Association for Nutrition

Regulating Professionals – Raising Standards – Improving Health

The Pathway to Professionalisation: Regulation for Nutritionists

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Preface

Dr Margaret Ashwell OBE

At some time towards the end of 2025, I was glancing at the Association for Nutrition (AfN) website to see what the organisation says about its history:
The Association for Nutrition derives directly from work carried out by the Nutrition Society, which has, over several decades, laid the foundation for professional practice in Nutrition. The need formally to establish nutrition as a profession was articulated by our Founding Patron of AfN, the eminent Professor John Waterlow CMG FRS, in his visionary 1980 Boyd Orr Lecture.

Having lived through those 'several decades', I felt it was time to tell more. I thoroughly enjoyed my six years (2016 to 2021) as President of AfN, mainly because it gave me an opportunity to give back something to the community that had served me so well throughout most of my career. As my own reflections show, I was aware of the initial discussions to regulate the profession way back in 1984, but played only a bystander role whilst major players such as Ann Walker, Jackie Landman, Judy Buttriss and Alan Jackson devoted hours and hours of their time over decades to ensure that nutrition became the profession that we wanted it to be. My goodness- over forty years, and yet, this pathway had never been fully documented. Time for action.

I was keen to tell the story through those who had played major roles in it, and I knew that meant we had to do something fairly quickly. I'm really grateful to all those who have contributed their reflections. It's been a long road and quite a bumpy one at times. We have tried to reflect the truth as well as the progress in this collation of articles.

Preface

Helen Clark, AfN Chief Executive

I was recently reminded in an article by Kate Collins, outgoing CEO of the Teenage Cancer Trust, that legacy isn't what you achieve, but what "grows in the space after you get out of the way." Reading the reflections in this book has reaffirmed how grateful I am to be one of those who inherit the legacy of those who went before. The people who had the vision to see the good that could be done through the professionalisation of nutrition, and the people who had the knowledge, skills and tenacity to realise that vision.

This book is not an historical record with facts and figures meticulously verified, but rather a collection of recollections from the people who were there, the people whose legacy is this fully formed, thriving profession and the organisation which I am now lucky enough to be part of. It is the reflections, memories and perceptions of those who have been involved in this journey over many years. The different perspectives of the writers lead to different recollections, but the thread running through is a strong sense of pride in the collective achievement.

The authors of this book talk about their involvement in various aspects of the profession's development, and the achievements they were involved in. But it is their collective legacy which we see in AfN and the UKVRN today.

Timeline of Development of the Regulation for Nutritionists

FOUNDATIONS 1979-1989

1979
- John Rivers publishes his thoughts on "The profession of nutrition" (1)

1981
- Prof John Waterlow, in his "Crisis for nutrition" speech, calls for action to establish nutrition as a profession (2)

1984
- Waterlow repeats his call in his Presidential address to the Nutrition Society (NS) (3)

1985/6
- Ashwell and Cole (1986), questionnaire to NS members includes questions about the professionalisation of nutrition (4)
- NS Working Party established: "Career Structure for Nutritionists" (Chair: Dr Ann Walker) which agrees to set up a Register in collaboration with Institute of Biology (IoB)

1989
- Joint working party (NS and IoB) established with Dr Ann Walker as Chair. Proposals for setting up the Register agreed

ESTABLISHMENT AND GROWTH 1990-2005

1990
- NutSoc members (91%) voted overwhelmingly in favour of allowing the Institute of Biology (IoB) to collaborate with NS and IFST and take over the day to day running of the first professional Register
- The Register of Accredited Nutritionists with IOB is launched in the July

1995
- NS sets up a Public Health Nutrition Development Group, chaired by Dr Barrie Margetts, to take forward work stimulated by the government's 1992 Health of the Nation Report

1997
- NS opens a Register for Public Health Nutritionists, with a Code of Ethics

1998
- Public Health Nutrition Course Accreditation begins (as opposed to registration of individuals). Publication of "Curriculum design for professional development in public health nutrition in Britain" (5)

ESTABLISHMENT AND GROWTH 1990-2005

1999

- After closure of the IoB Register, NS takes over management of its Register of Accredited Nutritionists and invites Accredited Nutritionists, who became NS members, to join the NS register and use the title Registered Nutritionist (RNutr), or Public Health Nutritionist (RPHNutr) if evidence of additional public health specialism was demonstrated

2000

- The NS Professional Affairs Committee is established. It oversees the work of the Registration committee, the Course accreditation committee (and the Professional development committee with effect from 2007)

2002

- The new level of professional registration, Associate Nutritionist (ANutr) or Associate Public Health Nutritionist (APHNutr), is introduced. This level of registration identified nutrition graduates with degrees in nutrition (BSc/MSc) but who lacked 3 years professional experience required for 'full' registration

2003

- NS publishes the first statement of professional conduct, signalling clearly that oversight of professional standards protects the public, the hallmark of all modern professions, as well as protecting and promoting professional standards

2005

- The work of the Course Accreditation Committee is expanded to establish core competences for human nutrition courses and, in due course, several nutrition specialisms received attention such as sport and exercise nutrition (6)

TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE 2006-2010

2006

- At the 2006 NS AGM it is agreed that, by 2008, the NS would transfer its voluntary register to a new UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN), so that registration became independent of membership of the learned society
- The NS also agreed the intention to establish a professional body, to provide more professional services and support than the NS could provide at this time

TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE 2006-2010

2007

- Publication of "Professional regulation of nutritionists: where are we now?" (7)
- The Shadow Independent Voluntary Register of Nutritionists is established, overseen by the Nutrition Society's Professional Affairs Committee
- A new independent organisation, the Interim Professional Body for Nutrition (IPBfN) is set up to take over the Register and Accreditation

2007/8

- Richard Denyer is CEO of IPBfN under a Board that included Prof Alan Jackson (Chair), Prof Martin Wiseman and Anne de Looy
- Registered with Charity Commission

2008

- The Association for Nutrition (AfN) is established as an independent professional body; an organisation created to oversee the Register

2010

- Full transfer of the UKRVN to the Association for Nutrition (AfN) in March 2010
- Full independence of AfN from Nutrition Society. Launch of AfN on June 10th, 2010

CONSOLIDATION AND RECOGNITION 2011-PRESENT

2011

- Appointment of Leonie Milliner as CEO of AfN
- Fellowships of the AfN introduced

2012

- Publication: The making of a nutrition professional: the Association for Nutrition register (8)
- Nutrition and Health Inequalities Project published the Workforce Competence Model in Nutrition for Health and Social Care
- Structural change to register - introduction of new Core Competencies for registrants and specialist areas of practice for RNutr, unified titles and phasing out of RPHNutr and APHNutr titles
- Launch of new website

CONSOLIDATION AND RECOGNITION

2011-PRESENT

2013

- Course Certification Scheme launched for courses delivering content aligned to Health and Social Care Framework
- Revised Accreditation Requirements and Standard Operating Procedures
- Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance published, replacing Code of Ethics and Statement of Professional Conduct
- By Distinction (Experience) application route and and Retired status introduced
- First Annual Discourse held

2014

- AfN Registrant fees approved by HMRC for tax relief as a professional subscription
- ASA uphold complaints made by AfN about company making misleading claims about the recognition of their qualifications

2015

- Better Nutrition = Better Health Manifesto Call issued
- Workforce Competence Frameworks in Nutrition for Fitness & Leisure and for Catering published

2016

- Certification Scheme extended to cover Fitness & Leisure Framework and Catering Framework
- Registrant CPD monitoring and recording concept proposals developed
- Revised Standards for AfN Degree Accreditation published
- Dr Margaret Ashwell becomes Chair of Council and President of AfN
- ASA uphold further AfN complaint about company making misleading nutrition training and regulation claims - ultimately leading to successful prosecution by Trading Standards

CONSOLIDATION AND RECOGNITION

2011-PRESENT

2017

- AfN memorandum of intent to petition for a Royal Charter was first submitted to the Privy Council in October 2017
- New Registration and Fitness to Practise Rules come into effect
- Manifesto on importance of nutrition issued ahead of elections.
- Early Careers Project undertaken with Nutrition Society

2018

- ICGN Medical Undergraduate Curriculum in Nutrition transferred from AoMRC to AfN
- AfN participates in New Scientist Live to highlight nutrition as a science

2019

- Appointment of Dr Glenys Jones as Acting CEO of AfN, and subsequently as DCEO
- AfN petition for Royal Charter formally submitted to Privy Council in April
- Appointment of Helen Clark as CEO of AfN
- Launch of the Strategic Plan for 2020-2025
- Academy of Nutrition Science is officially launched
- Enhanced Continuing Professional Development Scheme launched

2020

- New logos launched
- Move to new office on High Holborn
- National lockdown for Covid-19. Remote working begins
- Zoom Support Clinics introduced for applicants and for registrants, covering applications, CPD and practice support
- New website, with online applications launched
- Stakeholder consultation held on UG Medical Curriculum in Nutrition for Medical Doctors
- Voices of UKVRN Registrants launched to mark 10 years of AfN being a registred charity
- Nutrition Resources Hub launched

2021

- Course Certification Frameworks and scheme reviewed
- Revised Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance launched

CONSOLIDATION AND RECOGNITION

2011-PRESENT

2022

- Dr Alison Tedstone becomes Chair of Council and President of AfN
- Revised Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance come into effect
- AfN Curriculum in Nutrition for Medical Doctors published (9)
- Standards for Freelance and Independent Practice launched
- Course Certification Scheme updated for Fitness & Leisure and Catering Frameworks

2023

- Course Certification Learning Outcomes and scheme updated for Health & Social Care Framework
- Revised Accreditation Standards published for 2025 implementation
- Revised Registration Competencies published for implementation in 2024 (RNutr) and 2025 (ANutr)
- AfN International Degree Comparability Table for portfolio applications published
- CPD Endorsement Scheme reviewed and updated
- Content Assurance Scheme for resources to support the nutrition curriculum for medical training launched
- ANutr Development Framework launched

2024

- Mentoring training launched
- Video resources developed and published to support medical schools delivering the nutrition curriculum

2025

- Launch of the Strategic Plan for 2025-2030
- Monthly ANutr Group Mentoring sessions launched
- 2025-2030 strategic projects started

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The Very Early Years

Dr Margaret Ashwell OBE

1970s

It is difficult to say when discussions about the Regulation of the Profession started. There were obviously discussions about the need for a Register throughout the 1970s, maybe before. John Rivers (from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine - LSHTM) expressed his views in his wonderful manner in a paper published in 1979 entitled "The profession of nutrition - an historical perspective"(1):

"At present the nutrition profession in the UK gives the impression of being a beached coelacanth. We wriggle and writhe, but we have an uncomfortable awareness we are out of our element. A dispassionate observer might also conclude that we are out of date...The diseases we feel we must tackle do not yield answers in the test-tube or the rat-cage. We have not yet adapted to the applied science we will have to undertake."

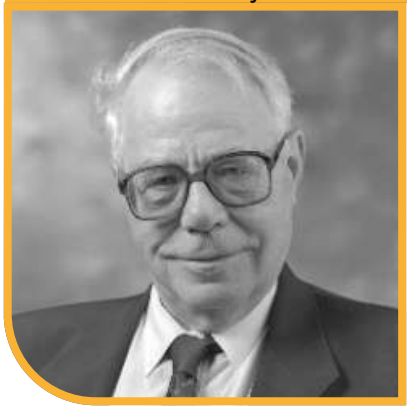
"The Nutrition Society ...is a powerful body, and the members of this Society have a choice either to defend themselves by professionalizing, or to justify themselves by being of use to mankind. They will, I hope, choose the latter path."

Word about these discussions must have reached the dietitians and the British Dietetic Association (BDA). They used their own journal, Journal of Human Nutrition, to make the following announcement in 1979 and to offer a solution to nutritionists who wanted a professional affiliation. I wonder how many took it up.

"The British Dietetic Association is the professional association of dietitians, and only those eligible for State Registration in Dietetics are eligible for Full Membership of the BDA. The BDA however recognises that the distinction between dietitian and nutritionist is a fine one, that both are concerned with the application of the science of nutrition to the feeding of people and that there is considerable overlap in their fields of employment. The BDA therefore invites nutritionists other than those eligible for State Registration in Dietetics to apply for election as Affiliates of the British Dietetic Association".

1980s

John Waterlow- President Nutrition Society 1983-6



Most people would say that the first official call to establish Nutrition as its own profession came from Professor John Waterlow, who was Professor of Nutrition at LSHTM and President of the Nutrition Society (NS) from 1983 to 1986.

Waterlow used his 1980 Sixth Boyd Orr memorial lecture, published in 1981, to point out three aspects of a Crisis for Nutrition. One of these was about the need for Regulation of the Profession (2):

"In one of the most important meetings of the Society in recent years, Rivers (1979) made the point that , 'We cannot consider the future of science of nutrition without considering the nature of the profession as well.'

The distinction between the science or subject and the profession is very apt.

We have neither of these things in nutrition: we have no recognised or required qualifications, other than those for dietitians, and in this country virtually no career structure, except in a handful of university departments and research institutes.

It is a part of the crisis I am speaking about that there is no relationship between existing demand and real needs. It is our job to define those needs, as a first step towards establishing nutrition as a profession."

John Waterlow followed up this plea in the lecture he delivered to mark his Presidency of the Nutrition Society (NS) which was published in 1984 (3). He made us take a serious look at the NS and how it functions. He stated his concern that the Society may not be meeting the needs and wishes of its members as fully as it might.

First, he thought it seemed unrealistic to try to think about such matters without knowing more about the composition of the Society. Who are we? How far do we cover the wide spread of disciplines and activities with which nutrition is concerned? Once we knew the answer to some of these questions, he felt it would be appropriate to raise three questions:

(a) Should the Society be more involved in current controversies about nutrition?

(b) Are our international relations adequate, both with other industrial countries?

(c) Should the Society be concerned with the problem of careers in nutrition?

There is, of course, no disparity between nutrition as a profession and nutrition as a science - the profession is based on the science

Here are his words to describe the situation posed by his third question:

"I wonder whether it might not strengthen the position of the younger people who want to work in nutrition if we had a professional organisation within which they could operate. There is, of course, no disparity between nutrition as a profession and nutrition as a science - the profession is based on the science. The objectives of the professional and scientific bodies are different; however, the former is concerned with service, the latter with knowledge. This is a further topic for discussion which the Society might like to take up sometime."

From then on, this topic became a standing item at every NS Council meeting and I, as Honorary Secretary, volunteered to conduct a survey of NS members to see what they thought. The results of the survey were published in 1986 (4). Respondents were asked if they agreed with this statement:

'There is a need for a professional organisation to give status to those trained in nutritional science'

Here is a summary of the responses:

"Overall, there was 23% strong agreement, 30% agreement, 31% neutrality and 16% disagreement. As usual, women were more in favour of a professional organisation than men and young members were more in favour than older members. An interesting difference was noted when the questionnaire respondents were divided according to their job.

Yet again, members engaged in animal-orientated research were least bothered about the need for a professional organisation, whilst those members working in industry were most aware of the need. It is also interesting that the group whose job is classified as 'other' (i.e. they do something which cannot be easily classified into one of the seven categories, or they do jobs which cut across several categories) are also quite strongly in favour of a professional organisation (62% of them agreed with the idea compared with only 43% of the animal researchers.)"

By this time, John Rivers had become the second editor of Nutrition News and Notes (NNN). This was a twice-yearly informal publication from the NS which could alert members to events and acted as a discussion forum on hot topics. John picked up the theme of Regulation of the Profession in his editorial in 1985.

John Rivers and Margaret Ashwell- the last two Editors of Nutrition News and Notes

"I see no way to restrain pseudo-nutritionists, (or nutritionists) except by defining what a nutritionist is. For many scientific disciplines the identity crisis is resolved automatically as the subject is taken over by people who studied it at university.

Biochemists were originally a heterogenous rag-bag from different disciplines, but now are dominated (numerically at least) by biochemistry graduates, who provide the measure of what minimal expertise defines a biochemist. Graduate nutritionists however are still sparse and unlikely to numerically dominate our Society, at least in the time to affect the current issue. It seems to me inevitable therefore that if a nutritionist is to be defined in any way, it will have to be done by developing some sort of professional structure which defines our expertise. This does not mean that the profession need accept an orthodoxy of view, merely that evidence of certain agreed common knowledge be presented to gain entry into the profession, without the candidate being obliged to accept that knowledge then or later. After all, that seems to be all that is required of Anglican Bishops. The real problem would be defining what these professional skills and knowledge were to be.

This is simply that we should professionalise because, like it or not, it will come, and our only real choice is not whether we professionalise or not, but what role the Nutrition Society will play in such a professional structure. A Working Party of Council has considered this, and pointed out that our Society is too small to be a professional body, so that if/when professionalisation comes it will come via something like the Institute of Biology."

Ann Walker

This Editorial provoked several letters in the next issue of NNN. The most important was from Dr Ann Walker who, by this stage, had offered to lead the NS working party on Career Structure for Nutritionists. Here are excerpts from her letter which give a very good summary of what had been achieved at that point in early 1986 (5).

"Having been able to read through respondents' replies to the optional question on careers in the Nutrition Society's Questionnaire in 1984, I am not sure that there are those who are so vehemently opposed to the setting up of a professional body as you have indicated in your editorial. In fact, most respondents who felt strongly enough about careers to comment were in favour of setting up a professional body. Members of the Working Party also feel that it is timely to discuss setting up a professional body for nutritionists for the following reasons:

1. *To promote the career prospects of nutritionists*
2. *To enhance the status of nutritionists and inhibit the formation of "fringe" institutes of nutrition.*
3. *To coordinate nutrition education.*
4. *To facilitate dealings with Government and the Food Industry. A recognised qualification would help to distinguish the genuine professional from the "self-appointed" nutritionist with no professional training.*

As a way out of the quandary, the Working Party came up with the idea of approaching the Institute of Biology (IOB). Those who are already members of the IOB will already know about the functions of the IOB, but it came as a surprise to me to learn that their function is to serve those in specialist learned biological societies (like ourselves), who wish to confine their activities to further the understanding of their respective subject areas.

After some discussions with representatives of the IOB, the Working Party put 5 points to the Council of the IOB for their consideration. These were as follows:

1. *That a separate register for nutritionists be set up by the IOB.*
2. *That the entry for the Register be jointly determined by the IOB and The Nutrition Society.*
3. *That the term "Registered Nutritionist" be instituted.*
4. *That consideration be given to financially advantageous joint membership of the IOB and the Nutrition Society.*
5. *That the eventual aim should be, under the aegis of the IOB, for suitably qualified nutritionists to achieve the status of Chartered Nutritionist.*

There has been a very warm response to these proposals from the IOB and none of the points raised have been ruled out. However, the IOB indicated that, before further negotiations can proceed, it would be necessary to have a working definition of the word "nutritionist".

Finding a suitable definition has not been easy. We were unable to get any guidance from either the International Union of Nutritional Sciences or the American Institute of Nutrition, as neither of these bodies make use of such a definition. Accordingly, as an interim measure to allow the discussion to proceed, the Working Party drafted the following tentative definition, which was sent to the IOB in December:

> *The function of a nutritionist is to elicit, disseminate and apply knowledge drawn from the biological sciences so as to promote an understanding of the effects of diet on growth, development, reproductive capacity, health and well- being of man and animals.*

Negotiations with the IOB are still proceeding and nothing is settled yet."

Another, rather provocative, letter in the same issue of NNN came from Mr Geofrey Cannon, a well -known journalist at the time (6). Here are some of the points he made:

"Before the Nutrition Society finally turns away from Ethiopia and casts itself over the cataracts of classification, borne on a few planks (a thin raft, too narrow for a platform), soaked by torrents of spurge from your latest Nilotic editorial (NNN10), with nothing in prospect but the interminable meanderings and stinking mudflats of professionalism, here is a New Year quiz."

1. *Here are the names of 10 men who have influenced our understanding of food and health in Britain, in recent years. Which of them is (or was) originally and mainly formally qualified as a nutritionist?*
    - *Dr Denis Burkett, Dr T.L.Cleave, Professor Sir Richard Doll, Dr Kenneth Heaton, Professor Philip James, Sir Francis Avery Jones, Professor Thomas McKeown, Professor Jerry Morris, Professor Geoffrey Rose and Dr Hugh Trowell. Answer: none*
2. *Which influential nutritionist always insists on listing sources of funding from the food industry at the end of all work published in professional journals and at the beginning of government advisory reports prepared by expert panels of which he is a member? Answer: none*

A third letter in that same issue of NNN (somewhat more gentle in its tone than the previous letter) came from Dr John Bacon (7).

"From the foregoing I draw the conclusion that the Society should continue in its present form. For those members who believe it would be better to seek self-regulation than to wait for governments to impose it, the Society ought to offer encouragement and help, and ask them to specify the minimum qualifications that might confer professional status, and the circumstances in which it might operate. They might then think it worthwhile to set up a separate body to carry this work forward.

However that turns out, it is important that the Society should continue to bring those, however originally treated (and some perhaps already professionals in their own right), whose main interest in the feeding of human populations, rich or poor, in sickness or health. As you rightly said, that is the way to improve our skills and to serve humanity better."

It is interesting that Dr Bacon was the first to mention the possibility of a separate body being responsible for the Regulation of the Profession.

During the mid to late 1980s, very slow progress on the Register was made as described here by Dr Ann Walker in 1989. (8):

"Following the presentation of its Report to the Council of the Nutrition Society, the original Working Party was dissolved. Recently a Joint Working Party was established by Council to define entry requirements for the Register. This Joint Committee is made up of representatives from the Nutrition Society and the IOB. Progress of this committee has been rapid. Members were anxious that entry requirements should be rigorous and where appropriate, follow the guidelines laid down for Membership of the Institute of Biology, with the additional requirement of at least 3 years' experience of working in the field of nutrition following graduation. A register and application form have now been produced in draft form. These have been circulated for comment to members of the Council of the Nutrition Society and have been discussed briefly at the AGM at Oxford in July. At the AGM the membership voted that details of proposals for the Register should be put before a general meeting of the Nutrition Society for the purpose of ratification. It was agreed that an Extraordinary General Meeting should be convened, if necessary, within 6 months for this purpose.

It is hoped that the Register of Nutritionists will come into operation in 1990."

The early 1990s

Ann Walker's hope was in fact fulfilled in 1990. Here is her report of progress (9) made in that momentous year when the Register of Accredited Nutritionists was eventually launched at the summer meeting of the NS in York:

"When the ballot of the members of the Nutrition Society closed on the 23rd February 1990, the members of The Nutrition Society showed themselves overwhelmingly in favour of the establishment of the Register in collaboration with the Institute of Biology.

A number of queries and comments arose as a result of the ballot....it will clearly be particularly important to define entry requirements more closely as well as work experience. It was not the intention to have any associate grade of membership of the Register at this stage, but to aim for an all-graduate Register.

However, it is envisaged that there will be a limited period at the commencement of the Register, when less qualified, but experienced nutritionists or dietitians will be invited to apply, although the timing of this arrangement still needs to be agreed.

Comments are still being received about the proposed definition of a nutritionist to be used in the Register. This was not regarded as ideal when it was first put forward to the IOB for their consideration several years ago, but it has now been agreed by The Nutrition Society Council and the IOB as a starting definition. No doubt, as the Register proceeds, refinements will take place as needs and experience dictate, but if a professional body is to exist at all, then we have to start somewhere (8)."

Six months later (10), Ann Walker was able to tell NS members more details about the new Register. Even with the existence of the new Register of Accredited Nutritionists, there were still strong feelings for and against it. A flavour of the different viewpoints was captured in the summer issue of NNN. Professor Don McLaren (11) made his points quite forcibly:

"Anyone whosoever may continue to call him or herself a nutritionist. Unlike the use of terms like physician and dietitian there will still be nothing illegal in their doing so. These professionals and bona fide biological and social scientists are hardly likely to feel flattered when called nutritionists and I suspect, they are largely indifferent to the issue although no doubt prepared to vote for the measure as not being a bad thing.

The largest group in favour, I imagine, are those who can lay claim to no other title, namely those with a first degree in Nutrition. They probably comprise the largest single group of the Nutrition Society when membership is categorised in this way."

Professor Alan Jackson was asked to consider Professor Mclaren's points and make a case for the Register (12). Here are some of his points.

Prof Alan Jackson OBE, RNutr, FFAfN

"Dr McLaren has proposed that nutrition is not a discipline, should not be a discipline and cannot be a discipline. He sets up a series of preconditions which in his opinion need to be satisfied before nutrition could be considered a discipline. He then goes on to show the futility of trying to make the coat from that particular piece of cloth.

I have no intention of arguing against Dr McLaren. However, it is clear that his perception is not shared by many members of the Nutrition Society. I for one disagree and present one alternative view of the world in which we live.

For me, human nutrition is the study of the ways in which interaction between dietary intake and the metabolic demands of the body establishes and maintains function. This interaction takes place against the background of a wide range of environmental factors, some of which provoke deleterious effects in the body, and to which the body responds.

It may be that nutrition is not a discipline in its own right, but simply an awkward hybrid which sits uneasily between other sciences or disciplines. However, there is a body of knowledge and skills that represent the foundation of nutrition and are utilised on a regular basis by nutritionists, which have not been borrowed, nor are they possessed or practised by any other discipline. The process of integration produces a unique creation, which relates to basic science, clinical science and applied science, but yet has its own identity. Therefore the group of people who identify with each other on this basis and can differentiate themselves from the rest of the scientific world justify an identity in their own right. This process of self-identification and differentiation has to be one of the first steps in the identification and creation of a discipline."

From this point onwards, Professor Alan Jackson became more involved in the debate. Not only did he become the Chair of the Interim Professional Body for Nutrition in 2005, but he also went on to become the first President of the newly formed independent body, the Association for Nutrition (AfN) in 2010.

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Dr Margaret Ashwell

AfN Trustee and President 2016 - 2021

I first got involved in the Regulation of our Profession when I was Honorary Secretary of the Nutrition Society (NS) from 1984 to 1988. John Waterlow (who had proposed me for that position) had given his Presidential Address at the 1984 AGM, and, in this, he touched on a topic he had first raised in his 1980 Boyd Orr lecture (1) when he asked the question "Should the Society be concerned with the problem of careers in nutrition?" (2):

I suggested that we needed to know much more about our members' views on many topics, including this one, and so we sent a questionnaire to all members in 1984 and displayed the results at the International Congress of Nutrition in Brighton in 1985. (3). One of the questions sought agreement or otherwise with the statement:

> *There is a need for a professional organisation to give status to those trained in nutritional science*

Overall, there was 23% strong agreement, 30% agreement, 31% neutrality and 16% disagreement.

Because of this encouragement from the membership, NS Council started talking about the regulation of the nutrition profession and the setting up of a Register. In those days, the NS was run, single-handedly from a small office in Chandos House by the wonderful June Schulkes. However, our Council meetings were held in the Marcus Beck Library at the Royal Society of Medicine (see figure at top of page) and this is the imposing room where the formal discussions about the professionalisation of nutrition began. I have to admit that this topic was one of those items on the agenda which did not exactly 'grab' me. Luckily, a lovely lady, Dr Ann Walker from the University of Reading, the Minutes Secretary, volunteered to take on the task of exploring options for the Register.

It was Ann who did all the work and all the negotiations with the Institute of Biology up until the time the Register was officially launched in 1990. I often think back to those early days, feeling somewhat guilty that it was probably my role as Honorary Secretary to get involved with this important topic. I have been heartily grateful for what Ann did ever since.

Nutrition Society

NS

Certificate of Registration

This is to Certify that

Margaret Ashwell

having demonstrated the required academic qualifications and experience in public health nutrition is a

Registered
Public Health Nutritionist

Signed: Council member

Signed: Registrar

Valid until December 2002

Date: June 1998

The Nutrition Society, 10 Cambridge Court, 210 Shepherds Bush Road, London W6 7NJ

Margaret Ashwell's 1998 Registration Certificate

Others have talked about the process of 'Grandparenting over' some NS members onto the first Register. This was how I got onto it. No application. No nothing. My 1998 certificate showing I was a Registered Public Health Nutritionist is shown in the figure to the left.

I was always keen to know about the progress being made in the professionalisation of nutrition, so I arranged for Richard Denyer to come to talk to our meeting of self-employed nutritionists (SENSE) at some point in the 2000s. Then Leonie Milliner, the second CEO of AfN, came to speak to us again in 2011, once AfN had been established for a while.

In 2012, I met up with Leonie again promoting AfN on a stand at an exhibition. "You ought to apply for a Fellowship", she said. "Ok", I said. I did and I was awarded my FAfN later that year.

Before I tell you about my years as President of AfN (2016 to 2021), I need to take you back to an incident in 1999. I was at the FENS meeting in Lillehammer in Norway. Browsing at the leaflets in my hotel room, I spotted that you could experience the Olympic bobsleigh run. (Lillehammer had hosted the winter Olympics in 1994). This was the original run but using a sleigh on wheels on the bare track. On a whim, I booked a lunchtime slot for 4 people and went off to the Conference to see who I could persuade to come with me. One of these people was Professor Janet Cade. After the most terrifying experience of our lives (125 km/hour, 16 bends at 5.4 G force), Janet vowed she would get her own back on me one day. Fast forward to 2015. I bumped into Janet at a conference. Her first words to me were "Margaret, we need a President." "President of what?", I said. "Of AfN," she replied. She proposed me and, much to my enormous surprise, I was elected. After 16 years, she had eventually got her own back for the horrific bobsleigh run!

