

Strategy for Lifelong Learning for dietitians in Europe

According to the European Commission, lifelong learning (LLL) is defined as ‘*all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.*’

This proposed strategy for lifelong learning is aimed at dietitians in Europe and written by Work Package 2 (Work Package 2) ‘*Second and third cycle competences for dietitians*’ of the Thematic Network of Dietitians (DIETS2, www.thematicnetworkdietetics.eu). A toolkit for collecting information about LLL activities will be developed by Work Package 3 ‘*Life Long Learning for Dietitians in Europe*’.

Dietitians need to be committed to constant development as they progress through their career; making effective use of LLL to increase their competence and attain a high quality of performance, creativity and innovation together with safe practice.

The purpose of the strategy is to encourage individual dietitians to improve their scientific and professional skills throughout their careers. Lifelong learning has a key role to play in advancing the status and reputation of the dietetic profession, reducing inequalities and improving nutritional health in Europe. Continued development will also ensure fulfilment of the professional code of ethics and good practice adopted by the European Federation of Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) which states that European Dietitians should have;

“Continued competence and professional accountability

- *Ensure accountability to the public*
- *Accept responsibility for ensuring practice meets legislative requirement*
- *Maintain continued competence by being responsible for lifelong learning and engaging in self-development.”*

Recommended actions for dietitians

1. Stay committed to constant professional development through your career
2. Use basic and advanced level benchmark competence statements for European dietitians* to set up short- and long term lifelong learning goals
3. Learn how to recognize learning possibilities
4. Actively seek opportunities for lifelong learning
5. Document all lifelong learning activities to review, set goals, monitor progress and demonstrate professional development
6. Help create a culture of lifelong learning and development amongst dietitians in Europe.

* EFAD (2009) *European Dietetic Competences and their Performance Indicators Attained at the Point of Qualification and Entry to the Profession of Dietetics*. Available at www.efad.org *European Dietetic Advanced Competences (EDAC)*. It was discussed and adopted at EFAD General Meeting in Portoroz, Slovenia 2012. Available at www.efad.org

Strategy for Lifelong Learning within EFAD

According to the European Commission lifelong learning (LLL) is defined as ‘*all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.*’

Part of the mission and aims of European Federation of Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) is to support member associations in developing the role that dietitians have in reducing inequalities and improving nutritional health in Europe.

This proposed strategy for LLL is aimed at dietitians in Europe through their National Dietetic Associations (NDAs) and written by the Work Package ‘*Second and third cycle competences for dietitians*’ of the Thematic Network of Dietitians (DIETS2, www.thematicnetworkdietetics.eu).

The purpose of the strategy is to support NDAs and the profession in Europe to fulfil the Mission and aims of EFAD by promoting the development of the dietetic profession and developing dietetics on a scientific and professional level in the common interest of the member Associations. This should also ensure fulfilment of the professional code of ethics and good practice adopted by EFAD, which states that European Dietitians should have;

“Continued competence and professional accountability

- *Ensure accountability to the public*
- *Accept responsibility for ensuring practice meets legislative requirement*
- *Maintain continued competence by being responsible for lifelong learning and engaging in self-development.”*

EFAD will help to develop and support NDAs who in their turn will be committed to the constant development and commitment of their members to improve their competence as they progress through their careers. This will not only benefit the people, that dietitians’ serve, to gain and maintain their health through improved food choice and nutrition, but also advance the status and reputation of the dietetic profession in Europe.

Aims of the EFAD Strategy for Lifelong Learning

1. To create a culture of LLL and professional development amongst dietitians in Europe.
2. To support individual NDAs to develop their commitment to LLL for/of their members.
3. To work with education providers, directly and through NDAs to develop learning opportunities, the promotion of these and the subsequent dissemination across Europe.
4. To work with all constituents who would benefit from professional engagement with dietitians in order to advance their learning about the contribution that can be made to the improvement of health through nutrition.
5. To provide basic and advanced level benchmark competence statements and a ‘toolkit to record LLL’ for European dietitians and to support individual NDAs to adapt to national requirements.
6. To monitor the development of the profession in Europe together with the NDAs as opportunities are introduced for LLL.

Recommended actions for NDAs

1. For Countries that do not yet have an accreditation or credit system, EFAD would recommend the NDAs and/or their education providers establish a system for rewarding learning (professional development and LLL) wherever it may occur.
2. Consider, adopt and promote a system for recording on-going professional development, for example using a portfolio-based or an internet based log system, to monitor the individual’s professional progress in achieving their learning goals.

3. Exploration and implementation of a Specialist Dietitian title by the NDA as a means of showing advancement as a professional and so create new career developments and opportunities.
4. The adoption either at national (competent authority level) or by the NDA of a mechanism to systematically monitor, ensure and publically list all dietitians they consider are safe and competent practitioners and a transparent system to identify those that are not competent (which may include reporting by colleagues or the public).