



Promoting higher quality

**The Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education**

**Benchmark statement:
Health care programmes**

Phase 1

Dietetics

Subject benchmark statements: Health care programmes

Subject benchmark statements provide a means of describing the nature and characteristics of programmes of study and training in health care. They also represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level and articulate the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should be able to demonstrate.

Subject benchmark statements are used for a variety of purposes. Primarily, they are an important external source of reference when new programmes are being designed and developed. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme but are not a specification of a detailed curriculum. Benchmark statements provide for variety and flexibility in the design of programmes and encourage innovation within an agreed overall conceptual framework.

Subject benchmark statements also provide support in the pursuit of internal quality assurance. They enable the learning outcomes specified for a particular programme to be reviewed and evaluated against agreed general expectations about standards.

Finally, subject benchmark statements are one of a number of external sources of information that are drawn upon for the purposes of academic review* and for making judgements about threshold standards being met. Reviewers do not use subject benchmark statements as a crude checklist for these purposes however. Rather, they are used in conjunction with the relevant programme specifications, the associated documentation of the relevant professional and statutory regulatory bodies, the institution's own self evaluation documentation, together with primary data in order to enable reviewers to come to a rounded judgement based on a broad range of evidence.

The benchmarking of standards in health care subjects is undertaken by groups of appropriate specialists drawn from higher education institutions, service providers and the professional and statutory regulatory bodies. The statements represent the first attempt to make explicit in published form the general academic characteristics and standards of awards in these subjects in the UK. In due course, the statements will be revised to reflect developments in the subjects and the experiences of institutions, academic review and others that are working with it.

* academic review in this context refers to the Agency's arrangements for external assurance of quality and standards. Further information regarding these may be found in the *Handbook for academic review*, which can be found on the Agency's web site.

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Foreword

This benchmark statement describes the nature and standards of programmes of study in dietetics, that leads to awards made by higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) in the subject.

It has been developed in collaboration with a number of other health care professions and these are listed below. Although initial work was undertaken in subject specific groups, the analysis of these early drafts identified a number of features which all the subject groups shared. It was, therefore, agreed by each of the specialist benchmark groups that their respective statements could be cast using a common structure. As work progressed it became increasingly apparent that there was considerable overlap within the details of the subject-specific statements and a common health professions framework was emerging. This emerging framework is, accordingly, displayed in each of the subject statements in order to illustrate on the one hand, the shared context upon which the education and training of health care professionals rests and, on the other, the uniquely profession-specific context within which programmes are organised. It is important to emphasise that benchmark statements are not cast in tablets of stone and will be revisited in the light of experience and further developments in health care. Moreover, we are confident that the emerging framework has the potential to embrace other health related professions such as social work, dentistry, medicine and other therapies. It is anticipated that further work in a second phase of the project could lead to an overarching health professions framework.

The initial section of this statement sets out the health professions framework under three main headings:

- A Expectations of the health professional in providing patient/client services;
- B The application of practice in securing, maintaining or improving health and well-being;
- C The knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin the education and training of health care professionals.

The main section of this statement, in addition to describing the nature and extent of programmes leading to awards in dietetics, describes the profession-specific expectations and requirements under the same three categories.

The key feature in this statement, as in the associated statements, is the explicit articulation of the academic and practitioner standards associated with the award in dietetics. This duality reflects the significance of the academic award as the route to registration for professional practice and formal recognition by the professional and statutory regulatory bodies. The threshold standards set out the expectations of health professionals entering their first post immediately on qualification.

The section on standards accords with the relevant level descriptor for awards in the qualifications frameworks published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

The section on teaching, learning and assessment draws attention to the central role of practice in the design of learning opportunities for students and the importance of ensuring that professional competence developed through practice is adequately assessed and rewarded. It also notes how essential it is that the integration of theory and practice is a planned process within the overall arrangements made for teaching and learning.

The statement acknowledges the need to put the prospective client/patient at the centre of the student's learning experience and to promote within that experience the importance of team-working and cross-professional collaboration and communication. Implicit in the statement are the opportunities that exist for shared learning across professional boundaries, particularly in the latter stages of training when inter-professional matters can be addressed most productively. It is essential that the opportunities that exist for shared learning in practice are optimised, as well as best use being made of similar opportunities that prevail more obviously in classroom-based activities.

This statement and the associated statements will therefore allow higher education institutions, in partnership with service providers (where appropriate), to make informed curriculum choices about the construction of shared learning experiences. In this context, shared learning is seen as one of a number of means of promoting improved collaborative practice and addressing a range of issues which span professional accountability and professional relationships.

Finally, the statement does not set a national curriculum for programmes leading to awards in dietetics. It acknowledges that the requirements of the professional and statutory regulatory bodies need to be incorporated into the design of programmes. It seeks to encourage higher education institutions and service providers to work collaboratively in the design and delivery of their curricula. Its essential feature is the specification of threshold standards, incorporating academic and practitioner elements, against which higher education institutions are expected, as a minimum, to set their standards for the award.

