PART 1 CONSULTATION PROPOSAL

To explore the development of a Competency assessment for non-European Economic Area (Overseas) educated and trained Nurses and Midwives who wish to Register and practice in Ireland.
Background:

This consultation outlines a draft proposal for knowledge and competence assessment for non-European Economic area (overseas) educated and trained nurses and midwives who wish to register and practice in the Republic of Ireland. The new test will be an alternative to the current adaptation assessment process for overseas candidates applying to the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland for Registration.

The primary purpose of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland regulation and registration rules, processes and procedures for nurses and midwives educated and trained overseas is to protect the public and support the provision of high quality, safe and effective professional practice.

Internationally nurses and midwives trained and educated outside the EU have become an important part of the health systems within the Western World. This is true of Ireland and the number of registered nurses and midwives educated and trained outside Ireland has grown since the first years of this century.

Since 2003 the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (formerly An Bord Altranais) published Criteria for the Provision of Adaptation assessment. An application to register with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland from overseas may be required to undertake a period of adaptation prior to obtaining registration. A period of adaptation is a period of supervised practice possibly being accompanied by further education and training (An Bord Altranais, 2003).

Current NMBI regulation of adaptation/assessments for Nurses educated and trained overseas.

The purpose and principle aim of the Adaptation and Assessment programme is based on the guidance on the provision of adaptation and assessment to nurses from overseas (An Bord Altranais, 2003). The purpose of the Adaptation and assessment programme is to ensure that each Candidate Nurse becomes eligible for registration with the Board. In order to become eligible for registration the Candidate Nurse must achieve competence. Competence is demonstrated by an ability of the Candidate Nurse to practice safely and effectively fulfilling his/her professional responsibility within his/her scope of practice.

The aim of the Adaptation/Assessment is to harness the knowledge and expertise that the Candidate Nurse brings to the programme in ways that empower the nurse to accept and exercise responsibility and accountability for independent learning, personal growth and self-awareness, and to demonstrate the competence required to have his/her name entered on the register (An Bord Altranais, 2003, p4). The period of adaptation and supervised practice is determined by the Board and is usually a minimum of 6 weeks. The candidate will undertake the placement in an NMBI approved clinical learning environment. The candidate will be
supported and supervised by Registered Nurses for the duration of the placement; preceptors and co-preceptors will have completed an approved preceptorship training programme and will have more than one year’s post registration experience. The placement will be designed to enable the candidate demonstrate the achievement of competence.

This proposal does not alter or replace this process but rather proposes an alternative assessment approach to it. This proposal does not in any way alter the existing regulatory requirements for Candidates to satisfy the Nursing and Midwifery Board requirements for registration, education and training, English language competence. It is only after completing the regulatory process that a candidate could then be offered the completion of an adaptation/assessment or aptitude test.

**EU Context the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications**

**Directive EU/36/2005**

This Directive does not create an obstacle to the possibility of Member States recognising in accordance with their Rules, the professional qualifications acquired outside the territory of the EU by third country nationals. All recognition should respect in any case minimum training conditions for certain professions. Such standing operating procedures linked to the Rules are applied in the assessment for registration by NMBI of nurses and midwives educated outside the EU. Article 14 of the Directive outlines compensation measures that can be adopted by the host Member State, an adaptation period (which NMBI utilise) or an aptitude test. The Directive states that Member States must offer the applicant the choice between adaptation period and an aptitude test.

Article 7 4 of the Directive states that “where there is a substantial difference between the professional qualification of the service provider and the training required in the host Member State, to the extent that the difference is such as to be harmful to public health or safety, the host Member State shall give the service provider the opportunity to show, in particular by means of an aptitude test, that he has acquired the knowledge or competence lacking.

It is contended that if this is available to EU citizens who apply for registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Board, it could also be available to non EU/EEA nationals who apply for registration also. Article 3 1(h) of the Directive defines an aptitude test as: a test limited to the professional knowledge of the applicant, made by the competent authorities of the host Member State with the aim of assessing the ability of the applicant to pursue a regulated profession in that Member State. It is contended in this proposal that this could be applied for EU (if appropriate) and more frequently to non EU applicants for registration with the NMBI.

It is proposed that such an assessment/test when compared to a six week adaptation/assessment would be more responsive to the needs of the candidates, their prospective employers, the regulator and the clinical sites currently approved to provide such adaptation programmes. It is also proposed that the assessment/test would be value for money
and would be more economical and efficient to administer. The test has the potential to be more flexible, reduce costs for the candidate, the regulator, the employer and the clinical sites approved for the adaptation/assessment programme within the HSE.

