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Master of Nutrition and Dietetics (MNutr) Applicant and Student Occupational Health Screening Policy

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Index page

	Page number
1.0 Introduction	3
2.0 Procedures for pre-registration health screening	4
3.0 MNutr student responsibilities and course requirements	6
4.0 Outcomes of Optima Health health screening	10
5.0 Appeals	11

1.0 Introduction

It is a legal responsibility to assess all applicants/students on any regulated professional course for fitness to train, to practice and also to work. This applies to all applicants and students enrolled on the MNutr course and who will train to be a registered dietitian.

The standards for training as a dietitian are defined by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and the Department of Health (DH). These standards meet the principles in the Equality Act, in that they are a proportionate means of achieving the aim of ensuring both service user safety and to be able to undertake the key functions, which are essential for the role and responsibilities of a dietitian.

This policy is informed by national policies and guidance, the University of Nottingham Student Services and our occupational health provider, Optima Health. Although the MNutr course manager and director holds the overall responsibility for all of our applicants/student's fitness to study and practice, we are informed by Optima Health who are contracted by the University of Nottingham to undertake all of our health screening on our behalf.

The role of Optima Health is to assess the criteria for medical fitness to study and train as set out by the Higher Education Occupational Physicians/Practitioners (HEOPS) document "[Dietitian students -standards of medical fitness to train, 2016](#)". (Appendix 1).

Occupational health screening of all of our applicants/students enables the course to identify, prevent and support study and practice placements, as well as provide applicants/students with a clear and objective assessment of their capacity and safety for undertaking the MNutr course and practice placements.

Where appropriate the MNutr course manager, course director and student services can identify additional support and/or reasonable adjustments which may be put in place to support a student through the MNutr course and/or their practice placement.

2.0 Procedures for pre-registration health screening

All applicants/students offered a place on the MNutr course are subject to an occupational health (OH) screening process and satisfactory health clearance. This should be undertaken as soon as possible after a place has been offered. All applicants/students are screened before/on entry to the first year of the MNutr course and at the start of every academic year.

On confirming an offer of a place, the applicant is sent a welcome email, which provides a link to an online health questionnaire. The applicant is required to complete the online health questionnaire as soon as possible and no later than 7 days following the date it was sent. Any applicant who does not submit their completed health questionnaire within 7 days, may have their offer of a place on the MNutr course being withdrawn for non-engagement.

Applicants/students are expected to provide full and honest information on their health questionnaire, no information should be withheld. Any non or partial declarations by applicants/students which fail to provide Optima Health with a full and accurate medical history, may result in their offer of a place being withdrawn or reconsideration as to their fitness to continue on the course.

Each questionnaire will be reviewed by a OH nurse advisor, who will contact the applicant/student to obtain further information, so a full assessment can be made as to their fitness for the course. Where the applicant/student has declared past and/or current health and/or medical related information, this may need further investigation by Optima Health.

All applicants/students should agree to and acknowledge if they feel that they do not satisfy the particular health screening requirements for the MNutr course. If they are unable to meet the requirements they may be required to withdraw from the course

Optima Health, student services and the course manager will ensure that reasonable and appropriate support is provided to applicants/students to be able to undertake the course and also ensure that they are well enough to complete the MNutr course. The final decision as to whether to allow a student to commence the MNutr course or not lies with the course manager and course director, this decision is based upon the medical opinion provided by Optima Health, the HEOPS Dietitian students -standards of medical fitness to train, 2016 document, and student services.

For those individuals who are not assessed as fit by Optima Health to undertake the MNutr course either at entry or at any other time in the future, this medical opinion will be communicated, with reasons why, to the course manager and a meeting will be arranged for the applicant/student to meet to discuss the outcome from Optima Health and the implications of the decision. Following this meeting applicants/students may be suspended or rejected on medical grounds as appropriate.

3.0 MNutr student responsibilities and course requirements

3.1 Routine annual health screening

All MNutr students are required to inform the course manager in writing of any health condition and/or personal circumstances which may affect their ability to undertake and/or complete the course. Before the beginning of each new academic year (either following progression or returning from an interruption in study) all MNutr students are required to complete an online health questionnaire provided from Optima Health.

Every MNutr student is required to complete the online health questionnaire as soon as possible and no later than 7 days of it being sent by the course administrator. Any student who does not complete and submit their health questionnaire within 7 days of it being sent, will not be able to recommence the course until the questionnaire has been completed.