¹ *Dietetics, Health Visiting, Midwifery, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Orthoptics, Physiotherapy, Podiatry (Chiropody), Prosthetics and Orthotics, Radiography, and Speech & Language Therapy.*

An emerging health professions framework

The subject specific statements for dietetics have been set within the emerging health professions framework outlined below. As indicated in the foreword, this framework developed as a result of the benchmarking work undertaken collaboratively by 11 different health professional groups. Further evolution of the framework is anticipated through a second phase of the project which will address its goodness of fit with a range of other health and social care professions benchmark statements.

A Expectations of the health professional in providing patient/client services

This section articulates the expectations of a registered professional within health and social care services. It describes what is regarded as a minimum range of expectations of a professional that will provide safe and competent practice for patients/clients in a variety of health and social care contexts.

A1 Professional autonomy and accountability

The award holder should be able to:

- maintain the standards and requirements of professional and statutory regulatory bodies;
- adhere to relevant codes of conduct;
- understand the legal and ethical responsibilities of professional practice;
- maintain the principles and practice of patient/client confidentiality;
- practise in accordance with current legislation applicable to health care professionals;
- exercise a professional duty of care to patients/clients/carers;
- recognise the obligation to maintain fitness for practice and the need for continuing professional development;
- contribute to the development and dissemination of evidence-based practice within professional contexts;
- uphold the principles and practice of clinical governance.

A2 Professional relationships

The award holder should be able to:

- participate effectively in inter-professional and multi-agency approaches to health and social care where appropriate;
- recognise professional scope of practice and make referrals where appropriate;
- work, where appropriate, with other health and social care professionals and support staff and patients/clients/carers to maximise health outcomes;
- maintain relationships with patients/clients/carers that are culturally sensitive and respect their rights and special needs.

A3 Personal and professional skills

The award holder should be able to:

- demonstrate the ability to deliver quality patient/client-centred care;
- practise in an anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive manner;
- draw upon appropriate knowledge and skills in order to make professional judgements, recognising the limits of his/her practice;
- communicate effectively with patients/clients/carers and other relevant parties when providing care;
- assist other health care professionals, support staff and patients/clients/carers in maximising health outcomes;
- prioritise workload and manage time effectively;
- engage in self-directed learning that promotes professional development;
- practise with an appropriate degree of self-protection;
- contribute to the well-being and safety of all people in the work place.

A4 Profession and employer context

The award holder should be able to:

- show an understanding of his/her role within health and social care services;
- demonstrate an understanding of government policies for the provision of health and social care;
- take responsibility for his/her own professional development;
- recognise the value of research and other scholarly activity in relation to the development of the profession and of patient/client care.

B The application of practice in securing, maintaining or improving health and well-being

All health care professionals draw from the knowledge and understanding associated with their particular profession. This knowledge and understanding is acquired from theory and practice. It forms the basis for making professional decisions and judgements about the deployment in practice of a range of appropriate skills and behaviours, with the aim of meeting the health and social care needs both of individual clients/patients and of groups, communities and populations. These decisions and judgements are made in the context of considerable variation in the presentation, the setting and in the characteristics of the client/patient health and social care needs. They often take place against a backdrop of uncertainty and change in the structures and mechanisms of health and social care delivery.

Sound professional practice is essentially a process of problem solving. It is characterised by four major phases:

- the identification and analytical assessment of health and social care needs;
- the formulation of plans and strategies for meeting health and social care needs;
- the performance of appropriate, prioritised health promoting/health educating/caring/diagnostic/therapeutic activities;
- the critical evaluation of the impact of, or response to, these activities.

B1 Identification and assessment of health and social care needs

The award holder should be able to:

- gather relevant information from a wide range of sources including electronic data;
- adopt systematic approaches to analysing and evaluating the information collected;
- communicate effectively with the client/patient, (and his/her relatives/carers), group/community/population, about their health and social care needs;
- use a range of assessment techniques appropriate to the situation and make provisional identification of relevant determinants of health and physical, psychological, social and cultural needs/problems;
- recognise the place and contribution of his/her assessment within the total health care profile/package, through effective communication with other members of the health and social care team.

B2 Formulation of plans and strategies for meeting health and social care needs

The award holder should be able to:

- work with the client/patient, (and his/her relatives/carers), group/community/population, to consider the range of activities that are appropriate/feasible/acceptable, including the possibility of referral to other members of the health and social care team and agencies;
- plan care within the context of holistic health management and the contributions of others;
- use reasoning and problem solving skills to make judgements/decisions in prioritising actions;
- formulate specific management plans for meeting needs/problems, setting these within a timescale and taking account of finite resources;
- record professional judgements and decisions taken;
- synthesise theory and practice.

