



COUNCIL FOR THE PROFESSIONS
COMPLEMENTARY TO MEDICINE

Benchmarking document

Dietetics

The Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine is issuing this Benchmarking Document for Dietetics in the performance of its functions as defined by Article 27 of the Health Care Professions Act, Chapter 464 of the Laws of Malta and in terms of Article 28 Health Care Professions Act, Chapter 464 of the Laws of Malta and Subsidiary Legislation 454.16 Professions Complimentary to Medicine (Licence to Practice) Regulations.

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Introduction

This document outlines Malta's Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine (CPCM) standards of proficiency for Dietetics. Via this document the CPCM is setting the minimum registration requirements for Dietitians in Malta. These standards are the threshold standards considered necessary to protect members of the public and via which qualified Dietitians are able to apply for registration in the Dietetics register kept by the CPCM.

This benchmarking document has been adopted by the CPCM to evaluate and assess applications to be registered as Dietitian and practise within the jurisdiction of Malta. They also serve as guidance to the CPCM on how to address substantive differences from these standards.

Description and Scope of Practice

Occupational Description

Dietetics is the science of applying nutritional principles to the planning and preparation of food and regulation of the diet in relation to both health and disease. Dietetics requires the application of safe and evidence-based practice, reflective practice and systematic clinical reasoning, (Gandy, 2014).

Scope of Practice

At an international level, a registered Dietitian is described as “a person with an academic qualification in nutrition and dietetics, recognised by national authority (s), acquired through taught and supervised clinical experience from a recognised institution”, (ICDA, 2020).

Using evidence-based approaches ¹, dietitians work autonomously ² to empower or support individuals, families, groups and populations to provide or select food, which is nutritionally adequate, safe, tasty and sustainable. Dietitians assess specific nutritional requirements throughout the life span and translate this into advice and/or treatment. This will maintain, reduce risk to, or restore health, as well as alleviate discomfort in palliative care. Beyond healthcare, dietitians improve the nutritional environment for all through governments, industry, academia and research”, (EFAD, 2016).

Dietitians practice their role in assessing, diagnosing, intervening, monitoring and evaluating according to the Nutrition Care Process/Dietetic Process (NCP), often in an interdisciplinary team, (EFAD, 2014).

In summary, a Dietitian is a unique healthcare professional authorized/registered to prescribe and give advice on human nutrition, food, dietary modification/treatments and to counsel patients, their relatives or the general public directly in institutional, community and educational settings and other workplaces to improve health and treat disease, (EFAD, 2014).³

¹ Evidence-based dietetic practice is about systematically search for research evidence, and assessing the validity, applicability and importance of that evidence. This evidence-based information is then combined with the dietitian's expertise and judgment, and the clients or community's unique values and circumstances to guide decision-making in dietetics.²

² Professional autonomy: the right and privilege to exercise professional skills independently without input from others.

³ *Scope note for the Skills/Competences/Knowledge:*

Knowledge: dietetics (human nutrition, pathology, psychology, sociology).

Scope note: Knowledge of human nutrition and dietary modification for optimizing health in clinical or other environments.

Skills: assessment and counselling.

Scope note: Diagnose individuals to determine food and nutrition modifications for health benefit and implement through counselling.

Although the description of a Dietitian's scope of practice is often broad, the main aim is to use such skills to prevent disease or treat/control/improve existing medical conditions, through manipulation of diets or specific food nutrients. In order to fulfil the occupational description, a Dietitian needs to combine all these skills with knowledge and experience, together with intuition, insight and understanding of the individual (or specific) circumstance in order to maintain and improve practice.

Level of Qualification

The CPCM considers applications for a person to be registered as a dietitian in the Maltese Islands from applicants who have undergone a recognised education and training in dietetics. There are two routes for qualification as a dietitian in Europe and both take place in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) recognised by the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (MQRIC) within the National Commission for Further and Higher Education in Malta (NCFHE), or equivalent. Both routes include a mandatory period of practice. The European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) recommends that a minimum of 30 ECTS is spent in practice education (one year of study equals 60 ECTS) guided by EFAD standards, (EFAD, 2010).

The main route for students of dietetics is to follow prescribed HEI first cycle (bachelor level) courses that carry a minimum of 180 ECTS at an MQF/EQF (Malta/European Qualification Framework) level of 6, or equivalent. The second route is available when students first study a minimum of 180 ECTS, or equivalent, in subjects related to dietetics (e.g., nutrition or biochemistry), and then study dietetics as second cycle (postgraduate/master level), (EFAD, 2016).

With the above taught modules, the student dietitian should have the essential knowledge to underpin informed, safe and effective practice of dietetics.

The CPCM understands that a number of programmes may be at, or above, the standard outlined, and that there may be some exceptions, so applications will be taken on a case by case basis to verify that the standard requirements as outlined by this document are met.

Courses delivered online are not accepted.

The applicant needs to:

- Provide a detailed transcript of Theoretical and Practical Training and Studies in hours associated with the Dietetics Qualification and in relation with the syllabus performed by the accredited institution. This has to be endorsed in the original format by the Institution's Head/Registrar of the University/College.
- Provide the course description, including study unit details. A copy of a portfolio outlaying the clinical practice will be necessary. This can be submitted either electronically or as a hard copy.

Language Proficiency

The CPCM requires those applicants who wish to enter the Dietetics register, to provide proof of language proficiency as defined in Annex A.

Evaluation of Application

On evaluation of the application the Council may choose to do one of the following:

- Grant registration;
- Ask for further clarification when required;
- Ask for the applicant to attend an interview;
- Reject the application if the qualification is not adequate and in line with this benchmark; and
- Be asked to carry out a period of supervised practice or undergo an aptitude test.

