places available on the Scheme. Where eligible Registrations of Interest exceed the number of places available on the Scheme, a selection process will be conducted. This is not subject to appeal.

4. Participation

- 4.1 Once you are confirmed on the Scheme, your participation is determined by:
- your commencement date on the Scheme
 - minimum employment requirements
 - movement between hard-to-staff communities
 - breaks and pauses in your employment
 - parental leave
 - work you may undertake as a locum.

In order to be eligible to receive payment from the Scheme you must comply with the eligibility criteria for payment (Section 5).

Eligibility Criteria

- 4.2 To be eligible for the Scheme payment(s), you must:
- meet the prerequisites as listed in Clauses 1.3 and 1.11 to 1.13 AND
 - work as a core-employed and/or LMC midwife in one of the hard-to-staff communities (clause 4.3) for midwives for at least the next three and up to five years **AND**
 - if employed as an LMC, meet the births requirements as specified in clauses 4.4 to 4.7 **AND**
 - undertake appropriate entry to practice training, which must include the Midwifery First Year of Practice programme and may include employer-run programmes.
 - **Note:** you may move between listed areas as per clauses 4.17 to 4.18.
- 4.3 **The 2023 eligible hard-to-staff communities for core-employed and or LMC midwives are:**
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Auckland District | • Hutt Valley District |
| • Bay of Plenty District | • Lakes District |
| • Capital & Coast District | • South Canterbury District |
| • Counties Manukau District | • Taranaki District |
| • Hawkes Bay District | • Waitemata District |

Lead Maternity Carer Midwives (LMCs)

- 4.4 The employment requirement for LMC midwives is based on the number of births attended as an LMC each year. This will vary depending on whether you work in an urban or predominantly rural hard-to-staff area (see clause 4.6).
- 4.5 The eligible communities are districts which reflect the geographical area of the corresponding former DHB. If you have any queries, contact us at vbs@health.govt.nz.
- 4.6 The **required number of births for LMCs** participating in the Scheme are as follows:
- when the Commencement Date (on the Scheme) is in the first postgraduate year, LMCs working in hard-to-staff **urban** communities are required to attend at least 20 births in their first postgraduate year of practice (clause 4.9) and at least 30 births for their second and subsequent years of practice
 - when the Commencement Date is in the first postgraduate year, LMCs working in hard-to-staff **rural** communities are required to attend at least 15 births in their first postgraduate year of practice, and at least 21 births for their second and subsequent years of practice
 - when the Commencement Date is not the first postgraduate year of practice, the LMC must attend the minimum number of births required for the second and subsequent years of practice.
- 4.7 When you apply for payment, you are responsible for verifying the number of births attended as an LMC each year and will be required to make a declaration and **provide a report from your midwifery provider organisation regarding the number of urban and/or rural births** you have attended as an LMC annually (clause 4.6) before each bonding payment is made. If you make birth claims directly via Te Whatu Ora of Health, please make contact by emailing vbs@health.govt.nz for more information.

Changes to Hard-to-Staff Communities

- 4.8 You must commence working in one of the hard-to-staff communities listed in clause 4.3. If you wish to change the community you are working in, you may only do so in accordance with clause 4.17 to 4.18.

Commencement Date

- 4.9 If you were already working in a hard-to-staff community on or before 1 January 2023, your Commencement Date on the Scheme is **1 January 2023**. Time employed in an eligible position prior to this date does not contribute towards the bonding period.
- 4.10 If you began (or begin) working in a hard-to-staff community, after 1 January 2023, your Commencement Date is the date on which your employment began.
- 4.11 If you have indicated in your Registration of Interest that you intend to shift into a hard-to-staff community your Commencement Date is the date that your employment in a hard-to-staff community or hard-to-staff specialty begins.
- 4.12 If you have not commenced employment or LMC work in accordance with these Terms and Conditions by **30 June 2024** your confirmation on the Scheme will lapse and you will cease to be eligible for the Scheme and payments.

Minimum Employment Requirements

- 4.13 To be eligible for payments, core-employed midwives must be employed for a minimum 0.6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE). This may be an average FTE for any 12-month period of employment if your hours worked fluctuated for any reason. This equates to 24 hours per week, or 1,152 hours across a normal working year of 48 weeks.

- 4.14 The eligibility criteria for LMCs (clause 4.6) have been developed to match an LMC's workload as closely as possible to the 0.6 FTE requirement for core-employed midwives.
- 4.15 You will not be eligible for payment from the Scheme if you undertake substantive or continuous locum work which means that you cannot meet the breaks and pauses clauses (clauses 4.19 to 4.21 and 4.25 to 4.27).
- 4.16 You are responsible for verifying that the FTE or birth requirements have been met and will be required to make a declaration and provide a certificate of service from your employer(s) or midwifery provider organization before each bonding payment is made (Section 5).

Moving Between Hard-to-Staff Communities

- 4.17 You may move between hard-to-staff communities:
- listed in clause 4.3
 - listed in any Voluntary Bonding Scheme Terms and Conditions for midwives after 2023.
- 4.18 You cannot move to a hard-to-staff community that is listed in any Voluntary Bonding Scheme Terms and Conditions before 2023.

Breaks and Pauses in the Term of Service

- 4.19 You can take up to 14 weeks absence (total paid and unpaid leave, not including Parental Leave) in any 12-month period from your position in a hard-to-staff community without affecting your eligibility for bonding payments. Such an absence is known as a "break".
- 4.20 A "pause" is any time beyond the 14 weeks break allowance that you spend away from the hard-to-staff community. Time taken as pauses must be added to the term necessary to complete the bond, and no more than ten weeks may be added during any one year. No more than 50 weeks in total can be added to the five-year bonding term.
- Total absences of more than 24 weeks in any 12-month period (not including Parental Leave) will render an applicant ineligible for the Scheme and payments unless there are exceptional circumstances as accepted by Te Whatu Ora (refer clauses 4.28 and 4.29).**
- 4.21 Breaks and pauses include any leave or absence from employment, with or without pay, including normal employment leave entitlements, such as annual leave and sick leave. Locum work will also be considered against the breaks and pauses provisions (see clauses 4.25 to 4.27).