B3 Practice

The award holder should be able to:

- conduct appropriate activities skilfully and in accordance with best/evidence-based practice;
- contribute to the promotion of social inclusion;
- monitor and review the ongoing effectiveness of the planned activity;
- involve client/patient/members of group/community/population appropriately in ongoing effectiveness of plan;
- maintain records appropriately;
- educate others to enable them to influence the health behaviour of individuals and groups;
- motivate individuals or groups in order to improve awareness, learning and behaviour that contribute to healthy living;
- recognise opportunities to influence health and social policy and practices.

B4 Evaluation

The award holder should be able to:

- measure and evaluate critically the outcomes of professional activities;
- reflect on and review practice;
- participate in, audit and other quality assurance procedures;
- contribute to risk management activities.

C Knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin the education and training of health care professionals

The education and training of health care professionals draws from a range of well-established scientific disciplines that provide the underpinning knowledge and understanding for sound practice. Each health care profession will draw from these disciplines differently and to varying extents to meet the requirements of their specialty. It is this contextualisation of knowledge, understanding and skills that is characteristic of the learning in specific health care programmes. Consequently, in this introductory section, the attributes and capabilities expected of the student are expressed at a generalised level.

C1 Knowledge and understanding

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- understanding of the key concepts of the disciplines that underpin the education and training of all health care professionals, and detailed knowledge of some of these. The latter would include a broad understanding of:
 - the structure and function of the human body, together with a knowledge of dysfunction and pathology;
 - health and social care philosophy and policy, and its translation into ethical and evidenced based practice;
 - the relevance of the social and psychological sciences to health and healthcare;
 - the role of health care practitioners in the promotion of health and health education;
 - the legislation and professional and statutory codes of conduct that affect health and social care practice.

C2 Skills

Information gathering

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- an ability to gather and evaluate evidence and information from a wide range of sources;
- an ability to use methods of enquiry to collect and interpret data in order to provide information that would inform or benefit practice.

Problem solving

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- logical and systematic thinking;
- an ability to draw reasoned conclusions and sustainable judgements.

Communication

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- effective skills in communicating information, advice, instruction and professional opinion to colleagues, patients, clients, their relatives and carers; and, when necessary, to groups of colleagues or clients.

Numeracy

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- ability in understanding, manipulating, interpreting and presenting numerical data.

Information technology

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- an ability to engage with technology, particularly the effective and efficient use of information and communication technology.

Benchmark statement for dietetics

Introduction

Dietitians work with patients in critical care, acute and chronic illness in hospitals and in the community. They use dietary manipulation and food to treat disease and optimise health. They can also work at population level in health promotion and in public health nutrition.

Dietetics is based on nutritional science. It incorporates the understanding of the composition of food, the nature of nutrients and their metabolism in the body, the nutritional requirements of people through the lifecycle, the dietary effects of foods on health and the ways that food can be used to treat disease and promote health in individuals and groups. It is a broad-based subject ranging from the natural and clinical sciences through to the social sciences.

Dietitians have a singular role in the therapeutic application of nutritional science. They interpret and communicate this knowledge to groups and individuals primarily in a health care setting. Practitioners of dietetics elicit information from individual clients about dietary intake, and interpret, translate and critically evaluate information on nutritional requirements and research from the various disciplines in order to produce practical advice on food intake and advisory resources. Dietitians are required to work professionally within the complex frameworks of accountability and ethical and legal boundaries within the workplace, be that the National Health Service (NHS), private practice, industry, local government, education or research. To become a state registered dietitian students follow prescribed university courses.

Therefore, the study of dietetics encompasses these principles:

- the application of the science of nutrition to individuals and groups by translating theoretical concepts and principles into relevant and applied diet therapy and dietary modification;
- acquisition of the educational skills and qualities, which enable the practitioner to empower individuals to take control of their food choice in relation to their health;
- integration of theoretical concepts from biological, clinical, numerical and social sciences with practical application to moderate food and nutritional habits;
- ability to assess, advise and enable individuals and groups to make appropriate and safe food provision;
- development of strong interpersonal skills to enable effective communication through varying media and to a wide diversity of individuals and groups;
- maintenance and enhancement of health both through the treatment of disease by diet and the promotion of good nutrition;
- critical reflection, self-evaluation and commitment to the use of research in the evaluation and improvement of the practice of dietetics.

Nature and extent of dietetics

Dietetics is an interdisciplinary and applied subject that is concerned with the application of nutritional science for treatment of disease and the promotion of health for individuals and groups. It is concerned primarily with ensuring that individuals have the appropriate nutrients from the foods they eat. Dietetics requires the integration of a broad range of natural and social sciences so that practitioners can educate and empower individuals and groups to improve food intake to the benefit of health.

Manipulating the food selected by individuals can modify their nutrient provision and this is used either to correct a metabolic imbalance or to maintain and promote health. Dietetics is concerned with the nutrition of the individual both in health and disease at a primary level and extends through to tertiary care in acute specialised medical provision. Practitioners of dietetics use their interpersonal skills, knowledge and expertise in other arenas such as industry (especially food and pharmaceutical), primary research and development, education, local government, the media and private practice.

