Association for Nutrition

Regulating Professionals – Raising Standards – Improving Health

Standards and Guidance for AfN Degree Accreditation

For undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes

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Introduction

AfN accredits degree programmes which meet our Standards and enable students to develop and demonstrate the ANutr Core Competencies. Graduates of these accredited degrees are able to apply for direct entry onto the UKVRN, for registration as Registered Associate Nutritionists (ANutr).

Our Accreditation Standards set out our expectations of accredited programmes. In this document, we provide the rationale for each Standard. Each Standard must be demonstrated by evidence, which is listed next to each of the Standard sections. In many cases, the evidence should be routine documentation for the Higher Education Institution (HEI).

AfN recognises and welcomes the diversity in approach by HEIs in designing and delivering a nutrition programme, which reflects the core values and ethics of AfN. Several examples are given as guidance for programme teams when considering the policies and documentation required as evidence for each Standard. The examples are intended to illustrate ways in which our Standards might be met, but are not prescriptive, and programme teams are encouraged to think about how to meet our Standards in a way which meets their local aims and aspirations.

The overall aim of the Accreditation Standards is to foster the development of the next generation of nutritionists, equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to practise in an evidence-based manner.

Accreditation Standards

The requirements for AfN Degree Accreditation of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are detailed within 5 standards:

- Professionalism and Ethics
- Admission of Students
- Curriculum Delivery and Assessment
- Quality and Resources
- Leadership and Staffing

Standard 1: Professionalism and Ethics

Rationale

Professionalism is the vital element that underpins all the accreditation standards and runs through the Core Competencies.

Accredited programmes are preparing students for registration on the UKVRN as Registered Associate Nutritionists (ANutr) and for a career in nutrition. It is therefore important that students comply with ethical guidelines, codes of academic conduct and health and safety guidelines appropriate to the programme.

Applications need to demonstrate that the institution has appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure compliance. Staff leading the programme should ensure that the current edition of the UKVRN Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance is being used to promote professional conduct within the programme.

Standard 1: Sections

Standard Section	Evidence Required
S1a – Graduates of the programme must be fit to practise. There must be transparent, robust and effective systems embedded within the institution to ensure compliance with AfN professional ethics, codes of academic conduct and health and safety guidelines. A fitness to practise policy, which applies to the programme, is required.	• Document showing the fitness to practise policy embedded within the programme. • Academic conduct policy. • Other relevant policies and procedures, such as health and safety guidelines.
S1b - Students must have effective support for wellbeing, academic conduct and employability.	• Details of relevant student support services or policies, such as a fitness to study policy, academic support or careers advice.

Standard 1: Examples

Example 1

Institution A submitted university-level policies for academic conduct and health and safety. The application could not proceed because the programme did not submit a fitness to practise policy. Feedback was provided to advise that an appropriate fitness to practise policy is required.

Institution A offered other degree programmes providing training in healthcare professions which had a fitness to practise policy and the programme team arranged for this policy to be applied to the nutrition programmes. The policy was provided and the application could proceed.

Example 2

Institution B already has a professional conduct policy for use within the optional nutrition placement year. This policy could be extended as a fitness to practise policy, if amended to cover the whole programme.

Example 3

Institution C was delivering a programme which included practical laboratory sessions. Their health and safety policy covered both the general health and safety requirements of the institution, and the specific risks and safety measures associated with laboratory work.

Standard 2: Admission of Students

Rationale

We recognise the need for a diverse profession and for diversity in accredited programmes. Nutrition programmes have the freedom to design a curriculum which meets our standards and delivers the Core Competencies, but also meets local or specialist needs and aspirations.

Entry criteria should be transparent and appropriate to the programme, which must ensure that students are supported to achieve all the required Core Competencies. Entry criteria should ensure that students have an appropriate background to be able to fully participate in the programme and engage with the programme content. For some programmes, it might be appropriate to include some of the underpinning knowledge required for Core Competency coverage in the entry criteria. Other programmes might prioritise engaging students from a range of backgrounds, but build into the programme teaching and support to develop the underpinning science knowledge.