Initially, I had a steep learning curve because, although I had always supported the professionalisation of nutrition, I had never been deeply involved in it. However, Leonie Milliner and Dr Glenys Jones helped me to find my feet, and I had the support of wonderful Honorary Officers and Council. The AfN staff were also extremely helpful, and I thoroughly enjoyed my visits to the offices in Portland Place. I remember being quite staggered at how tough the requirements were for becoming a Registered Nutritionist and felt rather grateful (and ashamed) that my own registration had been so easy.

> One of the major decisions made during the time I chaired AfN was to apply for a Royal Charter

One of the major decisions made during the time I chaired AfN was to apply for a Royal Charter. Leonie presented us with a range of options at the end of 2017 and Council were strongly in favour of going down the Royal Charter route.

Our memorandum of intent to petition for a Royal Charter was first submitted to the Privy Council in October 2017. We then needed to gather letters of support for this. Unfortunately, the timing of this decision coincided with the early days of establishing The Academy of Nutrition Sciences (ANS), i.e. the coming together of the Nutrition Society, the British Dietetic Association, the British Nutrition Foundation and AfN. The Academy was given some strange advice that, if AfN got its Charter, that would prevent the Academy, at some later date, from applying for one for itself. This caused difficulties with support for our application. However, a crucial meeting with the Privy Council in early 2019 clarified that this was not the case, and all differences between the four bodies of ANS were resolved. I can remember that situation as being the toughest time I had as AfN Chair because I hated AfN being at odds with the other organisations. The Academy has now gone from strength to strength and all differences forgotten. Eventually, Dr Glenys Jones (our Acting CEO) delivered our formal application for Charter, by hand, to the Privy Council offices in April 2019. I would love to be able to report that AfN has, by now, got its Royal Charter, but sadly this has proven to be a much more difficult task than we had ever expected.

One of the delightful tasks that falls to the President is to present Certificates to new Fellows. In December 2019, Professor Helen Truby was awarded one of these. Although British, Helen was at that time at Monash University in Melbourne. As it happened, I was visiting Melbourne in February 2020 as part of a grand tour of New Zealand and Australia, and I had a day spare in Melbourne.

Thanks to Helen's colleague, Tracy McCaffrey, I gave a lecture and presented Helen with her certificate at the same time (see figure to the right). I remember saying that I had never travelled 10,000 miles with such a precious piece of paper!

Margaret presenting Helen with her certificate

On returning home at the end of that month, everything changed as far as AfN meetings were concerned. From 2010 until 2019, all our Council meetings were held at the Portland Place address which housed the AfN offices. We were discussing leaving Portland Place as our lease was due to end in 2020. One of the options was for AfN to function remotely. Well, from March 2020 onwards, functioning remotely was thrust upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was amazing how AfN adapted very quickly to the virtual meetings. Mind you, I didn't enjoy chairing virtual meetings half as much as face-to-face meetings and I was pleased that, by then, I knew all the AfN trustees fairly well.

One of the bright spots of those lockdown periods was an initiative started by four registrants, Lynn Burns, Dr Laura Wyness, Dr Suzanne Zaremba and Vicki Pyne. They started an evening session for registrants so that we could all chat to each other on a virtual call. They called these @AfNutr Twitter chats and AfNutr Cafes and they were run on alternate months allowing regular networking among UKVRN AfN Registrants. That initiative was extremely helpful for keeping me in touch with many nutritionists when we weren't allowed to meet in person.

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Of course, probably the most important role I played at AfN was leading the search for our new CEO when, in late 2018, Leonie felt it was time to move on after being a very successful CEO of AfN since 2011.

Farewell and Welcome Party for Leonie and Helen. In the picture are three Presidents of AfN and three CEOs

My small recruitment team was Prof Alan Dangour (Treasurer), Claire Basely (Honorary Secretary) and Barbara Saunders (Lay Trustee and Deputy Chair). I can remember receiving all the CVs of the potential candidates for the position when I was on holiday in Costa Rica and reading them sitting on a lawn surrounded by prowling land iguanas. Back in London, we interviewed several people, but we all agreed that Helen Clark was perfect for the post. Although she couldn't start until June 2019, we knew that Glenys Jones would make a great Acting CEO, and we subsequently asked Glenys to be Deputy CEO, once Helen had taken up the CEO post. The figure above shows the Farewell party and Welcome party that we gave for Leonie and Helen respectively which we held in Portland Place in April 2019. Collating the contributions for this book has, at long last, given me an opportunity to tell the story that I have witnessed over several decades.

Margaret Ashwell at the 2018 AfN Annual Discourse

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Prof John Mathers

The Nutrition Society President 2001 - 2004

For the first 30 years following its foundation in 1941, the Nutrition Society (NS) operated as a conventional learned society in biology-based sciences. Its members were mainly academics undertaking teaching and research in universities and professional researchers in research institutes and companies with smaller, but significant, groups of policy makers and users. The Society served its members' needs through conferences for presentation of new research findings and topical reviews (published in the Proceedings of the Nutrition Society) and, from 1947, by publishing the British Journal of Nutrition that attracted primary research articles from researchers globally. In those early years, the Society had relaxed criteria for membership and did not attempt to define a nutritionist. However, after the UK and Ireland joined the European Economic Community (EEC) on 1st January 1973, both countries were subject to the Community's regulations on free movement of individuals and, importantly, to specific Directives that enabled mutual recognition of professional qualifications and that allowed professionals (including nutritionists) from one member state to work in other member states.

In addition to these external drivers, there were influential voices within the Society who argued for change. Among the most notable were John Rivers, and of course Professor John Waterlow (for details of their contributions, see Chapter on "The very early years").

What is a nutritionist?

Ahead of a Council Meeting of the European Communities Biologists Association to be held in Barcelona on 2-4 May 1981, a paper was prepared for the Nutrition Society Council on the professional employment of nutritionists within the European Community. This paper noted that, to enable Directives to be enacted into national legislation, it was necessary to lay down the areas of knowledge and the exact degrees and diplomas that should be acquired to qualify a person for a particular occupation.

The paper also noted that nutritionists in the UK were recruited from a wide spectrum of scientific disciplines and that relatively few took a first degree in human nutrition, dietetics or food science. Finally, the paper pointed out that there was no overall diploma-awarding body for nutritionists – in contrast with the Institute of Biology (IoB) or the Royal Society of Chemistry – although many nutritionists belonged to these bodies. The Nutrition Society Council was asked whether it wished to forward this (or a suitably amended) paper to the Barcelona meeting via the IoB and to include suggestions about the type of qualification that would enable the holder to undertake nutritional work. A diploma or mastership was envisaged.

For the first 30 years following its foundation in 1941, the Nutrition Society (NS) operated as a conventional learned society in biology-based sciences

Around this time, the Nutrition Society held a discussion among members about training in nutrition. There was a strong strand of opinion that nutrition should be a post-graduate qualification and that nutrition researchers should have a first degree in a "hard science" or in mathematics. Professor Sir Kenneth Blaxter (President of the Society from 1974 - 1977) was a leading proponent of this view. Although both undergraduate and postgraduate training programmes in animal nutrition were well established, at this stage, few UK universities offered undergraduate degrees in human nutrition (Queen Elizabeth College (now King's College) London and the University of Surrey were notable exceptions). This situation changed rapidly over the next 10+ years as more and more undergraduate degree programmes in human nutrition were launched and as employment opportunities for graduates widened beyond research and teaching to include more public health-orientated and public-facing roles. This coincided with a rise in the number of self-employed nutritionists who offered their services directly to the public, to companies and to other bodies. These developments, and initiatives by the UK Government and others (discussed later), were the stimulus for the Nutrition Society's growing interest in nutrition as a profession (as distinct from an area of scientific research) and, a little later, in the content and quality of university courses in nutrition. Both were hot topics during my time as Honorary Secretary (1993 – 1996) and as President (2001 – 2004) of the Society and I will restrict my reflections to events during those two decades.

First steps towards a profession - failed collaboration with the IoB

In 1990, working in collaboration with the IoB and in discussion with the Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST), the Nutrition Society set up the Register of Accredited Nutritionists that conferred the title of " Accredited Nutritionist" to those on its register.

In the early days, this arrangement worked well and a few hundred NS members joined the register. However, the initial promise was short-lived, growth in membership was sluggish and a substantial proportion of registrants failed to renew their membership of the Register. Importantly, many Nutrition Society members did not perceive any benefit from having the Register or being registered. Discussions with the IoB did not produce the desired improvement and by the time that Professor Mike Gibney (President from 1995 – 1998) assumed leadership of the Society, a considerable number of NS members held the view that the arrangement with the IoB had been a mistake. Honorary Officers felt the IOB had not addressed issues that had been under discussion with the Society from late 1994 to early 1996 but for some time the Society was divided on whether, and how best, to approach a divorce from the IoB. In part this was because some members did not think that setting up and running a Register was core business for a Learned Society and did not see the need for such a Society-run Register. Indeed, in a consultation with members, 45% of respondents thought that the IoB should run the Register. By early 1997, it was clear that this Register was failing. It was not being promoted and only 200 registrants were listed in the latest edition of the Register. After much formal and informal debate, and with the benefit of legal advice, an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Society held on 20 June 1997 resolved that the Society should establish its own register of nutritionists. Since it was not a requirement to be a member of the Nutrition Society to be listed on the Register, one of the issues in the tussle between the Society and the IoB over ownership of the Register were those Registrants who were members of the IoB but not of the Society. This was much less of an issue with the third partner in the triumvirate, the IFST, because all the IFST members on the Register were also NS members.

When Professor Christine Williams (President from 1998 – 2001) became President, the fate of the Register was sealed when the decision was taken to ask the IoB and partners to disband the Register as soon as possible and not later than 31 December 1998. The proposal was that all those on the original Register would be transferred automatically to a new Register run directly by the Society that would be established no later than 1 January 1999. The IoB bowed to the inevitable.

The Society takes control with the Register of Nutritionists and the Public Health Nutritionists

> Work had been underway for some time to develop a Register of Public Health Nutritionists that would be run directly by the Society

Work had been underway for some time to develop a Register of Public Health Nutritionists that would be run directly by the Society (see figure to the right). In 1992, interest in public health nutrition received a major boost with the publication of "The Health of the Nation - a Strategy for Health in England" White Paper. This proposed a major shift in government strategy for public health with greater emphasis on prevention rather than treatment of disease. The White Paper recognised explicitly the importance of nutrition and healthier diets in prevention of non-communicable diseases and, therefore, highlighted the importance of having an appropriately trained workforce to deliver the desired improvements in public health. It is worth noting that, nearly 35 years later, the present UK government's "Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England" has similar aspirations showing how difficult it has proved to implement the new strategy and to shift resources from treatment to prevention.

Article by the Registrar, Dr David Buss, about RPHNutr

Registered Public Health Nutritionist (RPHNutr): a new qualification in public health nutrition

David Buss

The author

David Buss is Development Officer of the Nutrition Society.

Abstract

Explores the background to the launch of a new qualification in public health nutrition – Registered Public Health Nutritionist (RPHNutr) – in the UK. This new qualification was led by the Nutrition Society and aims to set professional standards, promote the recognition of the need for such expertise, promote the role, create links with other relevant bodies, and provide a publicly available register of qualified people. Defines the role of public health nutritionist and outlines the requirements for accreditation.

Introduction

On 1 December 1997 the Nutrition Society launched an important new qualification in public health nutrition. Tessa Jowell, the Minister for Public Health, accepted an invitation to speak at the launch, and among the eminent people who attended to welcome the initiative were representatives of many universities and professional organisations, and several from other European countries.

Registration in public health nutrition shows that a person is well qualified and experienced in this important area. This article explains the background to this initiative, and why the Nutrition Society became involved.

Background

There is now widespread agreement about the need for a public health approach to the prevention of the major nutrition-related illnesses that affect all countries, such as heart disease and cancer. Such an approach targets the population as a whole, including those who are well, rather than selecting at-risk individuals alone. Many countries have developed dietary guidelines promoting changes to the diet of the whole population with a view to improving health (e.g. Hunt *et al.*, 1994a; 1994b; International Union of Nutritional Sciences, 1997). Achieving these guidelines requires a population approach, and conducting an effective population-based strategy requires a wide range of people trained and competent in various aspects of public health nutrition, as emphasised by the

The Nutrition Society thanks all those who have contributed to this initiative, and in particular Ashley Adamson (Human Nutrition Research Centre, University of Newcastle), Judy Buttriss (National Dairy Council, London), Paula Hunt (Health Education Authority National Unit for Health Promotion in Primary Care, Oxford), Jackie Landman (Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh), Eleni Maunder (Leeds Metropolitan University), Barrie Margetts (Wessex Institute of Public Health Medicine, Southampton), Robert Wenlock (Nutrition Unit, Department of Health, London), Carol Williams (Consultant in International and Public Health Nutrition, London), and Agneta Yngve (Unit of Preventive Nutrition, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm/WHO Collaborating Centre for Public Health Nutrition).

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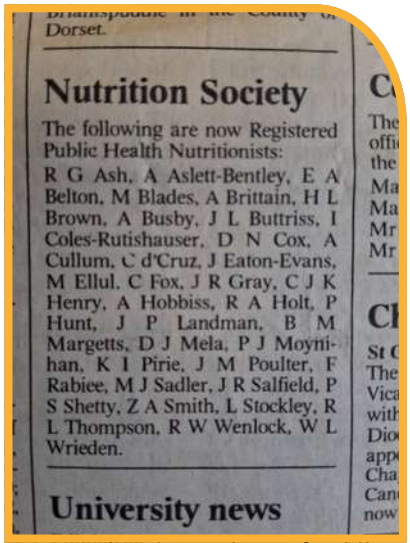
Although there were concerns that setting up a Register of Public Health Nutritionists run directly by the Nutrition Society might provoke a turf war with the IoB, the Society pushed ahead with a public launch of the new register on 1 December 1997 that was supported by Tessa Jowell MP, the then Minister of State for Public Health.



Dorset.

Nutrition Society

The following are now Registered Public Health Nutritionists:
R G Ash, A Aslett-Bentley, E A Belton, M Blades, A Brittain, H L Brown, A Busby, J L Buttriss, I Coles-Rutishauser, D N Cox, A Cullum, C d'Cruz, J Eaton-Evans, M Ellul, C Fox, J R Gray, C J K Henry, A Hobbiss, R A Holt, P Hunt, J P Landman, B M Margetts, D J Mela, P J Moynihan, K I Pirie, J M Poulter, F Rabiee, M J Sadler, J R Salfield, P S Shetty, Z A Smith, L Stockley, R L Thompson, R W Wenlock, W L Wrieden.

University news

Promoting the Register of Public Health Nutritionists by listing the names of the first 35 members (The Times, 3 December 1997)

Jowell congratulated the Society on establishing the Register and commented that "It will protect the public by giving professional registration to those working in Public Health Nutrition thus helping to ensure that only those with appropriate qualifications and experiences are involved". The Society moved swiftly to publicise the new Register and issued a press release entitled "New nutrition register seeks to ensure good sense on diet. How to separate the apples from the pears...". Two days later, a notice appeared in The Times newspaper listing the names of the first 35 members on the Register (see figure to the left).

The Society now had full control of a Register that catered for Registered Nutritionists (annual subscription in 1999 was £10) and for Public Health Nutritionists (annual subscription £30) and had set up appropriate committees to oversee the Register. The Registration Panel had two tiers: i) a Registration Committee to vet applicants for registration and ii) an Appeals Committee. Dr Jackie Landman was appointed as Registrar and undertook the role with enthusiasm. The stated purpose of the Register was to establish a list of appropriately qualified persons and in so doing to distinguish individuals who have received an approved level of training from others who have not. At the same time, it was claimed that the existence of the Register provided a source for those seeking advice or offering employment on nutritional subjects. The Society also published a Code of Professional Conduct for Registered Nutritionists. The Register proved popular and by October 2002 there were 630 persons listed on the Register with 216 of them Registered Public Health Nutritionists. The Registration Committee was now chaired very effectively by Dr Tony Leeds.

The Society moved swiftly to publicise the new Register and issued a press release entitled "New nutrition register seeks to ensure good sense on diet. How to separate the apples from the pears...". Two days later, a notice appeared in The Times newspaper listing the names of the first 35 members on the Register

Expanding the Register by including Sport and Exercise Nutritionists

The success of the new Register emboldened the Society to expand it to include Sport and Exercise Nutritionists. Quite deliberately, this included not just those with interests in, or responsibility for, elite athletes but also for amateurs in recognition of the importance of physical activity for the health of the public. To achieve this goal, the Society worked with the British Association for Sport and Exercise Science (BASES) and with UK Sport who provided financial support for the initiative. Professor Clyde Williams (Chairman of BASES and a member of the Society) was an important driver of the initiative working closely with Ron Maughan who acted as a consultant for the process. The preparatory work included producing a definition of Sport and Exercise Nutrition, defining the scope of practice and articulating the minimum competencies in Sport and Exercise Nutrition required for registration. Unfortunately, the Sport and Exercise Nutrition Register (SENR) did not get transferred to the AfN in 2010 and so it eventually became a voluntary register administered by the BDA.

Accrediting university courses in nutrition

Through the 1990s, public concern about the quality of some undergraduate degree programmes offered by some universities was growing. This occurred despite, or perhaps because of, the national work on quality assurance in higher education that had been undertaken by the Subject Review and Academic Audit since 1991. In parallel, there was concern about the sustainability of the funding model for universities that led to the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education chaired by Sir Ron Dearing. Although established under a Conservative Government, Dearing reported to the new Labour Government in the summer of 1997, and this provided the basis for the introduction of tuition fees (initially capped at £1000 per year) and the replacement of maintenance grants for living expenses with loans to be paid back after graduation. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established in 1997 and, in keeping with the Dearing Report recommendations, was given the remit of providing assurance about standards and quality. This led to a rapid increase in bureaucracy around degree programmes both within universities and in the QAA (not a good thing) and focussed attention on the career prospects and earning capacity of graduates (a good thing). The Nutrition Society acted quickly, initially accrediting courses in Public Health Nutrition. A little later, the Society and the Association of Professors of Human Nutrition established a working group to produce guidelines for accrediting university courses in nutrition. The group's report defined nutrition as a bioscience and defined the core subject knowledge and skills in nutrition that a graduate would require to be eligible for registration but stopped short of prescribing a nutrition curriculum.

By 2003, the Society was preparing to accredit both undergraduate and postgraduate nutrition courses and undertook engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Universities, including those that were planning to launch new nutrition degree courses, were generally supportive, and the British Dietetic Association described it as an excellent initiative. However, there was some pushback from industry and from other employers of nutrition graduates. The Food and Drink Federation felt that accreditation was not the way to solve the problem of nutrition courses that were not up to scratch. They were also concerned about equity and commented that "The only result of such a scheme would be to produce an elitist atmosphere among nutritionists themselves. A good student should not be penalised because she happened to attend a course which failed to get accredited". In addition, the Food Standards Agency noted that:

> "Accreditation would not be specifically helpful to the Agency. We already have sufficient understanding about higher education and the courses offered in this field to be able to make judgements about suitability for employment to specialist posts."

What happened next?

By the time that I stepped down from the role of President in 2004, the Nutrition Society had a comprehensive programme of activities for registering nutritionists of various kinds and for accrediting university degree programmes. This also included work as diverse as the provision of professional indemnity insurance to protect registrants and the public, battles with organisations that offered very short, superficial courses in nutrition and whose "graduates" traded as nutritionists and engagement with the Advertising Standards Authority about potentially misleading advertisements in the food, nutrition and health space.

However, whilst very important for the profession, there was a sense that many of these activities were not core business for a Learned Society

The Society had come a long way in responding to the challenges that Rivers and Waterlow had posed 25 years previously. Nutrition, as an academic discipline and as a profession, was now firmly established. However, whilst very important for the profession, there was a sense that many of these activities were not core business for a Learned Society. Within a few years, with backing and financial support from the Department of Health, the Society was engaged in setting up the Association for Nutrition. I will leave it to others directly involved to reflect on that next stage of the pathway.

Dr Ann Walker

Chair of first Working Party on Career Structure for Nutritionists 1984 - 1989

The establishment of a professional Register of Nutritionists was a significant moment in the evolution of our discipline, but it did not emerge overnight. It grew from years of discussion, quiet groundwork and the commitment of a small number of people who believed that nutrition should stand alongside other recognised professions. Looking back, I realise how much of that early momentum came from informal conversations, committee meetings and the willingness of volunteers to give their time - often in addition to demanding academic or clinical roles. My own involvement began almost by accident, yet it became one of the most formative and rewarding strands of my work with the Nutrition Society.

When I first became involved in developing a professional body for the regulation of nutritionists (about 1984), the idea of establishing nutrition as a recognised profession had already been circulating for some time. I knew this well because, for 13 years, I took the minutes of the Nutrition Society meetings in London. Unfortunately, those records have long since disappeared - floppy disks do not age well.

Minute-taking for Nutrition Society Committee Meetings occupied a good deal of my time in those days. Even with my very rudimentary word-processing system, each set of minutes took at least a full day to prepare. There was no ChatGPT to check phrasing or structure then. Yet I was more than willing to offer that time, despite being extremely busy at the University of Reading, where I was lecturing in human nutrition. I taught the entire nutrition syllabus to undergraduates in Food Science, as well as on a very active MSc course that attracted students from across the globe. When the Department of Food Science merged with the College of Food Technology in Weybridge, we moved into a new building on Whiteknights campus in 1981 and became the Department of Food Science and Technology. Throughout these transitions, I remained the sole nutritionist in the department - my colleagues were microbiologists, chemists, food processing experts and sensory specialists.

In that context, the Nutrition Society was something of an oasis for me. It was the one place where I could regularly meet others working in nutrition and feel part of a wider professional community. The Society provided inspiration and direction for my teaching and research, and I always felt I owed it a great deal. Contributing my time to support its activities seemed a natural way to give something back.

It was Professor John Waterlow who first approached me to lead the development of a professional Register. We held an initial working-party meeting at the new Food Science building in Reading - around 1986, although I cannot be certain of the exact date. John chaired the meeting; I was there, as was Dr Tony Leeds, and perhaps one or two others, though I no longer recall precisely who. At that stage, it was agreed that Tony and I would form a small working group to explore practical options for establishing a Register.

The creation of the Register as a joint enterprise

The Register of Accredited Nutritionists

The *Register of Accredited Nutritionists* lists those members of the Institute of Biology, the Nutrition Society and the Institute of Food Science and Technology who, as a result of their education and training, are competent to practise as a nutritionist and to give advice on nutrition to the public. The Register was started in 1991 and, at present, lists approximately 232 nutritionists.

Each person admitted to the Register shall:

(a) be a member of the Institute of Biology, or the Nutrition Society, or the Institute of Food Science and Technology;

and

(b) either

(i) possess a first degree from a UK university or other institute of higher education authorised to award degrees in an appropriate subject;

or

(ii) possess an alternative qualification which is acceptable to the Nutrition Registration Panel;

or

(iii) satisfy the Nutrition Registration Panel that on the basis of substantial professional experience at an appropriate level, the requirement for (b) or (c) be waived;

and

(c) have completed:

either

(i) three years' subsequent relevant professional experience;

or

(ii) a PhD in an appropriate area at a registered institute of higher education;

and

(d) have undergone an assessment of suitability for registration.

Those nutritionists interested in being admitted to the

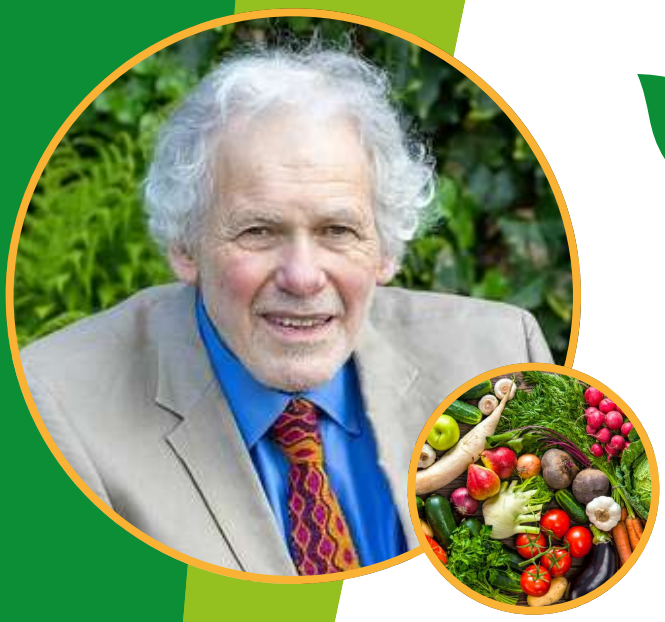
The creation of the Register as a joint enterprise with the Institute of Biology proved to be an astute and ultimately very successful approach. It offered a professional home that was acceptable to all members of the Nutrition Society - those whose work was firmly rooted in research as well as those more closely engaged with the practical application of nutrition. At that time, the idea that nutritionists might work one-to-one with patients or clients was still at a very early stage, and the Register provided a way of defining the profession before such roles became more widespread.

Once the Register had been formally established, the work that Tony Leeds and I had been tasked with was essentially complete. We handed responsibility back to the Nutrition Society and to colleagues within the Institute of Biology, who continued to administer the Register.

That arrangement remained in place until 1999, when the Nutrition Society took back full administrative responsibility and then, of course, the Association for Nutrition (AfN) was formed finally in 2010.

The establishment of a recognised professional organisation has undoubtedly given nutritionists a clearer identity and provided an authoritative place where government documents, consultations and policy matters can be considered

The establishment of a recognised professional organisation has undoubtedly given nutritionists a clearer identity and provided an authoritative place where government documents, consultations and policy matters can be considered. AfN continues to play an essential role for academically trained nutritionists working in public health, research, policy and the NHS. It also offers an important route for the public to raise concerns or seek accountability. My hope is that it will maintain this strong professional foundation without adding to the animosity that has occasionally arisen across the broader nutrition field. A profession as vital as ours needs both unity of purpose and space for its diverse strands to flourish; with careful stewardship, I believe this balance can continue to be achieved.



Richard Denyer

AfN Chief Executive
2008 - 2011

'Growing, supporting, preserving' a nascent embryo

Genesis: steadfastness, symbolism & strategic planning

As I write this in 2026, it is exactly a century since the word nutritionist appeared in English (just as Keynes was publishing The End of Laissez-Faire!); and exactly 600 years (1426) since nutrition was first used (derived from 'nutritive', current for Joan of Arc's short lifespan). But nutrire had already been for two millennia a Classical verb describing feeding, supporting, or preserving. In turn that originated some 7,000 years earlier (around the Neolithic Revolution) from the Proto-Indo-European root *nu-tri-.

The problem with such ancient words is that their meaning seems so obvious that neither they nor their modern connotations need unpacking ('nanny state', 'Frankenstein foods' and 'complementary therapy' were spontaneous comments from some serious policy-makers about creation of Association for Nutrition (AfN), as the new body became known (after our extensive consideration of other title options)!

Any new body is a classic 'disruptor' in terms of innovation- theory, and the 30 year gap between Waterlow's clarion call and AfN's flotation is consistent with that theory (linking adoption of complex innovations to a generation length, not technology!). Especially where fresh allegiance is called for, some fear the upstart may destabilise equilibria to their detriment. But this is rarely articulated, other than in code, in the values-driven not-for-profit world, where cultural convention frowns on overt competition (though can be tolerant of 'quiet words in the ear')! Decoding is a vital operating skill when creating any new purpose-based organisation, along with storytelling, crafting appropriate narratives, and the credibility to engage persuasively with nodal opinion-formers and gatekeepers.

Culture provides many more hidden trip-wires in seeking to secure organisational validity and respect. Professional bodies are an extreme case, since they come across as claiming the moral high ground of individual, organisational and collective intellectual, ethical and social status. In founding AfN, many were surprised to discover that, even in the seemingly classless 21st century, a street address counted for much. Despite long experience of reading such status-clues, even I was surprised to find just how differently I was treated by key figures when moving from being Chief Executive of a chartered professional body with an international headquarters building in Manchester to another in London's Belgrave Square, despite the former being widely celebrated and featured for location and architecture, both bodies being of broadly equivalent age, and with not dissimilar profiles.

28 Portland Place

For immediate impact, we were fortunate in AfN to find a base in London's Portland Place (see figure to the left), with close neighbours such as BBC, Royal Institute of Public Health, Nursing & Midwifery Council, Royal Colleges of Radiologists and Anaesthetists and Institutes of Energy, Architecture and Physics, just a short walk from Royal Colleges of Physicians and General Practitioners and many embassies. Holding launch events at The Royal Society was also valuable in demonstrating AfN's commitment to scientific excellence.

Branding and high aesthetic standards were equally important, along with good launch coverage in public health journals, and a series of articles in all editions of The Metro.

Although assumptions that location (indeed any physical base) and print ceased to be important after 2000 were premature, electronic media was indisputably accelerating in importance. AfN's social media presence was quickly established, but shortage of funds and manpower meant slow website investment was inevitable, though careful planning, commissioning and preparation ensured plenty of material was made ready for uploading.

Despite being dismissed by some as a luxury for a self-evidently beneficial non commercial body of modest-size, standard business planning tools like analyses of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and of political, economic, social, technological legal and environmental circumstances and financial risk, are essential in preparation for any new entity reliant on public and member accountability.

Extreme care over such analysis, drafting and review is even more essential and time-consuming in a field where strong economic, social, political and scientific interests and beliefs intersect. For AfN, wide-ranging plans and statements of mission, values, objectives, strategy and alternative budgets were required to make convincing cases to stakeholders, potential leaders, members, funders and gatekeepers.