It is proposed that the assessment/test of knowledge and competence would only be offered to candidates that satisfy the regulator in terms of its existing registration standards in terms of registration (other jurisdiction), education, training and language competence. In other words the regulator will based on its systems and processes determine candidates eligible to progress to assessment/test in the same way that this occurs in relation to adaptation/assessment decisions.

The legislative context (Nurses and Midwives Act, 2011)

In terms of the functions of the Board Head 9 (1) (e) states that the Board shall act as the competent authority for the purposes of-

(i) the mutual recognition of professional qualifications of nurses and midwives awarded in or recognised by Member States or other relevant states within the meaning of the Regulations of 2008

(ii) all matters referred to in Directive 2005/36/EC which relate to the role of a competent authority for the purposes of recognition of professional qualifications of nurses and midwives

Head 9 (1) (f) states that the Board shall enter into agreements, with bodies in third countries that are duly authorised to perform functions in third countries that correspond to the functions of the Board, in relation to-

(i) the recognition by the Board, for the purposes of registration, of degrees, diplomas and other qualifications relating to the practice of nursing and midwifery awarded in those countries,

The current Regulatory Board experience in terms of Adaptation/Assessment

Data from the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland indicate that up to 300 letters advising candidates that they must undertake an adaptation assessment programme are issued annually. The current adaptation/assessment process is challenging as there are very limited opportunities for candidates and their potential employers to access programmes to satisfy regulatory requirements. The regulator is acutely aware that many candidates who are required to avail of this programme are unable to source one. The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland is supportive of this proposal as a potential solution to the challenges faced
by candidates, their employers, the services that facilitate adaptation/assessment programmes, the private and public health care system and the HSE in general.

**The Private sector experience**

It is reported that there is very limited access to adaptation programmes and candidates who require such a programme are contacting the Board in this regard. Candidates individually seek the help of the regulator due to their inability to source adaptation/assessment programmes directly. Data from Nursing Homes Ireland indicate that their members have over 200 people working as care assistants who have a letter requiring them to undertake an adaptation programme and the nursing home members are keen to have these candidates employed as Registered Nurses. Further evidence suggests that the sector will require up to 1500 registered nurses in the medium term and with reluctance from new graduates to work in care of the older person, this sector will be required to recruit abroad, hence a demand for adaptation programmes. The challenge reported is acquiring the minimum six weeks supervised clinical practice which is the foundation of the programme.

In November 2013, Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI) made a presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health. Part of the presentation focussed on recruitment. The report indicated that there is a heavy reliance on recruiting nurses trained overseas. Data included from the NHI Annual Report (2010) indicated that 42% of nurses employed by their members were from outside the EU. The presentation also highlighted the challenges associated with securing adaptation programmes. The presentation submitted that the provision of “Adaptation” and Return to Work placements urgently requires attention if we are to obtain a sustainable nursing workforce.

**The HSE experience**

Workforce issues including the moratorium and the commitment to support undergraduate/pre-registration and post registration students within the services (clinical sites approved for the teaching of undergraduate nursing/midwifery programmes) that can provide adaptation/assessment programmes challenge the very provision of these programmes. The challenge is the provision of available preceptors/mentors for the candidate for the duration of the placement (minimum 6 weeks). Compounding the issue for the private sector is based on anecdotal evidence that as the moratorium is being eased, recruitment from the private sector to the HSE has further reduced the private sector workforce. The sector reports that this is creating a workforce recruitment challenge in the sector.
The experience of other Regulators in Ireland

Medical Council of Ireland

The Irish Medical Council provides a pre-registration examination system (PRES) for Doctors educated in non-EU/EEA countries wishing to register and practice in Ireland. All applicants for registration will be required to undergo level 1 assessment which is a documentary examination and verification process which is typical of most regulators. This is followed (if appropriate) by a two part examination process, level 2 is a computer based examination in the form of an MCQ; while level 3 is an assessment of the doctor’s clinical skills. Candidates must pass level 2 before being permitted to progress to level 3.

Level 2 MCQ tests factual knowledge in the main clinical disciplines of obstetrics & gynaecology, paediatrics, psychiatry, surgery, and medicine/general practice. It is based on the eight domains of good professional practice as devised by the Medical Council.