It is expected that open-access website links to entry requirements for the programme will be provided as evidence.

Standard 2: Sections

Standard Section	Evidence Required
S2a - Recruitment, selection and admission of students for entry to undergraduate or postgraduate programmes must be clear and appropriate to the programme.	• Details of student recruitment and selection processes. • Academic entry criteria published on website. • Policy and procedures for criteria relating to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for admissions, which must include an RNutr in the assessment.
S2b - Where Core Competencies are gained by students through prior study, the programme provider must provide evidence to demonstrate how those competencies are delivered and assessed to the same standards as for the rest of their programme.	• Policy and procedures for evaluation of criteria relating to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) of Core Competencies, which must include an RNutr in the assessment . • Where RPL is not allowed within an institution, programme leaders should confirm this within the compliance statement box.

Standard 2: Sections (Cont.)

Standard Section	Evidence Required
S2c - Students must demonstrate sufficient capability to study in the language used for delivery and assessment of the programme. For International students studying in English in the UK, the overall average score must be not less than 6.5 IELTS (or equivalent) with no individual section less than 6.0. **For programmes delivered in English outside the UK, the programme provider must be able to demonstrate an appropriate mechanism for ensuring that students possess sufficient command of English to study, participate in learning, and be assessed effectively with reference to the core competencies required for professional practice.**	• English Language criteria published on website. • For students who enter the programme below this standard, AfN would prefer to see that an alternative exit award, which is unaccredited, will be issued. • Programmes should consider a pre-master's course or foundation year to support students below this requirement, prior to enrolling on the accredited degree.

Standard 2: Examples

Example 1

After having completed the first year in Nutritional Sciences at Institution D, a student wishes to transfer to Institution E to continue their studies in Nutrition and Health.

Institution E has a policy which allows students to be accepted with advanced standing, but requires copies to be provided of all module specifications and the learning outcomes covered and achieved from Institution D.

An RNutr member of the programme team reviews the information provided to make a decision about whether the relevant Core Competencies that will not be covered in the remainder of the programme have been achieved before they can accept the student onto the programme.

Example 2

Institution F has an admissions policy which allows a broad range of A levels. The programme incorporates some introductory modules to ensure that all students have the appropriate underpinning knowledge of science to be able to successfully engage with the nutrition science modules later in the programme.

Example 3

Institutions G and H both offer programmes with the title MSc Human Nutrition, and both programmes cover the ANutr Core Competencies and are AfN accredited. However, Institution G requires a science degree background, and its modules are designed to build on this existing knowledge base, whereas Institution H accepts students with non-science backgrounds, and has additional measures in place to ensure students are supported to develop the underpinning science knowledge required to achieve the Core Competencies.

Example 4

At Institution I, international applicants who have non-standard qualifications, may enter onto their pre-Masters course of between 1 and 3 Semesters, to allow more opportunities for international students to study at their institution.

Standard 3: Curriculum Delivery and Assessment

Rationale

The ANutr Core Competencies describe the minimum requirements for knowledge, understanding and skills in nutrition at degree level for a Registered Associate Nutritionist (ANutr), and must be delivered and assessed in the curriculum of an AfN accredited programme.

The updated Core Competencies show an emphasis on the practical application of both knowledge and understanding. The Core Competencies should be delivered in a stimulating and dynamic manner, in accordance with current evidence-based practice. They should similarly be assessed in a manner reflecting real life and authentic situations and not rely simply on knowledge recall.

Students must achieve a pass mark in all modules that cover the Core Competencies. Where within module compensation is allowed under the Institution's regulations, this can only be applied if there is an opportunity to achieve the relevant Core Competencies in the programme elsewhere.

All programmes must ensure that students have achieved all of the Core Competencies by the time of graduation.

