



COUNCIL FOR THE PROFESSIONS
COMPLEMENTARY TO MEDICINE

Benchmarking document

Nutritional Therapy

The Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine is issuing this Benchmarking Document for Nutritional Therapy 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 Nutrition Therapists (NT). Via this document the CPCM is setting the minimum registration requirements for Nutrition Therapists in Malta. These standards are the threshold standards considered necessary to protect members of the public and via which qualified Nutrition Therapists are able to apply for registration in the Nutrition Therapy register kept by the CPCM.

This benchmarking document has been adopted by the CPCM to evaluate and assess applications to be registered as Nutrition Therapists 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

A Nutrition Therapist is a person who provides advice on matters relating to food and how it impacts on health. Nutrition Therapist can design, coordinate, implement and evaluate population and individual health interventions that are designed to improve health and wellbeing through food and nutrition.

Scope of Practice

Registered Nutrition Therapists hold a recognised qualification in Human Nutrition. (In general, registered Nutrition Therapists understand the basic principles of nutrition and nutrition related science and perform a variety of dietary related techniques using a number of tools including, but not restricted to dietary and food composition analysis, assessment of nutritional status and dietary assessment in groups or individuals across all the lifecycle. Nutritionists may also work in the food industry as well as play an important role in different aspects of health promotion and public health nutrition.

Level of Qualification

The Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine considers applications from applicants who have successfully completed a course in Human Nutrition (or equivalent) with a total of 180 ECTS credits (if at undergraduate degree level – Level 6 MQF) and a minimum of 60 ECTS (if at postgraduate level) after having completed a degree in Human Nutrition at an MQF/EQF (Malta/European Qualification Framework) level of 6 or higher at an Institution recognised by the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (MQRIC) within the National Commission for Further and Higher Education in Malta (NCFHE).

Please note, courses delivered entirely by distance learning do not meet CPCM requirements for registration.

Supervised Practice is expected to be of a minimum of 400 hours.

The applicant needs to:

- Provide a detailed transcript of **Theoretical and Practical** Training and Studies **in hours** associated with the Nutrition Therapy 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 and assessment weightings;
- Have carried out a minimum of 400 hours supervised practice.

Language Proficiency

The CPCM requires those applicants who wish to enter the Nutritional Therapy 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;
- Ask the applicant to sit for an interview;
- Ask the applicant to undertake supervised practice should the required hours be lacking;
- Reject the application if the qualification is not adequate and in line with this benchmark.

Minimum Curriculum Requirements

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

The Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine is aware that standards are continuously being updated over time. This document refers to the general subject areas (but not restricted to) that the course needs to offer for the applicant to be successfully considered as a Registered Nutrition Therapist. Different courses offer different specialisations and these need to be considered on a case by case basis.

Core subjects covered:

1. Fundamentals of Nutrition and nutritional sciences

The knowledge of the basics of human nutrition; the basic concepts of physiology; and, the biochemical and metabolic processes essential to human health.

Subjects include:

- Anatomy and Physiology;
- The macro & micronutrients and their deficiencies;
- General biochemistry including the digestion, absorption and metabolism of nutrients;
- The study of human nutrition including endocrinology, immunology and metabolic pathways;
- The basic principles of general pharmacology and nutraceuticals in relation to food issues;
- Biochemical Imbalances in Disease; and
- Pathophysiology of Named Conditions.

2. Food studies and policy

The knowledge of the supply chain from farm to fork which includes nutritional considerations and food safety issues.

Subjects include:

- Food science and technology and food microbiology;
- Food chain studies;
- Lifecycle nutrition; and
- Nutrition policy.

3. Food and dietary behaviour

The knowledge of the complex interaction between diet, dietary behaviour and food choices based on psychosocial, economic, anthropological, and cultural contexts.

Subjects include:

- Communication skills and the therapeutic relationship;
- Social policy and health systems; and
- Understanding of key issues of social, cultural and behavioural aspects of eating.

3i. Food and diet in NT practice

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

- Recognise that dietary eating patterns are diverse and may change, with consequent effects on health;
- Discuss factors affecting food choice;
- Discuss lifestyle and dietary risk factors of diseases commonly encountered in NT practice;
- Describe the biochemical structure and functions of nutrients and other food constituents and other non- nutritive substances including phytonutrients;
- Evaluate and use nutritional databases to determine the nutrient composition of foods;
- Describe classification of foods and outline current national and a range of international recommendations and guidance for a healthy diet;
- Discuss factors affecting the bioavailability of nutrients;
- Discuss the effects of food production and processing and storage on nutrient density and food quality;
- Explore the effects of food production on sustainability and food security;
- Describe procedures for safe handling and preparation of food in relation to dietary recommendations;
- Describe, evaluate and classify diet for potentially adverse reactions to foods;
- Outline legislation and regulation of food and nutraceutical labelling, including food additives and food preservation; and
- Discuss the safe use of nutraceuticals in terms of drug actions, nutrient interactions and safe upper limits.