Level three is a clinical based assessment; through a series of clinical scenarios or skill stations. These focus on communication, interpretation and practical skills across the same subject areas and based on the same eight domains of good professional practice. Practical and communication skills are examined in one clinical examination, interpretation skills are examined in one paper based written examination. The practical and communication skills assessment requires candidates to rotate through a series of clinical scenarios/skills stations (12); all candidates are assessed on the same issues by the same examiner. This assessment takes 2 hours and forty minutes. A simulated patient or anatomical model is employed and on occasion genuine patients are employed also.

The paper to assess interpretation skills consists of six questions and lasts one hour.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI)

The PSI uses a process and procedure for recognition of third country pharmacist qualification as a qualification appropriate for practice in Ireland. There is a four stage process involved. The first is that the candidate must satisfy the PSI that the qualification “respects” the minimum education and training conditions laid down in article 44 of EU Directive 2005/36/UE. Only if the regulatory review within the PSI deems that the candidate’s qualification meets these minimum conditions of education and training will the application be progressed to the next stage.

Stage 2 requires the applicant to sit an equivalence examination the purpose of which is for the PSI to identify and assess whether there are areas of an applicant’s training, education and qualifications which are of a standard that is lower than the standard necessary to practice in the State. When these shortcomings (if any) have been identified and assessed, an applicant
will then pass on to stage three of the process. If there are no shortcomings identified, an applicant may proceed directly to Stage 4.

Stage 3 requires an applicant to complete a period of adaptation of not less than six months in a manner directed by the PSI. During this the applicant makes up any deficiencies identified in stage 2 and acquires the competencies necessary to practice safely as a pharmacist in the State.

Stage 4 requires the applicant to sit and pass the Professional Registration Exam of the PSI. When stage 4 is completed the candidate is issued with a certificate confirming that their qualification is a “qualification appropriate for the practice in the State”, the candidate can then apply for registration with PSI.

The international experience

United States and Canada

Evidence exists internationally that supports the development and introduction of an examination/assessment for overseas nurse registration, specifically the NCLEX examination in the United States is an example. To ensure public protection, Boards of Nursing in the US require a candidate for Licensure/Registration to pass an exam that measures the competencies need to perform safely and effectively as an entry level nurse. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) develop two licensure/registration exams; the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses (NCLEX-PN), that are used by Nursing Boards/regulatory bodies to assist in making licensure/registration decisions. The NCLEX exam is a computerised assessment designed to test knowledge, skills and abilities essential to the safe and effective practice of nursing at the entry level. The NCLEX-RN examination can be anywhere from 75-265 items, of these items 15 are pre-test items that are not scored. Regardless of the number of items the time limit for the examination is 6 hours. Further the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination is also moving to NCLEX in 2015.

The United Kingdom

During the last 12 months the United Kingdom Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) have been engaged in a project regarding its Overseas Nurses’ Programme and its Adaptation to Midwifery Programme. This project included a national consultation exercise with stakeholders. The outcome of this research based national consultation is that the NMC is moving to a competency assessment/test for overseas nurses from October 2014. The normal regulatory process of the declaration and assessment of eligibility, proof of identity, evidence of training, evidence of registration in country of training and in other jurisdictions as
appropriate, employment references, evidence of good health and character and English language competence will continue.

In addition, the Overseas Nurses Programme and the Adaptation to Midwifery Programme will be replaced with two Tests of competence; the first is computer based examination with MCQ, scenarios and short answer questions which takes four hours. The second assesses competence in terms of holistic practical skills through OSCEs which are video recorded. The focus is on assessing the holistic and integrated nature of safe and effective care and candidates will be assessed against the current UK Pre-registration education standards for nursing or midwifery. They will focus on demonstration of competence across the domains and essential skills clusters for nursing and midwifery in the UK and the OSCEs will take place over one day. The NMC propose that assessing the candidate in a clinical situation is a robust means of determining if the candidate can translate the learning and training acquired in another jurisdiction to the UK standards. The NMC also contends that the introduction of the system will bring efficiencies to candidates and employers. The NMC suggest that their system is in line with other UK professional regulators such as the General Medical Council (GMC) and the General Dental Council.

**General Medical Council GMC (UK)**

In relation to the registration of overseas doctors, the GMC has in place the Professional and Linguistics Assessment Board (PLAB) system of assessment. This assessment consists of two phases; the first is a computer based MCQ exam with 200 items. Phase 2 consists of OSCEs whereby the candidate completes fourteen, five minute clinical scenarios.