Dietetics has nutritional science at its core. Nutritional science investigates how the body nourishes itself and the effects of nutrient supply on the body's functions in health and disease, the effect of diet on metabolism, and the interaction of the genes with nutrients. Public health nutrition focuses on the promotion of good health through nutrition and the primary prevention of diet related illness in the population. Whereas dietetics requires an understanding of individuals and how change can be brought about to effect a therapeutic outcome. Therefore, dietetics is essentially the manipulation of diet to improve health. This requires reflective practice, systematic clinical reasoning and a problem-solving approach as well as an understanding of individual circumstances, including age, gender, socio-economic status, disease state, food habits and lifestyle, to assess nutritional status and formulate appropriate dietary advice.

The practice of dietetics in the NHS is restricted to state registered dietitians. The requirements for 'fitness to practise' and eligibility for recognition to practise is overseen by the statutory body (SB). The SB assumes responsibility for the safe practice of dietetics through a published 'Statement of Conduct' and also sets the criteria for the curriculum leading to state registration. The SB has a statutory responsibility for approving all higher education institutions (HEIs) that participate in the education of dietitians through to the hospital placement. HEIs have a shared responsibility with the SB to ensure that all graduates who enter the professional register are appropriately fit to do so, eg the university conducts enquiries with relevant authorities such as the police.

Dietetics draws mainly on nutritional science and clinical subjects, including diet therapy, underpinned by life sciences including biochemistry, physiology, immunology, microbiology, genetics, pharmacology, and food science. The pre-registration student has supporting studies in psychology, sociology, communication, education, and health promotion. The study of these subjects enables dietitians to take an integrated view of dietetics and communicate this effectively with an inter-disciplinary perspective. Epidemiology, management, food studies, catering, information technology and statistics complete the major areas of study. The development of a reflective practitioner with the potential to continue professional development is encouraged through the study of research methods, subject-specific literature, ethics and clinical education placements.

There are two pre-registration routes for dietetics which take place in HEIs. Both routes include a mandatory 28 weeks of practice in their structure. The duration of the honours degree route is four years. It is also possible for existing graduates who have a relevant degree to follow the postgraduate route over two years.

A The dietitian as a registered health care practitioner; expectations held by the profession, employers and public

A1 Professional autonomy and accountability of the dietitian

The award holder should be able to:

- maintain the standards and requirements for state registration and undertake the professional role of the dietitian;
- demonstrate awareness of the roles of the statutory and professional bodies in dietetics;
- show understanding of the Statement of Conduct and its relevance to him/her;
- demonstrate understanding of his/her commitment to the ethics and code of conduct of the profession of dietetics;
- show an understanding of the need for continuing professional development in order to maintain a credible and professional dietetic role.

A2 Professional relationships of the dietitian

The award holder should be able to:

- show awareness of the role of the dietitian in primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare settings, and other statutory agencies;
- report accurately to relevant people, including writing in medical notes and producing technical reports;
- contribute to, and encourage colleagues to initiate and participate in, enquiry into all areas of dietetic practice;
- share the findings of evaluation and research with dietitians and other professionals;
- contribute dietetic advice to a multi-disciplinary team to enhance its effectiveness;
- take account of the normative and moral positions of others to understand how human needs are felt and met with respect to food choice and its provision;
- use interpersonal skills to demonstrate respect for others.

A3 Personal and professional skills of the dietitian

The award holder should be able to:

- demonstrate confidence in delivering a quality of dietetic service at an explicit level;
- practise within the framework set out in the Statement of Conduct;
- show awareness of the limitations of his/her knowledge and experience and know how to obtain advice and guidance;
- demonstrate understanding of the need to influence and contribute to all activities that enable each individual and group to make appropriate and safe food choices;
- identify strategies that can be used to influence nutritional choices for the individual and within the community;
- show understanding of the methods used to evaluate self-performance as an individual and as part of a team;
- draw up a plan for her/his own professional development including methods for continually updating dietetic knowledge and practice;
- act as a resource in nutrition and dietetics to develop appropriate educational material and training packages;
- show awareness of his/her role and sphere of influence within the organisation, enabling effective dietetic service delivery;
- manage own time, resources and people to complete tasks effectively and meet deadlines.

A4 Profession and employer context for the practice of dietetics

The award holder should be able to:

- show understanding of the role of the dietetic service within the NHS and function of the dietetic manager, and the levels of responsibility of other dietetic colleagues in achieving the quality of service;
- show familiarity with government policies for the provision of health care as they impinge on dietetic service;
- demonstrate awareness of NHS financial business planning, tendering and contracting, quality, standards, audit and clinical governance;
- show understanding of policy issues concerned with public health nutrition in the United Kingdom (UK);
- demonstrate familiarity with the current systems for the provision of health care, education and social sciences;
- demonstrate familiarity with community services available and the relevant government legislation with respect to dietetic provision;
- show understanding of the role of the dietitian as an advisor who can influence positively the wider social, commercial and political environment for the modification of factors that influence eating behaviour, and national and local nutritional standards.