4. Professional studies in Nutrition Therapy

The knowledge of standards, requirements and professionalism requirements as a Registered Nutrition Therapist (*applicable as from 2018*).

Subjects Include:

- Core competencies for nutrition (including critical literature appraisal);
- Key skills required for registered nutrition therapist including IT, numeracy, academic integrity, presentations, time management; organisational and management principles; and
- Code of ethics conduct and practice; moral and legal requirements for CPCM registered nutritionists.

4i. Professional nutritional therapy practice

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

- Understand the history of the profession and the place of NT within healthcare settings;
- Maintain the standards and requirements of professional and regulatory bodies;
- Adhere to relevant codes of conduct for registration with regulators and professional bodies including gaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality;
- Recognise the importance of the legislative framework and practice in accordance within the current legislation applicable to nutritional therapy;
- Uphold the principles and practice of clinical governance, including practice audit and risk management activities;
- Recognise the obligation to maintain fitness to practice;
- Prioritise workload and manage time effectively;
- Evaluate and reflect on own NT practice leading to action planning and continuous improvement;

- Recognise limitations of own knowledge and experience and use personal development planning to address these areas through engagement in high quality evidence-based continuing professional development;
- Contribute to the development and dissemination of evidence based NT practice;
- Recognise professional boundaries and scope of practice and refer clients where appropriate;
- Communicate professionally with other health professionals as appropriate;
- Act in the best interest of clients and exercise a professional duty of care towards them;
- Demonstrate cultural sensitivity and respect for others; and
- Contribute to the well-being and safety of all people in the work place.

5. Health research methods

The knowledge of the main scientific research methods utilised in nutrition-based research (including ethical rigour of research); the undertaking of appropriate scientific dissemination; critical review and conducting research using various research methodologies and their correct application in statistical terms.

Subjects include:

- Basic laboratory skills relating to food and nutrition;
- Preparation, processing, interpretation and data presentation;
- Use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation;
- Understanding of the research process including the evaluation of results;
- Scientific report writing and literature reviewing in nutrition related areas;
- The correct use of statistical packages and management of data processing;
- Clinical Data Collections and Case Interpretation; and
- Case Progression Strategies.

5i Evidence based practice

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

- Recognise the value of research and other scholarly activity in relation to the development of the NT profession and in planning safe and effective client care;
- Adopt a systematic approach to analysing, evaluating and synthesising primary research evidence to inform NT practice;
- Evaluate current recommendations and policies to inform NT practice;
- Interpret research data including statistical analysis to inform evidence based NT practice;
- Use research findings to support evidence based NT practice;
- Evaluate government health policies, dietary advice and guidelines including food and nutrition policies to inform NT practice; and
- Identify and access high quality, evidence based Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and reflect on its application in NT practice

6. Diet, health and wellbeing:

The understanding and impact of food and nutrients on health; application of the scientific principles of nutrition for the promotion of health and wellbeing of individuals, groups and populations (including the benefits vs. risks in different settings).

Subjects may include:

- The links between diet and disease prevention and management, health promotion and disease prevention;
- Public health nutrition (including socioeconomic aspects of health promotion);
- Nutritional epidemiology; and
- Recognise that dietary eating patterns are diverse and may change, with consequent.

6i. Physiological functions in health and disease

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to demonstrate understanding and application of:

- The structure and function of major physiological systems;
- The integration of physiological systems within the human body and the application of this to a systems biology approach in NT practice;
- The homeostatic regulation of major body functions in optimal health;
- Changes to physiological functions through the lifespan and links to alterations in nutrient requirements;
- Acute physiological responses to tissue injury and stress and the effect of these processes on nutrient supply and demand;
- The physiological responses to physical activity and effect on nutrient supply and demand;
- Energy balance and regulation of appetite and food intake;
- The influence of diet on the development of the gut microbiota and its effects on physiological function and health;
- The structure and functions of cell organelles including cell respiration, protein synthesis and membrane transport;
- The role of genetic variation in single-gene disorders (SNPs) and multi-factorial conditions;
- The role of epigenetic regulation of gene expression;
- The coordination and regulation of major metabolic pathways and the role of nutrients and other food components as coenzymes and cofactors;
- The pathophysiological and biochemical changes underpinning the development of health conditions commonly seen in nutritional therapy; and
- The physiological processes of drug absorption, transport, detoxification and elimination.

The mechanism of action of common classes of drugs and common drug -nutrient and drug-food interactions.

