



Nutritional Therapy Education Commission (NTEC)

Core Curriculum for Nutritional Therapy (2017)

Introduction

Nutritional therapy (NT) is an evidence based discipline that employs the application of nutrition science in the promotion of health, peak performance and individual care. Nutritional therapy practitioners use a wide range of tools to assess and identify potential nutritional imbalances and understand how these may contribute to an individual's symptoms and health concerns. This approach allows them to work with individuals to address nutritional balance and help support the body towards maintaining health. Nutritional therapy is recognised as a complementary medicine and is relevant for individuals with chronic conditions, as well as those looking for support to enhance their health and wellbeing. Practitioners consider each individual to be unique and recommend personalised nutrition and lifestyle programmes rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. Practitioners never recommend nutritional therapy as a replacement for medical advice and always refer any client with 'red flag' signs or symptoms to their medical professional. They will also frequently work alongside a medical professional and will communicate with other healthcare professionals involved in the client's care to explain any nutritional therapy programme that has been provided (BANT 2014).

The first core curriculum for nutritional therapy (NT) was published by the Nutritional Therapy Council (NTC) in 2004 and was revised in 2007. An interim revised version was published by the Nutritional Therapy Education Commission (NTEC) in 2015. The current revision of the core curriculum has drawn on the Framework for Higher Education in Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) (2008) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2008) benchmark statements for health care programmes. It has also been informed by the findings of Benbow & Ralph (2016) which suggested that nutritional therapy education would benefit from an increased emphasis the following areas which have been embedded into this revised curriculum;

- The application of behaviour change theory to nutritional therapy practice
- The evaluation of research evidence to inform evidence based nutritional therapy practice
- The development of business management skills including marketing and Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) compliance
- A systems biology approach to assessment including medical, functional and nutrigenetic tests
- Legislative framework for professional practice in NT.

This core curriculum provides a means of describing the nature and characteristics of programmes of study and education in nutritional therapy that lead to higher education awards. The areas of study outlined in this core curriculum have also been mapped against the Skills for Health National Occupational Standards (NOS) for nutritional therapy (2007) and the mapping is available on request. This curriculum is competency based and integrates theory and practice throughout.



This core curriculum should be used as a guide in developing programme specifications and module learning outcomes and assessments to support achievement of the NOS; and programme and module specifications should be mapped against it. It is also intended that the core curriculum will support development of the NT profession and to address concerns around the regard in which the profession is held by the public and mainstream medical community.

The clinical skills required for the nutritional therapy profession require an exit point at level 6 or higher on the educational framework. This means that courses will be delivering final year clinical skills and underpinning theory at this level. Providers delivering courses will need to evidence that the courses they offer are at that particular level of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ). Providers will be able to do this if they hold their own degree awarding powers, work with degree awarding bodies as delivery partners, or have had particular courses validated by a university or other body with such powers.

It is possible for a provider to offer free standing provision at level 6 which is not integrated with a degree programme. Organisations may offer qualifications that meet all of the requirements for a programme at HE level 6 by, for example, meeting the requirements of the FHEQ, and the compliance of this must have been checked by an external body. NTEC accreditation cannot be awarded without external body approval as checking compliance would be beyond our remit.

Language: Before joining a programme of study in nutritional therapy, students must be able to communicate in English to a minimum standard equivalent to level 7 of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). (This level is higher than required for entry to a degree programme but reflects the needs of a profession working with the public in a clinical setting).

Core Curriculum

A. Professional nutritional therapy practice

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

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

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

B. Physiological functions in health and disease

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to demonstrate understanding of and apply where relevant:

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

C. Food and diet in NT practice

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

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

D. Evidence based practice:

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

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

E. Assessment and planning for nutritional therapy practice

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

1. Communicate and negotiate effectively with the client to identify therapeutic goals and appropriate strategies.
2. Discuss the design and use of appropriate assessment and evaluation tools including health questionnaires and patient outcome measures
3. Identify where acute health conditions may be present (red flags) and refer appropriately (appendix 1).
4. Carry out integrated health and nutritional assessment activities skilfully and in accordance with evidence based practice These may include gathering a medical and social history, anthropometric and dietary assessment and results from functional, nutrigenetic and biochemical/medical testing as appropriate.
5. Use a systems based, integrated and evidenced approach to interpret and evaluate the results of nutritional assessment which may include, medical, biochemical, functional and nutrigenetic
6. Evaluate quantitative and qualitative methods used to estimate nutrient intake.
7. Evaluate guidelines and recommendations for nutritional intake including Dietary Reference Values (DRVs) and safe upper limits
8. Assess readiness for behaviour change.
9. Discuss the influence of social and cultural factors on dietary intake and lifestyle of clients.
10. Understand, and present numerical data from health assessments.
11. Monitor and critically evaluate the outcomes of practice and reassess priorities and adjust management plans in the light of these.
12. Maintain records of assessment and management plans appropriately in accordance with current legislation
13. Reflect on knowledge, skills and clinical experiences to progress personal and professional development.