B Principles and concepts held by the profession of dietetics which are applied to secure maintenance to, or improvement in, health/well-being

B1 Patient/client assessment

The award holder should be able to:

- collect medical, nutritional (anthropometric, biochemical) social, cultural and economic personal factors and food intake details, organise and then evaluate all relevant information before initiating the most appropriate dietetic response;
- show awareness of the social and cultural factors which shape the individual's lifestyle and which may affect the interaction between client and dietitian;
- use the dietetic knowledge base to assess the information gathered quantitatively and qualitatively, eg the perceived needs of the individual or group depending on their circumstances and attitudes;
- assign priorities to the information collected to set appropriate therapeutic dietetic goals;
- record concisely and in line with established standards and the professional code of conduct all the necessary information to support the professional dietetic judgement.

B2 Application of practice of dietetics

The award holder should be able to:

- formulate practical dietetic advice and resources by interpreting, translating and critically evaluating information emanating from the various disciplines that contribute to the knowledge base of dietetics;
- translate nutritional, medical and social theory into practical dietetic advice on food, eating and drinking for individuals and groups in primary, secondary and tertiary health care;
- plan menus for healthy adults and modify these for both sick and healthy people of all age groups and different cultural groups, being aware of personal circumstances and financial constraints involved;
- integrate health education programmes into patient treatment regimes as part of the overall health care programme;
- use a detailed knowledge of current theories of human nutrition and clinical dietetics to develop strategies that supports safe practice;
- apply knowledge and appropriate skills for the promotion of nutritional health and management of disease;

- plan, devise and review nutritional programmes for individuals and groups;
- prepare a plan for achieving an agreed goal, taking into consideration the contribution of the family, health professionals and other agencies, eg school meals and social services;
- set a timescale to review the achievements for individuals and groups and re-assess priorities as a result of the review;
- apply knowledge of sociology and psychology to support and motivate individuals to change their food behaviour;
- undertake educational activities that enable others to influence the dietary behaviour of individuals and groups;
- use educational and communication skills, together with knowledge of all factors which affect food choice, to give nutritional and dietary advice to individuals and groups.

B3 Evaluation of dietetic practice

The award holder should be able to:

- monitor and evaluate the effects of dietary treatment and nutritional interventions;
- undertake a simple audit, interpret the outcome and relate to the practice of dietetics;
- use research from the relevant disciplines as an evaluation skill in day to day work for the advancement of professional knowledge and practice;
- evaluate dietetic practice continually;
- evaluate dietetic interventions within the total care package (case history);
- reflect on dietetic experiences and demonstrate reflection in action;
- apply dietetic knowledge in a way so as not to endanger the health or safety of an individual or group;
- use nutrition and dietetic research findings to support evidence-based practice in dietetics.

C Subject knowledge, understanding and associated skills that are essential to underpin informed safe and effective practice of dietetics

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- C1 A systematic understanding of the key aspects of the range of disciplines underpinning dietetics and a detailed knowledge of some aspects including:

Biochemistry

Knowledge of the chemistry of living processes, the constituents of foods, and have had an introduction to clinical biochemistry. He/she will have a basic understanding of cellular and molecular sciences. He/she will know about the integrated nature of biochemistry, physiology and nutrition. This is needed so that the award holder can understand the cellular and molecular basis of disease, the metabolic complications that occur in common clinical conditions including diabetes, obesity and hyperlipidaemia, the basis for the classification of enzymes, co-factors and inhibitors, the major metabolic pathways and the involvement of nutrients and other food constituents in body chemistry.

Catering/food science/food skills

Knowledge of the procedure for safe handling and preparation of food and familiarity with related legislation. He/she must understand the principles of catering management in the NHS, be aware of the financial constraints involved in menu planning, the differing methods of food service, and the nutritional standards for catering services and how they are developed, implemented and monitored. He/she must have an appreciation of food labelling regulations and legislation, the types and uses of food additives, and the methods of food preservation. He/she must know how the nutrient content of food is altered by food production methods.

He/she must be aware of the wide range of commonly consumed foods, including convenience foods and their nutrient contents, and the suitability of a wide range of foods for inclusion in modified diets. He/she must be able to describe the range and relative cost of nutrient-modified foods available to the general public.

Clinical medicine

A sound medical background, particularly where diet is a significant part of treatment, including an understanding of medical terminology. He/she must understand the major disease processes and the difference between aetiology and risk factors. He/she should appreciate the different methods of disease classification and their uses with the major diseases. He/she should understand the ways in which patients are investigated to achieve a diagnosis and common types of therapy and patient management.

