

What you need to know before you choose a Nutrition course in Ireland



Are you passionate about food and living a healthy lifestyle? Or maybe you're interested in finding a career that is both diverse and rewarding? Well then, a career in nutrition might be just what you're after. Pursuing a degree in nutrition will help you to understand the importance of a balanced lifestyle and diet, while guiding individuals and populations to enhance their immune system and reduce their risks of developing certain illnesses. Choosing a career in nutrition also means that you will learn all about food science and how that knowledge is translated into policy and professional practice. Before choosing a nutrition course, it is essential to know the difference between a **dietitian** and a **nutritionist**. This is important to understand as each of these professions will open different career opportunities for you.

What is the Difference between a Dietitian and a Registered Nutritionist?

There is often confusion as to the differences between a Dietitian and a Nutritionist as both professions use diet to improve health however the key difference is in their *scope of practice*.

- a. A **Dietitian** is required to have a Bachelor of Science in Human Nutrition and Dietetics or a corresponding qualification in the field of science with a postgraduate degree in dietetics. Qualified dietitians in Ireland are regulated by [CORU](#) (responsible for regulating health and social care professionals). Dietitians **predominantly work in clinical settings** such as hospitals, medical care centres and private care centres where they evaluate, diagnose, and manage nutritional issues for individuals and populations. They are qualified to treat both healthy and unhealthy individuals providing evidence-based counsel.

- b. **Nutritionists typically work with healthy populations** to maintain health and prevent disease. The title nutritionist currently has no legal protection (meaning anybody in theory can call themselves a nutritionist without legal action) which has led to confusion among the general public as to their level of competence and scope of practice. The qualifications of those who call themselves nutritionists can range from short course certificates to 4-year bachelor's degrees or post-graduate education. This career has no legal requirement for professional accreditation. But don't let this deter you because those who have suitable qualifications may register with the [Association for Nutrition](#) (AfN) to join the United Kingdom's Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN). This registration is encouraged and viewed as an industry standard of competency. Those who register with the AfN can join as either an Associate Nutritionist (ANutr) or a Registered Nutritionist (RNutr). An ANutr has typically just completed a qualification in nutrition and is in the early stages of their career as a nutritionist. An RNutr has a minimum of three years' experience working as a nutritionist and has shown dedication to maintaining high standards in their practice and continual professional development. This accreditation with the AfN provides assurances to employers and clients that high standards of professional practice and education have been met and are maintained. Nutritionists may be employed in many diverse settings including local and national public health sectors, research, academia, the food industry, and in sports and exercise.



What advice would a nutrition student offer?

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) is a third level institute of education and is based at five locations in the west of Ireland. Campuses are located in Galway City, Castlebar, Letterfrack and Mountbellew. GMIT is a government funded higher education institution with a strong academic reputation. GMIT offers a BSc (Hons) in Public Health Nutrition course, the first of its kind in the west of Ireland.

We asked some of GMIT's Public Health Nutrition students for their best advice on how to decide if a nutrition career is right for you and if so, how to prepare for it.

All of the interviewed students admit it's a thrilling time to be learning and understanding more about nutrition. Their tips included:

- **Read.** Explore the nutrition industry by reading books from experts, it will help you gain some perspective as to what you will be studying and it will help you in deciding whether you have a real interest.
- **Work or Volunteer.** Work experience will give you the opportunity to see what a day in the life of a nutritionist can be like. Each day often brings different tasks and challenges adding variety to the job. You can discover what you are fond of and use that knowledge to find more suitable future job positions.
- **Understand the Variety of Modules.** Students emphasized that they wish they had realised that 1st year would be mostly science modules (biology, chemistry and

biomechanics) prior to commencing the course. If you are in secondary school, it is recommended that you study biology and chemistry.