All students are expected to provide full and honest details on their health questionnaire, no information should be withheld. Any non or partial declarations by MNutr students which do not provide Optima Health with a full and accurate current medical history, may result in a concern form being completed and a fitness to practice process being initiated.

3.2 Occupational health referral process following period of absence

For all MNutr students returning to study following sick leave of more than 4 weeks or following an interruption in their studies, the course administrator will send an online health questionnaire from Optima Health. This should be completed by the student within 7 days of receipt.

Every referral will be processed by Optima Health. Optima Health will review the referral and may contact the student within two weeks of the referral being received. Once the assessment has been made by Optima Health, this will be communicated to the student and the course manager. If required, the course manager will review the assessment outcome/recommendations and if necessary, arrange to meet with the student to discuss the content and any implications of the assessment. If appropriate, the course manager will advise the course administrator to organise the students return to study and/or the placement manager to arrange a practice placement.

3.3 Students returning to study or practice placement following sick leave

Students who have a period of four or more week's off sick from the MNutr course (regardless of the medical or health condition, or the timing of the sick leave) will be sent a health screening questionnaire by the course administrator. This should occur before the resumption of any studies and prior to commencing a practice placement. Students who have not completed the health screening process with Optima Health will not be able to recommence their studies or practice placement until the process has been completed.

3.4 Students returning to study following an interruption

Prior to resuming the MNutr course, all students who have undertaken an interruption in their studies must be referred to Optima Health for a health screening re-assessment. This is to ensure that the student is both fit to study and/or undertake a practice placement. A health questionnaire will be sent by the course administrator. Students who have not completed the health screening process with Optima Health will not be able to recommence their studies or practice placement until the process has been completed.

3.5 Students who may have raised some concerns

If a staff member or placement supervisor has any concerns about a student's health and wellbeing at any time during the course or their placement, the staff member or placement supervisor may initially request to meet with the student to discuss and raise their concerns. The staff member or placement supervisor may also request that the student discusses their concerns with their personal/placement tutor and/or the course manager.

An occupational health referral request may be made by the student's personal/placement tutor or the course manager with the student consent, if there are concerns raised about a student's health and wellbeing and/or their fitness to study and practice.

3.6 Health screening requirements during the MNutr course

Compliance and engagement with the Optima Health screening process is a requirement of the MNutr course. Upon registration to the first year, all students must agree to comply with the health screening and immunisation processes and annually thereafter at the start of every academic year (Appendix 2). The course manager will complete a concern form for students who fail to comply with the course requirements, which then may progress to Fitness to Practise proceedings.

3.8 Fitness to study and practice hearings

As part of a student's Fitness to Practise investigation or panel hearing, it may be identified by the course manager or panel that the student should be referred to occupational health for a re-assessment. In this instance the course manager should discuss their concerns with the student and complete the referral to Optima Health.

Should a student refuse to provide consent for a referral they will not be permitted to commence their studies or undertake practice placements until such a time that a re-assessment of their health and wellbeing can be made by Optima Health. In the event of no re-assessment being able to take place due to lack of consent, a concern form will be generated, which may be used within a Fitness to Practice hearing. This may result in the student being permanently withdrawn from the course.

3.9 Appointment cancellations and non-attendance

Applicants/students are responsible for cancelling and re-arranging their appointment with Optima Health directly, regardless of whether or not they have already reported an absence was reported to the University. Appointments cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice will be considered as non-attendance.

Optima Health will notify the course administrator of applicants/students fail to attend their scheduled health screening appointments. Any students who persistently miss appointments with Optima Health will be brought to the attention of the course manager and appropriate action taken.

3.10 Costs and charges

The MNutr course provides an occupational health screening process that is free of charge for all of its students. All occupational health appointments must be undertaken by a University of Nottingham approved service, provided by Optima Health. Where appointments are missed without sufficient notice or reason, students will be asked to pay the DNA charge, currently £35.00.

3.11 Health screening service provided by Optima Health

Health screening of MNutr course applicants/students is carried out for a number of reasons, these include:

1. To confirm their fitness to study and to complete the course
2. To confirm their fitness for a practice placement
3. To indicate where additional support and adjustments are required to complete the placement and/or aspects of the course
4. To confirm their fitness for employment at the end of the course

The criteria for health screening of health applicants/students are the same as those applied to all healthcare employees.

Following an assessment by Optima Health, a response for each individual student is provided to the course manager.