Dietetics

An understanding of the role of the profession in the treatment of those disorders which can be treated by the manipulation of food intake. He/she needs to have knowledge of a wide range of foods, including functional foods, their nutrient profile and possible use. He/she must know the rationale behind the modification of the food and nutrient intake and how these modifications can be applied to the treatment and/or prevention of diseases. This includes knowledge of the most appropriate route for ensuring safe, cost effective and adequate nutrient provision. He/she must know the range and use of foods including those that can be classified as drugs and prescribable products used in artificial feeding. He/she must know how to assess dietary intake, calculate the relevant nutrients and interpret the results to provide an optimum and practicable diet to meet an individual's clinical profile. He/she should know the limitations of the data used to estimate nutrient intake and nutrient requirements.

He/she must know how to modify the diet for individuals with differing food habits, cultural backgrounds and social and economic circumstances, using all available data. He/she must know the nutrient content of food so that the food in the diet can be manipulated to achieve a specified nutrient profile that recognises the nutritional bioavailability of the diet and meets the nutritional requirements of the individual. He/she must know the ways in which dietary modifications can be used for diagnosis and research. He/she must demonstrate knowledge of the dangers of dietary manipulation and how to manage the consequences to the individual.

Health promotion/education

An insight into broad health promotion and public health strategies designed to promote behavioural change.

Management

A general knowledge of the principles of management within organisations, with particular emphasis on the NHS. He/she must understand the professional role of the dietitian, the maintenance of standards and the requirements for state registration.

Microbiology

Knowledge of the key elements of microbiology applied to human disease, food science and food preparation. He/she must know specialist areas of medical microbiology with reference to the transmission of disease-producing organisms. He/she must have an understanding of clinical microbiology appropriate to dietetic practice, the micro-organisms most commonly associated with infection of all groups of the population and how to minimise the spread of infection. He/she must be aware of the means by which food spoilage can occur and strategies for prevention of food-borne disease.

Nutrition

Knowledge of the principles of nutrition and human nutritional requirements. He/she must know the fundamental mechanisms through which nutrition contributes to the maintenance of good health, and what methods are available to monitor nutritional intake and their limitations. He/she must have an understanding of the impact of nutrients on cellular mechanisms, including gene expression, and the contribution to diet-related disease and its management. He/she should be familiar with the British diet,

including sub-group differences such as region, ethnic origin and social class. He/she should have an understanding of the factors that determine food choice through the life cycle and the interaction of diet and other environmental factors in the development of disease.

Pharmacology/immunology/genetics

An understanding of clinical pharmacology to provide knowledge of the basis of drug/nutrient interactions, the use of nutrients as pharmacological agents and the use of drug therapy in relevant diseases. He/she must know the names, functions and contra-indications of drugs used in the treatment of diseases where the dietitian is usually a key member of the clinical team. He/she must have an understanding of immunology appropriate to dietetic practice. Awareness of the interactions of genetics and individual variation in nutritional requirements.

Physiology

Knowledge of the functions of the human body in health, including those aspects that are particularly relevant to the study of nutrition and dietetics such as the functioning of the visceral organs, endocrine system and cardiovascular system. He/she must have an awareness of the normal structure of the human body down to the cellular level. The knowledge of the physiology of systems of the human body in health facilitates the establishment of the specialised knowledge of the disease process.

Psychology

Knowledge of human behaviour, including the effects of personality, group dynamics and aspects of counselling. He/she must know the relative contributions of biological, psychological and social determinants of health. He/she must have an awareness of the psychological background to health behaviour and the patient-client relationship with particular reference to models of health beliefs. He/she must understand the psychological dimensions of hunger, satiety and food choice and be familiar with the psychological aspects of eating normally and eating disorders. He/she must understand the theories of motivation and behaviour change and know of a variety of helping strategies including counselling. He/she must be aware of basic educational theories relating to patient learning and the range of visual aids available.

Methods of enquiry

Understanding of the principles of scientific enquiry, the need for dietitians to be involved in research and evaluation of practice. He/she must demonstrate understanding of the principles of evidence-based practice, audit and evaluation of practice as applied to dietetics. He/she must demonstrate understanding of the terms used in epidemiology and how descriptive and analytical epidemiological studies can be used to examine the relationship between dietary intake and disease. He/she must show familiarity with the demographic, social and economic aspects of life in Britain, particularly those that impinge on health.

Sociology, social policy and administration

Knowledge of social problems, social policy and the availability of community services. He/she should know the role of food and eating in a social context, and the sociology of health and illness. He/she should be familiar with different systems of social organisation. He/she must understand the concepts of status, roles, social networks and social mobility relating particularly to health and healthcare, the concept of socialisation and its application to the various stages in the life cycle. He/she must be aware of classification systems and use of social class in relation to health and patterns of related behaviour, and inequalities of health.

C2 Skills

A capacity for self reflection on the extent and limitations of:

- the professional role of the dietitian, the maintenance of standards and the requirements for state registration;
- monitoring and evaluating the effects of dietary treatment. He/she must know the theory and rationale for reflective practice as a mechanism for maintaining and improving his/her professional practice;
- reflection on action and reflection in action and demonstrate his/her understanding of how these two processes can advance his/her professional practice.

