

Voluntary Bonding Scheme Terms and Conditions for Sonographers 2024

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Voluntary Bonding Scheme (the Scheme) is a practical initiative run by Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora (Health New Zealand) to encourage newly qualified health professionals to work in/for the specialties, communities or employers 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/for eligible hard-to-staff specialties, communities or employers. 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 payments, 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 2023 for your qualification for your profession at an accredited training Institution (clauses 1.11 to 1.13);
 - be registered, or be eligible to be registered with the Medical Radiation Technologists Board - Te Poari Ringa Hangarua Iraruke;
 - 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; and
 - work for a hard-to-staff employer(s) in Aotearoa New Zealand as per the eligibility criteria for your profession (clause 4.3) for at least three and up to five years, beginning on the applicable commencement date (refer clauses 4.5 to 4.8; and
 - comply with all other terms and conditions of the Scheme.
- 1.4 Involvement in the Scheme involves four phases:
- Registration of Interest
 - confirmation on the Scheme
 - participation (employment)
 - application 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.** Health New Zealand strongly encourages you to apply for payment no later than six months after becoming eligible to apply under the Terms and Conditions.
- 1.6 Health New Zealand 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, 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.
- 1.8 The Scheme is a voluntary process and you, not Health New Zealand, are responsible for any employment decisions you may make based on your intended participation in the Scheme.

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).

- 1.9 You are responsible for notifying Health New Zealand 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 an undergraduate degree in medical imaging and/or a relevant health science qualification as accredited by the Medical Radiation Technologists Board - Te Poari Ringa Hangarua Iraruke AND
 - have completed (in 2023) a postgraduate diploma in ultrasound from the University of Auckland **or** the Australasian Society of Ultrasound in Medicine (ASUM) and
 - be eligible to be registered as a sonographer with the Medical Radiation Technologists Board - Te Poari Ringa Hangarua Iraruke.
- 1.12 Registrants who gained their professional qualifications from an overseas training institution in 2023 and who meet the registration requirements of the relevant Authority 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

- 1.13 Eligible graduates are those who completed their postgraduate diploma in ultrasound in 2023 and can provide evidence of having done so, 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 successfully 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 a formal notification from Health New Zealand confirming this.
- 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.
- 2.4 If you have previously registered for the Scheme in an earlier intake and have already received a Scheme payment, you are not eligible to register for the 2024 intake or receive additional payment(s) under a new Scheme registration. If you have previously registered for the Scheme but have not received any payments from the Scheme, your previous registration can be voided at your request, and (if eligible) you may re-register for the Scheme. Please contact vbs@health.govt.nz if you have any queries.

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 Health New Zealand (following consideration of your Registration of Interest) to formally confirm you on the Scheme. You will be advised in writing whether your place on the Scheme 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 employers
 - 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) and comply with all other terms and conditions of the Scheme.

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 and 1.12 AND
 - have completed your postgraduate diploma in ultrasound in 2023 AND
 - work as a sonographer in Aotearoa New Zealand for an eligible hard-to-staff employer(s) for sonographers for the next three to five years, beginning on the applicable commencement date (refer clauses 4.5 to 4.8) AND
 - comply with all other terms and conditions of the Scheme.

Hard-to-Staff Employers

- 4.3 **The 2024 eligible hard-to-staff employers are:**
- Health New Zealand roles within Aotearoa New Zealand.²

Changes to Hard-to-Staff Employers

- 4.4 You must commence working in one of the hard-to-staff employers listed in clause 4.3. If you wish to change the employer you are working in, you may only do so in accordance with clause 4.12.

Commencement Date

- 4.5 If you were already working for an eligible hard-to-staff employer on or before 1 January 2024, your Commencement Date on the Scheme is **1 January 2024**. Time employed in an eligible position prior to this date does not contribute towards the bonding period.
- 4.6 If you began (or begin) working for an eligible hard-to-staff employer after 1 January 2024, your Commencement Date is the date on which your employment began.

² The eligibility criteria for the 2024 intake of the Scheme is based on Health New Zealand employment or, on a case-by-case basis, other eligible public sector employment (including where it can be verified that a private provider holds an essential services contract with Health New Zealand). Eligibility determinations will be at the sole discretion of Health New Zealand: should you have any questions as to the eligibility of your current or prospective employer, please contact us at vbs@health.govt.nz

- 4.7 If you have indicated in your Registration of Interest that you intend to shift to an eligible hard-to-staff employer, your Commencement Date is the date that your employment for the hard-to-staff employer begins.
- 4.8 If you have not commenced employment in accordance with these Terms and Conditions by **30 June 2025**, your confirmation on the Scheme will lapse and you will cease to be eligible for the Scheme or payments.