As well as simultaneously convincing sceptics and enthusing stakeholders, demonstrating systemic reliability, societal/public benefit and risk analysis are essential for charity registration, a key status /funding prerequisite and protection for all

In contrast to several previous incarnations, grappling with administrative, procedural and governance baggage accumulated over many decades was now replaced by having to create it all myself from scratch and at warp speed! Drafting and agreeing terms of reference, position descriptions and appeal mechanisms for the many governance and advisory roles that would both attract, and where necessary, later constrain was a time consuming but vital task. Watertight accounting and audit arrangements, and commissioning membership software were of course key priorities. As well as simultaneously convincing sceptics and enthusing stakeholders, demonstrating systemic reliability, societal/public benefit and risk analysis are essential for charity registration, a key status/funding prerequisite and protection for all.

Given understandable reluctance to be among first movers hitching wagons to an uncertain and potentially expensive engine, the tight timetable for all this represented a considerable challenge, requiring ingenuity, persuasion, persistence, patience, nerve holding and other circus skills.

Huge tribute for AfN's creation is of course due to:

- John Waterlow as the highly esteemed and supportive inspirational philosopher and prophet (having had to cry in the wilderness for the decades following his original clarion call for a new professional body);
- the eminent and wise Alan Jackson for his courage and outstanding leadership as inaugural Chairman of Council and President in what might have become a perilous and thankless endeavour;

- the small group of visionary UK public servants whose quiet and sage advice over several years opened so many doors and perceptual windows;
- those other distinguished experts and practitioners who accepted the uncertainties of shadow committee chairing and other governance or advisory roles long before the ink was dry (or even applied) and structures legitimised; and
- the brilliant tiny band of initial AfN staff for so imaginatively, rapidly and unflaggingly executing the vast number of sure-footed steps needed to launch and promote the new organisation, get it and all its components and projects operational and underway, and enlist and engage new and transitioning members.

Without such flair, faith, solidarity, teamwork, accountability, dedication and the many fresh ideas and new perspectives all round, no viable infant organism would have emerged. And such a body (the label is entirely apposite) was only able to thrive by being appropriately sustained, a tribute to the 1000 initial AfN members, and others who joined soon after.

Catch 22 : alchemy meets austerity in attempting to square the circle

In the past, new professional bodies have typically emerged in one of five ways:

- several hundred relatively wealthy potential members each putting up a redeemable bond (inoperable in these days of tight charity regulation);
- splitting an existing qualifying body with a substantial 'golden dowry';
- in new fields designated as government strategic priorities, with a tide of support from key decision makers, influencers and media;
- promoted by one or more rich and powerful first-mover innovators in the field, commanding large personal resources (George Stephenson launched the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in 1847 having been turned down for a fellowship by Institution of Civil Engineers, though it is noteworthy that obtaining a Royal Charter then took 83 years!);
- backed by a range of foundations and business donors, usually including suppliers.

In this instance, a series of significant but piecemeal preliminary initiatives had of course been taken over several years by the Nutrition Society (NS). Assuming that is covered elsewhere, suffice it to say here that there proved to be a mismatch between the resources they were eventually prepared to commit and those needed to operate the Transition Shadow Organisation (NTSO) and launch AfN.

Although nutrition could not in any normal sense be considered a new field, the general but untested assumption was that, for reasons outlined below, UK governments would find ways of covering the balance of getting the show on the road, given the massive and escalating costs of disordered nutrition to the public purse. Personally, I was also reasonably confident, having worked at charitable-arms-length with the food sector in the past, that such public funds as might be made available could be significantly exceeded by substantial no-strings donations from food sources. So, some weeks into the shadow role, I was extremely surprised to find that private sector support had been ruled out by promoters on ethical grounds.

These revelations could well have brought the whole project to an abrupt end, but I was determined to find ways of squaring the circle. This meant devoting many wholly unpaid hours and months preparing the ground, sounding out potentially acceptable funders and key people in civil society, EU and government, including ministers, other elected representatives and advisers. Apart from intensive scenario planning and writing, attending many conferences and meetings, it involved my being in the Palace of Westminster and 'Greater Whitehall' several times a month for over two years, all this in my own time.

It slowly emerged that, for a variety of financial, political and policy reasons, 2007-11 was an inauspicious time to be promoting a new professional body in nutrition and food, despite the signs of late 20th century practical dysfunctionality in everyday nutrition systems having been crystal clear for over 2 decades. Escalating health and social care costs, compromised health-quality-lives and the misinformation and misunderstanding arising from the way food was being consumed and promoted shine through news bulletins and features, with headlines like 'Obesity Time Bomb'.

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A growing list of diseases, allergies and intolerances were being linked to inappropriate nutrition. The decline in family eating and household cooking skills was hastened by demography, changed working and entertainment patterns, and the fashion for highly processed ready meals, take-aways and expensive imports. Wholly unwarranted faith in food fads and supplements, eccentric quack therapies peddled in the informal economy, and high-pressure marketing of many celebrity diets compounded the problem, alongside issues associated with an ageing population and mental health. Problems of affordability escalated with each financial crisis, and underlined the unambiguous case for action. But action mostly took the form of commissioning ever more expensive studies!

In the healthcare arena, there was a complex series of conundrums associated with the Stone, Wanless, Donaldson, House of Commons Health Select Committee and National Audit Office reports and White Papers, with titles such as...

'Change4Life'

'Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives'

'Healthy Towns'

The build-up to Marmot suggested that large-scale changes in public health were afoot.

Medical regulation was mired in a number of patient safety and disciplinary failings revealed in the Shipman and other Inquiries, establishment of Care Quality Commission, changes in the Health Professions Council, and recommendations from Skills for Health. The Food Standards Agency was sympathetic but without relevant budgets and subject to a concordat with the Department of Health. Meanwhile different parts of the Cabinet Office were focusing on the New Professionalism concept, on the Curry, Beddington and Porritt reports and the large scale Food Foresight and Sustainability agendas (some jointly with DEFRA and Chief Scientific Advisor's Unit). Along with fresh approaches to interaction with devolved governments, all these workstreams had a high degree of congruence with advanced arguments, but largely ignored professional skills and networks.

Instead of the accumulated evidence of nutrition system failure, massively escalating costs to the Exchequer, and the deteriorating quality of life in many segments of the population providing a good launch-pad for AfN, it served in some circles to generate uncertainty and factionalism, with meandering arguments, sometimes in the name of sustainability or freedom.

As (ill-) luck would have it, what was heralded as the miracle discovery of the millennium arrived in 2007 with the coining of the 'Nudge' concept by Sunstein & Thaler. This quickly took the whole political, managerial and marketing world by storm (their 2008 book became required reading for the whole incoming UK Cabinet). Many powerful opinion-formers became convinced that nudging would of itself simultaneously bring about a reversal of the rising graph of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and co-morbidities, all the while allowing big budget cuts! Such beliefs linked in to the broader deregulation and climate stampedes, in turn underpinned by the tabloid mantra 'we've had enough of experts'! In the specific case of nutrition, so-called complementary therapies benefitted hugely from a rising tide of public willingness to prefer essentially spiritual and alchemical rather than evidence-based approaches. And the nudge evangelists wholly overlooked the fact that without any significant depth of knowledge of mechanisms or innovations in life sciences, food products, balanced diets or marketing, the average consumer could be nudged in the wrong direction!

So the Catch 22 impasse slowly became clear: that no government direct spending on a new professional body would be possible in short order; and that none of the potential third sector or philanthropic funders were willing to risk moving until AfN was fully functioning with complete endorsement as a recognised professional body!

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Meanwhile, the reports kept coming, not just from England-centred UK authorities but notably also from Scotland and the European Union (in general both marginally more incisive and inclusive). Despite the seniority of many leading the studies or the associated advocacy, the avalanche of worthy but often complex recommendations and the plethora of increasingly strident expressions of 'something must be done', few key decision-makers drew the obvious conclusion from other major economic sectors that the existence of an authoritative professional body correlated well with rational, holistic and fearless strategic visioning, a stream of current and future leaders and skilled practitioners, and confidence in the sector by public and fellow professionals alike. The one exception to this was the report of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN), which stressed that the population was at risk from front-line staff inadequately trained in nutrition. Even the revelation that large food manufacturing and retail companies typically employ more research, development and managerial people in packaging than in nutrition, and that many own-label food lines remain unscrutinised, had no perceptible impact on policy-makers.

Workforce upskilling: lateral thinking , symbiosis & pathfinding

So began the search for a funded project addressing aspects of the knowledge gaps that could run in parallel with AfN's other workstreams. Through involvement in Third Sector policy in the UK and Europe, I was able to identify, apply for and secure a rare Department of Health competitive grant, thanks to help and advice from AfN Council members and a number of external bodies. Building on all that, enormous effort had to go into the rigorous preparatory and execution phases, involving in-depth conceptual and project management planning, mapping, scoping and reporting techniques. The small team of staff and interns did a truly magnificent job.

To improve capacity, confidence and competence in nutrition across health and social care to reduce nutrition-related inequalities, the project included identifying categories of staff capable of becoming able to offer safe/evidence-based advice; analysing job descriptions/competences; establishing quality assurance frameworks /benchmarks for level 3 & 4 frontline workers; assessing training, education, professional support and mentoring needs and optimal provision/delivery; career progression, mobility and opportunity ladders.

The Nutrition Workforce Competence Model was duly formulated, tested and (after my time) delivered to time and budget, an outstanding success for AfN

The Nutrition Workforce Competence Model was duly formulated, tested and (after my time) delivered to time and budget, an outstanding success for AfN. Along with the Project Steering Committee, not the least reason for success was enthusiastic involvement of many AfN registrants, providing suggestions, advice and other inputs. In turn, hopefully they were reassured that their status, reputation and potential was being reinforced.

Pathways to sunlit uplands: courage, pecking order, seeing round corners

Having spent many years involved with aspects of the international food, agriculture and health sectors, and encouraging exchange of ideas and experience across boundaries, I was delighted (after open competition) to be invited to facilitate the creation, structuring and launch of what became AfN.

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In the arcane allocation of relative status between different professions, naturally a key element is the standing of different grades of membership. Others will cover refining, developing and embedding Registered Nutritionist and Associate grades and the accreditation process into AfN, which together occupied much effort as Inaugural CEO. Here I focus on the crucial significance of The Fellowship, signifying substantial, high level experience showing significant advancement in practice, research, design, education, communication or management based in clinical, natural, social or behavioural sciences or technology, or food husbandry, commerce or manufacturing. Such specialisation sitting on top of a broad base of knowledge and competence in the core common parts of the field is a key attribute, underlining the nutrition profession's inherent multi-disciplinary character, covering almost every aspect of such a wide canvas. Commendably, animal nutrition and public health streams had been embraced earlier, and I was glad to be involved in negotiations to bring in sport and exercise nutrition. It is important to stress that this is the very opposite of a silo approach (among the world's greatest impediments to real understanding and progress), since interdisciplinary exchange and understanding are cardinal planks in the AfN mission. Multidisciplinary professional bodies are unusual but they have played, and are destined to keep playing, an increasingly important role in helping to equip practitioners of the future with the essential tools and mindsets of collaboration, mutuality, understanding and respect.

Promoting such an outlook, sparking new ideas and helping members see round corners and beyond boundaries have always been key ambitions for me.

I am proud to be designated as a Founding Fellow of the Association, and I am glad to salute current and past office-bearers and staff and indeed every member for the parts they have played in the continuing rise to fulfilment of its mission. In building up to the original launch of AfN, a number of strategic pathways were delineated and in due course fulfilled.

it should be easier now to sustain nutrition's claim to be one of the world's dozen most important professions

With the long-overdue eclipse of the supremacy of nudgery, the manifest need to address the consequences of inappropriate nutrition holistically, and the continued accumulation and codification of evidence bases, it should be easier now to sustain nutrition's claim to be one of the world's dozen most important professions.

Dr Jackie Landman

Registrar 1998 - 2009
AfN Trustee 2012 - 2019

Why did I develop an interest in nutrition? Firstly, my anti-apartheid community activist teacher parents instilled altruism in me during my childhood. I recall people coming to ask for their help to improve school lunches and deal with kwashiorkor in our town in South Africa or to support their protests against oppression. Secondly, when I wanted a speaker to talk about nutrition to the University of Dundee's Science Society, of which I was President, Prof Sir Kenneth Blaxter came to lecture to us. His talk lit my fire - I wanted to study nutrition. Thirdly, the Biafran War famine alerted me to a need for humanitarian aid: that's what I wanted to do. Of the two MSc courses available, I chose LSHTM for its international focus. Inspired by 'no survey without service' (Burgess and King) and lecturers' oft repeated mantra 'when you're in the field' said to ensure students would apply their learning in jobs they had already or in technical cooperation or humanitarian programmes in newly-independent countries, to which the few recent UK graduates like me aspired.

Having secured an MRC studentship, I set off for Kampala in summer 1972 to do a Master's project but, due to Idi Amin's expulsion of Israelis and Asians, Professor Roger Whitehead said he couldn't guarantee my safety. I was repatriated with other women (and children). Professor John Waterlow arranged for me to go to Tropical Metabolism Research Unit (TMRU), Jamaica instead. After the MSc project, I applied unsuccessfully for a job with the Trinidad Ministry of Health. Professor David Picou later told me he'd given me a bad reference because he wanted me to teach in the MSc course at the University of the West Indies. I appreciated TMRU's altruistic ethos and enjoyed helping to prepare the first manual for the treatment of severe malnutrition, a forerunner of WHO's. I helped to assess the nutritional status of children in local orphanages, train community health workers and train nurses in the treatment of severe malnutrition in rural Jamaican hospitals as well as doing applied, practical nutrition research. I later undertook technical consultancies for FAO/UNDP (in Bahamas, Kuwait), UNICEF and Terres de Hommes.

After I returned to England in 1988, I worked at Leeds Polytechnic (now Leeds Beckett University), University of Southampton and Queen Margaret College (now University). Overall, I taught students of nutrition, dietetics, nursing and medicine, at under-and post-graduate levels and was involved in interprofessional learning with physiotherapy and occupational therapy students too, so was steeped in professional education. I collaborated with community dietitians and local food charities around student placements or applied research projects, true to my values.

I was galvanised by Professor Waterlow's 1981 challenges in 'Crisis for Nutrition' (1) and by Alan Berg's ideas about nutrition engineers because I'd always wanted nutrition to work with and for people (2). I wanted nutritionists to have defined occupations dedicated to improving the nutrition, health and wellbeing of people and communities, like those my former students undertook in the Caribbean. Beset by bereavement, ill-health, changing jobs and cities I finally joined the Register of Accredited Nutritionists in 1991. That register was held by IOB on behalf of the Nurition Society (NS), Institute of Food Science and Technology and Institute of Biology, the latter a chartered body. Dr Ann Walker was instrumental in its inception on NS's behalf. Although I voted against NS taking the register away from IOB in 1999, because it lost the cachet of chartered status, I considered that, being based on credentials, it fell short of professional regulation, though it was open to members of all three organisations. Landman & Wootton (2007) (3) set on record NS's progress in establishing our profession and its regulation and the challenges that remained before the Association of Nutrition was established to take over the stewardship of UKVRN. At the time, the goal was still statutory regulation.

The impetus towards professionalisation was the Health of the Nation, not least because of the Taskforce on Nutrition established under Dame Barbara Clayton. Further, an expectation that nutritionists and dietitians would educate other health professionals was clearly stated and a core curriculum was published that could be distilled into 18-bullet points (4). This milestone prompted NS to commission IOB to undertake a review of Nutrition Training in the UK, published in 1991, revealing that most nutrition graduates working in nutrition were dietitians; other graduates went into jobs unrelated to the subject. I was not involved in any of this.

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Around this time, NS nominated me to sit on the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine's Dietitians' Board (1990-1999).

I learned much about professions and their regulation at a time of transition to competency-based clinical training for professions becoming graduate-entry and amid efforts to change the law. I later became a lay panellist with the Health and Care Professions Council (2002-2015) because Prof Judy Buttriss, as Hon Secretary agreed that this would be useful professional development for me.

A NS Development Group led by Professor Barrie Margetts and Professor Judy Buttriss on Public Health Nutrition sought my expertise in course design and validation as part of their vision for curriculum design for professional development in public health nutrition. Their work led to the launch of a Register for Public Health Nutritionists in 1997, described in our paper in the first issue of the new Public Health Nutrition Journal (5).

Jackie and Mike Gibney

I was among the first to be handed my registration certificate by then President, Mike Gibney when Dr David Buss was NS's first registrar (see figure to the left). I was brought in to handle applications to the Register, working remotely part-time. I was asked to design and pilot a public health nutrition course accreditation scheme in 1998. President Christine Williams's major review of the organisation led to staff changes in 2000, including Chris Darby's appointment as Executive Secretary. After David Buss's untimely death, I was asked to relocate to the London office to become full-time Membership Executive in 2000.

I became a member of the first Bioscience Benchmarking Group (2000-1). Immediately after the final meeting finished, I watched the horrific September 11 bombings on TV. In 2002, NS convened a Working Party co-chaired by Professor Christine Williams (NS) and Professor Peter Aggett (Association of Professors of Human Nutrition- APHN), to which I provided support. Following consideration of the IOB Report on Nutrition Training (1991), the Quality Assurance Agency's Benchmark Statements on the Biosciences, Dietetics and Agriculture, Forestry, Agricultural Sciences, Food Sciences and Consumer Sciences, the Working Party reached a consensus about importance of Nutrition Science and the competences that all nutritionists should share, for the benefit of human and other animals. As I described in 2004 (6), the consultation with members and stakeholders was comparable in scope with the IOB's: 130 copies of the report were distributed.

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In addition to individual responses, Liaison Representatives met to discuss the report. Some university departments and other bodies - BDA, Phys Soc, FSA, Nutritionists in Industry, FDF, Scottish Quality Assurance Agency, Meat and Livestock Commission, sent collective responses. This work led to a definition that, at last, staked a claim to a meaningful identity for nutrition as a subject, instead of the nebulous 'meeting point of the sciences,' building on Waterlow's and Blaxter's suggestions. NS supported the development of a register and course accreditation scheme for nutritionists (2005) alongside that for public health nutritionists. A Registration Committee chaired by Dr Richard Cottrell revised the first code of ethics (1997) in 2003, subsequently revised in 2005. Course Accreditation Committee meetings were chaired by an Honorary Secretary, firstly by Prof John Oldham. Judy Buttriss's masterstroke was to include representatives from both BDA and APHN 'ex officio', building trust to our mutual benefit.

In the 1990s, nutrition graduates had a reputation for being unable to translate their scientific knowledge into lay language or to provide services for people. Money for New Regeneration projects led to more dietetic services in public health/community nutrition using these funds. Dietetics managers' positive experiences of employing nutritionists led to the BDA/NS Guidance on the Employment of Nutritionists in Dietetics Departments (2002), of which I was particularly proud, because an illustrative case study used one of my former students.

All too often I would be the only nutritionist in a room with representatives of varied health professional bodies or regulators for pharmacists, medics and dentists etc., so I felt a responsibility to advocate for science-based nutrition professionals

Representing NS enabled me to stay abreast of the momentous changes ushered in by NHS Agenda for Change and the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (NHS KSF). A senior member told an NS AGM about plans to establish a register in public health and asked NS to protect the interests of its PHN register and registrants. I represented NS at an inaugural meeting about the development of multidisciplinary public health in response to Acheson's Report on the Public Health Function. I went on to represent NS in work on standard setting and later regulation of firstly public health general specialists, then defined specialists (a route now closed) and practitioners. I worked with the sector skills organisation, Skills for Health, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Royal Society of Public Health and the Faculty of Public Health. I was involved in developing National Occupational Standards for Public Health and the Public Health Knowledge Skills and Career Framework, working with specialists including Health Intelligence and meeting Professor Mala Rao when she was at DH. All too often I would be the only nutritionist in a room with representatives of varied health professional bodies or regulators for pharmacists, medics and dentists i.a, so I felt a responsibility to advocate for science-based nutrition professionals.

Being an assessor for the UK Public Health Register (UKPHR) gave me valuable experience of assessing competences at practitioner and consultant levels. I was able to base the UKVRN's standard operating procedures for fitness to practise investigations and conduct hearings on the Health Profession Council's where I was a lay partner. This proved useful when we got a spate of complaints, some made by Dr Ben Goldacre in the national press, sometimes taking me to task. For our first case the panel comprised Judy Buttriss RPHNutr then Hon Secretary as chair, Prof Christine Williams RNutr and Professor Clyde Williams, lay member. Fitness to practise hearings are stressful, emotional occasions but I'll never forget that someone likened me to a guard at a concentration camp! A symptom of distress no doubt but painful to hear.

This work contributed to recognition of PHN as a defined public health specialism so that experienced nutritionists (and dietitians) became eligible to apply for financial and mentoring support so that they could apply to become registered public health specialists

The UKVRN team engaged with a range of members in workshops we held in our office or in meetings hosted by Liaison Representatives or leaders of accredited courses, such as LSHTM or hosted by partners like BDA, Health Development Agency, BNF, FSA or DH, sometimes at external venues like the Institute of Physics or Novartis. We valued collegial contact for the steers we gave and received. We drew on lived experience from our professionals for our developmental work and to consult and then comment on developments. We sought to prepare registrants for job evaluations that would affect the level or band ascribed to job roles for, and hence salary levels and career prospects in, the health service. This work contributed to recognition of PHN as a defined public health specialism so that experienced nutritionists (and dietitians) became eligible to apply for financial and mentoring support so that they could apply to become registered public health specialists. The UKVRN registrants who became consultants, even deputy Directors of Public Health, chose UKPHR over dual registration.

One attribute of regulated professionals committed to public protection is holding professional indemnity insurance (PII), for work with individual clients particularly elite sportspeople or racehorses. In 2003, a senior representative from NS's insurance broker, Letton Percival joined UKRVN staff at a summer meeting following a survey of the 700 registrants' opinions about PII. It would have been complex to design a scheme when many already had insurance through professional bodies (eg BDA). I have no record of a PII scheme being included in NS's strategic business plan. It was gratifying that AfN delivered a scheme so quickly.

The buzz around our work to professionalise nutrition led to presentations about our work at conferences. One presentation in Berlin 1997 led to the publication by Landman, Buttriss and Margetts (1998) and presentations at the International Dietetics Congress, Edinburgh 2000; at a symposium in the IUNS Vienna Congress, 2004, that Prof Roger Hughes organised (7) and at ANEC in Cairo, 2008 as well as in numerous centres within the EU Masters in Public Health Nutrition Programme and to the Associate Parliamentary Food and Health Forum (2001 & 2002); contact from NS's membership of the Biosciences Federation (BSF) led to a talk at the Science Museum. NS's participation in BSF's science careers fairs got our leaflets about studying nutrition to much broader readerships than we could have managed by ourselves.

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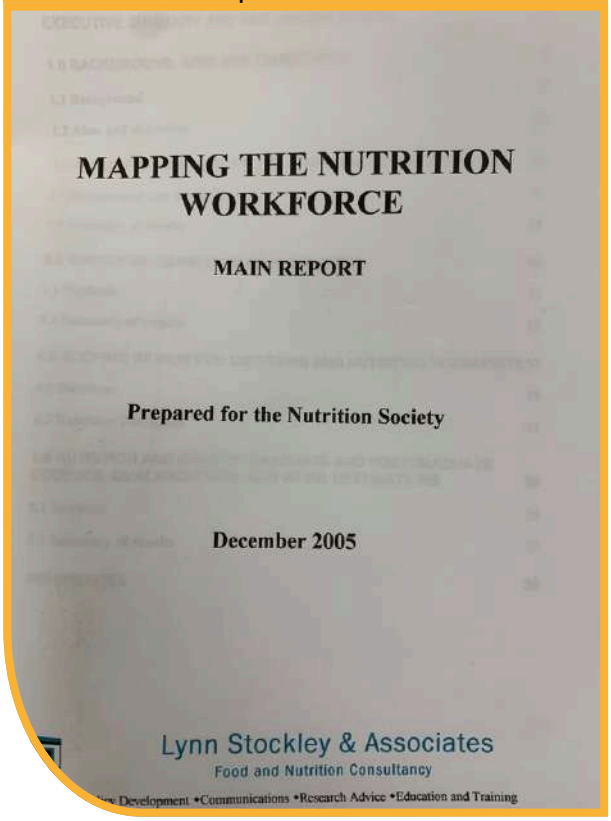
NS was also keen to support the regulation of sports and exercise nutritionists. So, I represented NS at meetings ably chaired by Professor Clyde Williams, with National Sports Medicine Institute, British Association for Sports and Exercise Sciences (BASES) and the BDA, that led to a successful bid for funding from UK Sport to enable consultation with practitioners, athletes and sports bodies such as National Cycling. When NS decided to set up AfN, the Sport and Exercise Nutrition Register was left in limbo because the priority was to establish AfN. Unfortunately, NS had to return unspent protected funds. This explains why there is a Sports and Exercise Nutrition Register set up by BDA with BASES and held by BDA, while UKVRN has a Sports Nutrition section. When Clyde asked me to speak in his stead at a meeting at the Royal Society of Medicine's Sport and Exercise Section in 2010, feeling responsible for the dropped SENR ball, I was worried I'd get a hostile reception, but the movers and shakers, Professors Ron Maugham, Susan Sherriffs and Jane Griffiths, doyen of SEN, were as friendly as ever.

By 2005, NS's Executive and Directors in Council had decided to prepare an application for statutory regulation by the Health Professions Council as soon as possible, buoyed by then support from CMO (England) Professor Sir Liam Donaldson. To succeed, UKVRN would need to meet the criteria set by DH & HPC, including being larger than 1000 registrants (viability), have standards for admission, retention and removal from the register; able to ensure high standards of performance, including standards for CPD, and ensure that professional ethics and values are upheld for the public good. That year, NS established a working party to help it prepare an application to HPC. I recall taking a checklist to NS meetings so that I recorded communications or papers that contributed to an evidence-base for nutrition practice. Kellogg's gave us seed funding that enabled us to develop first a business proposal for funding from DH for the first research into public perceptions of the nutrition professions.

Mapping the Nutrition Workforce Report 2005



MAPPING THE NUTRITION WORKFORCE

MAIN REPORT

Prepared for the Nutrition Society

December 2005

Lynn Stockley & Associates

Food and Nutrition Consultancy

Development •Communications •Research Advice •Education and Training

We commissioned qualitative research from Lynn Stockley and Kate Scott in 2004 (see figure to the right) who undertook semi-structured individual and focussed group interviews that were reported as Understanding the differences that DH permitted to be disseminated in 2005. I recall reporting to and liaising with Dr Sheela Reddy about this. Next steps were discussed internally, by the Association of Professors of Human Nutrition and the Nutrition Professions Confederation formed in 2004 by NS, APHN, BDA and the (medical colleges') Inter-Collegiate Group for Nutrition so that the science-based nutrition professions could speak collectively. It had identified a need to "provide a focus for nutrition across different professions" and recommended the development of a National Service Framework for nutrition to facilitate the implementation of nutritional health public policies and harmonise with NHS Knowledge and Skills Frameworks (KSF) for Agenda for Change, and the development of KSFs for the practice of public health anticipating the opening of a register for defined public health specialists in 2006.

Therefore, with support from the Nutrition Forum, a NS BDA research project proposal was put together. Again, our point of contact in DH was Dr Sheela Reddy to whom we should be grateful for DH funding for further research we commissioned from Lynn Stockley, this time with Linda Lawton, to characterise the 'primary nutrition workforce' i.e. people mainly employed to practise nutrition. Their results helped us estimate the potential size of the register by including people such as community nutrition or community food assistants or workers who are under-represented in NS's membership. Stockley and Lawton's work contributed to my report on Nutrition Capacity in the United Kingdom: Mapping the Primary Nutrition Workforce (2006). The report was launched at a seminar in the Institute of Physics on 26th January, with presentations by Bob Wenlock and Lynn Stockley. NS established a Modern Professions Taskforce chaired by Professor Catherine Geissler, Honorary Secretary with Bob Wenlock Hon Professional Affairs Officer, Sue Kellie BDA's Professional Development Officer, Ruth Campbell the first Scottish Board Public Health Nutritionist, Sue Lloyd then at the Centre for Health Wales, Jamie Blackshaw FSA, and Basma Ellahi and me.

We built on consultations about the defined specialists portfolio assessment framework, for example in Scotland with Ruth Campbell, Fiona MacDonald, Aileen McCraw, Joanne O'Sullieabhain and Moyra Burns; at LSHTM with Alan Dangour, Claire Schofield, Heema Shukla, Basma Ellahi, Marie Ann Ha, Claire d 'Cruz, Ailsa Welch, Jane Earland, Ruth Ash, Kay Eilbert, Marion Gibbons, Hannah Pheasant and Edwina Newman. Other consultations included registered nutritionists Claire Glazzard, Julia Rosser and Heema Shukla, the latter two both work at senior levels in public health, as do Sue Lloyd and Jenny Davies. Another important part of the Taskforce's work was to collect and analyse entry-level nutritionists' job descriptions in as many sectors as we could find.

I retained an active interest in the academic aspects of my work. For example, I was interested in the literature around learning outcomes, levels of learning and, crucially, the differences in levels of competence at novice, proficiency and expert levels and was convinced of the centrality of reflection or deliberation on practice to professionalism. This led to my joining the British Education Research Association. I was gratified to be encouraged by Michael Eraut, late doyen of professional education. My sister Maeve, a sociologist, collaborated with me to excavate the issues raised by the research Lynn Stockley and Kay Scott conducted into Understanding the differences between Nutrition Health Professionals in 2004. We presented a paper called 'Cucumbers packed with vitamins?: Expert nutritional advice in the 21st Century' to a British Sociology Association conference in 2005. Our paper considered the nutrition profession's efforts to become a regulated profession in the face of food and nutrition scares and influencer misinformation. The Health Development Agency found that nutritionists and dietitians were unfamiliar with the qualitative research methodologies that they needed to undertake needs assessments and assess client satisfaction using multi–methods. This prompted two interactive professional development sessions and publications in PNS with papers from Fatimee Rabiee (focus groups), Stefanie Fade (phenomenology) and Maeve Landman (feminist methodology).