- **Be Open Minded.** A nutrition course can open a variety of different routes for your future, and you could make an impactful difference to people's lives. Students expressed that it is important to keep an open mind in relation to a future career plan as there are many possible pathways available for a nutrition graduate.
- **Network.** Start reaching out to nutrition professionals in jobs that you are interested in. Talking with experienced nutritionists about their own career progression and why they themselves got into nutrition in the first place can be very enlightening. Networking is also a big aspect of any future job you will have. It is important to build connections with professionals to nurture future collaborations, share information and raise awareness of your practice.

Course Content

Nutrition degrees cover the basics in science, particularly those pertaining to food science and human anatomy and physiology, but they also teach students about professionalism, ethics, and prepare them for life in the real work environment. Take the BSc (hons) in Public Health Nutrition at GMIT for instance, this course prepares individuals to work in the area of public health nutrition and health promotion.

- In year 1, the course has a focus on core science modules and the principles of food. You will have modules that have interacting practical laboratory classes such as biomechanics, anatomy, cell biology and chemistry. In addition, you will also cover topics such as learning and innovation skills, human physiology and mathematics.
- In year 2, there is a combination of lectures, tutorials and practical modules. There is a greater focus on nutrition modules which include human nutrition and metabolism, food science and technology, nutrition, physical activity and health, evaluating the evidence for public health nutrition, human physiology, biochemistry, molecular biology and immunology.
- In third year, there are fascinating and engaging modules dealing with personal and professional development for nutritionists, applied research methods, community nutrition and food policy. You will also study nutrition through the lifecycle, this module highlights an individual's need for nutrients and energy change during the course of their life span.

A twelve-week work placement forms an integral part of the course in Year 3. The placement will significantly enhance your prospects for future employment as you will be applying the theory you have learnt so far to practical work situations. On work placement you will gain experience and acquire key skills such as teamwork, self-management and initiative, as well as establishing communication and presentation skills.

- Final year will cover more specialised modules such as clinical, health promotion, advanced food science, nutrition controversies, nutritional epidemiology and global perspectives in nutrition. The lectures are supplemented with relevant projects, assignments and practical experience. You will also complete your own independent research project in an area that interests you. Ever had a burning nutrition question? Well now's your chance to design and carry out a project to find the answer to that question.

Skills Acquired

Students we spoke to stated that if you choose to study this course, you'll find that you develop a wealth of *transferable* skills. Due to exams, projects and deadlines you develop excellent time management, organisation, teamwork and leadership skills. Good communication skills are paramount for any health profession and through many presentations, debates and group work this skill is continually developed throughout the course. Students will gain a lot of confidence in translating data and presenting information to both the public and professional or academic audiences. In this course you will acquire substantial lab technique skills such as lab safety and sterilization of lab equipment, as well as pipette, filtration and titration skills. You will also gain research skills such as how to carry out literature reviews, case-studies, collect, analyse and interpret data, and communicate the results. These are highly valued skills in many jobs. During a nutrition degree you will also develop computing skills and learn to be competent in MS office, SPSS statistics and Nutritics analysis software to name a few.

How to Apply

Applications for undergraduate nutrition degree courses are submitted via the [CAO](#) system. It is important to note that each nutrition course differs in requirements, so it is essential to check each institutions prospectus for their minimum entry and course specific requirements.

Institution

If you decide to pursue a nutrition degree, there are some important factors to consider when selecting an institution. Discover the format in which the course is delivered. It is important to know whether the course is delivered online or in-person. In addition, note if the course is accredited or registered with a representative body such as the AfN.

Association for Nutrition

The Association for Nutrition (AfN) is a non-compulsory regulator for nutritionists. The AfN holds the United Kingdom's Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN). Its' objective is to preserve the public by defining and advancing standards of evidence-based practice across the field of nutrition.



Choosing a nutrition programme that is AfN accredited, is extremely beneficial to students because it will help individuals to stand out and gives them an advantage compared to graduates from non-accredited programmes as they can apply via direct entry to the register- this direct entry process is much simpler than the alternate portfolio submission. Studying on

an AfN accredited nutrition program also provides assurance that they are gaining proper knowledge and skills from a science-based course. In addition, graduates will be confident in their ability to practice as competent, qualified, and professional nutritionists.