**General Dental Council (UK)**

In relation to the registration of overseas educated Dentists the General Dental Council has in place the Overseas Registration Exam (ORE) which consists of two parts. Part 1 is a written exam and consists of 2, three hour computer based exams which include MCQ and short answer questions.

Part 2 is the clinical exam and it consists of four components

- An operation test on a dental manikin
- An OSCE with 20 stations over 2 hours
- A diagnostic and treatment planning exercise with an actor and
- A Practical examination in Medical Emergencies which includes a structured scenario based oral and demonstration of CPR.
The Consultation:

Key Consultation Issues for Consideration:

- The proposal aims to support the enhancement of the protection of the public and enhance the high standards of the nursing and midwifery professions.
- The principles, beliefs and values underpinning the proposed knowledge and competence test.
- The content, structure and methodology of the test.
- The management infrastructure underpinning the test.
- Funding arrangements.

Consultation Process:

The consultation will take place over a six week period commencing in mid-January 2015. All views from interested stakeholders (individuals and organisations) will be welcomed. Purposive and targeted consultation will take place with the following:

- The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland
- The Office of the Chief Nursing Officer, Department of Health
- The Office of the Nursing Services Director HSE
- Patient and advocacy groups
- Nursing Homes Ireland
- Irish Association of Directors of Nursing and Midwifery
- Practice Development co-ordinators
- Nursing Unions, INMO, PNA, SIPTU (including overseas sections)
- Other regulators
- Private Hospitals Association
- Recruitment agencies

Face to face meetings will be conducted with those stakeholders identified above. The proposal and the questions posed in relation to it will be available through the Nursing and Midwifery Board website, the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery RCSI web-site and Nursing Homes Ireland Website.

The Proposal:

The Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery RCSI proposes, subject to an amendment to the “Competence Assessment Tool for Nurses Educated and Trained Overseas in non-EU Countries and Guidance on the provision of Adaptation and Assessment of Nurses from overseas” (An Bord Altranais, 2003) and an amendment to “Competence Assessment Tool for Midwives Educated and Trained in non- EU Countries and Midwives from EU member States who do not qualify for Registration under EU Sectoral Directives and Guidance in the

- Currently while there are adaptation assessment standards in place, the reality is that securing places for candidates is very challenging for the candidate, their employer and the services.
- The current system as implemented is not responsive to needs of many stakeholders (regulator, employer, the candidate and the health services).
- The Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery RCSI proposes an alternative to the current existing model for assessing the competence of overseas educated and trained nurses and midwives as an option.
- The Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery RCSI does not propose replacing the adaptation assessment programme, rather it proposes a second assessment strategy option.
- The Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery propose to introduce a knowledge and competency assessment strategy that is reflective of the approaches employed in the UK, US, Canada and Ireland.
- The Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery propose a system to assess and test the candidate’s theoretical and clinical competence and performance.

**Principles, beliefs and values underpinning the assessment proposal:**

The principles and values underpinning the assessment include:

- The priority to ensure patient and public protection
- The assessment must assure the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland that the assessment methodology will determine whether or not candidates meet the standards for safe, effective and competent practice in order to be eligible to Register with the Nursing and midwifery Board of Ireland.
- Developing a robust, fair, objective, valid and reliable assessment methodology.
- Providing a responsive efficient, effective, economical and equitable assessment for all candidates.
- The Competencies for Entry to the Nursing or Midwifery Register will inform this assessment.
- When appropriate the Practice Standards for midwifery will inform this assessment.
- The assessment structure and process will support the candidate to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and competencies that are determined by the Board in terms of the Registration Requirements and Standards.
- An evaluation of this revised process if implemented will be undertaken within a three to five year period following implementation.
Requirements for entry to the test:

These are unchanged, the regulatory requirements that leads to a decision by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland to decide that a candidate is eligible to proceed to adaptation/assessment or assessment test remains unchanged. What changes is the option for the candidate once deemed appropriate by the regulator. The candidate must be in receipt of a decision letter from NMBI informing them that they are eligible to proceed to the adaptation/assessment or assessment/test phase.