> I was convinced of the centrality of reflection or deliberation on practice to professionalism

As Honorary Professional Affairs Officer, Steve Wootton convened a workshop to bring together key members of the standing committees: the overarching Professional Affairs Committee (Professor Anne de Looy), Registration Committee (Professor Janet Cade, Ann Price, Professor John Webster) and Course Accreditation Committee (Professor Julie Lovegrove, Dr Alan Dangour); the ad-hoc committees: the Modern Professions Taskforce (Jamie Blackshaw), the Sport and Exercise Register Board and the CPD working party (Anne de Looy) in January 2007 together with Professor Catherine Geissler Hon Secretary, Professor Brian Ratcliffe Honorary

External Affairs Officer, Dr Eileen Gibney Editor Nutrition Gazette, Dr Basma Ellahi Public Health Nutrition Theme Leader and other interested parties – Michael Clapham RPHNutr for Scottish and Northern Universities and Jenny Davies, RD PHNutr and module leader for an accredited course as well as NS staff Fred Wentworth Bowyer, Sue Lloyd and me. Lucy Schneiderman RNutr wrote a report and Dawn Wood, also an independent consultant, facilitated. Steve undertook to base proposals for the future on the workshop's conclusions, but I suspect that NS's decision to establish a Presidential Working Group overtook that.

we wanted to find ways to enable professionals to show their commitment to demonstrating active learning that enhanced the quality of their practice

When we looked at systems for evaluating CPD for continuing registration and retention, we wanted to find ways to enable professionals to show their commitment to demonstrating active learning that enhanced the quality of their practice, something that cannot be achieved by merely counting hours spent in lectures, seminars or webinars for all their easy documentation with certificates of attendance at accredited events eg FSA's 2008 Salt Partnership Event. Therefore, we undertook a 4-month long pilot with the FSA, before which I met Alison Tedstone, Louis Levy and their colleague to ensure that the pilot would fit in with the FSA's commitment Investor in People. Registrants were asked to keep portfolios with reflective logs on their learning that would show not just what, when, where they learned, but how they incorporated their learning into their practice. We were lucky that Louis Levy showed that it was possible and supported colleagues too, so the pilot was a success. We envisaged different competencies for continuing registration from those expected of initial registrants to enable flexibility to reflect registrants' actual, likely specialised scopes of practice.

We drafted standards of proficiency that we tested in consultative workshops in December 2006 and January 2007, leading to a final version, which were close to acceptance after a final consultation. I thought that few universities could develop integrated practical training or internships though these seemed feasible in courses with year-long industrial placements (e.g. Newcastle and Surrey Universities). I hoped Health Education England might support formal on-the-job professional development in nutrition inspired by the approach used in developmental routes to Public Health Practitioner registration since adapted for use at specialist level as well. Nutritionists work in many sectors so we could not set up the kind of standard scheme used by statutorily regulated health professions. Instead, we devised a professional assessment framework so that registrants could assemble portfolios of evidence to show how they met each standard of proficiency in their own workplaces.

Looking back, I conclude that my years working to establish UKVRN did indeed 'crown my career' as Christine Williams said, because I put my heart and soul into my work. I met and learned from many wonderful colleagues in universities, for example, using Objective Structured 'Clinical' Examinations to assess UKVRN core competences in courses at Chester (Prof Basma Ellahi) and Southampton (Dr Penny Nestel), common in health professional courses and the many practitioners (see above) who gave freely and constructively of their expertise, despite employers' restrictions on travel. I found my work absorbing, as intellectually stimulating and rewarding as any, sometimes because of, sometimes despite challenges. I'm proud of laying the basis for the successful independent professional regulator of which I'm still a member. By December 2008, the number of registrants had quadrupled to 1,000 and it was clear that UKVRN could reach a viable size. Once registration was no longer a NS member benefit, fees could rise to cover full costs. NS members had balked at the costs of registration in my time.

Looking back, I conclude that my years working to establish UKVRN did indeed 'crown my career' as Christine Williams said, because I put my heart and soul into my work.

I recognise that I was a cog in interlocking wheels that turned because we had a favourable socio-political environment as expressed through permissive government policy, funding and constructive criticism of projects needed to characterise our nascent profession. Favourable policy was necessary but insufficient by itself to effect radical change. Key individuals within NS (vide supra) and in or ex DH viz., Professor Martin Wiseman, Robert Wenlock and Dr Sheela Reddy. Similarly, at first in FSA and later DH, Professor Alison Tedstone, Prof Louis Levy and Jamie Blackshaw provided wise counsel that certainly kept me on my toes. Louis was, and is, a consistent source of personal support that I esteem him as a Abou Ben Adhem (8). Judy Buttriss, a steadfast mover and shaker for decades first while she was at National Dairy Council and then at BNF as well as a NS Trustee. UKVRN could not have made the progress we did in my time without these and other key individuals.

Upon looking at my albeit patchy records I was struck by how NS consistently involved key stakeholders, notably the BDA and the Association of Professors of Nutrition (APHN) and the Inter-Collegiate Group on Nutrition. I hope that the demise of APHN has not impaired our profession's and our discipline's strength and unity. Even when his name does not appear in my papers, Professor Alan Jackson CBE was an active member of APHN, the Intercollegiate Group and the Nutrition Confederation and promulgated the Nutrition Core Curriculum. As the first Chair of SACN, Alan took an active interest in nutrition workforce capability and capacity, instigating a Nutrition Training Review in 2005 for which I wrote NS's contribution (9). Alan and Martin worked closely with Richard Denyer to establish AfN as a company (2008) and subsequently as a charity, and like Martin, Alan was a key member of AfN's Council.

Ideally institutional memory is alive and does not exist in documents alone.

The Future for UKVRN?

In my opinion, we face three challenges two longstanding and the last one, new:

1. The political climate and economic climate may now be more uncongenial, but we need to press on towards Chartered status.
2. Can we do more to promote our profession? It pains me to see or hear more uninformed doctors and cooks talking about nutrition in the media than Registered Nutritionists.
3. Are our registrants ready to seize the opportunities and evade the scourges of AI, especially in social media?

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Dr Alison Tedstone

AfN President 2022 - 2026
AfN Trustee 2010 - 2012 and 2022 - Present

Early involvement

My first involvement in the regulation of nutrition as a profession was in the 1990's. I was the course organiser of the MSc in Public Health Nutrition at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and I did the paperwork for the course being accredited.

I remember that it was quite an admin exercise finding and pulling together a lot of information. It was worthwhile. I was proud that our MSc became one of the first to be accredited. Students were positive about it, seeing it as a mark of quality associated with their degree.

My next substantial involvement in professionalisation was after leaving academia in the early 2000's and moving to work in the nutrition team at the Food Standards Agency (FSA). At that time the government nutrition workforce was split between the FSA and the then Department of Health (DH). There were colleagues working in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

There had been, for a while, some concern in government that there were potential safety issues arising for the general public, and particularly vulnerable individuals, from some of the advice on nutrition being promoted in books, articles and by practitioners. This was mostly benign, but some was deeply concerning for example on cancer and HIV treatment. DH were worried that harm or even deaths would occur. There was also an ongoing concern about the quality of training for some of the nutrition workforce, and that some people were working as nutritionists having completed only very short courses on the topic.

Dr Sheela Reddy, who headed up the nutrition team in DH was a great champion of professionalisation. She recognised the public health importance of it, and the risks to the public of poor-quality advice and low standards.

My next substantial involvement in professionalisation was after leaving academia in the early 2000's and moving to work in the nutrition team at the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

She worked hard to ensure that the issue was recognised in government and supported the work of the Nutrition Society in addressing it.

Sheela and I were FSA/government reps on several Nutrition Society committees on professionalisation. They were developing quality standards and processes for the registration of nutritionists and the accreditation of courses.

The work at Nutrition Society was spearheaded by Jackie Landman with the support of the Nutrition Society Council and various Chairs. Jackie and her small team developed standards for registration of courses and individuals and processes for maintaining standards, such as complaints procedures. These were overseen by several committees. Judy Buttriss and Martin Wiseman put a lot of effort into supporting the work.

I remember becoming a Registered Nutritionist myself. Jackie was very encouraging. Like many people working in nutrition of my age, I had not done a degree in nutrition. There were very few nutrition degrees when I was deciding on my higher education options. My degrees are in physiology, so I registered through professional practice. I was proud when my registration certificate arrived and I saw that I was a Registered Nutritionist (Public Health).

The Association for Nutrition (AfN)

There was some concern at the Nutrition Society that there was a potential legal issue in the Society running the Register. I do not recall the details but think that there was scrutiny at the time on organisations like it (learned societies) and benefits to members. It had sought legal advice and, on its basis, decided that the register should be transferred to a separate organisation.

AfN was born. It was chaired by Alan Jackson. Both Sheela Reddy and I were Trustees. The first Chief Executive was Richard Denyer. Richard worked with very little resource to establish the fledgling organisation and then to transfer the register to it. It was supported both financially and practically by the Nutrition Society for several years.

It was no small task establishing AfN. There were many processes and legal loops to be jumped through.

It is thanks to Richard in the early days and then the second Chief Executive Leonie Milliner that this was done successfully.

Quality control procedures and processes were set up to oversee and develop the register, and to maintain and improve its integrity. Core AfN objectives were and remain protecting the public and improving health.

I was a Trustee for AfN in the early days but stepped away when my term of office finished. AfN was still a fledgling organisation. The register was relatively small, and it was financially insecure.

Over the years, I maintained my registration and did my CPD. I also encouraged nutrition staff in government to do the same, indeed with my colleague Louis Levy we enabled registration to be a 'desirable' recruitment criterion, and expected and encouraged professional skills maintenance and development for all nutrition staff.

I rejoined the AfN board as Chair of Trustees and President at the end of 2021. I was delighted to find that AfN was then an established organisation with a thriving register and mature codes of practice, complaints procedures etc, supported by a professional team headed by the third Chief Executive, Helen Clark. The register has grown substantially. We have a decent bank balance and can support our members in line with AfN objectives.

Richard laid the foundations; Leonie built the initial structures and now Helen Clark has developed the organisation.

The development of the concept of, actuality of, operation of and then improving and maintaining a professional register is down to many people including members and staff of the Nutrition Society who had the vision to see the issue and address it, and their willingness to support it (financially and practically) over the early years when AfN was being established. AfN is dependent on a small team of staff, as well as trustees, numerous volunteers on its committees and its assessors. It is these people that have taken the register to where we are today. The three chief executives are to be applauded as they have navigated different stages of the journey – Richard laid the foundations; Leonie built the initial structures and now Helen Clark has developed the organisation. Glenys Jones, the deputy chief executive, needs special praise for her commitment and being AfN's senior nutritionist – she really understands what AfN has and what is needed. As a membership organisation, AfN's profile and success are down to those who see value in it, pay fees and support it year in and year out. Members are at its heart.

AfN has strengthened its governance over the years; this has included appointing lay members to Council . Their perspectives and skills have helped the organisation not to be so inwards looking.

The future

Nutrition is a topic that everyone and anyone feels able to comment on. This can be reasonable, but it can be a problem (leading to for example buying unnecessary supplements, going on unhealthy diets and believing unproven health claims about products), misleading the public or, in the worst case, it can be harmful. It's an area where people have commercial interests (selling books, diets, products and services) and people have strong views.

It is critical for the health of the population that those giving advice on nutrition are competent. It is also an area of health which, if neglected or not recognised, can be harmful and result in people being sicker or not recovering as they should. It has a massive role in public health. The health of the population is worse than it should be because of poor nutrition. The role of the register and AfN remains critical in helping to address this and in protecting the public and by ensuring standards.

AfN has been pursuing a Royal Charter for many years and is currently awaiting a decision by the Privy Council. This is a very big deal for members and if awarded will be a major step forward in protecting the public. The process is largely out of AfN's hands and subject to challenge. I tend to think it's important for AfN to be as good as it can be with or without chartered status.

There are currently lots of financial issues for universities. AfN needs to navigate that and help where they can. AfN needs to spend members' money wisely to support its members. As a more mature organisation, there is more scope for doing this now better than before. Others, however, are seeing the same opportunities for them in terms of maintaining or growing their income. We need to work out how to cooperate.

AfN has been pursuing a Royal Charter for many years and is currently awaiting a decision by the Privy Council.

My aim remains the same for the nutrition profession – nutrition professionals need to be science based. They need to be able to provide good quality advice and not mislead. I would like to see a proactive profession that takes a leadership role in protecting the health of the public.

Prof Judith Buttriss

The Nutrition Society Honorary Secretary 1999 - 2005
AfN Trustee 2012 - 2016

Efforts to define the role and skills-set of public health nutritionists, championed by Prof Alan Jackson, Prof Mike Gibney and others, and establishing a register of qualified nutritionists under the auspices of the Nutrition Society are interlinked in my recollections – I was involved with both over a number of years. In my experience, the scene was set by the Department of Health's shift in emphasis in the early 1990s directed towards prevention of diet-related disease in its Health of the Nation strategy for England (and similar strategies for the other home nations) (Department of Health 1992). For the first time since the Second World War, the government strategy provided explicit nutrition policy for the UK and signalled a change in approach, with more emphasis being placed on the need for disease prevention and health promotion. It incorporated explicit nutritional goals and targets, translated into dietary terms, which paved the way for the emerging public health nutritionist role (1).

Furthermore, the government's strategy located health and health outcomes in the wider context of economic, social and physical environments. It identified the need to explore ways to create national and local networks to draw together the scarce public health skills and the widespread specialist knowledge needed to take the strategy forward. It also identified the importance of developing and adopting agreed standards of good practice, and the need for monitoring and research. With the support and encouragement of the Department of Health, the Nutrition Society decided to take the lead in securing an infrastructure that would assist in defining evidence-based strategies and coherent dietary messages, by establishing criteria for professional competence in public health nutrition practice and for training (2).

In my opinion, defining and articulating the need for public health nutrition professionals in the delivery of the government's strategy and also the associated skills-set and competences required were key drivers in establishing the Nutrition Society's register of nutritionists.

The potential professional vulnerability of nutritionists working in the emerging nutrition education/public health roles (now referred to as public health nutritionists), coupled with the fundamental need to protect the public in a scenario where non-qualified individuals were growing in number and influence, has been a major stimulus of the work that has led to the development of routes to registration in nutrition. Dietitians, for whom formal registration has existed since 1963, are more readily identified as competent professionals and a source of reliable advice on diet and health for the public, and so were assumed to be better equipped from a professional perspective. 'Dietitian' is a legally protected title; nutritionist currently is not (although an application for a Royal Charter has been with the Privy Council for some time).

From a personal perspective, by way of illustration, my first degree was in Nutrition (from Surrey University), which incorporated dietetics alongside biochemistry, physiology, microbiology, human nutrition etc. Successful graduates not only received an Honours Degree in nutrition but also a diploma in dietetics, providing eligibility to State Registration (now Registration) as a dietitian. However, similar formal registration opportunities for nutrition graduates undertaking similar degree programmes that did not include dietetics, from the same university department, were unavailable. Working alongside such graduates I readily saw the disadvantages potentially faced such as when operating in public facing situations. Unlike 'dietitian', the term nutritionist was and still is used by individuals who lack the formal training in nutrition science and inter-related subjects such as biochemistry, physiology and microbiology, designed to underpin professional expertise and protection for the public. In a media interview or debate, a Registered Dietitian might choose to underpin an opinion with reference to the training they underwent to achieve registration, but this option was not available to non-dietetic nutritionist colleagues.

The lack of protection of title was, and still is, potentially making it difficult for employers and colleagues, as well as the public, to distinguish appropriately qualified nutrition graduates from those self-styled individuals claiming expertise in nutrition but lacking formal qualifications

The lack of protection of title was, and still is, potentially making it difficult for employers and colleagues, as well as the public, to distinguish appropriately qualified nutrition graduates from those self-styled individuals claiming expertise in nutrition but lacking formal qualifications. This scenario was a key driver of my interest in working with others to improve matters.

My Contribution and Reflections

As described elsewhere, by the 1980s there was already interest in establishing a nutrition profession and recognition of the need to develop a professional register. The Nutrition Society collaborated with the Institute of Biology (IOB) and the Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST). As I recall, nearly all of those (including myself) who applied to join the early Register of Accredited Nutritionists (managed by IOB) were Nutrition Society members. Dr Ann Walker from Reading University had a leading role in driving this initiative forward on behalf of the Nutrition Society.

I became heavily involved in work initiated by the Nutrition Society to help define 'public health nutrition' competences and how these might differ from dietetic skill sets

Between 1992 and 1994, I served as a Nutrition Society Council member. Professor John Webster was President at the time and encouraged me to become involved in the very early discussions about the further development of the IOB-maintained Register of Accredited Nutritionists, which had been established in 1989. At the time, the register had a low profile and few members, and the Nutrition Society initiated discussions with IOB to improve matters. There was already a sense that perhaps the Nutrition Society should take over the registration process on behalf of the nutrition community, which eventually came to pass a few years later, as outlined in the chapter by Professor John Mathers.

Alongside this contribution, I became heavily involved in work initiated by the Nutrition Society to help define 'public health nutrition' competences and how these might differ from dietetic skill sets (3). This work was a response from the Nutrition Society to the change in government policy on health, referred to earlier, which built on Professor John Waterlow's call for action in his 1980 Boyd Orr Memorial Lecture entitled Crisis in Nutrition (4). In 1995, the Nutrition Society appointed a Public Health Nutrition Development Group to take forward work stimulated by the government's Health of the Nation White Paper for England (5) and comparable policies for other parts of the UK. I was a member of this group, which was chaired by Dr Barrie Margetts of Southampton University. The group's work benefitted from the insight of senior Nutrition Society members employed by the Department of Health, notably Prof Martin Wiseman and Bob Wenlock, and from the active participation of members of the Community Nutrition Group of dietitians.

The Public Health Nutrition Development Group comprised five members, drawn from public health nutrition research, higher education, industry and community dietetics. The membership changed over time but retained this wide range of expertise.

From July 1996, the Public Health Nutrition Development Group included a member from mainland Europe and the International Union of Nutrition Sciences (IUNS) Committee on Public Health Nutrition. This reflected membership of the Nutrition Society, which extended beyond the UK, and the Society's long-standing commitment to European and international nutrition institutions. It also reflected the obligation that members of the EU have to recognize each other's qualifications, under the global commitment to encourage free trade and movement of labour.

Through the Public Health Nutrition Development Group, the Nutrition Society consulted widely with stakeholders to build a consensus about the definition, roles and functions of public health nutritionists and the need for, and scope of, this new professional grouping. Building on this consensus, a definition of 'public health nutrition' was developed and this led on to identification of a list of competencies essential for a public health nutritionist to have and the specialist knowledge required to underpin these. This in turn enabled development of a public health nutrition curriculum, as outlined below (3).

On behalf of the Nutrition Society, the Public Health Development Group established a definition for *public health nutrition*:

Public Health Nutrition focuses on the promotion of good health through nutrition and the primary prevention of diet-related illness in the population. The emphasis is in the maintenance of wellness in the whole population.

I re-joined Council in 1997, and in 1999, I was elected Honorary Secretary, a post I held until 2005, serving on the Society's Executive Committee alongside Presidents Professor Mike Gibney (1995-8), Professor Christine Williams (1998-2001) and Professor John Mathers (2001-4). During this time, I continued my involvement in the work associated with the development of The Nutrition Society's Register that now resides with the Association for Nutrition, and in defining competence in public health nutrition.

Defining competence in public health nutrition

The leadership of Prof Mike Gibney during his presidency (1995-8) was very influential in the continuation of this important work. With Council, he set about establishing a 5-year strategy for the Nutrition Society. As I recall we had two plenary meetings, both at weekends, and over a period of a year, a strategic plan was developed, with three priorities: (a) to have a greater international presence particularly in Europe, (b) to foster public health nutrition and (c) to establish a register of nutritionists.

In 1995, the Society's Public Health Nutrition Development Group (referred to above) began a review of the competencies that would be needed to create its own Register of Nutritionists, with a sub-register of Public Health Nutritionists. This process was led by Dr Barrie Margetts from Southampton University.

With a definition in place, the Public Health Nutrition Development Group identified an agreed list of competences essential for a public health nutritionist to have and the additional specialist knowledge required to underpin these (3). The common core of competences (known as the 18 bullet points) of the core curriculum for nutrition training for healthcare professionals (6) was used to shape the development of these core competencies and training requirements (7), to help ensure public health nutritionists could contribute to the training of other health professionals. This document had been developed by a working party of the Nutrition Task Force. The Task Force had been established to steer delivery of the government's The Health of the Nation strategy (5) and was chaired by Prof Dame Barbara Clayton (1, 8). The outputs of other Task Force working parties, such as the publication on nutrition and low income, were also helpful. This paved the way for a core curriculum for public health nutrition training. It was recognised at the outset that relevant work experience is also crucial postgraduation, and this was incorporated into the registration requirements.

Core curriculum in public health nutrition

These developments paved the way for a workshop convened by the Nutrition Society, in conjunction with the Department of Health, in April 1996 (3). In preparation for this meeting, the Development Group had undertaken an audit of courses offered in nutrition in the UK to find out which elements of the proposed core curriculum in public health nutrition were already taught. Participants in the workshop were representatives of higher education institutions offering courses in nutrition and other important stakeholders from health promotion, health education, dietetics and industry.

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At this point, there was agreement about the principle of accrediting courses and registering individuals graduating from them, with a need to work on how to verify or validate these processes. The report of this workshop led to agreement on a proposal for procedures for registration and accreditation, thereby fulfilling one of the objectives set by the government's Nutrition Task Force in 1994 (1).

Following minor changes to the curriculum as a result of further consultation with colleges and universities that confer nutrition degrees in the UK, the procedures for accreditation of courses were refined, and ready to go.

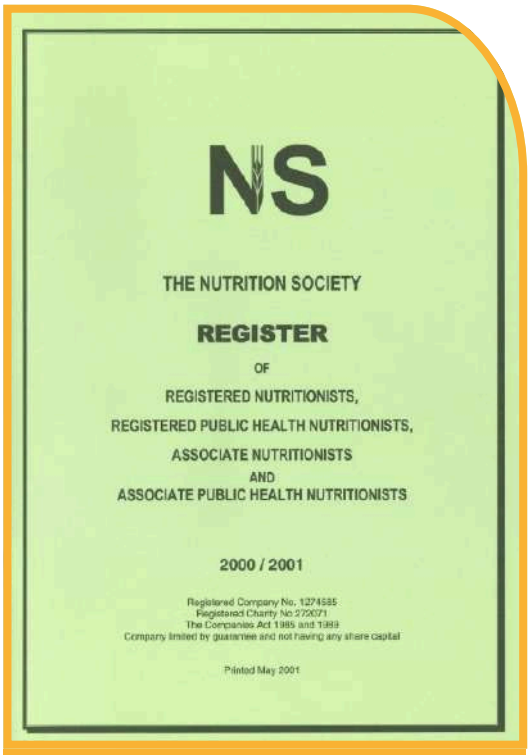
The curriculum in public health nutrition extended the scope of nutrition beyond its disciplinary roots in the biomedical sciences, by including three additional interdisciplinary topics: the psychological, social and cultural factors which influence food and dietary choices and how to effect change through modification of these; principles and key components of health education and health promotion policies and programmes; and sociology and politics of institutions, stakeholders, agents and agencies in national and global food and public health systems, sustainability and equity in Public Health Nutrition programmes (see Landman, Buttriss & Margetts, 1998). Competence was considered necessary in these additional topics in order to enable cooperation with specialists in the social sciences and in health education and health promotion, in the prospection of public health nutrition, rather than expecting public health nutritionists to acquire specialist expertise in each of these disciplines.

The curriculum in public health nutrition extended the scope of nutrition beyond its disciplinary roots in the biomedical sciences

At this point, there was agreement about the principle of accrediting courses and registering individuals graduating from them, with a need to work on how to verify or validate these processes. The report of this workshop led to agreement on a proposal for procedures for registration and accreditation, thereby fulfilling one of the objectives set by the government's Nutrition Task Force in 1994 (1).

Launch of the Nutrition Society's register of public health nutritionists

By the end of 1997, the Nutrition Society was ready to launch its own Register for Public Health Nutritionists, alongside a Code of Ethics, with the support of the Minister of State for Public Health, Tessa Jowell MP. In readiness for this, the Society published a document entitled Register in Public Health Nutrition: philosophy and how to apply. Entry to this new register required evidence of specialist competency in public health nutrition, as well as competency in nutrition (7). Barrie Margetts, Jackie Landman and I were among the initial small group of 35 individuals who applied and were subsequently accepted onto the new register at a launch at the Royal Society of Medicine on 1 December 1997 and, as referenced in Professor John Mathers chapter, the full list of 35 was published in an announcement in The Times on 3 December 1997.


NS

THE NUTRITION SOCIETY

REGISTER

OF

REGISTERED NUTRITIONISTS,

REGISTERED PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITIONISTS,

ASSOCIATE NUTRITIONISTS

AND

ASSOCIATE PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITIONISTS

2000 / 2001

Registered Company No. 1274585
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The Companies Act 1985 and 1989
Company limited by guarantee and not having any share capital

Printed May 2001

The Nutrition Society Register 2000/2001

Transfer of the IOB register

Meanwhile the IOB register remained in existence but was still proving to be unsatisfactory in terms of its profile and appeal to potential registrants. Following an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Nutrition Society in June 1997, the Society had voted to establish its own register of nutritionists. Eventually, in 1999, after closure of the IOB Register, the IOB Register's Accredited Nutritionists were invited to transfer to the Society's new register, provided they became Nutrition Society members (see figure to the left). A new replacement title, Registered Nutritionist was adopted, with designatory letters RNutr. Transfer to the specialist category Public Health Nutritionist (designatory letters RPHNutr) required evidence of additional specialist competency (see below).

Registration requirements

The entry requirements for the new Register at its launch were summarised as follows by Buttriss & Landman (2000):

Registration in Nutrition requires:

- Academic qualification – a university degree in nutrition (or a related subject)
- Three years of relevant experience
- Three professional/academic referees
- Membership of the Nutrition Society
- Confers the title Registered Nutritionist (RNutr), which has to be renewed annually.

Registration in Public Health Nutrition requires:

- Academic qualifications – a university degree in public health nutrition, human nutrition or dietetics (or a closely related subject)
- Three years of relevant experience in public health nutrition in the past 5 years (a longer period of experience may be necessary for those with degrees other than those specified above)
- Two professional/academic referees
- Membership of the Nutrition Society
- Confers the title Registered Public Health Nutritionist (RPHNutr)*, which has to be renewed annually.

NB: * over time, RPHNutr became RNutr(public health)

Criteria for retrospective registration were also put in place to enable 'grandparenting' of, for example, individuals whose career in nutrition had followed a different route but who had nevertheless acquired substantial expertise in the subject over a number of years.

By this time, several committees had been established focussing on registration and course accreditation, both of which still exist under the auspices of the Association for Nutrition (AfN). I was a Member of the Nutrition Society's Registration Committee from 1998-2007, which established and refined the criteria for admission to the Register and assessed applications against these. In the early days, this was chaired by Professor Tony Leeds from Kings College London.

In 2002, to support the professional careers of recent graduates, an Associate Nutritionist category (ANutr, APHNutr) was introduced for appropriately qualified nutrition graduates who had yet to achieve at least 3 years of professional experience post graduation (7).

In 2002, to support the professional careers of recent graduates, an Associate Nutritionist category (ANutr, APHNutr) was introduced

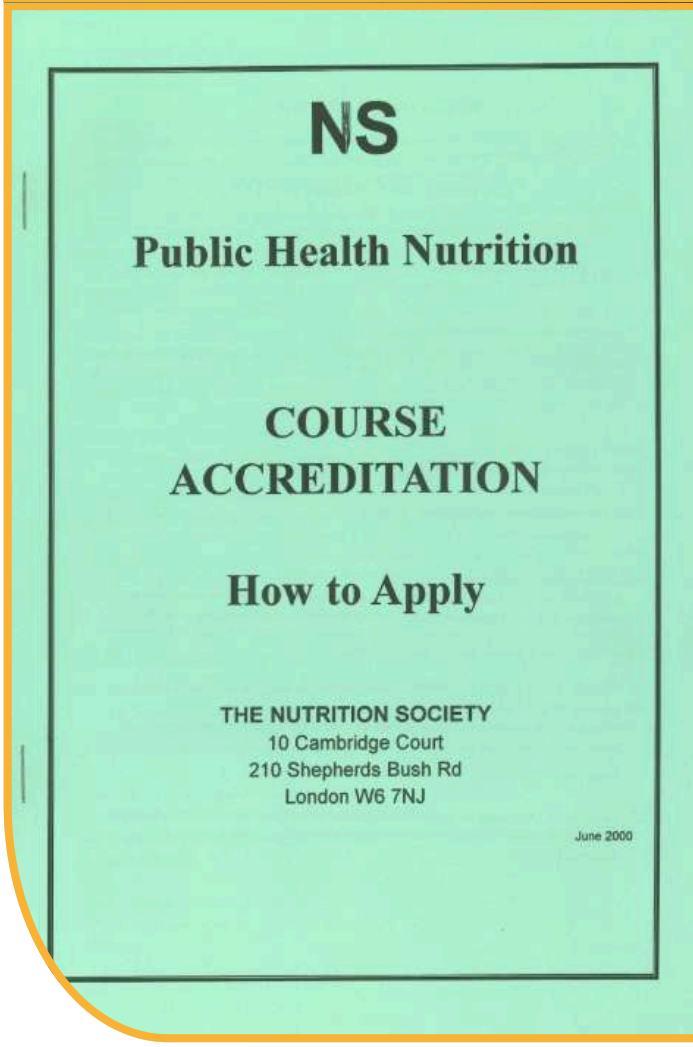
As so often happens, establishing the Nutrition Society's Registers and course accreditation processes relied heavily on the drive and commitment of Honorary Officers and the sustained efforts of a small group of volunteers who contributed via working groups and committees. These groups and committees were ably supported for a while by Dr David Buss, who worked as a volunteer with the Society after his retirement from MAFF – a lovely man who sadly died before his time. I think it was during David's time that Dr Jackie Landman also became involved in the practicalities, and she subsequently provided a huge amount of support and expertise for the Registration and Accreditation Committees as the Society's Registrar, and for Nutrition Society members seeking registration.