F. Therapeutic nutritional management:

The award holder in nutritional therapy should be able to:

1. Formulate therapeutic plans for, nutrition and lifestyle advice to educate the client and meet negotiated goals, drawing on a critique of evidence in the literature and client assessment.
2. Develop plans for the management of nutritional deficiencies or excesses, including obesity and eating disorders recognising the need for referral to appropriate services where relevant.
3. Plan appropriate dietary advice and construct menu plans to safely and effectively meet negotiated health goals within an agreed timeframe.
4. Apply appropriate communication skills to develop therapeutic relationships for effective clinical practice.

5. Appraise and select appropriate nutraceuticals for safe and effective practice to achieve therapeutic goals
6. Apply knowledge of behaviour change techniques that may include motivational interviewing, TA (transactional analysis) and NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) to support, motivate and empower clients to make negotiated food and lifestyle behaviour changes to promote health.
7. Employ strategies to empower the client to become actively involved in dietary changes and the management of their own health care including reviewing their wider environment.
8. Communicate effectively with the client using, information sheets and other forms of written communication
9. Educate clients about food safety and provide practical advice about food, eating and drinking
10. Identify the sustainability and environmental impact of dietary advice and food choices
11. Critically review effectiveness of previous nutritional plans and negotiate to adjust these as appropriate.

G. Business skills:

The award holder in Nutritional Therapy should be able to:

1. Manage time and resources.
2. Demonstrate relevant knowledge of the legislative framework for Nutritional Therapy.
3. Understand the legal responsibilities of a self-employed healthcare professional.
4. Understand the role of Professional Bodies and Regulators; the role of each and the difference between them.
5. Understand the role of insurers and evaluate insurance needs.
6. Understand the financial responsibilities of running a small business.
7. Explain the basic accounting and book-keeping requirements of a small business.
8. Undertake a business and clinical audit.
9. Recognise that Nutritional Therapy can be a 'product' to be marketed.
10. Understand the value of different marketing strategies and how these can be applied.
11. Develop a business plan and recognise the need to update this on an on-going basis.
12. Understand website construction (sufficiently to guide those with the skills to do this) and the use of web based communications including social media.
13. Design and publish brochures, fliers and promotional literature.
14. Understand how to deliver a presentation to a variety of different audiences.
15. Manage client expectations, relationships and develop service excellence.
16. Develop an awareness of networking and the interpersonal skills of effective listening, negotiating, persuasion and presentation and their use in generating business contacts.
17. Be an effective communicator, using relevant communications for business including understand the effectiveness of digital tools.
18. Develop communication skills with fellow health professionals, clients and other businesses.

Appendix 1: Red flag list

Red Flag List Symptoms

Pain

- any pain which is persistent, particularly if severe or in the head, abdomen or central chest
- *pain in the eye or temples, with local tenderness, in the elderly, rheumatic patient
- pain on passing urine in a man
- cystitis recurring more than three times in a woman
- absence of pain in ulcers, fissures etc.
- *sciatic pain if associated with objective neurological deficit

Bleeding

- blood in sputum, vomit, urine or stools
- *vomit containing “coffee grounds” (coagulated blood, twisted bowel)
- *black, tarry stools (cancer)
- non-menstrual vaginal bleeding (intermenstrual, postmenopausal, or at any time in pregnancy)
- *vaginal bleeding with pain in pregnancy or after missing one period

Psychological

- deep depression with suicidal ideas
- hearing voices
- incongruous behaviour

Persistent

- vomiting &/or diarrhoea delusional beliefs
- *vomiting &/or diarrhoea in infant thirst increase in passing urine
- cough
- unexplained loss of weight (1lb per week or more)

Sudden

- *breathlessness
- *swelling of face, lips, tongue or throat
- *blueness of the lips
- *loss of consciousness
- *loss of vision
- *convulsions
- unexplained behavioural change

Difficulty

- **swallowing**
- ***breathing**

Change

- **in bowel habit**
- **in a skin lesion (size, shape, colour, bleeding, itching, pain)**

Others

- **pallor**
- **unexplained swelling or lumps**
- ***neck stiffness in a patient with fever**
- **unexplained fever, particularly if persistent or recurrent**
- **brown patches (Addison's disease)**

****may denote emergency intervention required***

Note: There is no reference for the Red Flag List. It has been in historic use by BANT and the organisations that pre-date BANT. It is believed to have originated from a training provider teaching Naturopathic and Osteopathic Courses. There are plans for NTEC to update this at a future point and to ensure the future Red Flag List will be referenced.

References

BANT (British Association for Applied Nutrition and Nutritional Therapy). 2014. *About Nutritional Therapy*. (Online). Available at: <http://bant.org.uk> (Accessed 11 August 2016)

Benbow A. & Ralph S. (2016) Professional trajectory from initial qualification to the workplace: what do Nutritional Therapists do? NTEC. 2016 (Publication awaited).

CNH1. Explore and establish the client's needs for complementary and natural healthcare. Skills for Health. June 2010.

CNH2. Develop and agree plans for complementary and natural healthcare with clients. Skills for Health. June 2010.

CNH8. Provide Nutritional Therapy to clients. Skills for Health. June 2010.

CNH9 Prescribe nutraceuticals to clients. Skills for Health. June 2010.

CNHC Core Curriculum Templated (updated September 2015)

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Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. (August 2008) The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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