4.0 Outcomes of Optima Health health screening

4.1 Suitable for the course with no restrictions or adjustments required

Where this response is received no further action is required by the student, course manager or the school.

4.2 Suitable for the course with recommended restrictions or adjustments

Where this response is received, the information is provided to the course manager and personal tutor and/or disability co-ordinator to assess whether the recommendations received are 'reasonable' and would enable the student to meet all the MNutr course and professional requirements as required by the HCPC. Where appropriate, practice educators are consulted with and a risk assessment is undertaken.

4.3 Not suitable at this time

Following an assessment by Optima Health, the recommendation may be that an applicant/student may be suitable for their chosen course/profession only following a period of recovery/stability and this will be communicated to the student and course manager. On receiving this response, the course manager will discuss the recommendation with the

student and agree with them a deferred start date and re-assessment with OH Works and potential start date.

4.4 Not suitable for the course

Occasionally Optima Health will reach the recommendation that an individual is not suitable for their chosen course/profession in line with HEOPS guidance (2016) and other relevant guidelines and legislation. In this instance the course manager will discuss the medical opinion with the individual and inform them that they have not met the minimum requirements for the MNutr course. However, the course manager and Student Services will discuss and support the student in exploring other suitable courses (both professional and non-professional) or careers where their health would not pose a barrier.

5.0 Appeals

If an applicant/student wishes to appeal against a recommendation made by Optima Health, they must put this in writing to the course manager and provide written evidence and grounds for the appeal. Should the school feel the student has provided sufficient evidence and the ground are valid, the applicant/student must provide additional evidence and request a further reassessment by Optima Health. The outcome of this medical review will be final as far as the school is concerned and if an applicant or student is still not satisfied with the medical decision, they can submit a complaint via the university's complaints process.

Appendix 1



Dietitian Students – Standards of medical fitness to train

Introduction

This document has been drafted by HEOPS, following wide consultation, as guidance for those providing occupational health advice to Higher Educational Institutions (HEI's) on students' fitness to train and meet the required standards on completion of a training programme. All dietitian students should complete a health screening program before commencing clinical placements. The standards for training as a dietitian are defined by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)¹ and the Department of Health (DH).^{2,3,4,5,6} These standards meet the principles in the Equality Act, in that they are a proportionate means of achieving the legitimate aim of ensuring service user safety, and they are targeted at functions which are intrinsic to the discipline.

Prospective students who have serious concerns that a medical condition may have implications for future fitness to train should, at an early stage, and even before making a formal application, contact the HEI and if appropriate be offered professional advice. There is an obligation on HEI's to make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities where such adjustments enable a student with a disability to fulfil the required competencies. There is no requirement to make adjustments to competence standards themselves.

Medical and personal information disclosed during the assessment processes should be held “in confidence” by the occupational health service. Medical details should only be given to education programme leaders and others outside the occupational health service in so far as it is necessary for them to discharge their management responsibilities, in accordance with the Data Protection Act.⁷ Explicit informed consent should be obtained from the student if it is necessary for medical information to be shared more widely. Education programme leaders in HEI’s should be advised of the nature of any relevant impairment, its effect on function, and adjustments necessary to allow the student to fulfil the required competencies for completion of training and professional practice. Specific information about underlying causes should not be disclosed, except where this serves a specific purpose to protect patients or benefit the student, and only with explicit, informed consent.

The criteria for medical fitness to train are:

1. **Testing for immunity and infection** should be in accordance with current DH guidance or an equivalent evidence based standard. This will change over time. Students should protect service users, colleagues and themselves by being immunised against serious communicable diseases when vaccines are available. The current DH guidance recommends the following:
 - a. TB – Evidence of immunity and freedom from TB disease.²
 - b. Measles, Rubella and Chickenpox – Evidence of immunity.²
2. **Assessment to achieve outcomes for dietitians.** Mandatory outcomes and competencies published by the HCPC include the following:
 - a. Understanding the importance of maintaining their own health.¹
 - b. The ability to communicate effectively with service users, carers and others, in English to the standard equivalent to level 7 of the International English Language Testing System.^{1,8}
 - c. The ability to select, move between and use appropriate forms of verbal and non-verbal communication with service users and others.¹
 - d. The ability to keep accurate, comprehensive and comprehensible records.¹
 - e. The ability to conduct appropriate diagnostic procedures, treatment, therapy and interventions safely and effectively.¹
3. **Assessment of functional capacity.** These examples are not exhaustive. They are drawn from functions within the HCPC standards of proficiency. We suggest that these are examples of impairment needing careful assessment to ensure safe practice:

a. Mental health, eating disorders, concentration, awareness, memory and ability to learn and understand –