Accreditation of degree courses in nutrition

Building on the work of the Society's Public Health Nutrition Development Group, the process of accrediting public health nutrition courses (as opposed to registration of individuals) began in 1999 (7).

The work of the Course Accreditation Committee, which I chaired during the period 2002-2007, initially focused on courses in public health nutrition specifically but was later expanded around 2005 to establish core competences for human nutrition courses and, in due course, several nutrition specialisms received attention such as sport and exercise nutrition (2). (See figure to the right)

Public Health Nutrition - How to Apply for Course Accreditation



NS

Public Health Nutrition

COURSE ACCREDITATION

How to Apply

THE NUTRITION SOCIETY
10 Cambridge Court
210 Shepherds Bush Rd
London W6 7NJ

June 2000

The Committee took responsibility for establishing core competences for nutrition courses that would facilitate fast track (direct) entry to the Register. Graduates with at least 3 years of directly relevant experience following graduation from accredited courses could apply via the Registration Committee for Registered Nutritionist (RNutr/RPHNutr) status and new graduates from accredited courses could apply to be fast tracked to Associate Nutritionist (ANutr/ APHNutr) status.

A portfolio application route was established for graduates from unaccredited courses. Establishing the core competences required a considerable amount of detailed work and the group, which largely comprised course leaders from UK based graduate programmes, was supported by the Registrar, Dr Jackie Landman.

What triggered the decision to expand the accreditation process beyond public health nutrition courses?

In the 1970s, when I was an undergraduate, there were just two undergraduate university honours degree programmes in human nutrition in England– at University of Surrey and Queen Elizabeth College London but by 2003 there were 42 academic departments within the UK, responsible for 258 awards at undergraduate level that included 'nutrition' in their title (7). However, it was suspected that only a fraction of these would offer comprehensive training in the subject.

As well as posing a risk to the public looking for evidence-based and sound nutrition advice, this situation made it extremely difficult for employers and health colleagues to quickly distinguish high quality courses from those offering a more general training.

In light of the rapid expansion in nutrition degree programmes, a joint working party of the Nutrition Society and the Association for Professors of Human Nutrition proposed in 2003 that the Society should accredit courses in nutrition, as well as accrediting courses in public health nutrition, which had already begun in 1999 (7). Following a pilot study, course accreditation was extended to courses that met the Society's new standards of education in nutrition. By June 2006, twenty-four courses had been accredited.

As the Register grew in public profile and in size in the new millennium, the Society started to receive occasional complaints about individual registrants

As the Register grew in public profile and in size in the new millennium, the Society started to receive occasional complaints about individual registrants (7). There was thus a need to offer more guidance on professional conduct than that in the brief code of ethics introduced at the inception of the Society's register, so that registrants and the public knew what to expect. The first statement of professional conduct was published by the Nutrition Society in 2003, signalling clearly that oversight of professional standards protects the public, the hallmark of all modern professions, as well as protecting and promoting professional standards.

Over time, the governance of the Society's registration procedures continued to develop and in 2005, the first Nutrition Society Fitness to Practise hearing took place. The first scheme for continuing professional development formally began in July 2006 (7).

I resigned from the registration and accreditation committees in 2007 when I was appointed Director General at the British Nutrition Foundation, but re-engaged (with AfN) as a Trustee in 2012-2016. I have been a member of the Nutrition Society register since its inception in 1997 (and before that appeared on the IOB register). When AfN fellowships were first introduced, I successfully applied and subsequently served as a member of the Fellows Nomination Committee, which managed fellowship applications, for a number of years.

Although I stepped down as an AfN Trustee in 2016, I supported AfN, both in writing and in person at meetings in Whitehall, in its petition to the Privy Council for a Royal Charter.

Building bridges

I was also a member of the Nutrition Society's Professional Development Committee (later Professional Affairs Committee) (from 2000-2007). One of our areas of work was to pursue and maintain a strong working relationship between The Nutrition Society and other organisations such as the British Dietetic Association. This work helped pave the way for the Academy of Nutrition Sciences, a collaboration between the Association for Nutrition (AfN), British Dietetic Association, British Nutrition Foundation and Nutrition Society that became a registered charity in 2019 and of which I am proud to be a Trustee and the current Chair.

But development of the thinking around public health nutrition was not without its challenges and, as a member of a small group representing the Nutrition Society Council, I recall several difficult and sometimes heated discussions with senior figures from the BDA membership. Perhaps not surprisingly, a small minority of dietitians saw the emergence of the role of 'public health nutritionist' as direct competition for jobs in their non-clinical territory. Of course, this perceived threat must be seen in context. This was an era when community dietetics was developing rapidly, as an extension of the traditional hospital clinically focused roles that had predominated prior to the 1980s, alongside development of health promotion/ nutrition education roles (in the wake of The Health of the Nation white paper); roles that didn't necessarily require specialist dietetic expertise. To address this, collaborative work was undertaken on behalf of the Nutrition Society and BDA to map out the differences and similarities between roles (see Landman, Buttriss & Margetts 1998). This process also teased out potential opportunities available for eligible graduates working in community dietetic health promotion roles.

Discussions were also initiated with the Irish dietetic organisation; Mike Gibney invited Barrie Margetts, me and Bob Wenlock to participate in a meeting in Dublin to share the work the Society had been doing and to inform discussions being initiated in Ireland.

Looking to the future and learning from the past

> Given the initial focus of the Nutrition Society's initiative on public health nutrition, it is perhaps no surprise that the majority of applications to the Register in the early days were from nutritionists (some of whom also had qualifications in dietetics) working in public health roles

Given the initial focus of the Nutrition Society's initiative on public health nutrition, it is perhaps no surprise that the majority of applications to the Register in the early days were from nutritionists (some of whom also had qualifications in dietetics) working in public health roles. I imagine that the opportunity afforded by registration would be particularly attractive to those outside academia working in public-facing roles, often single handedly or in very small teams. Such individuals may well have lacked the type of support and mentoring available from being part of research or teaching teams in academia and were more likely to find themselves competing for jobs in situations where employers were less familiar with appropriate training routes in nutrition science or having to justify their advice in a context where individuals, with very limited formal training in the subject, purport, or are assumed, to be competent sources of advice. Nevertheless, over the years with gentle encouragement, senior figures across the Nutrition Society have shown leadership to their students and/or teams and applied for registration, even if the direct benefits were less tangible to them and their established careers.

In my view, the Nutrition Society's efforts to formalise voluntary registration and the accreditation of quality nutrition courses was triggered by the combination of the Society's response to the call to action from Professor John Waterlow in 1980 and the change in health strategy by the government in 1992, heralding the need for public health nutrition expertise for its delivery.

In my view, the Nutrition Society's efforts to formalise voluntary registration and the accreditation of quality nutrition courses was triggered by the combination of the Society's response to the call to action from Professor John Waterlow in 1980 and the change in health strategy by the government in 1992

In an article written in 2000, Dr Jackie Landman and I posed the question "Who will benefit?" from the Society's initiative. We began by focussing on efforts to define public health nutrition roles, which went hand in hand with the identification of competences. At that time, public health nutritionists were found to work in many settings, including health commissions, trusts or authorities involved in nutrition-related health promotion; health/ medical/scientific organisations with a major involvement in public health nutrition; consumer or public interest organisations concerned with public health nutrition; food industry or trade associations; government departments and related bodies; university academic departments undertaking research or training in public health nutrition.

In many cases, there may have been only one or a small number of nutritionists working in a particular setting, and the Society's initiative provided a forum for networking and a mechanism for establishing formal professional linkages.

The initiative also served to promote recognition of the particular mix of skills represented by public health nutrition, which benefits both employees and employers trying to identify suitable personnel.

The public have also benefitted through the introduction of a mechanism to help in the identification of nutritionists who have undergone a rigorous period of academic training, for three or more years (typically in human nutrition or in dietetics), underpinned by a strong biosciences component and a belief in the adoption of an evidence-based approach, and have a minimum of 3 years relevant experience.

Since the 1990s, registration in nutrition, the title Registered Nutritionist and the post nominal RNutr has provided a means to characterise the set of skills and competences acquired through degree level training in nutrition science and its practice

So, the journey towards professionalisation, articulated by Prof John Waterlow, was already well underway as the new century dawned. But less progress was being made to address the growing concern about the quality of advice available from some of the self-styled "nutritionists" who had not undergone the rigorous scientific training in nutrition science referred to above. This concern was already recognised in the 1990s in the work programme established by the government's Nutrition Task Force, and was further emphasised more than 20 years ago by the joint working party of the Association of Professors of Human Nutrition and the Nutrition Society. Then and increasingly now, such individuals proffer advice via a plethora of high-profile wide-reaching routes, including books, magazines and newspapers, social media and blogs, television and radio, and also personally through consultations with clients. The concern was, and still is, that members of the public following such advice are potentially at risk of being the recipient of misinformation that might do more harm than good, and at the very least, may cause them unnecessary expense and concern.

Since the 1990s, registration in nutrition, the title Registered Nutritionist and the post nominal RNutr has provided a means to characterise the set of skills and competences acquired through degree level training in nutrition science and its practice (over a minimum of three years). The title has been used for a number of purposes, including as a signpost to help individuals navigate the plethora of information and advice on offer about nutrition. The Register (now known as the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists; UKVRN) was transferred to AfN in 2010, an organisation created to oversee the Register. AfN is now the body looked to by the UK nutrition science community to promote high standards in training and practice and to foster professionalism.

As we beavered away, in the 1990s and 2000s, developing the competences and processes for registration and accreditation, it was already clear that protection of title was the ultimate essential aim, with tangible benefits for the public, employers and the profession itself.

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Leonie Milliner

AfN Chief Executive 2011 - 2019

Appointment

17th January 2011: It was raining. Great sheets of it, billowing across Bedford Square, tree branches snapping; leaves whirling. I was soaking wet; my shoes, tights, the hem of my skirt, the shoulders of my coat drenched in the dash from the tube to the WCRF's offices, where the interview panel awaited in the grand first-floor sitting room, now a converted meeting room. The panel (Professor Alan Jackson, Professor Anne de Looy and Peter Baker (Chief Executive of the Men's Health Forum)) sat in a row, their backs to the floor-length sash windows. I sat opposite, facing the panel and the rain outside. My first observation was that none were wearing shoes. Like me, they had been caught in the rain, and the pervading sense of humanity, of being questioned about my proposed leadership of this embryonic voluntary regulator by a panel who also had wet feet, and were confident enough to discard their footwear and let their socks dry out whilst interviewing, was the first indication that this was an organisation, and a Council, I could work with.

The second indication was the humble curiosity of Dr. Martin Wiseman, then the AfN's Honorary Treasurer, in the second part of the selection process, a bilateral conversation about the AfN's finances.

I had done sufficient research prior to applying for the role to understand the precarious nature of the finances of the regulator I was being asked to lead; its dependency on a grant funding from Department of Health (soon to become Public Health England); an annual subvention from the Nutrition Society, the profession's learned body, and the benefits accrued from a successful application to the Department of Health Third Sector Investment Programme (TSIP). This three year fully funded project aimed to 'Improve the capability, confidence, and competence in nutrition across the workforce.'

It was of significant strategic importance, giving the AfN the authority to develop, consult and introduce standards for the wider health and social care workforce who carried responsibility for providing accurate, scientifically sound and effective nutrition advice to individuals and families. I was delighted to launch the TSIP project's final report 'The Workforce Competence Model in Nutrition' at the Royal Society in 2012, and the standards introduced at the time remain the benchmark for the AfN's important work setting standards for the wider nutrition workforce today.

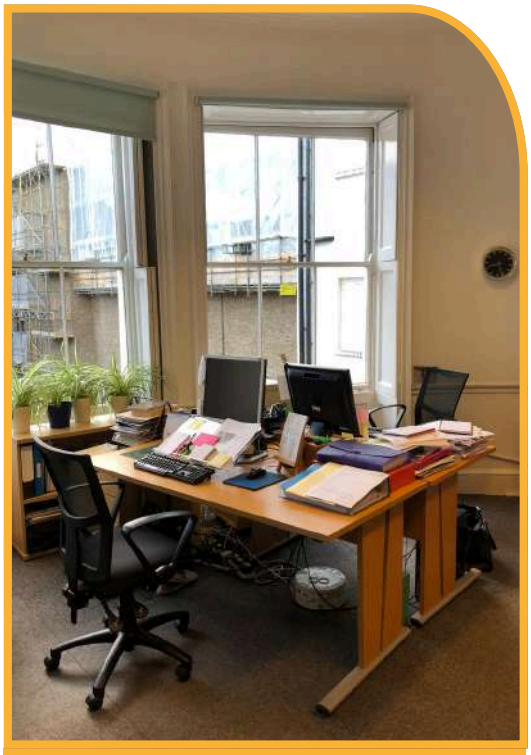
What was the appetite for a profession cohered around demonstrating the public benefit of nutrition science for self-regulation?

On that rain-filled afternoon in January 2011, Martin and I discussed a number of areas critical to the Association's success. Long term-financial stability would depend on reducing dependence on grant funding; and that would only be possible by realising register growth. Register growth depended on securing the confidence of stakeholders in our ability to cohere loosely affiliated groups of nutrition scientists to a common set of professional values, behaviours and standards, under a unified title. It would depend on our ability to regulate fairly and cost-effectively, and to demonstrate the benefits of regulation to the public and profession, and it was this that I discussed with Martin at the interview. What was the appetite for a profession cohered around demonstrating the public benefit of nutrition science for self-regulation? What was the relationship with the universities like? How strong was the pipeline of future talent? What were the business risks around delivering its broader ambitions to improve the capability of the wider health and social care workforce in nutrition, and how to match that ambition with the resource available? How would voluntary regulation proportionately target the risk posed by registered nutritionists to the dietary health of the nation? And finally, what was the Board's view on the capacity and capability of the staff team? It was a conversation that gave me confidence that my values and professional expertise aligned with that of the Council, and so I accepted the role as Chief Executive, commencing as CEO designate on 1st March 2011 and stepping fully into the role on 1st April 2011.

What was the relationship with the universities like? How strong was the pipeline of future talent?

AfN's offices

Portland Place was a prestigious address for the Association's offices. Designed in the 1770s by Robert and James Adam, it is a wide, tree lined thoroughfare connecting Regent Street to Regent's Park.



28 Portland Place offices

The AfN's offices were at 28 Portland Place, directly opposite the headquarters Nursing and Midwifery Council, in a distinguished Robert-Adam designed terraced house that had been converted into offices and meeting rooms (see figure to the left), retaining many original features. Portland Place was home to many professional and statutory bodies, including that of my former employer, the Royal Institute of British Architects. 28 Portland Place was at that time owned by the Royal Society of Public Health (RSPH), with whom we had a very productive working relationship. Other tenants in the building included SANDS; the neonatal and stillbirth charity, the British Medical Ultrasound Society (BMUS) and several other smaller public health charities.

Over time, as our turnover and staffing increased, we took a larger footprint in the building and the number of other tenants decreased. At our Annual General Meeting (AGM) in November 2011 we named the second floor reading room (figure below), after Professor John Waterlow CMG FRS, the Association's inaugural patron who died shortly after the Association's launch on 21 June 2010. It was my favourite room in the building, retaining its graceful proportions, including a curved Georgian window overlooking the rarely seen jumble of mews and backstreets behind Portland Place.

Second floor reading room named after Professor John Waterlow CMG FRS

Early Challenges

It was a great privilege to lead the formation of a new regulator at such a critical juncture. At the outset its success was uncertain, and it was only because

of the significant volunteer commitment of a small number of founding Registrants that the organisation was able to navigate early challenges with confidence.

It was an utter delight working with Alan. He combined ambition for the Association's success with a clarity of intent and intellectual rigour in pursuit of our charitable purpose

Two people were key to capturing early successes. The first was Professor Alan Jackson CBE, the AfN's founding President and Chair of the Association until December 2015. It was an utter delight working with Alan. He combined ambition for the Association's success with a clarity of intent and intellectual rigour in pursuit of our charitable purpose. He was a type of Chair one rarely encounters. He listened carefully. He asked one or two well-judged questions that would pivot and strengthen our approach to a particular business issue or policy problem. And that was sufficient to enable me and the Council to set the right course.

We benefited hugely from Professor Alan Jackson's global web of connections. He was an eminent clinician who had been appointed as the first Chair of Human Nutrition at the University of Southampton. His longstanding support for voluntary regulation in nutrition stemmed from John Waterlow's Boyd Orr lecture in 1980, which had called for the professionalisation of the practice of nutrition and effective discharge of responsibilities in its application in service to society. We frequently discussed this critical moment in the context of the founding of AfN, which drove Alan's engagement with us.

Tensions were emerging as Government, local authorities and the health service, businesses, especially in those operating in the sports and fitness, food retail, manufacturing, restaurant and catering sectors, and individuals and families were becoming increasingly reliant on the translation of nutrition science into its practical application determining the relationship between food choice, diet and health. This in turn generated the need for the development professional standards to mitigate risks to the public from poor or inadequate advice; and to inform the formation of nutrition professionals as a distinct cadre of practising professionals within the public health, care and food-science workforce, with a visible career path.

In the discharge of his responsibilities as President of the Association, Professor Alan Jackson drew heavily upon the expertise of Dr Martin Wiseman, another distinguished clinician who had formally led the nutrition group within the Department of Health. Martin served as the Association's Honorary Treasurer until 2015, succeeded by the equally brilliant Professor Alan Dangour. I recall with huge fondness my regular 8.15am briefing meetings at our Portland Place offices, first with Martin and then with Alan (both of us arriving on our bicycles, with tales to tell!) The Association's finances were not hard to fix.

It just required some diligent detective work in the early days to establish a credible budget and five-year forecast. (My predecessor had liked to pay suppliers delivering cheques by hand to their individual offices across London. I remember a morning spent with our newly appointed finance manager, Mary Wallbank, going through the cheque stubs and bank statements to double check we had accounted for all our suppliers and expenses.) I am pleased to report that for each of the eight years of tenure as Chief Executive income targets were regularly exceeded, costs were carefully controlled, and we regularly returned a surplus on our charitable activities; demonstrating to our stakeholders, as we grew, that we were a financially viable organisation. This surplus was then returned each year to our reserves, which then helped offset any future unforeseen contingencies.

One of the first tasks Martin and I put our minds to back in 2011 was the formation of a reserves policy, which was particularly important given the restricted nature of some of our funding relating to the Department of Health funded TSIP project. We then turned our attention to consolidating register growth, and that work relied on two people; Professor Janet Cade, the longstanding Chair of the Registration Committee; and Professor Julie Lovegrove, who chaired Accreditation Committee from December 2012, before being appointed deputy Chair of Council.

The Register and path to statutory regulation

When I arrived at the AfN I found at its heart a robust and fully functioning voluntary register of nutritionists operating with reach and authority; the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN). The UK had been fortunate for some time in having a body of well qualified and well-regarded nutritionists whose work impacted nutrition practise both nationally and internationally. This register had been held in an embryonic form by the Nutrition Society for some years before it was transferred in 2010 to the Association.

The first task was technical; to integrate both registers into a single entity that was searchable on our new website (always harder than anticipated!) and held accurate information about our registrants and their qualifications

At that point it was, in effect, two registers; a register of public health nutritionists, with registrants using the professional title 'Registered Public Health Nutritionist (RPHNutr); and a register of nutritionists (Registered Nutritionists) with professional scopes of practice spanning sports and exercise; animal nutrition; food and nutrition science.

The first task was technical; to integrate both registers into a single entity that was searchable on our new website (always harder than anticipated!) and held accurate information about our registrants and their qualifications.

The second was to restructure the register into a coherent offer, supported by clearly defined, rigorously applied standards of competence. Under the guidance of Professor Janet Cade and with the assistance of Alison Douglas, the Association's very capable Registration Manager, we rapidly developed, consulted upon, and introduced a single unified title, 'Registered Nutritionist', which was launched on 31 July 2012, alongside new competency requirements for each of the five specialist register categories: Animal; Food; Nutrition Science; Public Health; and Sports and Exercise nutrition.

Under the guidance of Professor Janet Cade and with the assistance of Alison Douglas, the Association's very capable Registration Manager, we rapidly developed, consulted upon, and introduced a single unified title, 'Registered Nutritionist', which was launched on 31 July 2012

This was a moment of celebration. Now the public, Government, employers and clients could be confident in the skills and competency of Registered Nutritionists listed on our database; professionals who demonstrated extensive understanding of nutrition science and its application, underpinned by shared ethical standards described in a comprehensive code of conduct.

Critical to the success of the introduction of unified title was the creation of new fields in our database to enable searches by specialism and to improve the online details we held about registrants. We also published supporting documentation to accompany the new competency requirements, including application competency mapping forms, assessment forms and guidance documents. Most importantly we developed new marketing materials, including leaflets distributed at multiple public-facing events, conferences and talks so that we could better communicate the benefits of a well-regulated profession to our target audience, as well as developing our social media platforms and revising and updating our own website. We identified media trained registrants who helped us raise the profile of Registered Nutritionists right across the UK. We also took this opportunity to update our logo and corporate identity, issuing secure, well-designed annual registration certificates to each of our registrants on renewal, and a logo to be used by registrants so that registrants could demonstrate to individuals, families, clients and their employers their professional status. An important innovation was the launch of an exclusive professional indemnity scheme for registrants with the insurance company Hiscox, brokered by Charles Milne and Co.

Following the introduction of unified title in July 2012, registrants were able to use the letters RNutr after their name to designate their professional status, with their associated specialism indicated in brackets. Associate Nutritionists, nutrition science graduates working towards full registration, could use the designation ANutr.

This was a very important step forward in facilitating the promotion of the skills of registered nutritionists to employers, the public and the wider workforce, protecting the public from unsafe practice. When visiting registrants in their workplace I took great satisfaction in seeing AfN registration certificates proudly displayed in frames on desks and office walls; and on social media when an Associate Nutritionist achieved their full RNutr registration status, smiling broadly at their newly arrived certificate.

Leonie at an exhibition 2003

Communicating regularly and clearly with registrants was a priority. In May 2011, I launched our monthly e-newsletter to registrants, alongside a registrant-only section of the new website. One of my most enjoyable tasks was writing each month the foreword to our registrant e-newsletter; an email packed with information, course listings, job opportunities and advice. I also had great pleasure in attending Nutrition Society meetings; giving talks at universities, science fairs, schools and careers fairs; to other professional societies, such as the AMRC; RSPH and RCGP; to DHSC; and to national and international conferences and events, on the benefits of voluntary regulation to the public and the profession, as well as authoring many articles in sector-specific journals and magazines (see figure to the left).

Alongside this work I was keen to develop a network of national and regional representatives, Registered Nutritionists who could volunteer at a national and regional general level to organise local meetings, CPD events, and attend school career fairs, conferences and briefings, as well as arrange work placements and respond to local media requests on behalf of AfN. I was delighted that the profession rose quickly to the challenge and I really enjoyed my close working relationships with each volunteer national and regional representative during my tenure as Chief Executive. We developed a briefing note which described the role of regional representatives and feedback was sought from registrants via the e-mail newsletter on desired activities and potential for deepening the regional networks' local impact. There was an unexpected benefit to this work; it had the consequential effect of providing a pipeline of future assessors, Committee members and Council, and helped accelerate regional representatives' leadership and media profiles, locally and nationally.

Register operations continued to be strengthened; in September 2017 we published new 'Registration rules for the competence, eligibility and procedures for UKVRN registration.' A key part of these new rules was an additional route to registration as a registered nutritionist for those experienced graduates in nutrition science with a minimum of 10 years continuous work experience and evidence-based nutrition practice, called Experience in Evidence Based Nutrition.

We also developed robust arrangements for resolving concerns about Registrants' fitness to practise; as well as a thriving Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Endorsement scheme which recognised a variety of learning activities that met verified standards for CPD Endorsement, and provided high quality professional-level training and education aimed at maintaining and advancing Registrants' knowledge, skills and experience, such as conferences, workshops and webinars. We worked hard to ensure all AfN endorsed CPD was recognisable, with a unique numbered logo, listing approved events on our website, e-newsletter and on social media. We knew, however, that we needed to improve our monitoring of Registrants' compliance with our CPD requirements. In 2016, following a public consultation, we introduced a three-year cycle of CPD recording and monitoring, with Registered Nutritionists expected to undertake a range of CPD activities evidenced in a reflective portfolio, equivalent to approximately 30 learning hours a year or 90 learning hours over the three-year cycle. To provide assurance, we commenced a process of random sampling of Registrants' reflective portfolios.

In 2016, following a public consultation, we introduced a three-year cycle of CPD recording and monitoring, with Registered Nutritionists expected to undertake a range of CPD activities evidenced in a reflective portfolio, equivalent to approximately 30 learning hours a year or 90 learning hours over the three-year cycle

Recalling those early conversations with Dr Martin Wiseman about the criticality of register growth in securing AfN's success, I was really pleased to note that in my eight-year tenure as Chief Executive, the register more than doubled in size, growing by over 120%, demonstrating the confidence of the profession and stakeholders more broadly had in our ability to regulate proportionately and fairly. Our continued investment in the development and promotion of the UKVRN and its efficient management for the benefit of the public was designed to secure our strategic aim; statutory regulation, an aim I was firmly focused on.

A key question I was grappling with was how to learn the lessons from the statutory regulation of other professional and occupational groups, namely that statutory protection of title is often insufficient to reduce the risk posed by unqualified individuals operating at the economic margins of a profession.

Statutory protection works best when it reduces the risk of harm to the public. Protection of the professional title 'nutritionist' but not the practice of nutrition (the production, translation and use of nutrition science for public benefit) could potentially expose the public to harm through the use of alternative titles such as 'nutrition advisor.' My advice to Council and the profession was therefore to seek statutory protection not just of title but also of function. My paper articulated three additional considerations; the integration with dietetics and the potential regulatory overlap between the two fields; the regulation of the wider non-professional workforce and their role in supporting individual and family food choice; and the relationship between Registered Nutritionists and those working in the field whose practice might not be considered sufficiently scientifically sound and who may also present a risk to the public.

The paper informed discussions at national and regional level and with the government and set us on a clear path to applying for Chartered status.

University course accreditation

The new competency requirements for UKVRN registration also underpinned the development of our role in higher education course accreditation. When I became Chief Executive in 2011, we had 19 approved undergraduate programmes and 10 postgraduate programmes, all in the UK. Nutrition science was a rapidly growing discipline in the university sector; it was popular with students, and Vice Chancellors saw nutrition-related undergraduate and post graduate programmes as an attractive proposition. By 2019 we had approved over 80 degree and post-graduate level programmes; including three overseas.

The new competency requirements for UKVRN registration also underpinned the development of our role in higher education course accreditation

It was this area of the Association's operations that gave me most satisfaction, for, alongside my role as AfN Chief Executive, I occupied an non-executive role first as member, and then chair, of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) accreditation panel, a post I held for ten years, as well as serving as a lay member of CILEx Education Committee, and as a member of the HEFCE Teaching Excellence Framework Panel (TEF). I was able to bring much of my extensive experience of higher education and its quality assurance to the AfN and in particular the development of higher education course accreditation.

Working very closely with Professor Julie Lovegrove and the Association's energetic volunteer Accreditation Committee, we worked hard to sharpen our standards and systems for programme approval.

We developed new standards and procedures to describe how we accredited undergraduate and postgraduate courses, which we published in September 2016. These procedures described the expected context for the delivery of education and training, and included revised procedures for the receipt and assessment of applications from course providers for accreditation, including submission requirements, annual review and appeals. I really enjoyed the process of drafting and revising this suite of documentation, the development and approval of which represented at the time a significant step forward in the robustness of our offering to universities, and in our stakeholders' confidence in our ability to manage applications and appeals.

As with AfN endorsed CPD, AfN accredited programmes were able to use a unique numbered AfN logo, which gave the public and the profession confidence that graduates would have that the right knowledge and understanding of the scientific basis of nutrition and understanding of professional conduct, including the AfN's standards of ethics and professional conduct. To support our ambitions in this area, we recruited and trained a new cadre of accreditation assessors, and I remember, with fondness, leading our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training for the first time for all our assessors to reduce bias in decision-making.

AfN Fellowship

Very early conversations with the then AfN President, Professor Alan Jackson, and AfN Honorary Treasurer Dr Martin Wiseman centred on how to recognise the sustained and ongoing contribution of Registered Nutritionists working at a national or international level through the award of Fellowship.