Standard 3: Sections

Standard Section	Evidence Required
S3a - Core Competencies must be delivered and assessed within validated programme modules. The Core Competencies should be fully embedded within modules and be delivered and assessed in an integrated manner, demonstrating appropriate pedagogy	• Programme specification document. • Mapping document showing the Core Competencies covered in each module. • Assessment briefs/guidelines for modules covering Core Competencies.
S3b - An AfN accredited programme must have an assessment strategy which ensures that all students who successfully complete the programme have demonstrated all of the Core Competencies and that all modules which contain Core Competencies have been passed.	• Programme regulations document. • Assessment regulations • document. • Module specifications. • External examiner reports. • Assessment strategy
S3c - An AfN accredited programme must be delivered in an environment which is informed by appropriate research and evidence-based nutrition practice. Students should experience a balance of taught components, directed study and independent learning, with a strong focus on critical analysis, evaluation and evidence-based practice.	• A concise narrative (maximum of two pages) explaining the ethos and aims of the programme and detailing how research and evidence-based practice informs the programme. This description should refer to the balance of learning opportunities within the curriculum and describe any other pieces of evidence, such as placements, original research, external stakeholders etc.

Standard 3: Sections (cont.)

S3d - Where Core Competencies are gained by students as part of the programme at another institution, the programme provider must provide evidence to demonstrate how those competencies are delivered and assessed to the same standards as for the rest of their programme.	• Policy and procedures for evaluation of standards of delivery and assessment of Core Competencies from any other institution (for example as part of an exchange programme).

Standard 3: Examples

Example 1

Institution J has recently had their BSc Nutrition programme validated. As part of this validation event, there is a Programme Validation document containing several pages covering the ethos and aims of the programme and linking in research and evidence-based practice. This document would be suitable as a descriptive narrative to cover S3c.

Example 2

Institution K integrates the Professional Conduct Core Competency throughout the three years of the degree by incorporating a directed study module in each year, relating to material covered in other modules, as spiral learning. These modules include the creation of a nutrition blog; a nutrition seminar and finally a research project. However, Institution L integrates the Professional Conduct Core Competency as a substantial module in the second year involving the creation, implementation and evaluation of a secondary school nutrition outreach project. This illustrates the acceptable diversity of approach for different programmes and institutions.

Example 3

Institution M offers a BSc in Human Nutrition and has mapped the Core Competencies against a range of modules. All Core Competencies are covered in more than one module. For modules containing Core Competencies which have two or more assessment components, students do not have to pass each individual component, provided that they achieve a pass mark in the module overall. However, all Core Competencies are also mapped to modules with only one assessment task. No compensation is allowed for failed modules containing Core Competencies.

Example 4

Institution N for its MSc Global Health programme, requires an online portfolio of achievements to be completed for each student, which records all Core Competencies as they are successfully demonstrated through core modules. All modules must be passed according to the University assessment regulations.

Examples 3 and 4 are equally acceptable strategies, provided that evidence of the current programme assessment strategy can be demonstrated.

Standard 4: Quality and Resources

Rationale

Higher Education Institutions should have robust quality assurance processes in place and the AfN programme accreditation is designed to complement these existing structures. Higher Education Institutions in the UK will have been subject to external quality assurance which ensure that institutions have appropriate processes in place. International universities which are applying for accreditation of programmes will need to provide additional information to ensure we have a good understanding of the external quality assurance processes in place.

The quality of AfN accredited programmes must be managed, monitored, reviewed and evaluated in a systematic manner, through transparent processes which show accountability at each stage.

It is expected that evidence of quality assurance would be provided by links to any recent QA reports as appropriate.

If specific facilities are required for the programme, this should be indicated in a document .

Standard 4: Sections

Standard Section	Evidence Required
S4a - There must be policies and systems in place to ensure the quality of education and assessment is monitored and evaluated, and action taken to address concerns.	Programmes must demonstrate that a robust QA process is in place across the institution. This can be demonstrated by, but not limited to: • Internal quality reports showing approval or validation of the programme, • Annual Monitoring Forms (APR; Quinquennial reviews) • External Examiner Reports • Evidence of staff/student liaison committees' consideration of modifications to the programme • Module evaluation forms
S4b - There must be sufficient and relevant teaching and learning resources in place to deliver and assess the programme in its entirety.	• A generalised list of available teaching and learning resources appropriate to the programme. • Details of any specific resources which are required for any modules, which may be included in the module specifications provided in respect of Standard 3b.