Parental Leave

- 4.22 You may take up to 52 weeks parental leave, in accordance with the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987 and remain on the Scheme.
- 4.23 Time spent on parental leave does not accrue towards your bonding period and must be made up. The bonding period will automatically restart as soon as you return to work in one of the hard-to-staff communities listed in clause 4.3.
- 4.24 Time spent on parental leave is separate to the break and pause provisions (clauses 4.19 to 4.21).

Working as a Midwifery Locum

- 4.25 Locum work that you may undertake is considered an absence under these terms. If you undertake locum work such that you cannot meet the breaks and pauses clauses (clauses 4.19 to 4.21), you will not be eligible for payment from the Scheme.
- 4.26 For the purposes of the Scheme, a locum is someone who provides the services in the stead of another midwife or LMC within the same scope of practice.

- 4.27 When you apply for payments from the Scheme, you will be asked to confirm that you have not engaged in “substantive” locum work.

Exemptions and Reviews in Exceptional Circumstances

- 4.28 If there is a change in your circumstances that is exceptional and results in an inability to meet the 2023 Terms and Conditions, you may request an exemption from Te Whatu Ora. Exemptions from the standard Terms and Conditions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of Te Whatu Ora. It is strongly recommended that you seek an exemption prior to becoming ineligible under the normal terms. If you are applying for payment and have not met the terms due to exceptional circumstances, you can also request a retrospective review.
- 4.29 Applications for exemptions under exceptional circumstances must be made in writing, with a clear explanation as to what clauses cannot be met and the exceptional circumstances which have prevented you from meeting the Terms. These can be sent to vbs@health.govt.nz, or submitted along with an application for payment.

5. Payment

- 5.1 You are responsible for initiating the first claim for payment after three full years (36 months) have been completed on the Scheme, in accordance with these Terms and Conditions, starting from your Commencement Date (see clauses 4.9 to 4.12).
- 5.2 If you remain on the Scheme for a fourth and fifth year, you are responsible for initiating the second and third claims for payment.
- 5.3 **To be eligible for payment under the scheme, you must apply for payment within twelve (12) months of becoming eligible for payment under the Terms and Conditions.** Te Whatu Ora strongly encourages you to apply for payment no later than six months after becoming eligible to apply, under the terms and conditions.
- 5.4 Te Whatu Ora also recommends that you check your progress while participating in the Scheme (by contacting us via email at vbs@health.govt.nz), particularly:
- at the three, four- and five-year points after registering for the Scheme, and
 - if you change employers, communities, practice type, take parental leave or extended leave.
- 5.5 You will only be eligible for payments if you have:
- worked for at least three full years (1st payment) in accordance with these Terms and Conditions. Up to two additional payments can be applied for upon completion of a fourth or fifth year.
 - met the minimum full time equivalent (FTE) employment requirements for midwives (clauses 4.13 to 4.16) OR
 - the required number of births for LMCs (clause 4.6) AND
 - complied with the rules governing breaks and pauses (clauses 4.19 to 4.21), Parental Leave (clauses 4.22 to 4.24), and locum work (clauses 4.25 to 4.27) for the Scheme.
- 5.6 No payments will be made until you have:
- applied for payment in accordance with the application for payment process
 - submitted a declaration confirming that you have met these Terms and Conditions
 - provided a certificate of service from your employer(s) or midwifery provider organisation confirming that your employment has complied with the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme during the bonding period.

- 5.7 Details of further information required to confirm that you have met the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme and to enable payment to be made (e.g., proof of identity) are outlined in the payment application form, which will become available on the Te Whatu Ora website by January 2026.
- 5.8 If you have a student loan, the net Scheme payment will be made against your student loan. If the balance of your student loan is less than the Scheme payment, you will need to contact Inland Revenue once the payment has been made to enable the difference to be paid to you.
- 5.9 If you do not have a student loan, the net Scheme payment will be paid directly to you.
- 5.10 The payment for midwives for the first 36-month bond completed on the Scheme is **\$10,500** after tax (net). You can go on to be eligible to apply for additional payments of **\$3,500** net upon completion of a fourth year, and **\$3,500** net again after a fifth year.
- 5.11 If you are an independent contractor, a gross payment will be made and the net amount you receive will depend upon your personal tax situation.
- 5.12 Scheme payments are subject to income tax and may affect your tax situation, for example, in relation to provisional tax, Working for Families and child support payments.
- 5.13 Te Whatu Ora recommends that you seek independent advice on how the payment will affect your tax position. For further tax information, contact Inland Revenue.

6. Privacy Statement

- 6.1 All of the information you provide in the Registration of Interest form will be treated as personal information and will be used, stored and disclosed in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act 2020.
- 6.2 By submitting the Registration of Interest form, you are authorising Te Whatu Ora of Health to collect personal information about you and consenting to relevant information being shared with other key stakeholders, including your employer, for the purposes of the Voluntary Bonding Scheme. This information will be stored and used by Te Whatu Ora for purposes associated with the Scheme, in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act 2020.
- 6.3 The information will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed to any person except in connection with the purposes for which it is obtained, or by operation of law.
- 6.4 You have the right to contact Te Whatu Ora to request access to and correction of any personal information held about you.
- 6.5 We suggest you keep a copy of these Terms and Conditions for your records.