In June 2011, Council agreed to establish a Fellows Nomination Committee, chaired by the AfN President, and I drafted the criteria and application process for the award of Fellowship, which was quickly approved by Council

In June 2011, Council agreed to establish a Fellows Nomination Committee, chaired by the AfN President, and I drafted the criteria and application process for the award of Fellowship, which was quickly approved by Council. Fellowship was launched in September 2011, and, at Council in December 2011, the first four nominations for Fellowship were approved. By the 31st March, 2012 there were six Fellows, all of whom were early advocates of professional regulation for nutritionists and who had invested significant volunteer time and effort to the establishment of the AfN. The number of Fellows continued to grow each year, and one of my most joyful responsibilities as Chief Executive was handing our new Fellows their certificates at each year's Annual General Meeting and thanking them for their contribution to the advancement of the profession.

In September 2012 we launched the Honorary Fellowship. I designed Honorary Fellowship to recognise distinguished individuals who had made an outstanding contribution to nutrition in its broadest sense; its science, promotion, and administration; its role in promoting healthy individuals and communities; its growing professionalism and its role in the education of the public and of future nutritionists. This was intended to be a lifetime honour, allowing recipients to use the title of HonFAfN after their name.

I feel a huge debt of gratitude to those awarded a Founding Fellowship, for each had had a profound impact on the development of the Association; and, with it, the course of my career

Council also agreed to my proposal to award a Founding Fellowship to individuals who had given significant and sustained service to the establishment of the Association. This one-off lifetime award allowed recipients to use the initials FFAfN after their name. I feel a huge debt of gratitude to those awarded a Founding Fellowship, for each had had a profound impact on the development of the Association; and, with it, the course of my career. I treasured my working relationship with each and every Fellow and Founding Fellow, but most particularly the support and challenge offered by Dr Alison Tedstone, then the Government's Chief Nutritionist, and now President and Chair of the Association, who I often described as the profession's greatest asset; Dr Jackie Landman, whose influence was far-reaching in relation to our work to set standards for the wider nutrition workforce; and Dr Louis Levy, who at that time worked in the diet and nutrition team at Public Health England, and was instrumental in guiding future registrants through the portfolio route to full registration. Louis worked with me to both onboard and develop our team of portfolio assessors as well as streamline and update our register assessment processes.

We awarded the first Fellowships, Founding Fellowships and Honorary Fellowships at our Annual General Meeting on the 4th of December 2012, held at our offices at Portland Place. We spent time thinking about how to organise such an event so that it felt inclusive and celebratory. It was masterfully organised by the team, led by our very experienced marketing and communications executive, Alice Cameron, and captured a real sense of achievement. We had successfully navigated our first year of operations; our finances were on track; our registrants engaged; Government was listening; we held the trust and confidence of our stakeholders; and our impact was growing. We were perfectly positioned, for on the horizon was the Public Health Act which launched Public Health England, with its renewed focus on the relationship between diet and nutrition, non-communicable disease and the nation's health; local authorities were assuming new responsibility for public health; the Carbohydrates and Health report, and the consequential introduction of the sugar

tax were on the starting blocks; as was Jamie Oliver's school meals campaign. The Professional Standards Authority had just published its first iteration of 'Right Touch Regulation,' and the Law Commission was working on its report on the regulation of HealthCare Professionals in England, which it published in 2014. We had captured the zeitgeist; and the future couldn't look more promising.

Annual Discourse

I was determined to build on the sense of community so evident at our December 2012 AGM and provide a forum to discuss the relationship between the responsibilities carried by Registered Nutritionists in relation to their professional practice, and their accountability to their peers and to society more broadly.

Annual Discourse December 2013

The inaugural Annual Discourse (see figure above) was held in December 2013 at our offices in Portland Place. Concerns were expressed by the Nutrition Society's observer to our Council meetings that we might be offering an alternative to the scientific discourse offered by the Nutrition Society's meetings. However, this was quite a different type of proposition; one with its roots in Waterlow's Boyd Orr lecture of 1980. My own professional formation also came to the fore, having trained as an architect and having worked for nearly a decade for the Royal Institute of British Architects, I was used to operating within a professional discipline that actively debated its purpose, and how it delivered public benefit, in the context of a carefully considered ethical framework and with professional accountability assured through statutory regulation. I wanted to provide a forum where registrants could reflect on their professional practice within the context of voluntary regulation for public benefit. And so I launched our Annual Discourse, with an invited audience of stakeholders, professionals and public, which illustrated the contribution of registered nutritionists to improving the nutritional health of the nation. I am pleased to note this work continues today as an annual conversation around the positive impact of Registered Nutritionists.

Points of stress, and lessons learned

An early challenge was to stabilise the Association's governance. A successful application to the Charity Commission resulted in charitable status on 28 June 2010, alongside its registration as a company limited by guarantee.

This had the practical effect of focusing the Council and the executive on the Association's public benefit and impact. Although reliant on registrant subscriptions; we were not a membership body. AfN existed to;

1. to promote the health of the public by the promotion and maintenance of high standards of practice among and the regulation of nutritionists;
2. to advance the study and practice of nutritional science and medicine; and
3. to advance the education of the public and promote search for public benefit in the field of nutrition health and allied subjects.

In 2015-16 we sought to enhance our governance through the drafting and approval of new Governance Rules, schemes of delegation and updated terms of reference for the Association's suite of committees, which were approved in June 2016.

Here, I must mention the input of Professor Robert Welch from the University of Ulster, Coleraine, a stalwart member of Council and AfN trustee who chaired the 2015-16 governance review. He and I worked closely together to resolve some of our knotty governance issues; particularly around trustee elections and appointment; and he was unstinting in his support for our university course accreditation. His unexpected death affected everyone in the team. I was unable to attend his funeral due to a meeting with DHSC; but our colleague Jenna Quin was able to fly out to Coleraine on our behalf, and we were pleased to be able to mark his significant contribution to strengthening our governance and internal control environment at the following Council meeting with a short act of remembrance.

Crises create opportunities, and test governance processes. One such issue arose in 2014, when copies of our website content emerged on a website purporting to offer nutrition registration, which required the sustained intervention of the Advertising Standards Agency and a successful criminal prosecution by Norfolk Trading Standards. Although very stressful at the time, we benefited in the long term, as it caused our key stakeholders to rally in support of the UKVRN and its primacy, with key lessons learnt for the Association's Council about the need to be more confident in taking swift action when public protection issues emerge.

The summer of 2018 was spent drafting our memorandum to the Privy Council for an application for a Royal Charter in preparation for a formal petition for use of the protected title of 'Chartered Nutritionist,' which was submitted in April 2019 after a very supportive meeting with the Privy Council's Deputy Clerk, Ceri King. Our application included over fifty letters of support, testament to the strong regard others had of our work as a voluntary regulator.

The introduction of lay trustee members to Council was an issue I was very keen to progress, in order to bring additional perspectives and challenge to Council's decision making. Unremunerated, I was surprised by the level of interest in the roles, and, in 2015, Alan Jackson and I interviewed the first cohort of prospective candidates in the Reading Room at Portland Place. Dr David Gale, at that time a Director at the HE Quality Assurance Agency was a welcome early addition to Council. His insights were invaluable in the development of our internal audit arrangements, particularly in securing the accuracy of our register, and our relationships with universities. Barbara Saunders was also an excellent appointment, serving eventually as deputy chair of Council. Barbara brought insights from consumer affairs and significant regulatory experience.

Securing the skills of the wider workforce

Alongside our regulation of Registered and Associate Nutritionists, we also progressed a strategically important and complex set of projects to improve capacity, confidence and competence in nutrition across the wider health and social care workforce to guide food choice. The first phase of this project was funded by the Department of Health. Its aim was to establish competence frameworks and professional standards for those directly and indirectly involved in the delivery of nutritional advice within the health and social care sectors, at RQF levels 3, 4 and 5+ on the public health skills and career framework. It focused on frontline staff situated in the most deprived parts of the UK who delivered nutritional advice to individuals and families, those for whom nutrition was a primary aspect of their work, as well as those for whom nutrition might be an important but ancillary part of their role. In 2011 we scoped and drafted a Workforce Competence Model in Nutrition at RQF levels 3, 4, and 5+. We tested the model was accurate, valid and fit for purpose, commissioning workshops across England with the target workforces. It was a complex project ably led by Stephanie Radford and her team, and the final report was submitted to the Department in late 2012.

Alongside our regulation of Registered and Associate Nutritionists, we also progressed a strategically important and complex set of projects to improve capacity, confidence and competence in nutrition across the wider health and social care workforce to guide food choice

This work was soon expanded upon with further financial support from Public Health England in 2014-15 to develop new competence frameworks for the catering, leisure and fitness workforce, extending the impact of our existing Workforce Competence Model in Nutrition for health and social care. We progressed this work with significant input from stakeholders across both sectors and verified the proposed competence frameworks directly with the workforce, alongside public consultation.

Central to ensuring the new competence frameworks assisted all who worked or volunteered in fitness, leisure and catering who had a responsibility to use or offer nutrition information to become demonstrably more competent was the development of an associated quality assurance framework. I must acknowledge the contribution of Dr Jackie Landman and Dr Glenys Jones who brought insights and leadership to this work which significantly strengthened the credibility of the final output. The competence frameworks and our certification scheme provided focus, coherence and direction across each sector in reducing nutrition-related health inequalities and we were delighted when our work formed part of the evidence package published by Public Health England to support its 'Carbohydrates and Health' report in October 2015.

I was determined that all AfN certified course providers would be instantly recognisable to groups who may not be aware of their broader responsibilities for providing or using scientifically sound, effective nutrition advice

This was a key emergent business area for the Association: the certification of learning opportunities and resources for these different target workforces. I was determined that all AfN certified course providers would be instantly recognisable to groups who may not be aware of their broader responsibilities for providing or using scientifically sound, effective nutrition advice. AfN certified courses received a unique numbered logo which they could use in their marketing materials, as well as listing on our website and access to resources. Following publication of the frameworks, we worked hard to reach out to key employers, professional groups and training providers to demonstrate the impact of our work and secure the use of the frameworks to drive change.

Alongside our work to influence the wider nutrition workforce, we also worked hard to ensure that the medical community had the right clinical skills in nutrition. With Professor Alan Jackson and Dr Martin Wiseman, I was an active member of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges Nutrition Group which worked collaboratively with the medical royal colleges to set standards for the nutrition content of undergraduate medical education. Key to this piece of work was the development of a structured curriculum in nutrition which was approved by the General Medical Council for undergraduate medical schools, and we worked with the medical royal colleges to define guidance on nutritional care in specific areas of clinical specialisation in paediatrics and psychiatry. We were also part of the working group to develop the Intercollegiate Foundation course on human nutrition offered annually at three centres in the UK, in Scotland, Nottingham, and Southampton. I was also a member of the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) Nutrition Stakeholder Committee, and one of the key pieces of work we progressed there was authoring a nutrition stakeholder map for RCGP members signposting to relevant and trusted online nutrition training.

Moving on – March 2019

It was a huge privilege to lead the Association as its Chief Executive; to determine its strategic intent; mould its operations; build the team and advocate to government, the health service, businesses and registrants the strength, robustness and currency of our voluntary regulation that offered such clear public benefit. I particularly enjoyed our extensive parliamentary engagement; attending and speaking at committees in the House of Commons and House of Lords; and supporting the work of the various APPGs with an interest in nutrition.

Despite having no connections with the profession before I arrived (or so I thought!) I cared deeply for its work, for its very able staff team, committed trustees and members who drove our operations with such clarity and pace; and the positive impact of our vibrant and determined registrants; trusted, reliable evidence-based experts in nutrition science.

Despite having no connections with the profession before I arrived (or so I thought!) I cared deeply for its work

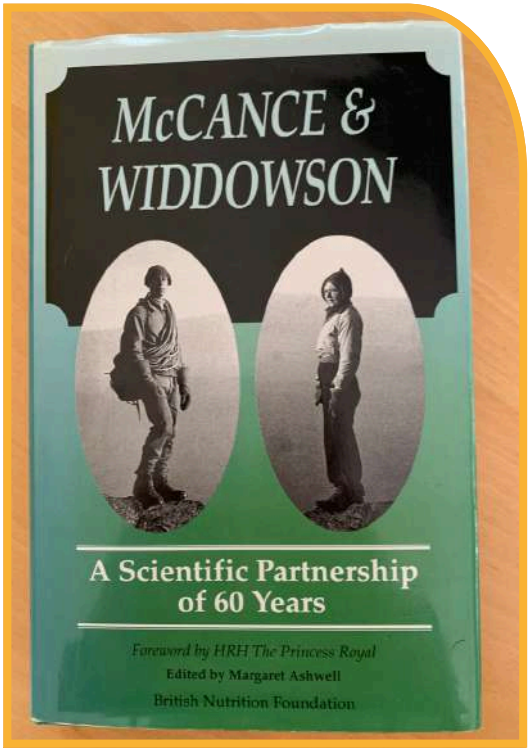
At the outset, it was not certain whether voluntary regulation would hold fast. Certainly, some critics of our ambition - to professionalise the discipline of nutrition science and hold its activities open to public accountability - were not confident we would succeed. From the moment I began preparing for my interview I was clear about our focus as the nutrition profession's independent regulator. Our strategic aim was statutory regulation, to ensure the public could easily identify credible, trusted nutrition professionals, and my work was focused on creating the conditions for its success, to enable the Association to step into that role with confidence should the opportunity arise.

At the heart of the profession remains a commitment to evidence-based science, underpinned by rigorously applied professional standards, and it is with immense pride that I look back on my work to cohere the disparate groups of scientists and public health professionals; vets and animal nutritionists; sports and exercise and food science experts that emerged in the maelstrom of post war Britain into a single professional group with a shared identity, shared ethical expectations, a shared commitment to articulating the contribution of a well-regulated profession to improving the nutritional health and wellbeing of the nation.

My work had a breadth, depth and intensity that was immensely satisfying. Leaving felt like grief. I went on to head-up as Chief Executive the statutory regulator for osteopaths, General Osteopathic Council (GoSC), moving in December 2019 to lead the General Optical Council (GOC), first as Director of Education, and for the past five years as its Chief Executive and Registrar.

My grounding in the early days of AfN set me up well for my early work at GOC, which was facing, at that time, many similar challenges to those of the Association in its early days.

During my time at the Association my children also grew with me: their school was close by, on nearby Harley Street, and they now look back with fondness at their early exposure to the workplace on the few occasions they came into the office; tidying the stationary cupboard; finishing off left over sandwiches.



Leonie's gift from Margaret

When I joined AfN I thought I had no connections with the nutrition profession. My mother-in-law's education had been disrupted by the war, and having left school at 16, she put herself through secretarial night school and obtained a position in Uganda as a medical secretary. For over twenty years she had spoken frequently to me about her work in Uganda and shown me photos of the mothers and babies in the clinics and wards in Kampala. However, in late 2015, our newly elected President, Dr Margaret Ashwell OBE, gave me a copy of the book she had written about the nutrition pioneers, McCance and Widdowson (see figure to the left), who had both worked at some time at the MRC Unit in Uganda. It turned out that my mother- in- law had been Elsie Widdowson's secretary in Uganda.

She went on to serve Professor Roger Whitehead as his secretary and ran his office in Kampala for nearly a decade. It's a small world, and no doubt my path will cross that of the Association and its people once more. I do hope so.

Dr Glenys Jones

AfN Communications Manager 2015 - 2020
Acting Chief Executive 2019
Deputy Chief Executive 2019 - Present

Looking back on my time so far at the Association for Nutrition (AfN), I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to both a profession and organisation that has grown steadily in confidence, impact, maturity and ambition. Since joining AfN in 2015, I have been fortunate to play a part in work that has not only supported the organisation itself, but also contributed to the wider professionalisation of nutrition. For me, this has never been simply a job. It has been a chance to help shape a profession that really matters — from working with amazing nutritionists to support safe, effective and ethical practice and showcasing the impact of nutrition that is grounded in robust-science, to sharing this with those are training to join the profession, and from supporting those in the wider community to gain a foundation of knowledge, to the public who rely on clear, credible nutrition information.

From the outset, and part of the reason I joined AfN, was a shared understanding about the importance of professional identity. Nutrition is a field that reaches into everyday life, public health, education, healthcare, industry, animal care and policy, yet it has often had to work hard for recognition and respect. For me, that made AfN's role feel especially important. A professional regulator does more than simply administer standards; it helps define what the profession stands for, how it is understood, and how it earns trust. I have always felt proud to contribute to that work, and over time that sense of purpose has only deepened.

One of the early areas in which I was able to make a contribution was communications. I led AfN's communications with registrants, policy makers, the media, health professionals, employers, and the public, and I could bring with me the need for the organisation to see that communications in this context are never just about information-sharing. They were about relationship-building, reassurance, and clarity.

They were also about helping people navigate a field where misinformation is common and where the consequences of confusion can be significant.In that respect, the communications work then and through to today feel closely tied to professionalisation: helping the public understand who nutrition professionals are, what they do, and why evidence-based practice matters.

Branding is often underestimated, but I believed then, and still believe now, that it plays a vital role in expressing an organisation's values and ambitions

That thinking also influenced several important developments I was involved in, including new branding for the organisation, a new website, and online application processes. I saw these not as isolated projects, but as part of a wider effort to make AfN more accessible, more visible, and more confidently positioned. Branding is often underestimated, but I believed then, and still believe now, that it plays a vital role in expressing an organisation's values and ambitions, and that this expands out to also support the identity of the profession and those who have worked so hard to gain, and maintain, their professional registration. Therefore, the branding needed to reflect professionalism, credibility, and modernity. It had to feel authoritative without being remote, and welcoming without losing seriousness. In many ways, it was a visual expression of the organisation's evolving identity and a great opportunity to work with experts in this field and consult with registrants and stakeholders to create not only a visual identity, but also a strapline that neatly summarised the main roles of AfN.

A Branding Evolution

The same was true of the website and online applications. These improvements were practical, of course, but they also represented a shift in how the organisation presented itself and served its audiences. The pandemic expedited the launch of these activities, and I remember spending many hours in front of the laptop quickly developing a temporary online application and assessment process that would enable us to maintain this function whilst we were all locked down, with no idea when or if we would make it back into the office. Whilst this temporary system was in place, lots of work was happening behind the scenes with a great team of website developers to get the new website and its in-built application forms and registrant dashboard ready to go live. This is an area that continually develops, and helps to provide a platform to share information with the public and an increasing amount of guidance and support materials for registrants.

A particularly meaningful part of my work has been the direct support I have been able to provide to registrants and applicants. Over the years, I have been involved in regular Zoom clinics, one-to-one discussions, guidance development, talks, and a range of other forms of professional support. These activities have been among the most rewarding aspects of my role because they bring the purpose of the organisation into very human, practical settings. Many people coming to AfN are at important stages in their professional journey. They may be seeking clarity about requirements, reassurance about next steps, or a better understanding of expectations and to discuss challenges and opportunities. Being able to offer support in those moments has always felt valuable to me, and showcases what modern regulation should be, where it supports those in the profession to reduce the risk of poor practice happening in the first place, rather than just addressing it if it does occur.

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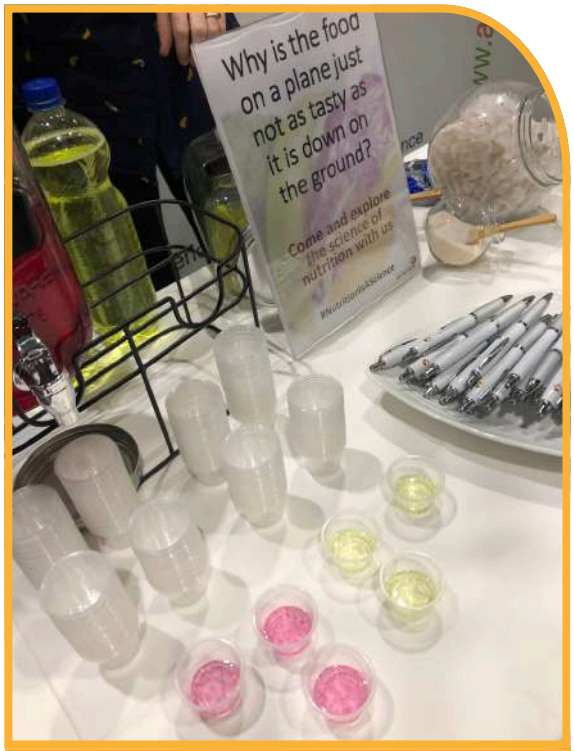
What I have appreciated most about these interactions is the chance to listen and learn, as well as advise and help where possible. Professionalisation is often discussed in terms of structures and standards, but it is also built through conversation. People need guidance that is clear, respectful, and grounded in real understanding. I have found that the regular clinics and one-to-one contact not only support individuals, but also strengthen the organisation's relationship with its community. They make AfN feel more present and more approachable, while still maintaining the professionalism that is essential to its role.

My work at AfN has also taken me into education and public engagement, both of which I consider central to AfN's wider mission.

Talks and workshops for students have been especially valuable because they allow us to connect with the next generation of nutrition professionals at an early stage. These events give students a better sense of what professional nutrition and regulation looks like in practice and helps them see the pathways available to them. I have always felt encouraged by those conversations, because they show that the profession's future depends not only on standards, but also on inspiration and support.

Alongside student engagement, public events have offered a different but equally important opportunity: to help people make sense of nutrition in everyday life. Nutrition is one of those subjects where the public is constantly exposed to conflicting messages, simplified claims, and persistent myths, indeed that was a key driver as to why regulation was initiated for the profession. It is also why I have always seen public engagement as an important part of AfN's work. These events allow us to provide a platform for registrants to explain, clarify, and challenge misunderstanding in a way that is constructive rather than paternalistic.

Glenys and volunteers at New Scientist Live



Taste test at the New Scientist Live Stall

Helping the public to navigate nutrition myths, rather than correcting people from a distance; it is about offering them ways to spot the signs of misinformation and tips on how to access reliable information and professionals that can support their needs, make evidence-based choices and have greater confidence in this information. This is also why the nutrition resource hub that was launched during lockdown, has also provided a helpful platform for showcasing reliable information and a great way for the profession to share this with the public.

Among the achievements I look back on most proudly are the development of new certification frameworks, the medical nutrition curriculum, and, of course, the Royal Charter petition.

These all represented significant milestones, not just for AfN, but for the profession more broadly.

One of my very first projects when I joined AfN was to be the Research Lead on work that led to the development of a report for Public Health England on the minimum nutrition knowledge and skills needed within the catering and fitness sectors. This was a wonderful opportunity to utilise my research background and get out talking to those working in these sectors and gaining a good understanding about their training, knowledge and activities. It was great to have so many different stakeholders come together to support this work and I remember being really honoured and excited to have rooms full of stakeholders at Portland Place engaging in active discussions and joining together in a combined desire to enable learning outcomes to be developed that were relevant and practical, which in turn enabled new frameworks to be added to the Course Certification scheme. It has been a delight to see this work continue to develop with exciting new areas being added to help address gaps and be there as a way to support the wider workforce to access reliable, and suitable training to gain a solid foundation that will support their work activities and will also aid their personal understanding and nutrition.

Many of those who know me will know that I have a particular passion for improving the recognition and understanding of the importance of nutrition within medicine. This meant that when the opportunity to work on the development of a nutrition curriculum for medical schools came up, it was particularly meaningful to me personally because of this longheld belief that nutrition should be more strongly embedded within core healthcare education. If our doctors, nurses and pharmacists are to care effectively for their patients, they need a solid foundation in nutrition. That does not mean turning them into nutritionists or dietitians, but it does mean ensuring that nutrition is properly recognised as part of safe, informed, holistic care and knowing when and who to refer on to.

Contributing to the development of the nutrition curriculum for medical doctors felt like a real step forward

Contributing to the development of the nutrition curriculum for medical doctors felt like a real step forward. It was a careful, collaborative, and evidence-based process, and I valued being part of something with such a clear practical purpose and being able to take on driving this forward and getting to a curriculum that was agreed and supported by so many different stakeholders. This work addressed a real gap and has helped lay the foundations for better nutrition education in medicine. In that sense, it was both ambitious and grounded: ambitious in its long-term aims and the recognition it will take time to become fully embedded in the core teaching of all our

future doctors, and grounded in its focus on what future doctors genuinely need to know, rather than what it might be nice for them to learn.

It would, of course, be remiss of me not to reflect on the journey so far for the Royal Charter. Long before I joined the AfN, as a profession we have been calling for better protection for the public from those who, whilst often well meaning, do not have the depth of knowledge, understanding and critical appraisal skills to provide safe, robust, effective and ethical nutrition support and advice. The public are bombarded with misinformation, which in some cases is scarily dangerous in what it is recommending. Having a robust way to identify those who can be trusted as genuine nutrition experts is an essential way to help protect the public from this barrage of confusion.

After all, a Royal Charter is not simply a formal recognition; it is a statement about public value, trust, institutional standing, and a profession that makes a difference

When I joined AfN, the ambition to apply for a Royal Charter was firmly in place. The desire being to have a protected title of Chartered Nutritionist that could only be used by those who met the high standards to be safe, effective and ethical practitioners, grounded in robust science. At the time it was felt that this was an ambition for the long-term future, but changes in requirements meant that this opportunity was brought forward. Being in a position to petition for a Royal Charter is a landmark achievement, and one that carries considerable symbolic and strategic significance. I am extremely proud of the huge amount of support we received from both registrants and stakeholders, both when we were developing the submission and in the future consultation stages. That support and passion has given the whole process a real sense of shared purpose. For me, it represented the maturity of the organisation and the seriousness of its purpose. After all, a Royal Charter is not simply a formal recognition; it is a statement about public value, trust, institutional standing, and a profession that makes a difference.

It is for this reason and combined passion that I feel it was a wonderful privilege that it was during my period as Acting Chief Executive that the time came to sign and formally submit our petition for a Royal Charter to the monarch. There was something deeply memorable about leaving Portland Place and making the journey over to Horseguards on a beautifully sunny day and presenting the petition to the Privy Council. It was one of those rare moments where the significance of the occasion, the sense of responsibility, and the atmosphere of the day all came together. I will always remember that experience as one of the high points of my time at AfN.

It captured not only the achievement itself, but also the years of work, commitment, and belief of so many that had led to that moment. I know that this journey is not yet complete, and there have been many an hour and long night put into responding to the challenges that have come up along the way, but I do hope that those involved can see the passion and desire behind this and our impenetrable commitment to public protection.

A further development I feel privileged to have been part of was the creation of new competencies for ANutrs and RNutrs. These were shaped through wide consultation with stakeholders, including employers and registrants, and I was truly proud to work on them with colleagues, including Tina Sabbagh and a fantastic working group. The process showed both the maturity of the profession, and how far professional regulation of nutrition science and nutritionists has come. It also felt important that the new RNutr competencies better reflected the range of specialist practice, and it was great that we could incorporate the input of registrants, employers, colleagues and the public to develop these and the creation of Standards for Freelance and Independent Practice, which offer valuable support and guidance for those working in, or considering, this area of work.

As my role has developed over time, I am increasingly aware that AfN's growth is completely inseparable from the profession's own development. The organisation and the profession have grown together, each strengthening the other. My own responsibilities expanded to include acting chief executive duties, strategic leadership, registration, communications and broader organisational support, and I have seen these responsibilities as being part of a shared commitment to building something resilient and worthwhile. I have always believed that the best professional regulators are those that both challenge and support their registrants to be the best professionals they can be, that remain focused on their core purpose of public benefit, and adapt thoughtfully as the world around them changes.

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This is why the combined professional sense of belonging and community of registrants and AfN, along with the work AfN does to support registrants practice and development, and a shared commitment to continual development is so important. Both now and in the future.

What has made the work of AfN especially meaningful to me, is that it has always felt alive and relevant. I am still working at AfN, and I still have the same passion and commitment to professionalism and to the advancement of nutrition that I felt when I first joined. That continuity matters to me. It speaks to the fact that this is not simply a period of past achievement, but an ongoing contribution to a profession that continues to evolve. There is still much to do, and that is part of what makes the work so worthwhile and something I am proud to be a small part of.

Looking back, I am proud not only of the specific projects and milestones, but also of the culture of support, clarity, and professionalism that I have tried to contribute to throughout my time at AfN. Whether through direct support to registrants, public-facing engagement, educational development, or strategic organisational change, my aim has always been to help strengthen the profession in practical and lasting ways.

I hope that the work I have had the privilege of being part of has, in some way, helped make AfN more accessible, more trusted, and more confident in its role and impact.

> I would say that my experience at the Association for Nutrition and in the professional journey of nutrition has been defined by both continuity and change

In closing, I would say that my experience at the Association for Nutrition and in the professional journey of nutrition has been defined by both continuity and change: continuity in commitment to professionalism, evidence, and public benefit; and change in the growth, reach, maturity, impact and ambition. It has been a privilege to contribute to that journey, and I remain deeply committed to AfN's mission and to the continuing advancement of nutrition as a respected and meaningful profession. I look forward to continuing the journey of professionalism together, because as the sayings go, we are stronger together, and the whole is greater than the sum of our parts.

Prof Julie Lovegrove

AfN Trustee 2012 - 2016
AfN Deputy Chair of Council 2016 - 2019

Public confusion over dietary guidance is increasing, particularly in light of the overwhelming amount of food messaging on social and other media platforms. Diet-related advice is available from a vast range of sources, much of which is opinion rather than evidence-based, and derived from individuals with little or no qualifications or training in nutrition and health. Dietary advice should be consistent and understandable by all and obtained from trusted and reliable evidenced-based sources.

