



## Nutrition students' employability skills: need for a graduate employability framework

S. McLeod<sup>1</sup>, A. Ng<sup>1</sup>, K. Furness<sup>1</sup> and R. Belski<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sport, Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, School of Allied Health, Human Services and Sport, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria 3086, Australia

For a qualified nutritionist to obtain registration with the Nutrition Society of Australia they must first demonstrate that they meet a set of competencies relating to required nutrition knowledge and skills<sup>(1)</sup>. However, theoretical knowledge and a technical skillset may not be enough to actively contribute to the workforce as a new graduate<sup>(2)</sup>. Employers have previously expressed a desire for nutrition graduates to also develop employability skills in undergraduate studies to be better prepared for the workforce<sup>(3)</sup>. Universities across Australia appear to have heterogeneous approaches to building nutrition students employability skills. To better understand student workforce readiness and employability skills, the research team undertook a mixed-methods study. A validated work-ready tool was used to survey undergraduate nutrition students self-perception of work readiness (n = 88) and semi-structured interviews of students pre/post nutrition industry placements (n = 18) were conducted to assess factors impacting student understanding and development of work readiness. Preliminary data from the survey showed higher levels of perceived ability related to higher age in, written communication (P<0.05), decision making (P<0.05), working unsupervised (P<0.05) and managing challenges (P<0.05). Lower age showed lower perceived ability in understanding how to apply skills (P<0.001). Lower levels of work experience showed lower perceived ability to work in a team (P<0.01), collaborate (P<0.01), work under pressure (P<0.05), and identify problems (P<0.01). Thematic analysis from interviews revealed themes related to improved confidence following a placement experience, communicating to stakeholders, the importance of translation skills, the benefits of networking and self-efficacy. The results suggest there are numerous identified gaps and significant room for improvement. To have a systematic approach to skill development, universities training nutrition students should consider developing a framework that builds understanding and scaffolds skill development across year levels. An employability framework has the potential to increase students employability skills and knowledge, enhance student confidence and increase graduate employment.

**Keywords:** graduate employability; nutrition undergraduate; employability framework; work ready skills

### Ethics Declaration

Yes

### Financial Support

This research received no external funding.

### References

1. Lawlis T, Coates AM, Clark K *et al.* (2019) *Asia Pac J Clin Nutr* **28**(1), 166–176.
2. Murray E, McLeod S, Biesiekierski J *et al.* (2020) *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability* **11**(1), 63–80.
3. Croxford S, Stirling E, McLeod S *et al.* (2022) *Nutr Diet* **79**(4), 447–455.