Standard 4: Examples

Example 1

Institution O does not currently hold a staff-student liaison committee for the nutrition programme. However the programme leader decides to initiate a similar scheme for student discussion and feedback to ensure that any student concerns are addressed

Example 2

Institution P includes in its syllabus a module on Catering for Health, but the institution does not have any food preparation facilities. It arranges to hire out the catering kitchens at the local college of Further Education on a weekly basis. Therefore, Institution P needs to provide a copy of the agreement letter from the FE college to demonstrate that this is a secure arrangement.

Example 3

Institution Q delivers a similar module on Healthy Cooking as part of an online programme. The module is designed so that students can use the cooking facilities they have in their place of residence. The health and safety policies of the programme account for use of home cooking facilities and the module includes teaching about relevant sections of this policy.

Example 4

Institution R uses Microdiet software as a nutrient analysis system. The institution should specify the type of licence it currently has for the software.

Standard 5: Leadership and Staffing

Rationale

We recognise that staff from a variety of disciplines are able to contribute to the delivery of Core Competencies and that this variety can enrich accredited programmes.

We believe it is important that there are Registered Nutritionists (RNutr) involved in the leadership, delivery, assessment and moderation of the programme. This ensures that accredited programmes are managed by people who have the knowledge and skills required for registration and are able to promote a culture within the programme which aligns with the philosophy, values and ethics of AfN and the nutrition profession.

Staff who are Registered Associate Nutritionists (ANutr) are also able to contribute to the programme, and should record their experience and developing competencies as part of their progression towards submitting an RNutr transfer portfolio.

Standard 5: Sections

Standard Section	Evidence Required
S5a - There must be AfN Registered Nutritionists (RNutr) involved in the leadership of the programme, who will take a role in ensuring that staff delivering the programme maintain their knowledge and skills in respect of the Core Competencies.	• Details of the nutrition programme team structure and individual roles, showing the contribution of RNutr staff to the programme. • Details of Continual Professional Development (CPD) undertaken by staff in the past three years.
S5b - There must be sufficient AfN Registered Nutritionists (RNutr) to deliver a programme which aligns with the philosophy, values and ethics of AfN and the nutrition profession. As a minimum, there must be two FTE AfN Registered Nutritionists (RNutr) contributing to the design, delivery and assessment of the Core Competencies for each programme.	• Names and UKVRN registration numbers of RNutr staff. • FTE value of each RNutr staff member.
S5c – At least one External Examiner must be an AfN Registered Nutritionist (RNutr).	• Name and UKVRN registration number of external examiner(s). • When deciding on an external examiner programmes might like to consider the External Examining Principles on the QAA website. *AfN request at least one External Examiner is an RNutr, as we feel RNutrs are best placed to understand the implementation of the Core Competencies within programmes.*

Standard 5: Sections (cont.)

Standard Section	Evidence Required
S5d - There must be sufficient appropriately qualified and experienced staff to deliver and assess the Core Competency requirements. This may include Registered Associate Nutritionists (ANutr) and staff from other relevant disciplines	• Curriculum Vitae of all staff contributing to the programme. • Mapping document showing which staff teach on each of the modules.

Standard 5: Examples

Example 1

The programme leader for the suite of MSc Public Health pathways at Institution S, (in which nutrition is just one option), is not an RNutr.

The programme leader delegates the responsibility of reviewing the nutrition staff members' CPD records to another member of staff, who is an RNutr, to ensure that these staff maintain their knowledge and skills in respect of the Core Competencies.

Example 2

One of the two RNutr staff teaching on the nutrition course at Institution T is shortly to take a year's sabbatical.

Institution T must ensure that the sabbatical cover staff is also an RNutr, otherwise there will not be the minimum number of RNutr staff actively contributing to the programme.