When I graduated as a State Registered Dietitian in the late 1980s, with a degree in Human Nutrition and Dietetics from the University of Surrey, I was acutely aware of the difference between a profession with a recognised, protected title ('Dietitian') and one without ('Nutritionist'). To redress this disparity, I have strived throughout my academic career to secure and protect the professional recognition and status of the title 'nutritionist', as a trusted source of evidence-based dietary advice.

In 2004, a project was completed by Lynn Stockley and Kay Scott for The Nutrition Society, then Holder of the Voluntary Register for Registered Nutritionists, and Department of Health. This project reported that the role of dietitians was understood and trusted by the public and health professionals. Dietitians were regarded as credible experts, because of their close association with the NHS. There was little awareness of graduate nutritionists with qualifications required to give them a professional title on a voluntary register. Despite this, public opinion indicated that ideally the term 'Nutritionist' should be restricted to professionals who have met certain standards. This important work supported the decision to reclaim the term 'Nutritionist' and use it specifically to describe one professional group with appropriate training and experience.

I am an active advocate of this and feel proud to have played a small part in the process.

Prof Julie Lovegrove

I was delighted to join the register as an 'Accredited' (1992) and more latterly 'Registered Nutritionist' (from 2000) and honoured to be awarded Fellow of the Association of Nutrition in 2013. In 2003, I became involved with course accreditation, after joining the 'Course Accreditation Committee' of the Nutrition Society. The aim of this committee was to create standards against which nutrition-focused degrees could be assessed to achieve accreditation status. Students graduating from these degree programmes could then join the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists as 'Associate Registered Nutritionists' (ANutr), progressing to a 'Registered Nutritionist' (RNutr) after 2-3 years working within the field of nutrition.

In 2003, I became involved with course accreditation, after joining the 'Course Accreditation Committee' of the Nutrition Society

I have fond memories of early committee meetings in High Holborn House, chaired by Professor Judy Buttriss, then Honorary Secretary of the Nutrition Society, with discussions on matters related to accreditation of nutrition degrees. The University of Reading was among the few universities involved in the pilot scheme for nutrition course accreditation in 2005. Professor Parveen Yaqoob OBE (then Lecturer in Nutritional Physiology) and myself were tasked with mapping our MSc and BSc degrees in Nutrition and Food Science against the rigorous standards for accreditation. While both courses were successfully accredited, which was key in attracting students to our degree programmes over the next 20 years, the task was considerably more challenging than we had imagined.

My involvement in course accreditation continued as the register moved from the Nutrition Society (1999-2007) to the Interim Professional Body for Nutrition (2007-2010) and finally the Association of Nutrition (from 2010), where I had the privilege of chairing the 'Accreditation Committee' in 2012. I can recall many discussions in the sun-drenched offices of the AfN in Portland Place, over specific core competencies and the nature of evidence required for accredited status. This committee offered advice, reviewed and accredited numerous national and some international nutrition programmes. To date, a total of 60 undergraduate and 38 postgraduate degrees have been accredited in the UK, Ireland, Australia and the United Arab Emirates, an impressive feat.

As a trustee (from 2012) and latterly Vice President (2016-2019) of AfN, I became more active in the quest to acquire a protected title for nutritionists, which topped our agenda.

This was effectively led by our founding President, Professor Alan Jackson CBE and more latterly Dr Margaret Ashwell OBE, with the assistance of Leonie Milliner as CEO, AfN staff, trustees and many supportive organisations. A strong case for a Royal Charter for the title of 'Chartered Nutritionist' was finally submitted for consideration to the Privy Council in 2019. There were a number of setbacks, including COVID-19 pandemic, and a change in monarch. We are still awaiting approval and there will be much to celebrate when this is confirmed.

Julie, Margaret and Leonie

To secure the title 'Nutritionist' as a recognised, trusted source of nutrition advice and knowledge, ultimately for the safety of public health, is a worthy ambition. In this respect, it is the combined efforts and often considerable personal sacrifice, of so many inspiring individuals in this mission that is truly remarkable. It is the opportunity to work alongside these incredible people, at committee and trustee meetings, Annual Discourse Days (see figure to the right), workshops and training sessions which has been a true pleasure and privilege and an extremely rewarding endeavour. I am proud to call myself a 'Registered Nutritionist' and will continue to support nutrition as a recognised profession throughout my career and beyond.

Prof Louis Levy

AfN Trustee
2015 – 2018

Past and current

I was originally on the register while undertaking my PhD at the University of Southampton (1990) when it was held by the Institute of Biology. My primary interests at the time were to engage with like-minded evidence-based scientific colleagues, expand my contacts and knowledge and to encourage clear, evidence-based scientific communication to promote public health. Over time, and with different roles in the voluntary (1995-1997) and public (1997-2021), sectors the importance of having a route to help the public recognise the quality of the advice being provided to them by individuals became more important – particularly as use of wider sources of health advice expanded. The importance of enabling the public to recognise appropriately qualified individuals was enhanced as celebrity and other influencers began to engage in their own brands of promotion – some in keeping with good evidence and some not – and this was apparent across public health (I was working within public health and health promotion at the time). This was also true for dietary advice and has become more so in the time since. The UKVRN was a key route to enabling those seeking dietary advice to identify that the individual providing advice had appropriate qualifications, met key delivery competencies and importantly kept their knowledge up to date through evidence-based, high-quality learning. I believe the UKVRN continues to provide these important securities.

By the time I had joined the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in 2001 the register had moved from the IOB and was held by the Nutrition Society of Great Britain and Ireland (NS). The competence framework underpinning registration had developed through the hard work of Dr Jackie Landman, the then Registrar, and it is her hard work that has remained the basis of the registration, CPD requirements and the UKVRN that we know today.

At the FSA (2001-2010), my role in policy and advice required knowledge,

understanding and skills in keeping with the competence framework and many of my staff were already on the register. As the competence framework became more established, job descriptions for nutrition-related roles aligned to require that potential candidates would be able to demonstrate the knowledge, understanding and skills commensurate with registration while recognising that individuals may not have chosen to be registrants. This helped to ensure that the FSA could promote evidence- based approaches to its various functions. Individual staff members were encouraged to join the register if they met the criteria for doing so – and in so doing to promote the evidence -based approach of the FSA, communicate effectively and help the public recognise the importance of appropriate scientific qualifications when getting dietary advice.

Based on my own experience in previous roles in academia, the voluntary sector and local government, I encouraged my team to regularly consider their own learning needs, discussed learning emerging from our daily work activities, discussed learning needs to take policy approaches forward and spent time in our regular meetings to critically appraise new developments and peer review papers beyond those that were needed to deliver our roles. This led to the development of a Journal Club that met regularly with participation from wider nutrition and science teams. The approach was very much in keeping with the requirements for maintaining knowledge and understanding, keeping up to date and demonstrating the requirements for registration. After the machinery of government changes in 2009 and 2013, the team moved between the Food Standards Agency, the Department of Health (England) and Public Health England and, for some of this period, our regular Journal Club achieved CPD accreditation from the Association for Nutrition (AfN). FSA also achieved continuing professional development (CPD) accreditation for an event promoting the learning from FSA's salt partnership work in 2008.

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Jackie Landman had considerable knowledge of registration requirements from her work as a Registrar, her links to wider professional registers and experience of fitness to practise from which she had identified the need for registrants to demonstrate their continued professional development and was looking at different approaches to achieve this. Jackie approached me to participate in a pilot project in 2008 (with Sue Lloyd and Kate Tabbernor) looking to demonstrate continuing professional development.

I agreed to produce a portfolio covering a retrospective 6 months of activity alongside recording 6 months of ongoing CPD. The task was not as straightforward as I had originally thought, and I soon discovered that it was difficult to identify clear evidence of CPD retrospectively - documents that were available were either confidential or unclear about my own involvement. To complete the project, I developed an approach to recording my CPD, storage of my attendance certificates, evidence of my contributions to different activities and my own reflective practice. In some instances, owing to the confidential nature of the work of various working committees, testimonials of my contributions were requested to support redacted minutes of meetings identifying my attendance which were used alongside self-reflection to demonstrate my involvement and learning. This resulted in a large tome which Jackie reviewed and confirmed I had managed to provide evidence in a variety of ways which could be used to demonstrate the CPD that I had identified. Based on that experience I encouraged my colleagues to start collating their own CPD evidence and it became a regular part of my review meetings with my own staff – even those who were not registrants as it promoted good evidence recording, reflection on learning and needs and, I believe, helped my staff develop their own potential. Further, I also led a series of webinars to colleagues across government and wider nutrition organisations to promote better recording of CPD evidence.

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At around the same time, I was invited by Jackie to join a training event for registrant assessors. This was led by Jackie along with the then Professional Affairs officer for NS, Dr Steve Wootton. The training event was a very well organised event with clearly planned practical activities and discussion which confirmed my own thoughts, that despite registrants being schooled in evidence-based approaches, many failed to understand the need for this in terms of their own contributions to work and especially learning/CPD. I have been a registrant assessor since then and this issue – how do I demonstrate that I did/attended/contributed/learned from a particular activity – continues to be area of comment when I receive registration applications.

It was also while I was at the FSA that I became a trustee for the NS (2008-2011) – with the register being one of the areas of interest, to ensure that the public were protected from inappropriately qualified individuals giving nutrition advice, while promoting the importance of good scientific evidence. Although there was no evident conflict with my day job, I ensured that I was always clear to keep distance between my Trustee activities and the role I had within central government.

Prof Louis Levy

During the period of my time as a Trustee for the NS there were various changes to guidance for charities, and a question arose about whether there may be conflicts for the Society as a charity while holding a professional register. The President of the Society, Professor Alan Jackson, convened a President's special working group to look at this issue. I was invited to join this group alongside Professor Jackson, President Elect Professor Sean Strain, and Hon Professional Affairs Officer Dr Steve Wootton. Dr Landman, as the Registrar, and Fred Wentworth Bowyer, the then CEO of the NS briefed the group on the various issues. Dr Sheela Reddy from the Department of Health (DH) was invited as an observer. After careful consideration of the risks and benefits associated with the register being hosted by the NS, it was agreed to establish the register in a separate charity with the sole aim of holding the register of nutritionists to protect and benefit the public. Following discussions with other professional organisations and the NS membership, plans were established to form a charity to this end – the Interim Professional Body was thus established, with Professor Jackson as the President/Chair. Professor Jackson was joined as founder Trustees by Dr Martin Wiseman and Dr Alison Tedstone. Richard Denyer was recruited as CEO and moved the organisation from the NS building into the Royal Society of Public Health (RSPH) building in Portland Place so that AfN could be near similar organisations and therefore enable close working relationships/learning. Articles of Association, Memorandums of Working and Rules were all developed and the new charity established. Further Trustees were invited and the Association for Nutrition (AfN) was established in 2008 with financial support from NS and a grant from DH.

During the period of my time as a Trustee for the NS there were various changes to guidance for charities, and a question arose about whether there may be conflicts for the Society as a charity while holding a professional register.

A review of the core competency framework was undertaken by Janet Cade in October 2009 who, working with registrant assessors and registrants tested wording to ensure that the updated competency framework was clear, reflected the knowledge and understanding of nutritionists and the professional standards expected.

Around the same time a machinery of government change meant that my role moved from the FSA to the Department of Health but I, and my team, continued to demonstrate our knowledge, understanding, competence and learning in line with registration requirements. I continued to maintain a distinction between my role as a civil servant and my role as a registration assessor for the UKVRN. By 2013, my role was moved into Public Health England (PHE) and the same level of care was taken – particularly when I became a Trustee for the AfN (2015-2018).

Prof Louis Levy

During my terms as a Trustee, I maintained a commitment to the importance of protecting and benefiting the public through supporting the organisation to meet its legal requirements as a charity, develop and review strategy and grow as an organisation; including the recruitment of new staff, to ensuring the development of the register and the maintenance of standards and activities of AfN. During this time updates to registration titles, competence descriptions and levels, development of accreditation and a range of committees to support these functions were discussed at council and actioned by a small but efficient team led by the then CEO, Leonie Milliner. Key to discussions at Trustee meetings were the future aims for registration – protected title and steps towards this including the potential for obtaining a Royal Charter. The application for a Royal Charter was led from within the secretariat with support from the Trustees over several years – work to ensure that functions and processes aligned with both charity and charter requirements, development and wording of appropriate policies and the practical aspects of discussions with various interested parties and registrants were undertaken. I was very pleased when the petition for a Royal Charter was made in 2019.

Other

One step that I believe has been truly effective for the benefit of the working of the AfN was the recruitment of lay trustees to bring in wider experience, perspectives and learning as well as challenge. In this way the workings and debate within trustee meetings, I believe, has been improved and provided clearer governance for the charity.

I was very pleased to see the introduction of revalidation for registrants – particularly given the pilot project I had completed for the previous Registrar, Dr Landman. And, when asked, became a CPD assessor– having insisted that my own CPD be assessed before I commenced!

Most recently I have been asked to sit on the AfN Governance Group – a task and function group to review the current governance procedures and identify actions to ensure the organisation continues to meet its charitable requirements and grows in line with its organisational aims and purpose in line with Charity commission guidance and perceived good practice.

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Future

I foresee ongoing challenges for the AfN in growing the register at a time of economic challenge for both individuals and institutions.

Other challenges for the AfN include:

- Achieving Chartered status – as a step towards protected title
- Succession planning (staff and trustees)
- Maintaining and growing the register
- Reputational protection

Prof Janet Cade

AfN Registrar 2010 – 2015
AfN Honorary Secretary 2021 - 2023

I have been thinking about professionalising nutrition scientists long before AfN was even born! My mentor in my early days was Professor Barrie Margetts; he developed training and support to strengthen capacity in nutritional epidemiology which led to the evolution of public health nutrition.

Although it is a long time ago, in my mind, Barrie had the idea to develop the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists. This register was originally established by the Nutrition Society in 1997 to recognise and encourage high standards of professional training in nutrition. On 1st March 2010 responsibility for the Register was transferred from the Nutrition Society to the Association for Nutrition – sounds simple, but it was quite a tricky time navigating from one organisation into a new charity. As I looked back over the transfer documents and early AfN Council Minutes I was reminded about the exciting time this was. I was very glamorously called 'Cabinet Member for Registration' before we really had a register! I can clearly recall on a train back to Leeds from London in the early days writing a document to lay out the first set of competencies and what would be required for different specialisms. It was a privilege to have that 'blank sheet of paper' and to create something useful for us all as a result. Prof Alan Jackson was Chair at that time. He had been an internal examiner for my PhD (something you never forget) and I was a bit scared of him back then. I became the first Registrar for the AfN, it wasn't always easy, growing our organisation, clear communication, developing appropriate standards was a challenge. Finding the balance between demonstrating high quality professionals and the demands placed on registrants to evidence this needed navigation.

As we developed the register, we needed to always consider our charitable aims of protecting and benefiting the public by promoting nutrition. Explaining to potential registrants why we can do more together than we can achieve as individuals.

Showing how registered nutritionists can contribute to some of society's most pressing issues, demonstrating a confident and capable workforce. We also had to consider what practical benefits registrants would receive from being part of the register. As the register developed, we realised that 'one size does not fit all'. We developed specialist registrant areas: food; sports and exercise; nutrition scientists; animal nutrition; public health and associated competencies. As our profession grows, I am sure we will revisit this to ensure we support everyone in the field.

Just a flash back to past President of AfN, Margaret Ashwell. She and I were attending the FENS nutrition conference in Lillehammer in 1999. She invited me to go with her to check out the bobsleigh run. What was I thinking! Although there was no snow on the track, the sleigh was running with a wheel. It was the worst couple of minutes of my life being thrown down that track at speeds of over 100mph in a tin. Margaret made amends though and many years later agreed to my request to stand for President of AfN. When Margaret took over the Presidency at the beginning of 2016, I had just stepped down as AfN Registrar after 10 years developing the register. However, when I came back to Council as Hon Secretary in early 2021, she and I worked closely together again and, along with the staff team, we tried to raise the profile of our profession and grow the register.

I strongly believe that we must support and protect our profession. As we must contend with more and more misinformation from media influencers it is vital to keep our standards high and our register alive.

Here is a haiku to summarise this if you don't want to read it all:

> Nutrition needs you,
> Protecting public well-being
> Stick together now!

Claire Hislop

AfN Trustee
2016 - 2018

I am extremely passionate about the professionalisation of nutrition and very proud to have been part of its development. I graduated from Queen Margaret University (QMU) with a BSc (Hons) in Applied Human Nutrition in 1999. I had originally applied to study Dietetics in Aberdeen but, due to a change in family circumstances I needed to stay in Edinburgh and could only get onto the Nutrition course. At this time, I had hoped that I would be able to swap to Dietetics due to the fact that the course came with a protected title and, at that time, was seen as superior in some folks eyes due to the fact it was a more recognised profession.

However, I very quickly realised that my passion was not in the clinical aspects of the treatment of diet related illness but in the prevention of this. The applied human nutrition course at QMU was so motivating that I knew it was a career that I would enjoy for the rest of my life! Of course, I had wonderful academics in Michael Clapham and Jackie Landman who helped affirm this. I think I pretty much became a member of the voluntary register as soon as I could after graduating as it was so important to me to have that recognition of the skills and competencies that we have as nutrition professionals recognised.

Throughout my early years of my career in public health, I do remember some comments being made when I said I was a nutritionist rather than a dietitian and that this was in some way inferior; there was still a bit of a view that it wasn't as legitimate a profession as dietetics. I was always very quick to point out my registration with Nut Soc (at that time) and have always been happy to discuss with anyone what it means to be a Registered Nutritionist and the skills we have.

Views have certainly changed over the years, and this is down to the hard work of everyone who has worked to build our register and its reputation to what it is today. I am very proud to have played a part in that and very proud to say that I am a Registered Nutritionist with the Association for Nutrition (AfN).

But I have to admit I am still a bit envious of my wonderful dietetic colleagues who do have the protected title, and I do think that this is something we still need to aspire to. So why did I choose to be involved with AfN? Possibly due to the aforementioned misunderstanding about our profession (much of which I believe comes about with anyone being able to use the Nutritionist title). I therefore very much felt that it was important that I helped raise awareness of the profession, specifically in Scotland.

In 2012, I became the Scottish representative for AfN. A role which I very much enjoyed until 2020 when, unfortunately due to time commitments, I needed to pass the role to someone else. I used this role to network and support new ANutr in their careers. I also spoke often to nutrition students in Scottish Universities about the importance of the Register, so it was great to be able to offer them some support to meet others in Scotland and share our experiences.

> Views have certainly changed over the years, and this is down to the hard work of everyone who has worked to build our register and its reputation to what it is today.

In 2016, much to my surprise (so much so that I didn't even bother going to London for the event as I didn't think I stood a chance of getting it!) I was nominated and appointed to the AfN Board of Trustees. I served for four years on the Board, and it was such an incredible experience working with some of the most respected people of the nutrition world. I was truly gutted when my term came to an end.

The work of the Board to ensure that the profession is recognised, to support and protect the public and ensure that we all uphold the ethics and competencies we require to be a recognised profession is outstanding. It has been good to see the Board expand from mainly academics to include a variety of individuals with differing experience and also from across the UK and I think that is important. I have to give a mention to Glenys whose passion just shines through and is such an example to us all. The team at AfN does an amazing job on a small resource – it is very much appreciated.

My only current role with AFN is on the Fitness to Practise (FtP) panel as my registration committee tenure has also ended. But I will always play an active role in promoting the profession as far and wide as possible.

So, what do I wish for the future of AfN? I would really like to revisit whether or not we can protect the title of Registered Nutritionist. This was a big part of the work that was done when I was a Board member and I am not sure whether or not this is still an option. I think it would be good for registrants but also to help protect the public further.

Zoe Griffiths

AfN Trustee
2023 - 2025

I am extremely proud to be a Registered Nutritionist and a Fellow of AfN. I first got involved back in the mid to late 90s by getting in contact with Jackie Landman at the Nutrition Society (NS) and strongly agreeing with her that professional registration was needed.

I am extremely proud to be a Registered Nutritionist and a Fellow of AfN

I had just graduated from Kings College London (KCL) with an MSc Nutrition. I was the first Public Health Nutritionist to work at a local level in public health in the UK. But it was difficult to achieve professional credibility without a medical degree, dietetics qualification or a PhD. There were no other Nutritionists working in a similar role and you had a tough time if you wanted to establish yourself without one of these. I really was breaking new ground as a Nutritionist and felt that I needed professional registration to give me the professional credibility that I needed.

Jackie and I had many discussions about the unique position I was in and why professional registration was so important for me. I also wrote a blog about why I thought it was so important, but sadly this is lost to the sands of time. Other Nutritionists at that time were working for national organisations in groups of Nutritionists, so I feel that my experience was unique compared to others. I only saw other Nutritionists when I went to conferences.

Once we got the Register for Public Health Nutritionists in 1997, I applied immediately and I was at the first ever ceremony for registration where Professor Mike Gibney gave out the registration certificates in 1998 and I still remember Mike's smile as he handed me my certificate (see figure to the left). That was a huge moment in my career. I was now an RPHNutr, as we only had registration for Public Health Nutritionists at the time.

Zoe Griffiths

When I started out, there were roughly 100 Nutritionists in the UK. Now, there are over 5000 Nutritionists registered with the Association for Nutrition. As a growing profession, our scope of practice has evolved greatly over the years, and I could never have imagined how big our profession would become or the areas of work that would have been available to us. Regulation is important to ensure that we remain a highly respected and valued profession.

We very much need the Charter to give us credibility and esteem as a profession. We also need to have pride in our profession and be elevated in status.

Elia Monteiro

AfN Honorary Secretary 2016

Past

My journey into the field began with a BSc (Hons) in Human Nutrition, where I first developed a strong interest in prevention, health inequalities, and the role of lifestyle in long-term conditions. In the early years, I hoped to contribute to public health through nutrition, but quickly recognised how limited the opportunities were for nutritionists within the NHS. This ultimately led me into nursing, where protected titles, structured pathways and clinical recognition enabled me to pursue the preventive, population-health ambitions that originally drew me to nutrition.

During this period of transition, in 2016, I was nominated by Dr Claire Robertson and supported by Dr Ihab Tewfik for election as Honorary Secretary of the AfN Council. Being elected was an honour and a meaningful moment early in my professional life. However, as I began to understand the expectations of the role, I recognised that I was still early in my professional development and not yet ready to contribute at the level I wanted. Balancing two emerging professional identities - nutrition and nursing - meant I lacked the experience and confidence required to fulfil the responsibilities of an Honorary Officer. For that reason, I made the decision to step down. It was a thoughtful decision and, with hindsight, the right one at that stage in my development.

Present

My career has since grown across advanced clinical practice, multimorbidity, NHS workforce development, national advisory roles and digital transformation. Through this work, I see daily how central nutrition is to the management of long-term conditions, cardiovascular risk, obesity and prevention. Yet the profession still faces many of the challenges that originally motivated the creation of the Register: limited NHS integration, absence of statutory regulation, and unclear pathways for early-career nutritionists.

One recurring issue is the lack of structured educational and career pathways. Unlike nursing - with defined support worker roles, apprenticeship routes, registered pathways, advanced practice roles, and consultant-level progression - the nutrition profession has a narrow entry point. This restricts opportunities both for professional growth and for organisational recognition.

Future

Looking ahead, my aspirations for the profession are centred on strengthening its structure, identity and long-term sustainability:

- Statutory regulation of the nutrition profession
- Protection of the title "nutritionist"
- Development of associate-level roles akin to Nursing Associates
- Flexible educational pipelines, including apprenticeships and bridging routes into dietetics
- Clear, recognised NHS pathways for nutritionists, especially in primary care and public health
- Stronger mentorship and leadership development for graduates and early-career registrants
- Greater integration of nutritionists within the multi-professional workforce, particularly in prevention and chronic disease management

Nutrition remains critical to the future of healthcare. With the right regulatory and educational foundations, the profession can hold a much stronger place within health systems and public health policy.

I remain grateful to have been part of the Register's history, and I offer my sincere thanks to Dr Claire Robertson and Dr Ihab Tewfik, whose support, encouragement and mentorship during my early development continue to shape my professional practice and values today.

Barbara Saunders

AfN Lay Trustee 2017 - 2022
AfN Deputy Chair of Council 2019 - 2022

Looking back at my time with AfN has not proved easy. As an experienced non-executive, and Trustee I have been 'trained' to appreciate that any information acquired during one's time on a Board, or Council is to enable you to function effectively in the role, and not for any personal gain. In the pre-Covid world when documents were distributed by post, the papers themselves belonged to the organisation, and were distributed in confidence only to those entitled to receive them. Hence, all of my paperwork has been painstakingly shredded, and most of the more recent computer records deleted. So, these are truly reflections, and as accurate as my memory allows!

At the time of my appointment in 2017, there were 3 Lay members, 15 members with expertise in nutrition and two observers from the BDA and Nutrition society, reflecting the importance of keeping the professional bodies in contact with the evolving work of AfN and ensuring they understood its attitude to professional regulation. Apart from the 'lay' label, at the outset, I saw my role very differently from that of other Trustees, although in respect to charity law, we had the same responsibilities. I was not a nutrition specialist and hence had to earn their respect and demonstrate that I too could add value to the Council.

As a lay/independent member with a background in consumer affairs and professional regulation, it would not have been unusual to join a Board or Council where I knew none of the professional members. In this instance, having been interviewed by President, Dr Margaret Ashwell (whom I had previously met while serving on the Food Advisory Committee) and Chief Executive, Leonie Milliner, I knew there would be some familiar faces. It was nevertheless a surprise to find Dr Louis Levy and Professor Martin Wiseman, who were well aware of my involvement as a consumer representative with MAFF, the Food Standards Agency, and the Department of Health's Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food.

These connections made my induction rather easier than I believe it was for some of the lay members appointed subsequently, who only saw other Council Members on the screen, or once a year at the Annual Discourse. It was, nevertheless, a steep learning curve.

It took me a while to fully understand the purpose for which AfN had been established. I recognised the importance to the universities of verification of the standards for the courses they offered, and hence credibility of their qualifications. For students, the development of clear qualifications, understood by employers and recognised by the public was of vital importance. Nutritionists were to be found not just working in health settings, but taking up wide-ranging opportunities in industry, or as independent practitioners in sports science and nutrition. Hard won qualifications deserved to be recognised and respected, and this depended on them being comparable to other recognisable professional qualifications. The website had understandably evolved to reflect the interests and needs of registrants, and potential registrants, and the institutions which AfN regulated. Public information was general and apart from the complaints procedure not easily accessible. This was not surprising for a relatively small and developing profession, already highly respected in government circles, and by related professions and regulators but with a limited public profile and resources.

In the face of complex and conflicting messages and competing claims on food products, and in advertising, however, the public's need for trustworthy and reliable sources of information and advice is self-evident

Over the next few years, vast improvements were made in the quality of information on the website, and public statements agreed with other regulators working in the health sector to help non-specialists understand the differences between different qualifications, and the work they are qualified to undertake. The commitment of all those involved in AfN to improving health and wellbeing through nutrition underpinned by science had always been evident to me as a Member of Council. Significant efforts had been made by Government and the European Union during the last quarter of the 20th Century to improve food labelling, and inform those with allergies so they can choose appropriately. In the face of complex and conflicting messages and competing claims on food products, and in advertising, however, the public's need for trustworthy and reliable sources of information and advice is self-evident.

With the publication of the 2020-25 Strategic Plan, AfN's role, vision and values became much clearer for anyone who wished to read it. I would have appreciated such a document when I joined the Council. When huge national organisations with multi-million-pound budgets fail to get their message across to those who need help, for example to resolve a complaint or gain redress, it would be unrealistic to expect AfN to communicate individually with everyone. Good communications, and on-line materials are a great start, and AfN's commitment to do more to raise public awareness of the register and expertise of its registrants is commendable. I hope that the register continues to grow, but that may depend on factors beyond AfN's control.

Twenty-first Century governance required clear criteria for selection and appointment, training and appraisal, relevant skills and a degree of independence and objectivity to ensure AfN could fulfil, and be seen to fulfil, its functions and legal obligations

During my time at AfN, issues of governance dominated my in-tray. Reviews were already underway of the organisation's governance and Articles of Association when I was appointed. Before the turn of the century, the obligation on Charity Trustees to govern effectively, in both the Charity's and public's best interest became stronger after a number of high-profile scandals affecting large charities. Sound financial management was top of the agenda, but that required sound business plans, independent scrutiny of budgets and financial planning, and clear lines of accountability between executive staff and trustees. The foundations for AfN had been soundly laid, but as legal obligations on trustees themselves increased, it became clear that AfN's own structures needed amendment to enable it to become more readily adaptable to changes in its public obligations. Issues such as the size of the Council required to deliver registration, standards, complaints and disciplinary functions, ran counter to official recommendations for good governance, which supported smaller Executive Boards. The proportion of independent (lay) members to fulfil the public functions and demonstrate accountability were extensively debated, as changes in size generally had financial implications. Following good practice in public appointments, encouraging turnover, advertising widely, and treating candidates fairly is costly. The cost of regulation has become an increasingly hot topic for all regulators and professional bodies, and AfN was no exception. Twenty-first Century governance required clear criteria for selection and appointment, training and appraisal, relevant skills and a degree of independence and objectivity to ensure AfN could fulfil, and be seen to fulfil, its functions and legal obligations.

