



## A survey of graduate areas of employment and factors that influence employability

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In Ireland, nutrition science programmes prepare nutrition graduates for a wide range of employment opportunities<sup>(1)</sup>. These programmes undergo regular evaluations to implement necessary adaptations to meet the changing needs of the labour market and ensure student success. Employability, career pathways and student success for nutrition graduates lack robust research and are under-represented in comparison to other allied healthcare professions such as nursing and dietetics<sup>(2)</sup>. The objective of this study was to identify areas of employment for nutrition science graduates in Ireland and explore graduates' preparedness for the workforce.

A survey was completed by nutrition graduates (n = 70) who had completed an Irish nutrition science degree after 2016. Open and closed questions were utilised to gather opinions from graduates on their career journeys thus far. Quantitative data was statistically analysed using SPSS and Excel, whilst the qualitative data was thematically analysed to identify themes and sub-themes.

Upon graduation, graduates predominantly obtained their first jobs in the food industry, research, and non-nutrition related roles including hospitality and retail. Current employment areas remained similar to post-graduation, however one quarter were now pursuing further study. Over half of participants (n = 45) secured employment in nutrition-related roles such as research, food industry and academia upon graduation with 1 in 2 reporting employment success due to placement. Preparedness levels varied amongst respondents, with an even split between graduates who felt somewhat or very prepared (n = 31) and those who felt somewhat or very unprepared (n = 31). Eight individuals felt neutral when considering their preparedness at time of first employment. A positive correlation between having relevant work experience in the field of nutrition, including placement, and preparedness was shown to be statistically significant (p 0.001). Just over 3/4 of graduates expressed placement was what best prepared them when entering the workforce, with communication skills reported as the second most useful aspect. Graduates stated a desire to see more professionalism modules and resources for career guidance within programmes to boost employment success – examples listed included career talks, guest speakers, professional development guidance, and network opportunities. Additionally, graduates expressed interest in having more active learning and real-world activities throughout their education to boost confidence in skills developed. Placement opportunities were explored further: graduates expressed a desire for compulsory placement modules within all nutrition courses allowing students to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to feel competent within their chosen area of work, along with increased variance in placement opportunities to boost employment prospects by gaining experience in different areas within the nutrition field and expand their networks.

These results provide a glimpse into the graduate experience in Ireland and highlights future areas for research and improvement to ensure nutrition science education is preparing capable and confident graduates for the workforce.

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### References

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