Minimum Curriculum Requirements

This standard ensures that the curriculum meets the standards for professional knowledge, skills and attitudes as expected by CPCM and therefore the applicant would be considered fit to practise in Malta.

The CPCM is aware that standards are continuously being updated over time. This document refers to the minimum general subject areas (but not restricted to) that the course needs to offer for the applicant to be successfully considered as a Registered Dietitian. The course programme successfully completed will reflect the skills and knowledge base that ensure that an applicant, once registered, is able to work as an independent and autonomous practitioner.

The applicant must be registered with the national regulator in the country of origin (if the profession is regulated in that country) and should have practiced the profession of Dietetics for a minimum of 6 months in the past 1 year.

The core modules expected to be covered in the course of studies are:

- Biochemistry
- Physiology
- Nutrition
- Dietetics
- Clinical medicine
- Catering and food service
- Food skills
- Food science and food hygiene
- Communications and inter-personal skills
- Research concepts and statistics
- Public health and health promotion
- Pharmacology
- Immunology
- Microbiology
- Genetics,
- Sociology
- Psychology
- Professionalism
- Management, administration, leadership and marketing concepts

Further details on a curriculum framework see; British Dietetic Association, 2013:

<https://www.bda.uk.com/practice-and-education/education/pre-registration.html>

Practice and Training

Applicants seeking registration will be required to submit documentary evidence of the supervised/mentored clinical training in the form of either a student portfolio or a logbook duly signed by the supervisor. These will include the practical sessions undertaken showing the key defined learning objectives. The clinical supervised training is expected to be of a minimum of 800 hours (equivalent to 30 ECTS).

Clinical is defined as an environment that provides healthcare services to patients or clients, most of the clinical setting should be a secondary healthcare setting. During the supervised clinical placement, the students should be exposed to a wide variety of clinical situations including but not limited to diabetes, nutrition support, gastroenterology, renal and paediatrics.

By the end of the supervised clinical placements, the students should have gained experience with different patient groups, including children, adolescents, adults and elderly and should be able to competent to conduct a dietetics session.

The mentioned practice has to be carried out under the direct supervision of a CPCM registered and licensed Dietitian. Hours of practice included as part of Research Projects will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Other CPCM documents to be considered in conjunction with this Benchmarking Document:

1. Codes of Professional and Ethical Conduct

<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/regcounc/cpcm/Documents/Codes%20of%20Professional%20and%20Ethical%20Conduct%20-%20March%202019.pdf>

2. Code of Practice (Dietetics)

<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/regcounc/cpcm/Documents/Dietetics%20Code%20of%20Practice.pdf>

CPCM MALTA

This document has been prepared by the CPCM Dietetics Subcommittee – April 2020

References

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 2. ICDA International Confederation of Dietetic Associations
<http://www.internationaldietetics.org/> Accessed 8th October 2019.
 3. EFAD (2016) Dietitians in Europe Definition, Profession and Education; Statement by the European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) 27th General Meeting. <http://www.efad.org/en-us/about-efad/definition-of-a-dietitian/> Accessed 8th January 2020.
 4. EFAD (2014) European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD): Nutrition Care Process/Dietetic Process (NCP)
<http://www.efad.org/everyone/5216/7/0/80> Accessed 15th December 2019.
 5. Response to ESCO; Dietitian; dietetics (2014) European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) at www.efad.org Accessed 14th November 2019.
 6. EFAD (2010) European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) European Practice Placement Standards for Dietetics
<http://www.efad.org/media/1424/european-practice-placement-standards-for-dietetics.pdf> Accessed 12th January 2020.
 7. BDA (2013) British Dietetic Association (BDA) - a Curriculum Framework for the pre-registration education and training of dietitians <https://www.bda.uk.com/practice-and-education/education/pre-registration.html> Accessed 15th Feb, 2020.
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ANNEXE A

Language Proficiency Requirements by The Council for The Professions Complementary to Medicine

The Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine requires applicants to meet the Council's level of Proficiency in the English or the Maltese Language.

All professionals seeking registration are requested to present either one of the following:

1. A Maltese language certificate; **OR**
 - (i) An Ordinary Level MATSEC certificate (MQF level 3); OR
<https://myexams.gov.mt/matsec-examinations/>
 - (ii) An Advanced/Intermediate Level MATSEC certificate (MQF level 4); OR
<https://myexams.gov.mt/matsec-examinations/>
 - (iii) A Medical Maltese Proficiency Certificate.
<https://www.um.edu.mt/arts/malti/korsijiet/medicalmaltesecourse>
2. The applicant can provide evidence that his/her professional qualification(s) (on the basis of which he/she is applying for registration) was/were acquired through the medium of English or Maltese and that practice placements in that/those qualification(s) were undertaken and supervised through the medium of English or Maltese; **OR**

3. The applicant can provide evidence that s/he has **lived in and practised** his/her profession through the medium of English or Maltese in a country that has English or Maltese recognised as the official language of that country for a period of **not less than 2 years in the past five-year period; OR**
4. Any other proof of English or Maltese language Proficiency.

Additionally, should the applicant choose to opt for other forms of proving language proficiency, the applicant can opt for either one of the following Secure English Language Tests.

Should the applicant opt for this, the below is the list of Examining Boards recognized by the Council and the minimum required standards accepted by the Council in terms of the table below (or equivalent);

Examining Board	TOEFL Internet-Based (iBT)	IELTS (Academic)	Cambridge	Occupational English Test (OET)
Required Level	95	6.5	Advanced Certificate	B
Remarks	A writing score of at least 24 is required.	Required with a minimum of 6.0 in all elements.	A pass at a grade C or better is required.	A grade B or better is required in all components.

Any other Secure English Language Tests which are equivalent to those mentioned in the table above will also be considered.