I'm sure there were critics both within and outside the organisation who felt some of this public and Government pressure was overkill. From my perspective, the training, development of clear business plans and streamlining systems, ensured Council members had a common sense of purpose, and could measure AfN's progress. It became unnecessary to identify Council members as lay or nutritionist, but important for public credibility to appoint an independent deputy Chairperson if the Chairperson was a Registrant. We were a team with a variety of skills and experience, paid staff and voluntary trustees with a common purpose to strengthen the organisation, and what it can offer. Gradually, I felt those responsible for setting the strategy for the organisation and holding staff to account for its delivery, became more effective, clearer about priorities, willing to share their vision, and have the confidence to be more open to registrants and stakeholders about the issues under discussion.

The external climate and public views about regulation of large professions had been changing throughout the nineties and noughties, with restructuring of the statutory arrangements governing health professionals, including doctors, dentists, and nurses

While establishment of a credible voluntary register was a clear objective from the outset for AfN and its predecessors, Council policy and many stakeholders supported statutory regulation of the title 'nutritionist'. The question was how this could best be achieved. The external climate and public views about regulation of large professions had been changing throughout the nineties and noughties, with restructuring of the statutory arrangements governing health professionals, including doctors, dentists, and nurses. Laws governing different branches of the legal and accounting professions, were consolidated with over-arching regulatory bodies. More stringent regulation of financial advisers was brought in and a range of independent, Ombudsman-led schemes for dealing with public complaints were established with Government backing. The public was less confident that it could always trust professionally qualified individuals who were seen to regulate themselves, and expected Government approved bodies to set and enforce the standards. But there were also a significant number of organisations, such as AfN, which were providing registers of accredited professionals especially in the field of health and related areas.

In 2000, the National Consumer Council published a report 'Better Business Practice - How to make self-regulation work for consumers and business'.

It laid down criteria against which organisations could be judged, including, having clear principles, measurable standards, accessible complaints procedures, compliance monitoring and meaningful sanctions against those who failed to comply with the standards set. There was no doubting the importance of gaining and sustaining public confidence and to this end standards were regularly reviewed and updated, and systems put in place to check, for example, the ongoing quality of courses offered, and Registrants' CPD.

In my experience, the nutrition field has had more than its fair share of controversy, but it is by no means unique among professions in that regard. I believe in the power of collaboration, multidisciplinary working, and the importance of structures in society to protect standards in the public interest and to ensure that consumers, clients and users of services know what they are buying and can judge its value. For most of my colleagues, the prize from proving AfN to be effective at voluntary regulation, sustaining confidence in government and academia, has been to work towards statutory regulation. The Council put considerable energy into demonstrating its value to decision-makers, and organisations in the nutrition field. AfN built substantial credibility for what it was doing, but was still perceived by some to be marking its own homework with insufficient independence, as long as it was at its heart a self-regulatory organisation.

For most of my colleagues, the prize from proving AfN to be effective at voluntary regulation, sustaining confidence in government and academia, has been to work towards statutory regulation

Much of my time on Council was dominated by investigation of different forms of regulation for title and models of regulation adopted by different organisations. Talks were held with the PSA, an oversight body for people working in the field of health and social care. Options for statutory legislation protecting the title of nutritionist were considered and considerable work was done so that an application could be made for a Royal Charter. This was judged to be the best means of meeting the objectives of AfN, the wishes of the profession and the importance of protecting the public. An application, supported by a wide range of stakeholders, including the university sector, was duly made.

My term on Council ended in 2022 and I have been able to reflect on some of the outcomes I witnessed and experienced. Emboldened and encouraged by changes in public life and the regulatory context for professionals, I personally feel the Council took its responsibilities to its Registrants, course providers, and stakeholders, extremely seriously.

It kept up to date with changes in regulatory expectations and guidance, maintaining contact with other regulatory bodies which were themselves undergoing changes in duties and public expectations. As the scope of work and the range of specialist qualifications approved by AfN expanded, greater turnover took place among staff and volunteers assisting the committees in setting and maintaining relevant standards. More flexibility was required for staff and members, to recruit the best people wherever they were based and whatever their circumstances.

28 Portland Place Office

After more than 10 years in the hot seat, Leonie Milliner's career progressed to new horizons. A strong foundation had been established, the building blocks were in place, and the number of Registrants was increasing year on year. AfN recruited a new Chief Executive, Helen Clark, who brought her own experience and style to the organisation, further streamlined its working methods and continued the process of modernisation. At the time, the end of the lease of a beautiful Georgian Property in Portland Place, near to Oxford Street, the BBC and government offices, with a large Council Chamber which housed members 4 times a year, seemed a lot to lose. But the reality for the staff was small, cramped offices in the garret, without proper access for anyone with a disability or mobility impairment, significant cost tied up in central London rent, and a wholly inadequate cramped working environment for our staff and IT (see figure above). Unfortunately, a new lease on a much smaller, more practical property was secured just before Covid.

Some changes were inevitably challenging. AfN stood up to pressure from a range of competing interests, incurring significant legal costs in defending its copyright and reputation. Regrettably AfN has failed to gain the badge of independence it so desired and the application for a Charter remains on the table. But AfN remained undaunted. It modernised its systems and telecommunications. It rebranded to reflect its status as a modern regulator to its students and young professionals. Appointment of Fellows became subject to assessment against clear criteria, recommendations to Council being made by panels including independent members.

None of us, however, anticipated the change which was about to come. The impact homeworking would have in improving the efficiency with which the Council was able to carry out its business, using modern technology to replace significant cost and enable AfN to direct more resource to its regulatory effectiveness.

Many of us, no doubt, felt the loss of regular visits to London, not just for quarterly Council meetings but for all the specialist committees which met in person. We will never put a financial value on the benefit in decision-making from non-executives and executives to getting to know each other, and learn informally about all aspects of the organisation and the experience of those who had been involved over a long period. For an independent member such as myself, to learn quickly about the history and commitment of those who came before us, was valuable. The extensive involvement of Council members with stakeholders and Registrants through teaching and examining, drafting and updating standards and in building the profession, took time to assimilate, and this was more easily done through informal discussion face to face. Significant networking also took place on such occasions. However, it came at a high financial price which had to be paid by all those graduating, joining the register and otherwise funding the work. Many organisations paid for their professionals to come to London and travel elsewhere in the country to promote and develop the profession's standing and contribute to AfN's work. Covid put an end to much informality, and I felt to some of the shared understanding, but to some it could be seen to reflect a closeness among the profession's leaders, which could be seen as exclusive, and more akin to a closed shop.

The changes in society post Covid, were unimaginable and have had undoubted benefits for AfN in my view

The changes in society post Covid, were unimaginable and have had undoubted benefits for AfN in my view. The value of IT to overcome distance in time and space, and especially the ability to hold meetings down the line, face to face in real time from anywhere in the world can bring huge benefits, not just for efficiency and cost-saving, but in facilitating a more diverse culture within staff and among trustees.

Human interaction remains important to oil the wheels of regulation and allow continued sharing of good practice. I hope AfN will find many creative ways to involve young and experienced nutritionists in contributing to the further development of the profession in the future. There will be opportunities and challenges from AI, and the continuing advance in technology but public and media interest in food and health continues to grow apace. The extensive resources available on AfN's website are now readily accessible to students, specialists and the general public. Looking to a future in which personalised health and nutrition plans will become more common, I hope many more people will recognise and value the registered nutritionists in their communities, and know their work is based on sound science, ethical standards and appropriate regulation.

Helen Clark

AfN Chief Executive
2019 – Present

Unlike most contributors to this collection, I have to confess I had not heard of AfN until I saw the job advert. I remember I was recovering from the flu, still unable to do much but scroll through my phone, and thought the job looked right up my street. After a bit of research I applied and was delighted to be asked for interview. My memory is that, unlike most job interviews, this was a highly enjoyable experience. I walked back to the station afterwards feeling that if I didn't get the job I had, at least, enjoyed the day and learned something in the process. Fortunately I was successful, and delighted when Margaret Ashwell phoned later that day to offer me the role of Chief Executive. I began working with AfN in June 2019.

In those early days my focus was financial stability, robust public protection, organisational culture, and the very practical task of finding us a new office. My predecessors had played their parts, and done a great job of establishing the organisation from the ground up, but there was much to do in terms of streamlining, ensuring we had the right kind of resources in place to support the functions of the organisation, creating and updating policy frameworks to ensure we remained compliant with the whole range of regulations a charitable company must follow, and taking the organisation forward into the next phase of its life. I was also learning to be a Chief Executive. I had worked in the membership and professional body sector for over 25 years, had held senior management roles in two other organisations and achieved an MBA, so I felt well prepared. But there is so much you can't learn until you are sitting in the seat and doing the job. Fortunately the Honorary Officers and AfN Council were incredibly supportive, and to this day I talk about nutritionists being the best, most supportive profession to work with.

Much of my time in that first 6 months was spent traipsing round London looking for new office space that would meet our needs. We found suitable office space on High Holborn, signing a lease in early February 2020. 2020 was, of course, full of surprises for us all.

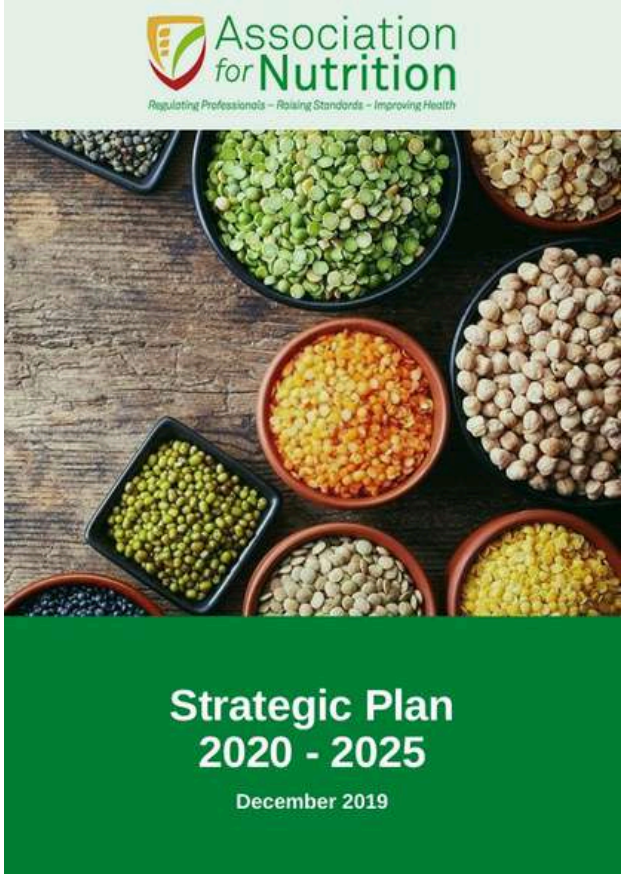
On 17th March on my personal Facebook I noted,

> "A few months ago we had to decide whether we should look for a new office or move to being a completely remote organisation. Close call but decided we weren't ready for total remote working so we took a new office lease. Due to move into new premises next week. This week, setting everyone up so we can be an entirely remote working office."

Our scheduled move date was 23rd March. Of course, the significance of that move in date won't be lost on most people, as the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the first lockdown. We realised what was coming, and moved our plans forward, but I ended up in "self-isolation" in that final week and had to manage things remotely, with Glenys Jones and the rest of the staff team on the ground hurriedly packing up desks and moving the whole operation to High Holborn. Not surprisingly, everything did not go entirely smoothly. The comms cabinet – vital for connecting up our IT, was delivered to the wrong address and by the time Glenys had tracked it down that office had closed for the lockdown. We started the first lockdown with our furniture and files safely moved to High Holborn, and our computers and servers running in the old Portland Place office! I was incredibly grateful to our IT support company who volunteered to host our servers and computers at their office when the lease on Portland Place was due to expire.

In many ways the lockdown made us focus and accelerate some of our plans. We could no longer rely on paper based systems and needed to ensure that we could accept, process and assess applications electronically. We prioritised IT development, both internally and externally. We moved to SharePoint and cloud storage, retiring the old servers which were on their last legs. This improved our efficiency, and gave us more reliable IT to deliver day to day services. And we prioritised website development, launching the new website and creating the online application forms which made registration more accessible. In my previous role I had been Director of Membership at the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, managing staff and relationships with member organisations worldwide. So when we went into lockdown I already knew the value of Zoom for meetings and had a good deal of experience managing teams remotely. It was an incredibly challenging time for everyone, but I also have some quite fond memories of that period, hastily reorganising the kids playroom to make space to work, and holding online meetings where children and pets were frequently part of the experience as they wandered in

to shot, often seeking snacks! It gave a very human connection to people, where we were able to recognise that this immensely difficult experience was happening to all of us and understand that we were all facing similar challenges.



In the second half of 2019 I worked with Council to develop our strategic plan for 2020-2025, launched at the 2019 Annual Discourse. As is often the case with those workshops, there was good agreement about our priorities for the coming period, but lengthy discussions about the nuance of wording. After a very full day we agreed our Vision to be that "Everyone is empowered to improve health and wellbeing through nutrition grounded in science," and that this would be underpinned by strategic aims around recognition of our register, high standards for training and practice, AfN competencies being recognised as the standard for regulation of nutritionists, and our registrants being supported to be effective in their roles through clear guidance, a CPD framework and robust regulation. A great deal of work was undertaken, guided by this strategic plan. We reviewed and updated our registration competencies to ensure that nutritionists are appropriately trained to meet the needs of the public and employers. We updated our Standards of Conduct, Ethics and performance, and the Fitness to Practise process which upholds them. We ensured that nutrition students received appropriate education and training through revised standards for accreditation, and also reviewed and updated our CPD Endorsement scheme. We had been running a Certification Scheme for several years, which certified courses aimed at non-nutritionists who would benefit from nutrition knowledge in their work. We revised and updated this scheme, focusing on the nutrition essentials across three certification frameworks and introducing a streamlined process. And we increased the guidance available to registrants to support them in their safe, effective and ethical practice.

My view of regulation has long been that the public are best protected when regulated professionals are supported to maintain their knowledge and skills, and understand their scope of practice. I have a strongly held belief that people want to do a good job. Nobody wakes up in the morning and decides to be incompetent that day, but incompetence can creep in when professionals aren't supported to develop and maintain their competence.

AfN had good foundations in place, with a CPD endorsement scheme, regional groups for networking, and CPD monitoring. But it is also a profession which has challenges. Often nutritionists can be working in fairly isolated roles, with limited opportunities to talk with someone else who does the same job as they do. There is a wide range of job roles for the profession, but this can also mean there isn't an obvious career path and no main employer. The challenge for a professional body, whose primary purpose is protection of the public through voluntary regulation, is to ensure its registrants remain connected to the profession and their professional identity, and remain supported to keep their knowledge and skills up to date.

Early on in my tenure Council discussed the particular challenges for early career registrants who were still finding their way in the nutrition field

Early on in my tenure Council discussed the particular challenges for early career registrants who were still finding their way in the nutrition field. From this discussion grew the ANutr Framework, developed through a collaborative project where we listened to ANutrs about the challenges they faced and the support they would appreciate, and developed resources to meet those needs. The ANutr Framework is now well established, with website resources, regular webinars and group mentoring. There is also mentoring training for RNutrs who are able to offer this vital service to ANutrs. Separately to the Framework, we have also introduced Zoom clinics, which provide advice and support on specific topics such as preparing transfer portfolios.

During 2024/5 we worked with Council on the next Strategic Plan, for 2025 to 2030. This plan builds on the achievements of 2020-2025, maintaining a strong focus on regulation, and on supporting our registrants at all career stages to be safe, effective and ethical practitioners. We will also be tackling one of our biggest challenges - the visibility of our register particularly with key stakeholders. I'm excited about what we might achieve over the coming period!

No reflection on my first six years at AfN would be complete without mention of our petition for a Royal Charter. My predecessor, Leonie, had done a huge amount of work with Council and the office team to prepare and submit a petition for a Royal Charter, with the final petition being submitted by Margaret Ashwell and Glenys Jones in April 2019. The charter process itself is based on criteria, published by the Privy Council Office, and custom and practice which has developed over centuries. In late 2019 a public consultation on our petition was held, closing on 2nd January 2020. It was February before we received the feedback on the public consultation. There had been overwhelming support for our petition, but two objectors. The process is that the petitioner (us) is able to review any objections received and provide a response.

The petition, submissions in support, objections and the petitioner's responses are then submitted for review by Privy Council assessors. The assessors have no time limits.

Our register continues to grow and we currently have well over 5000 registrants

Unfortunately the process has been beset by delays and become a long running saga. So far, since submitting our petition there have been six secretaries of state for health, five prime ministers, and two monarchs! Delays caused by the pandemic, priorities in a very busy Department for Health and Social Care, and continued correspondence have made the process unusually lengthy. Much to our delight the assessment was successfully completed at one point, but then withdrawn following a legal challenge and referred for reassessment. At time of writing we are waiting, again, for the outcome.

Regardless, AfN continues to develop, striving for continuous improvement as we serve the public interest through ensuring the robust regulation of nutritionists. Our register continues to grow and we currently have well over 5000 registrants. There are challenges in the higher education environment resulting in some programme closures, but we have around 100 accredited programmes training the next generation of nutritionists. Our new strategic plan builds on our work of the last five years, and remains true to our principles that this profession is supported to deliver the safe, effective and ethical application of nutrition science for the public benefit.

One of the ambitions noted by earlier contributors is for statutory regulation of nutritionists, whether that be through protection of title or of function. This is a journey I have been on before, when working at the British Psychological Society, and it is a long road. For other professions which have moved from voluntary to statutory regulation it has typically taken decades to achieve. It remains an ambition for nutrition, but should be expected to take several years of sustained effort working with all stakeholders to make a convincing case to Government. We need to be willing to invest time and effort in the groundwork now, understanding that others are likely to be the beneficiaries of this work in the future. My hope for the future is that AfN continues to grow and thrive, that the attention of those who are concerned about nutrition is focused on nutrition science rather than fad, and that this fabulous, committed profession receives the recognition of a Royal Charter, followed in due course by statutory regulation, for the public good.

Other Reflections

Some people who have been involved with the professionalisation of nutrition preferred to answer specific questions. Here are their responses.

Why did you want to get involved in the regulation of the profession?

Prof Catherine Geissler

Because there are many people without adequate training who set themselves up as expert nutritionists and it is impossible for the general public to distinguish who to trust.

Prof Geraldine McNeill

As an early retiree I was happy to continue some professional involvement in a new role. It was attractive to me to be involved in a national organisation.

What was your own personal involvement?

Prof Catherine Geissler

As a council member, then President of the Nutrition Society.

Prof Geraldine McNeill

I was a trustee for 6 years and registrar for 4 of these. I remember Leonie Milliner driving the organisation beyond an academic interest group with Margaret Ashwell, Julie Lovegrove, Martin Wiseman, Judy Butriss, Alan Dangour and Louis Levy making major contributions as trustees.

Other Reflections

Prof Heather Hartwell

I was involved with the Register from about 2010 when it was transferred to AfN. In fact, I was an author on the paper that Janet Cade and others wrote to announce the establishment of AfN. I was Chair of the Certification Committee.

Dr Peter Grabowski

I was very much a latecomer to Nutrition and AfN having changed my career focus from skeletal biology around 2014. I had no involvement in the establishment of the Register, and my involvement with AfN was very much around the work of the Accreditation Committee.

Sarah Grey

I got involved with the Nutrition Society as an assessor for portfolio registration some time prior to 2009 (and I still am today - so over 17 years and counting!) The oldest communications I can find are with Sarah Stammers in a role as at the Office of the Registrar in the Interim Professional Body for Nutrition - we were discussing new SOPs for portfolio assessment (Also involved were Ann Price, Louis Levy, Clare Jaggers and Jenny Davies). Before that I have a very clear memory of attending assessor training with a group led by Jackie Landman, and discussing the development of a new professional body to handle the register. I was living in Italy at the time and at one point flew back to London for the discussions - it was cheaper than most UK train fares!

In July 2009 I took part in a focus group led by Kathy Lewis with regards to the development of the AfN Register, and this work continued as some form of sub-committee working on the logo, new AfN brand guidelines for things like tone and style of communications, and new email policy guidelines, feeding our thoughts into the new AfN council and CEO Richard Denyer.

The thing I remember most clearly was discussions around the new logo which were very interesting - some of the initial proposals were based around what might be more 'clinical' blue and white style themes which didn't resonate with our close food connection as nutritionists. It was also important to differentiate ourselves from the blue logo of dietetics profession and we thought it might be to a good idea to have more 'food' based colours, hence the green, orange/yellow and red colours we know today.

What was satisfying about your role?

Prof Catherine Geissler

Being part of the process of supporting the idea and having the register transferred to the Nutrition Society and subsequently as an independent organisation, the AfN.

Prof Geraldine McNeill

A sense of contributing to professional standards.

Why was it important to set up the Register?

Prof Geraldine McNeill

To give recent graduates a sense of belonging to a profession and to reduce the chance of inappropriate advice or information to the public, particularly from self-employed nutritionists.

Prof Catherine Geissler

Unless there is a register, there is no record of those who meet the criteria that were to become established to designate a recognised qualified nutritionist. This is especially important for those who give advice to the general public and who work as consultants. Employers can then have greater assurance that their advice is valid.

Who do you remember as being instrumental in the quest for the regulation of the profession?

Prof Catherine Geissler

Many nutritionists.

Dr Marie-Ann Vanginkel

I came over from New Zealand in 1994 and, as a Public Health Nutritionist, I worked at University of Glasgow, then Anglia Ruskin and then the University of Brighton. The person who deserves all our thanks for running the Register whilst held by the Nutrition Society is Dr Jackie Landman. She really 'was' the Register for many years. Officially she reported to several of the Society's Professional Affairs Officers, but it was Jackie who, with amazing enthusiasm and effort, ran the show. Jackie set up the Professional standards that are the basis for what we use today. I was part of one of the groups that discussed these and made sure they were relevant for Nutritionists, the different specialisms and Associate or Full registration.

What were the challenges in getting the Register off the ground?

Prof Catherine Geissler

Setting up the criteria, deciding which organisation should control it, setting up funding mechanisms, appointing suitable people to run it.

Prof Geraldine McNeill

Persuading senior colleagues in established roles to join.

Do you think some of those initial problems (which led to the Register being set up) still exist?

Prof Catherine Geissler

They do still exist as many people are not aware of the existence of the AfN and inadequately qualified people still give advice.

Prof Geraldine McNeill

Yes, not everyone who gives nutrition advice is regulated, and some new graduates who join do not continue with their registration.

What difference did it make having an independent organisation (AfN) looking after the Register?

Prof Catherine Geissler

It meant that the organisation had to become self-funding. They were then in a position to determine the qualifications of applicants from a variety of educational/training backgrounds.

Prof Geraldine McNeill

Widened the professional to link academic, public health and private roles. Supporting course organisers in developing the syllabus for nutrition degrees.

Do you think having a professional body has supported the development of a professional identity for nutritionists?

Prof Catherine Geissler
It has helped to do so.

Prof Geraldine McNeill
Yes for those who are on the register, but the wider public are still not neccessarily aware of the register.

Prof Colette Shortt
Absolutely! Congrats to those who established and support the Association for their sterling work. The Association for Nutrition professional standards and accreditation are of critical importance to the profession. They ensure quality and consistency of services, help protect the public, and build trust in the profession. In addition, the provision of clear standards helps nutritionists navigate complex practical situations in their day-to-day work. The Association provides a framework for professional development, which is invaluable for continuous development and informs on best practice. In my experience, accreditation also signals to stakeholders a commitment to the highest professional standards.

What do you think are the priorities for the future?

Prof Heather Hartwell

AfN will have to cope with the difficulty of getting new members when some University Courses in nutrition are closing. There will always be ongoing problems with the distinction between nutritionists and dietitians and there will always be problems in distinguishing those on the AfN Register from alternative registers.

Prof Catherine Geissler

Advertising more widely the role of the AfN.

Dr Peter Grabowski

The registration process clearly assesses an applicant's competence in their specialism, so it should be easy enough to make better make use the register specialisms for the benefit of the public, perhaps making better use of the specialism titles (e.g. Registered Public Health Nutritionist and Registered Healthcare Medical Nutritionist) in an application to HCPC, without the need to introduce separate codes of practice, ethics or standards. That's one priority in my mind for AfN for the future, regardless of whether the application for a Royal Charter is successful or not.

Under Helen Clark's leadership, AfN has developed significantly as an organisation, particularly in relation to professionalism and standards. One of the most significant more recent developments has been the introduction of CPD for all registrants, a mature professional activity for voluntary registrants. I would also add that the strong steer towards supporting associate registrants on their journey towards full registration is a strong positive move - more of that for the future too!

Over my period of involvement with Accreditation Committee, again with a strong influence from Helen, we moved away from long discussions about individual programmes, that on occasions were maybe more akin to unresolvable academic debates, towards much more purposeful business meetings that not only dealt more supportively with programme applications, but also contributed significantly to reviewing and developing strategy, processes and better defined standards. Important for the future will be to not stand still but to continue to reflect and develop in response to a significantly different world perspective than that of the 1980s and '90s when the register got going, and even a different world in many ways from five years ago.

How do you see AfN's role developing?

Dr Peter Grabowski

I can understand the wish to outwit AI, and would be one of the first to agree it is not yet fit for purpose. But perhaps there is a role for professional Nutritionists to feed (excuse the pun) into AI and its developers to ensure that it can recognise and rank the authority and quality of different sources, undertake critical and/or systematic review of the best evidence, formulate opinions and develop proposals where relevant. After all, isn't that what we do with students? Perhaps another focus for the future?

What is your ultimate wish for the profession?

Prof Catherine Geissler

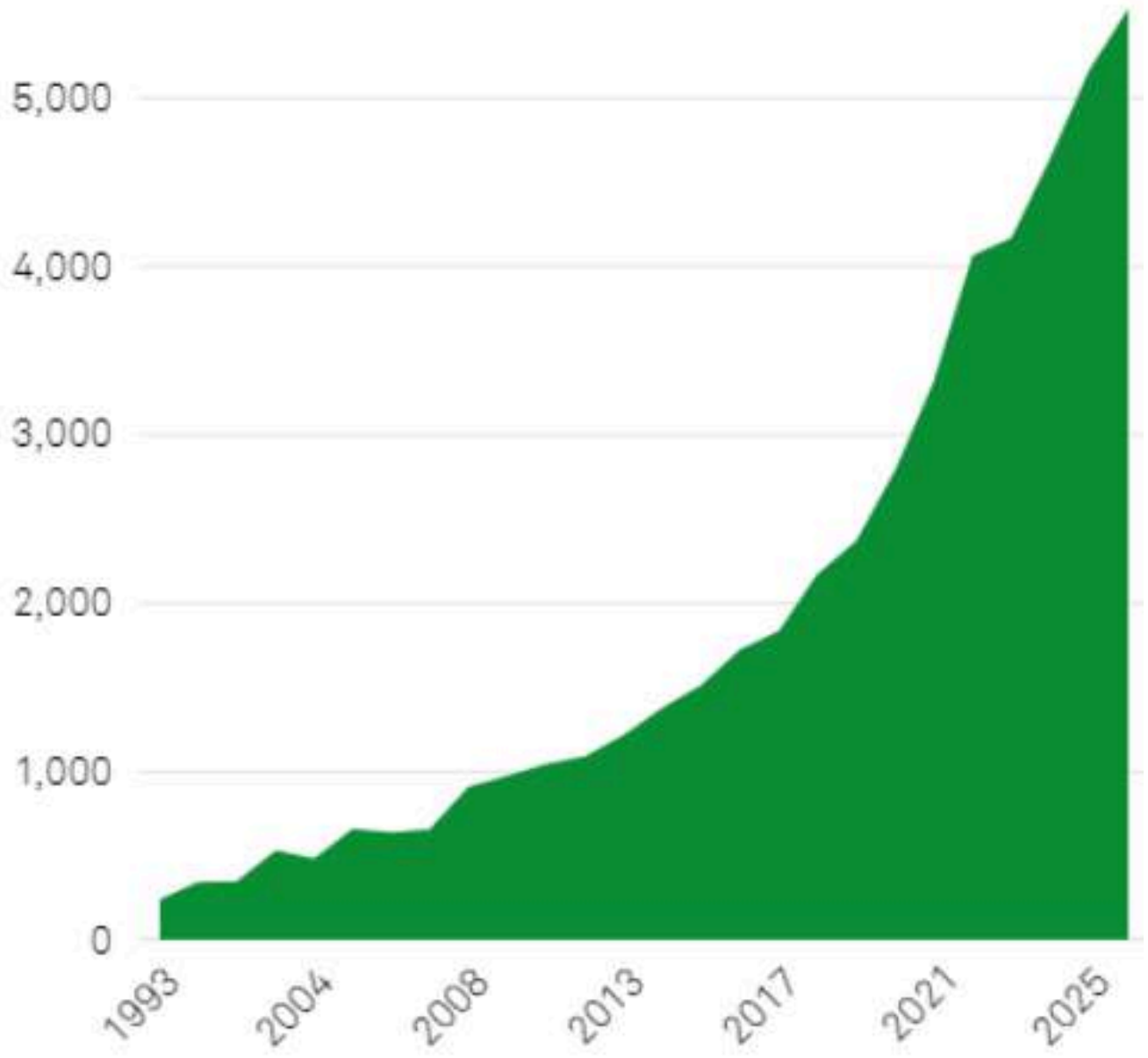
That everyone in a public role should be registered with AfN and is obliged to keep up to date with advances in Nutrition.

Prof Colette Shortt

Gazing into the future? Charter status would be the icing on the cake!

Some facts and figures

Register growth



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Miss Claire Baseley (Hon Secretary)
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2010 to present

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The Pathway to Professionalisation: Regulation for Nutritionists

Edited by
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