An ability to gather and evaluate evidence and information from a wide range of sources and draw reasoned conclusions or reach sustainable judgements with particular regard to:

- knowledge of the economic, political, social and psychological aspects of nutrition and health promotion initiatives;
- an awareness of world nutrition problems;
- understanding of the principles of biochemistry and integration of knowledge acquired in physiology and nutrition with biochemistry;
- the ways in which dietary modifications can be used in diagnosis and research;
- critical appraisal of techniques used to assess the nutritional status of individuals such as anthropometry, biochemical tests, haematology, and clinical chemistry.

An ability to identify, investigate, analyse and formulate solutions to problems, including a capacity to draw on established analytical techniques where appropriate and particularly to:

- assimilate and assess critically new concepts; and initiate and promote changes in practice;
- know how to undertake a practical project of some substance, demonstrating a critical approach to research and involving some original thought.

An expertise in an appropriate range of skills and procedures essential for the practice of dietetics including:

- the rationale behind the modification of nutrient intake and how these modifications can be applied in the prevention and/or treatment of disease;
- how and why the intake of specific nutrients must be modified in the treatment of named diseases and be able to give practical advice to clients from differing social and economic backgrounds to achieve the required modification;
- the ways of fortifying/modifying diets;
- knowledge of the types of nutritional products which are prescribable, and when and how to use them;
- familiarity with objective setting in the delivery of a care plan for patient management;
- knowing how to evaluate and interpret relevant biochemical and medical data;
- awareness of, and the ability to prepare, both standard recipes and recipes modified with those products specifically for use in therapeutic diets, eg gluten-free flour;
- a thorough understanding of the methods of achieving optimal nutritional status in all disease states;
- knowledge of what intervention a patient requires to follow a healthy eating regime taking into consideration financial and other constraints;
- understanding of the origins, changes and current eating patterns of different sectors of the population.

An ability to collect and interpret data to provide qualitative information, particularly to:

- understand the theoretical and practical basis for the use of biochemical tests in the detection and management of disease states of patients;
- be aware of ways in which dietary modifications can be used in diagnosis and research;
- understand basic statistical techniques used in nutrition and dietetics.

The range of communication skills and other interpersonal skills necessary for effective performance including:

- knowledge of some elements of educational and learning theories including health promotion strategies;
- knowledge of formal and informal methods of communication;
- awareness of the different methods and styles of communication that are used when interacting with other health care personnel, catering staff and clients, and appropriate one to one communication with colleagues and the general public;
- use of communication skills to establish working relationships and develop strategies for coping with pressure;
- the ability to identify the barriers to communication and ways in which these may be overcome;

- knowledge of what factors must be considered to work successfully with colleagues to prepare and present a talk on a given topic;
- ability to choose the most appropriate methods of communication for a given situation.

Confidence in engaging with technology in the pursuit of effective dietetic practice including:

- a working knowledge of the methods commonly used in nutrition research and the ability to evaluate research papers critically;
- ability to use basic packages for word processing and statistical analysis, and understand how to set up databases and spreadsheets;
- demonstration of appropriate IT skills to communicate with colleagues (eg electronic mail) and search for information;
- competence in using a nutritional analysis programme to analyse food intake records/recipes.

Teaching, learning and assessment

Decisions about the strategies and methods for teaching, learning and assessment are for institutions to determine, but should complement the learning outcomes associated with health profession programmes. It is not for benchmark statements to promulgate any one, or combination of, approaches over others. However, this benchmark statement promotes an integrative approach to the application of theory and practice. It underlines the significance attached to the design of learning opportunities that facilitate the acquisition of professional capabilities and to assessment regimes that ensure these are being both delivered and rewarded to an appropriate standard. Fundamental to the basis upon which students are prepared for their professional career, is the provision of programmes of academic study and practice-based learning which lay the foundation for career-long professional development and lifelong learning to support best professional practice and the maintenance of professional standards.

Academic and practitioner standards

The standard expected of the threshold graduate is outlined below. 'Threshold' is taken to mean that standard of achievement demonstrated at the end of the educational experience, at the point of registration (ie at the bottom of the third class honours or minimum pass level of a postgraduate diploma). The applied nature of dietetics means that students must demonstrate capability in both the academic and the practical experience at the threshold level. Achievement of this standard will meet the statutory requirements handed down by the statutory body.

A Working as a professional in dietetics

The award holder should be able to:

- recognise the potential and limitations of dietetics as a practice-based discipline within the legal and ethical boundaries laid out by the Statement of Conduct;
- integrate his/her understanding of ethical issues and Statement of Conduct with his/her own dietetic interventions in specific situations;
- demonstrate his/her capacity to update continuously his/her knowledge and practice in response to changing circumstances and nutritional knowledge;
- exercise substantial autonomy in most of the professional activities associated with dietetics: these will cover processes such as assessment, planning, execution and evaluation of safe dietary intervention;
- guide and direct the work of others and be responsible for the proper use of resources;
- work effectively as a reflective practitioner in exercising judgements based on awareness of key issues in dietetics;
- as a reflective practitioner accept responsibility, in a peer relationship and with some guidance, for determining and achieving personal and group outcomes;
- demonstrate appropriate knowledge of the workplace within the dietetic practice context;
- demonstrate an understanding of the organisation of health promotion and health education, with a critical understanding of the role and the theoretical foundation of dietary interventions in public health;
- recognise the importance of undertaking research and scholarly activity and be able to make a contribution to the evolving knowledge base of the profession of dietetics.