Here is a more detailed look at the two types of registration available, each indicate a certain level of experience and qualification obtained.

Registered Associate Nutritionist (ANutr)	Registered Nutritionist (RNutr)
A Registered Associate Nutritionist (ANutr) has typically graduated from a BSc (Hons) or MSc in a nutritional science. A Registered Associate Nutritionist has scientific knowledge in evidence-based nutrition but has yet to acquire the significant experience of the practical application of this knowledge required for transfer to Registered Nutritionist (RNutr) status.	A Registered Nutritionist (RNutr) will have nutrition science knowledge and understanding and at least 3-years' experience of evidence-based application of nutrition science in professional practice.
<i>Methods to apply to become a Registered Associate Nutritionist (ANutr):</i>	<i>Methods to apply to become a Registered Nutritionist (RNutr):</i>
1. <u>Direct Entry:</u> Graduates of courses that are AfN accredited.	1. <u>Portfolio:</u> For nutritionists with at least 3 years of experience, post-qualification in nutrition science at honours degree level.
2. <u>Portfolio:</u> Graduates of any nutrition science degree not accredited by AfN, or for those who graduated from an accredited degree more than 3 years ago.	2. <u>Experience in Evidence-Based Nutrition:</u> For nutritionists with a minimum of 10 years' experience.

There are several courses in Ireland that are currently AfN accredited, these include:

- Athlone Institute of Technology – BSc (Hons) Nutrition and Health Science
- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology – BSc (Hons) Public Health Nutrition (submitting for accreditation Summer 2021 when the first cohort of students graduate)
- Institute of Technology Sligo – BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition
- Munster Technology University – BSc (Hons) Nutrition and Health Science
- Technology University Dublin – BSc (Hons) Public Health Nutrition
- University College Dublin – BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition
- University of Ulster – BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition
- University of Ulster – MSc Human Nutrition

Career Opportunities

The beauty of working in such a diverse field as nutrition means that the career opportunities available to you will be equally diverse. Graduates of nutrition degrees will be able to begin work in many different areas such as:

- Advisory positions in food safety and health, example: Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI)
- Advisory positions in healthy eating
- Roles in health promotion and health improvement
- Advisory work with government agencies, example: Ireland's Health Services (HSE)
- Scientific research and data analysis in public or private sectors
- Jobs in the food and nutrition industry, for example: Pepsi, Kellogg's, Kerry, Glanbia
- International work in public health, example: World Food Programme, World Health Organisation
- Programme coordinator roles on humanitarian relief initiatives with Non-Governmental Organisations like Goal, UNICEF, Action Against Hunger, and Concern
- Nutrition consultation in private practice

Further study options: Graduates will be suitably qualified to pursue a master's degree/doctor's degree in the field of science, nutrition and related areas. This is often a great option if you would like to specialise in a particular area within the field of nutrition. Most graduates of nutrition degrees would advise working for a year or two after completing your undergraduate before pursuing postgraduate education to allow for time to decide which speciality area you're most passionate about.

Acknowledgement for the importance of nutritional science, and its role in maintaining the health of individuals and the general public has grown considerably. By choosing a career in nutritional sciences, students develop a keen understanding of the nutritional needs necessary for growth, development and maintenance of health. They can apply this understanding as public health nutritionists, dietitians or nutritional therapists. If you're intrigued by food, especially in terms of its elements and how it influences us, then you should consider a career in nutrition. Start doing your research and searching for volunteering opportunities as early as you can. Most importantly, know that if you're impassioned about health, well-being and nutrition, you ARE on the right track by considering a nutrition degree and you will have golden opportunities with your career!

This post was written for NutriPD by Amanda de Sousa, a BSc Public Health Nutrition student at GMIT.

References

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