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Working in nutrition: interim analysis of a national survey exploring career pathways and perspectives of nutrition graduates

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The design of nutrition undergraduate courses is guided by national nutrition science competencies.⁽¹⁾ Nutrition graduates feel uncertain about their career pathways, and the diversity and perceived competitiveness of nutrition roles contribute to their anxiety about employability.⁽²⁾ There is a need for universities to improve the understanding of where nutrition graduates secure employment to improve the preparedness of these graduates for practice. The aims were to report preliminary findings from the Working in Nutrition (WIN) study, that investigates career pathways that graduates from nutrition science courses across Australia have pursued after completing their degrees. Alumni from all nutrition and combined university programs (undergraduate and postgraduate) offered across Australia were eligible. Surveys were distributed in July 2022 through university alumni groups, social media networks and targeted emails from degree coordinators. A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was used. After being tested for face validity the purpose-built WIN survey was delivered online via Qualtrics. The survey includes a mix of 35 close- and open-ended questions about participant characteristics, additional education, employment and professional experience, and perceived preparedness for the workforce. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics (IBM SPSS) and open-ended questions using qualitative content analysis. An interim analysis revealed that 128 participants had given informed consent; of these, 88 completed 75% of the questions and were included in the current analyses. The majority of respondents were female (91%), aged 25–34 years (46%). A total of 54.3% of participants had completed their degrees between 2010 and 2019, 28.4% since 2020 and 18.2% before 2010. Respondents had completed their qualifications at 16 different Australian universities. Over one third of respondents had completed a post-secondary qualification prior to their qualification in nutrition and more than half completed an additional tertiary qualification such as research, dietetics, education, or public health. Almost one quarter (23.9%) of respondents did not work in a nutrition-related role (for reasons including retirement, family and other commitments), and 76.1% of respondents were working or had worked in a nutrition-related role. Clinical settings were the most common (17%) followed by research settings (16%), education (11%), food industry (9%), non-government organisations and not-for-profit organisations (9%). Only one in five respondents reported working in a position that they thought they would upon completion of their nutrition qualification and almost half were not. The data is supportive that a nutrition science degree has at least in part helped the majority of responding graduates pursue careers in nutrition fields. Further data and analysis will provide more context around job titles and responsibilities, including where transferable skills may be relevant to professions within and outside nutrition.

References

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2. Murray E, McLeod S, Biesiekierski J, *et al.* (2020) *J Teach Learn Grad Employ* **11**, 63–80.