7. Assessment and planning for nutritional therapy practice

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

- Communicate and negotiate effectively with the client to identify therapeutic goals and appropriate strategies;
- Discuss the design and use of appropriate assessment and evaluation tools including health questionnaires and patient outcome measures;
- Identify where acute health conditions may be present (red flags) and refer appropriately;
- Carry out integrated health and nutritional assessment activities skillfully and in accordance with evidence based practice These may include gathering a medical and social history, anthropometric and dietary assessment and results from functional, nutrigenetic and biochemical/medical testing as appropriate;
- Use a systems based, integrated and evidenced approach to interpret and evaluate the results of nutritional assessment which may include, medical, biochemical, functional and nutrigenetic;
- Evaluate quantitative and qualitative methods used to estimate nutrient intake;
- Evaluate guidelines and recommendations for nutritional intake including Dietary Reference Values (DRVs) and safe upper limits;
- Assess readiness for behaviour change;
- Discuss the influence of social and cultural factors on dietary intake and lifestyle of clients;
- Understand, and present numerical data from health assessments;
- Monitor and critically evaluate the outcomes of practice and reassess priorities and adjust management plans in the light of these;
- Maintain records of assessment and management plans appropriately in accordance with current legislation; and
- Reflect on knowledge, skills and clinical experiences to progress personal and professional development.

8. Therapeutic nutritional management

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

- Formulate therapeutic plans for, nutrition and lifestyle advice to educate the client and meet negotiated goals, drawing on a critique of evidence in the literature and client assessment;
- Develop plans for the management of nutritional deficiencies or excesses, including obesity and eating disorders recognising the need for referral to appropriate services where relevant;
- Plan appropriate dietary advice and construct menu plans to safely and effectively meet negotiated health goals within an agreed timeframe;
- Apply appropriate communication skills to develop therapeutic relationships for effective clinical practice;
- Appraise and select appropriate nutraceuticals for safe and effective practice to achieve therapeutic goals;
- Apply knowledge of behaviour change techniques that may include motivational interviewing support, motivate and empower clients to make negotiated food and lifestyle behaviour changes to promote health;
- Employ strategies to empower the client to become actively involved in dietary changes and the management of their own health care including reviewing their wider environment;
- Communicate effectively with the client using, information sheets and other forms of written communication;
- Educate clients about food safety and provide practical advice about food, eating and drinking;
- Identify the sustainability and environmental impact of dietary advice and food choices; and
- Critically review effectiveness of previous nutritional plans and negotiate to adjust these as appropriate.

9. Business Skills

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

- Manage time and resources;
- Demonstrate relevant knowledge of the legislative framework for Nutritional Therapy;
- Understand the legal responsibilities of a self-employed healthcare practitioner;
- Understand the role of Professional Bodies and Regulators; the role of each and the difference between them;
- Understand the role of insurers and evaluate insurance needs;
- Understand the financial responsibilities of running a small business;
- Understand the basic accounting and book-keeping requirements of a small business;
- Recognise that Nutritional Therapy can be a 'product' to be marketed;
- Understand the value of different marketing strategies and how these can be applied;
- Develop a business plan and recognise the need to update this on an on-going basis;
- Understand website construction (sufficiently to guide those with the skills to do this) and the use of web based communications including social media;
- Understand how to deliver a presentation to a variety of different audiences;
- Manage client expectations, relationships and develop service excellence; and
- Develop communication skills with fellow health professionals, clients and other businesses.

Practice and Training

The overall ratio of Theory to Practice is typically 75% theory to 25% practice.

Professional supervised practice in Nutrition (400 hours)

Subjects include:

- Practical training in food composition data with the use of computer software (minimum of 50 hours);
- A minimum of 70 hours of development and supervision of clinical skills with the simultaneous physical presence of the Learner and the supervisor must be carried out;
- A minimum of 15 cases studies (min. 30 hours) must be completed. Of these three must be supervised and include initial and follow up client appointments. 12 can include fictional, role play and observations. The three written-up case studies must provide:
 - (a) Demonstration of a critical and evidence-based approach to designing and monitoring Nutritional Therapy interventions, which may include one or more of the following; food, nutraceuticals, testing and lifestyle recommendations;
 - (b) Adherence and awareness of all relevant codes of professional practice and safety issues;
 - (c) Application of a systems biology approach to inform nutritional intervention *in addition, the following may also be included if relevant to the case study;*
 - (d) Critical evaluation and application of use of behaviour change theories; and
 - (e) Evidence of critical reflection and personal development planning.
- Nutrition in practice such as field visits/experiential learning projects/ placements in nutrition (minimum of 250 hours).

Food composition data as well as the *dietary, experiential learning in nutritional therapeutics and nutritional assessment techniques* presented as part of the field visits or placements will be considered as long as the total supervised practice carried out is of a minimum of **400 hours** and the minimum hours for each of these elements is presented.

Practice and Training

Applicants seeking registration will be required to submit documentary evidence of the supervised/mentored 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.

For those carrying out the training after graduation, the mentioned practice has to be carried out under the direct supervision of a Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine registered Nutrition Therapist and the logbook duly signed.

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 (Nutrition)

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

This document has been prepared by the CPCM Nutrition Therapist Subcommittee in consultation with the British Association of Nutrition Therapists and The Complementary and Natural Health Care Council UK (CNHC) – March 2020

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.