

## Assessment in nutrition education – an exploration of nutrition educators' experiences

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Teaching and assessment practices in nutrition education are informed by competency standards. These standards describe the knowledge, skills and attributes expected of a nutrition professional and drive competency-based education and assessment in nutrition. Competency-based assessment (CBA) evaluates a student's competence by analysing performance in line with the standards<sup>(1)</sup>. Little is known about educators' experience in developing or implementing CBA in nutrition education or their opinions on how well it captures a student's preparedness for the workforce.

The objective of this study was to explore educators' experience of CBA in nutrition education in Ireland.

In-depth, semi-structured, video-recorded interviews were conducted with 13 educators on undergraduate honours degree nutrition programmes across Ireland. This study was grounded in interpretivism whereby researchers sought to co-construct meaning of experiences of CBA between themselves and the research participants. A reflexive thematic analysis approach was implemented whereby the data was transcribed, coded, and emerging themes identified and discussed by all authors.

A clear divide was evident between participants who were confident in their understanding of CBA and those who were unsure or had no knowledge of the term. 'Student-centred approach to assessment' was the dominating theme emerging from the data, of which sub-themes included preparation for the workforce, competency-development, work-based assessment, practical assessment, and reflective assessment. Many participants felt their programmes provided ample opportunities for students to prepare for the workforce and that preparedness was dependent on the student's effort throughout the programme. However, there were some gaps identified for consideration to adapt assessments to reflect today's nutrition workforce and the roles a nutritionist can fulfil – these included reflective practice training, client consultation training, job specific translation of theory into practice and more community involvement. A call for more authentic assessment was unsurprising as this introduces the student to real-life work scenarios they may come across. Reflective practice, an essential component of CPD for a nutrition professional, was also mentioned as a habit that would be most beneficial to instil in students before graduation.

Educators' overall positivity towards CBA was predominantly linked to their acknowledgement of its importance as a student-centred methodology. Ensuring students are developing competencies and meeting the standards expected to practice as a nutrition professional is essential as it prepares them to enter the workforce. The implementation of more authentic assessment such as simulations and reflective practice will aid in the preparation of students for the realities of work they may find employment in after graduation.

### Reference

1. O'Donovan S, Palermo C & Ryan L (2021) *J Hum Nutr Diet*, 1–10.