Content, structure and methodology of assessment:

Nursing:

- The assessment of knowledge will reflect specifically the division of the nursing register in terms of the key components of the nursing syllabus:
  - Nursing
  - Communication and Interpersonal skills
  - The individual in health and illness
    - Person centred care
    - Health promotion
    - Health sciences
  - Behavioural and social sciences
  - Professional and personal development including ethics
  - Organisation and management of care
    - Nursing Research
    - Health care systems

- The assessment of competence will reflect the specific division of the nursing register and the competencies for entry to the Register
  - Professional and ethical practice
  - Holistic approaches to care and the integration of knowledge
    - Interpersonal relationships
  - Organisation and management of care
  - Personal and professional development

Midwifery:

- The assessment of knowledge will reflect specifically the midwifery division of the register in terms of the key components of the midwifery syllabus:
  - Biological sciences (general and specific)
  - Social sciences applied to midwifery
  - Pharmacology and medication management
    - Research
Maternal service provision
- Midwifery practice-knowledge and skills
  - Health promotion
  - Communication and interpersonal skills
  - Professional, personal, ethical and legal issues.

- **The assessment of competence will reflect the competencies for entry to the Midwifery Register**
  - Professional and ethical midwifery practice
  - Holistic midwifery care and the integration of knowledge
    - Interpersonal relationships
  - Organisation and coordination of midwifery care
  - Personal and professional development
  - The practice standards for Midwives

*It is acknowledged that these are changing currently and will be subject to future change also.*

**Assessment methods:**

Assessment methods will be subject to the Quality Assurance approval and monitoring process of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland.

**Assessment of professional knowledge and understanding:**

This assessment will consist of an online theoretical assessment of professional knowledge and understanding. A multiple method of assessment items such as Multiple Choice and short answer items will be employed. They will be designed to reflect the nature of the syllabus, indicative content and knowledge required for the specific division of the nursing register and for midwifery. The knowledge assessment will reflect the Requirements and Standards for Pre-Registration Nursing or Midwifery Education and Training. The RCSI has the teaching and learning infrastructure to facilitate the development of valid, reliable and robust testing process within a secure testing environment and currently provides such assessments on its undergraduate medical programmes. It is proposed to initially and for security reasons and for verification of identification and the minimisation of fraud to hold the assessment in Ireland. The test can be structured to precede the OSCEs by a very short period (a couple of days). Following a period of evaluation of the process the assessment may be offered in other jurisdictions through strategic partnerships.

It is proposed that only on satisfactory completion and passing the assessment of professional knowledge and understanding will a candidate be then invited to undertake the OSCEs.
Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE)

The OSCE is used internationally and nationally in nursing, midwifery and other health professions education programmes to assess the application of knowledge, theory and evidence to practice through performance in a simulated environment. It is acknowledged as an assessment methodology that enables the person to demonstrate competence in a simulated practice setting.

It is proposed that each OSCE station would have two assessors and an assessment template, each OSCE. OSCEs will be developed that take account of the knowledge skills and competencies required for each division of the Register.

This proposal provides an option to the existing practice based period of adaptation and assessment. It proposes the following two potential approaches.

Approach 1

Part 1

An online assessment of the knowledge, understanding, skills and values of the candidate for Registration using multiple assessment items.

On successful completion of Part 1 the candidate can then progress to part 2.

Part 2

Assessment of Competence for Practice through a range of OSCEs which would include a number of different simulated stations to assess the candidate in areas such as assessing risk, patient assessment and history taking, managing challenging behaviour, medication management including drug calculations, pressure area care assessment and management, aseptic technique, wound care-assessment and management, assessing and managing a patient in pain, infection control, patient education and gaining consent, junior colleague education, patient observations, activities of daily living etc.

On successful completion of part 2 the candidate is then eligible to Register with NMBI.
Approach 2

This has three parts (part 1 and 2 above)

Part 1

An online assessment of the knowledge, understanding, skills and values of the candidate for Registration using multiple assessment items.

On successful completion of Part 1 the candidate can then progress to part 2.

Part 2

Assessment of Competence for Practice through a range of OSCEs which would include a number of different simulated stations to assess the candidate in areas such as assessing risk, patient assessment and history taking, managing challenging behaviour, medication management including drug calculations, pressure area care assessment and management, aseptic technique, wound care-assessment and management, assessing and managing a patient in pain, infection control, patient education and gaining consent, junior colleague education, patient observations, activities of daily living etc.

Part 3

On successful completion of part 2 the Candidate can then proceed to a period of supervised practice with the potential employer. This is a six week induction and orientation to the service and provides the employer to mentor and assess the candidate further. The candidate is assessed utilising the Competence Assessment Tool for Nurses Educated and Trained Overseas in non-EU Countries or the Competence Assessment Tool for Midwives Educated and Trained Overseas in non-EU Countries (as appropriate).

Successful completion of this induction assessment enables the candidate register with NMBI.