Example 3

Institution U has no full-time RNutr staff who teach solely on their MSc Nutrition programme. However, the staff teaching on the programme includes two 0.5 FTE RNutr staff who have a full-time job share and two full-time RNutr staff, who both spend half their time on the MSc Nutrition programme and half in another department.

The programme listed all four staff on their application, indicating 0.5 FTE for each person to demonstrate that they meet the requirements.

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
AfN (UKVRN) Practise Standards	This refers to the UKVRN Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance and the AfN Standards for Freelance and Independent Practise.
Academic conduct	The expectation that students will undertake individual assignments independently and write assessments in their own words, with any quotations clearly marked and any citations fully referenced, without plagiarism, collusion, falsification or cheating.
Compensation	A mechanism whereby an HEI can award credit for an assessment component or a module in which the student did not achieve a pass grade, usually according to strict criteria.
Core Competencies	These describe the minimum requirements for knowledge, understanding and skills in nutrition at degree level for a Registered Associate Nutritionist (ANutr) and are divided into sub-competencies. These can be found online, here.
Critical analysis	An intellectual process involving understanding information, logical reasoning, questioning, evaluating information, developing an evidence-based opinion and drawing conclusions.

Term	Definition
Embedded within modules	Core Competencies should be delivered alongside relevant subject material and in context with sufficient examples within appropriate modules and should not be delivered separately or without context.
Employability	The attributes that a person possesses that make them able to enter employment. Employability can be enhanced by subject knowledge, practical skills, real-life or work experiences, transferable skills and emotional intelligence.
Ethics of AfN	The current edition of the UKVRN Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance document can be found online, here.
Evidence-based practice	A process which requires that decisions about nutrition are based on the best available, current, valid and relevant evidence from research literature.
Fitness to practise policy	When conferring awards leading to professional qualifications that can be registered with a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB), the HEI should be satisfied that the student is a safe and suitable entrant to the profession. The student should demonstrate appropriate standards of behaviour, health and conduct relevant to future employment in the profession, that deem them fit for registration and practise. A Fitness to Practise policy states how the HEI will ensure that this process occurs.

Term	Definition
IELTS	The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is an English language test for study, migration or work. IELTS is accepted by more than 11,000 employers, universities, schools and immigration bodies.
Institution	This refers to Higher Education Institutions, often referred to as HEIs or universities.
Integrated	Core Competencies should be delivered and assessed throughout the curriculum in a linked, coordinated and logical manner.
Leadership of the programme	This refers to sustained input into the curriculum design, implementation and/or management of the programme and does not necessarily refer to the named programme leader.
Pedagogy	The methodology of education, which encompasses differing learning styles and teaching theories and differing methods of feedback and assessment.
Registered Associate Nutritionist (ANutr)	A person who has successfully demonstrated they meet both the minimum requirements for UKVRN registration to hold current registration with RNutr status.
Registered Nutritionist (RNutr)	A person who has successfully demonstrated they meet both the minimum requirements for UKVRN registration and the additional competencies within a specialist area of practice to hold current registration with RNutr status.

Term	Definition
Resit opportunities	Opportunities provided by the HEI, for a student to retake the assessment of a module in which they did not achieve a pass grade, usually according to strict criteria.
Summative assessment component	This is an element of assessment, which may consist of multiple tasks, that counts toward the final grade of a module and is a formal method to evaluate learning by comparison with a standard or benchmark.
UKVRN	The United Kingdom Voluntary Register of Nutritionists, is an independent register held by AfN to distinguish nutrition practitioners who meet rigorously applied training, competence and professional practice criteria. Its purpose is to protect the public and assure the credibility of nutrition as a responsible profession.
Validated programme modules	Modules which have been fully approved by the HEI, ensuring consistent academic standards in line with their current strategy. These should also meet external requirements with regards to Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.
Wellbeing	This is a holistic term that encompasses all aspects of a student's overall development and quality of life, including their physical, social, mental and emotional state.

Association for Nutrition

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