

European dietetic education – the need for uniform dietetic practice

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Over the years 6 surveys of the education and work of dietitians have been undertaken by EFAD. They have highlighted a great diversity of education and work throughout Europe. 2003 most countries but not all had BSc programmes, the entrance requirements varied as well as the length of the studies. The practical training varied from 0-65% of the total programme. The title Dietitian was protected in some countries and not in other countries. The variation is a barrier which have to be dismantled to meeting goals of the Bologna Declaration. Dietitians and students demand a qualification they can use Europe wide.

The Bologna Declaration 1999 agreed to establish a European Education Area by 2010. There was a decision on convergence into two cycles, BSc and MSc, with a common Education Credit Transfer System to promote mobility.

At the EFAD delegate meeting in 2003 the delegates agreed on priorities for the convergence of the education and practice of dietitians across Europe as follows: agree a description of the role of a dietitian working in Europe, define minimum 3 year degree qualification (benchmarked at defined level with ECTS) agree a European Benchmark Statement (EDBS) including a practical placement benchmark, set a benchmark for teachers of dietetics, agree on a common language by defining technical terms used, promote national registration of dietitians to protect the title and consider European registration. The EDBS was adopted by EFAD 2005.

A need for funding to establish practice standards was recognised and an application for funding to Socrates ERASMUS thematic networks scheme was accepted 2006 “Dietitians Improving Education and Training Standards” (DIETS).

The objectives of this three year project, starting November 2006, are to describe practice based education, improve communication between educators and dietetic practitioners, harmonise education, develop the utilisation of ECTS, develop quality indicators, facilitate the sharing of knowledge, disseminate research findings concerning practice education and develop the role of the dietitian in the promotion of nutritional health through embedding lifelong learning competencies in the first cycle degree.

With the start of this project an important step forward for students, dietetic practitioners and practice educators within Europe has been taken.