Minimum Employment Requirements

- 4.9 To be eligible for payments sonographers must be employed for a minimum 0.6 FTE (Full Time Equivalent). This may be an average FTE during any 12-month period of employment if your hours of work fluctuate for any reason. This equates to 24 hours per week, or 1,152 hours across a normal working year of 48 weeks.
- 4.10 You will not be eligible for payment from the Scheme if you undertake substantive or continuous locum work that means that you cannot meet the breaks and pauses clauses (see clauses 4.13 to 4.16 and 4.20 to 4.22).
- 4.11 You are responsible for verifying that the FTE requirements have been met and will be required to make a declaration and provide a certificate of service from your employer(s) before each bonding payment is made (Section 5).

Moving Between Hard-to-Staff Employers

- 4.12 You may move between hard-to-staff employers:
- listed in clause 4.3 OR
 - listed in any Voluntary Bonding Scheme Terms and Conditions for sonographers after 2024;
 - You cannot move to a hard-to-staff employer that is listed in any Voluntary Bonding Scheme Terms and Conditions before 2024 that is not listed in clause 4.3.

Breaks and Pauses in the Term of Service

- 4.13 You can take up to 14 weeks absence (total paid and unpaid leave, not including Parental Leave) in a 12-month period from your position for a hard-to-staff employer without affecting your eligibility for bonding payments. Such an absence is known as a “break”.
- 4.14 A “pause” is any time beyond the 14 weeks break allowance that you spend away from your hard to staff employer. 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 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 and agreed to in writing by Health New Zealand (refer clauses 4.23 and 4.24).**
- 4.15 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.
- 4.16 Locum work will also be considered an absence against the breaks and pauses provisions (see clauses 4.20 to 4.22).

Parental Leave

- 4.17 You may take up to 52 weeks parental leave (per pregnancy), in accordance with the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987 and remain on the Scheme.

- 4.18 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 your employment as a sonographer as specified by your registration on the Scheme.
- 4.19 Time spent on parental leave (up to a maximum of 52 weeks) is separate to the break and pause provisions (clauses 4.13 to 4.16). Parental leave of over 52 weeks (per pregnancy) will be considered under the breaks and pauses clauses.

Working as a Locum

- 4.20 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 4.13 to 4.16), you will not be eligible for payment from the Scheme.
- 4.21 For the purposes of the Scheme, a locum is someone who provides the services in the stead of another sonographer registered within the same scope of practice.
- 4.22 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

- 4.23 If there is a change in your circumstances that is exceptional and results in an inability to meet the 2024 Terms and Conditions, you may request an exemption from Health New Zealand. Exemptions from the standard Terms and Conditions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of Health New Zealand. 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.
- 4.24 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 you have completed three full years (36 months) on the Scheme, in accordance with these Terms and Conditions, starting from your Commencement Date (see clauses 4.5 to 4.8).
- 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.** Health New Zealand strongly encourages you to apply for payment no later than six months after becoming eligible to apply under the terms and conditions.
- 5.4 Health New Zealand 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, take parental leave or extended leave.
- 5.4 You will only be eligible for payments if you have:
- been employed for at least three full years (1st payment) in Aotearoa New Zealand accordance with these Terms and Conditions. Up to two additional payments can be applied for upon completion of a fourth or fifth year, provided all terms are met.
 - met the minimum FTE employment requirements (clauses 4.9 to 4.11)

- complied with the rules governing breaks and pauses (clauses 4.13 to 4.16), parental leave (clauses 4.17 to 4.19), and locum work for the Scheme (clauses 4.20 to 4.22).
- 5.5 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 the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme
 - provided a certificate of service from your employer(s) confirming that your employment has complied with the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme during the bonding period.
- 5.6 Details of further information required from you in order 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 be made available to you by January 2027.
- 5.7 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.
- 5.8 If you do not have a student loan, the net Scheme payment will be paid directly to you.
- 5.9 The payment for sonographers for the first 36-month bond completed on the Scheme is **\$11,796** after tax (net). You can go on to be eligible to apply for additional payments of **\$3,932** net upon completion of a fourth year, and **\$3,932** net again after a fifth year.
- 5.10 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.
- 5.11 Health New Zealand 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 Health New Zealand to collect personal information about you and consenting to relevant information being shared with other key stakeholders, for the purposes of the Voluntary Bonding Scheme. This information will be stored and used by Health New Zealand 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 Health New Zealand to request access to and correction of any personal information held about you.
- 6.5 We suggest you print a copy of these Terms and Conditions for your records.