B Application of principles and concepts

The award holder should be able to:

- select and use appropriate dietetic, nutritional analysis and assessment techniques within his/her practice;
- evaluate social, cultural, financial and personal factors together with medical and nutritional information to reach a justified and reasoned response to a dietetic problem;
- devise a dietetic intervention for a range of therapeutic cases, and in accord with established dietetic standards, some of which will be at the forefront of the discipline area;
- demonstrate a capability to advise, with a high level of autonomy and communication skills, individuals or their carers about food choice which will be clinically effective;
- effect a change in food choice or nutritional intake which can be recorded and monitored in a manner appropriate to safe dietetic practice;
- critically evaluate new concepts, arguments and evidence from a range of current theories and research from relevant disciplines and use these to analyse novel problems in dietetic practice;
- show creativity when solving problems, often undertaken with senior colleagues or in peer groups, where evaluations are based on limited information and data;
- communicate effectively with peers and senior colleagues, including those who have particular expertise in the area;
- show awareness of limitations and a capacity to draw on advice to improve personal performance and interactions with others.

C Subject knowledge and understanding

The award holder should be able to:

- show systematic and integrated understanding of the key areas of study as specified in C;
- draw evidence from a range of sources specified in C to solve problems and plan strategies for dietetic intervention;
- draw on his/her knowledge of investigative methods, introduced in C, to critically evaluate published materials in nutrition and dietetics and related fields;
- communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions on diet and health in a variety of formats appropriate to specialist and non-specialists groups and individuals;
- exercise judgement based on awareness of key issues in dietetics and show responsibility for achieving personal and group outcomes;
- show confidence in using technology to analyse nutrient content of diets, undertake investigative work and deliver nutrition and dietetic health education;
- describe the limitations of nutritional assessment tools and recommended dietary allowances.

Appendix 1

Dietetics benchmark group membership

Mrs Linda Auty	Leeds Metropolitan University
Dr Jill Eaton-Evans	University of Ulster
Miss Norma Lauder	Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Trust
Professor Anne de Looy (facilitator)	Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh
Miss Gill Pearson	West Herts Hospitals NHS Trust
Professor Brian Ratcliffe	The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen
Dr Caroline Seddon	University of Luton

Appendix 2

Benchmark steering group membership

Mrs Margaret Andrews	North East Wales Institute of Higher Education
Mr David Ashcroft	Society of Chiropractors & Podiatrists
Mrs Linda Auty	Leeds Metropolitan University
Miss Lesley Barrowman	National Board for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting for Northern Ireland
Mrs Valerie Beale	Somerset Health Authority
Ms Mary Boyle	National Board for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting for Scotland
Mrs Ann Clarke	Bedford Hospital NHS Trust
Ms Helen Davis	Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield
Professor Anne de Looy	Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh
Miss Faye Doris	University of Plymouth
Mr Martin Duckworth	College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth
Mr Brian Ellis	Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh
Miss Anne Fagan (deceased)	Hospital of St John & St Elizabeth, London
Mrs Janice Gosby	UK Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting
Ms Valerie Hall	University of Brighton
Mrs Julia Henderson	University of Hertfordshire
Ms Anne Hopkins	University of Wales Swansea
Mr Stephen Hutchins	University of Salford
Mr Tom Langlands	English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
Ms June Leishman	University of Abertay, Dundee
Professor Jeffrey Lucas	University of Bradford
Professor Dame Jill Macleod-Clark (co-chair)	University of Southampton
Ms Diane Marks-Maran	Thames Valley University
Mrs Susan Montague	University of Hertfordshire
Mrs Christine Mullen	South Manchester University Hospital NHS Trust
Mr Luke O'Byrne	East Berkshire NHS Trust
Mrs Audrey Paterson	Canterbury Christ Church University College
Ms Robyn Phillips	Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting
Professor Mike Pittilo (co-chair)	Kingston University & St George's Medical Hospital
Ms Lorna Povey	Wolverhampton Health Care NHS Trust
Mrs Jarina Rashid-Porter	Coventry Healthcare NHS Trust
Mr Gwilym Roberts	College of Occupational Therapists
Ms Jenny Routledge	University of East Anglia
Mr Ian Rutherford	University of Nottingham
Mrs Sandra Sexton	University of Strathclyde
Ms Gail Stephenson	University of Liverpool
Professor Averil Stewart	Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh
Professor Mary Watkins	University of Plymouth