Students must be able to meet HCPC proficiency standards in relation to spoken, written and electronic communication with service users, colleagues and carers. Students must have a full awareness of their own mental health, when to seek help and from whom.^{1,4} Students must understand the need to maintain safety of service users, carers and colleagues. There is concern among senior educational leaders that this discipline may attract students with increased vulnerability to eating disorders, which may represent an increased risk to both the student and service users. HEOPS has published guidance in relation to students with eating disorders which is relevant in this context.⁹ Students with eating disorders who have difficulty recognising the nature or severity of their problem, may be reluctant to seek help and may have difficulty ensuring the safety of care users. In this context students must have a very good awareness of their own health and must achieve the health standards described in HEOPS eating disorder guidance in relation to physical, psychological and social functioning. The HCPC endorses the principle that every student must be uniquely

assessed on the basis of functions intrinsic to the discipline, and that no judgements about fitness to train should be made purely on the basis of a diagnosis.

2. **Mobility and Upper limb function** – Students must have sufficient mobility and manual dexterity to conduct appropriate diagnostic procedures, treatment, therapy and interventions safely and effectively.¹
3. **Vision** – N6 near vision is needed to read 1mm text. N8 near vision is needed to detect a 3mm movement. 6/18 acuity is required to read digital monitor at a distance. 6/18 and N8 are the threshold for seeking the opinion of an Occupational Physician. All acuities are with correction. Students must be able to select, move between and use appropriate forms of verbal and non-verbal communication with service users and others and must be able to establish and confirm service user identity prior to treatment.
4. **Hearing and Speech** – Students must be able to demonstrate effective and appropriate skills in communicating information, advice, instruction and professional opinion to colleagues, service users, their relatives and carers. Hearing loss of 40dB across all speech frequencies should be referred to the Occupational Physician. Assessment of hearing should be after correction with hearing aids. Students should have the ability to speak clearly in English and be understood at 3 metres in quiet room with background noise of no more than 60dB.
5. **Learning, language and numeracy skills** - This refers to the student's learning ability rather than educational attainment. Students must have the ability to:
 - i. communicate effectively with service users, carers and others, in English to the standard equivalent to level 7 of the International English Language Testing System.^{1,8}
 - ii. select, move between and use appropriate forms of verbal and non-verbal communication with service users and others.¹
 - iii. to keep accurate, comprehensive and comprehensible records.¹

Where a student has a disability causing impairment of these skills, the assessment should take into account the effects of reasonable adjustments that could enable the student to learn and to apply these skills appropriately in professional practice. An occupational health assessment can provide an objective opinion on the existence of a disability and advice on adjustments that may overcome disadvantage associated with the disability. The adequacy of these adjustments in enabling the student to achieve the mandatory competences may be best assessed by in- course assessments under supervision.

6. **Skin function** – Skin must have integrity compatible with protection of patients from increased risk of infection. This is especially so for the scalp, face and hands which cannot easily be covered with dressings. Skin conditions that may be aggravated by frequent hand cleaning, or which cannot be readily decontaminated should be assessed by an Occupational Physician.
7. **Interruption of consciousness** – The risk must be low enough to represent minimal risk to service users.
4. **The occupational health process** to assess fitness of students who declare specific functional impairments will usually require referral to an accredited specialist in occupational medicine. Screening and assessment should only be undertaken by qualified occupational health professionals or practitioners working under the clinical governance of specialist occupational health professionals. Occupational health opinions should always be provided by a suitably qualified practitioner, evidence based, logical and reasoned and should lie within a reasonable range of professional opinion.^{10,11} Depending on the nature of the condition being assessed, this process may involve:
 - a. Taking a full, relevant medical history.
 - b. Physical examination and functional assessment.
 - c. Full mental state examination.
 - d. Seeking targeted, specific medical evidence, with consent, from treating NHS doctors, Educational Psychologists

or other specialists, to confirm diagnosis, severity, treatment and prognosis.

e. Referral for physical or psychiatric assessment by medical specialists without a therapeutic conflict of interest.

f. Reporting to the HEI in a timely manner, in accordance with data protection legislation and medical confidentiality.

5. **The format of health screening** should be in accordance with DH guidance² and should include the following steps:
1. A health questionnaire completed and submitted to an occupational health service as soon as possible after an

offer of a training place is issued. GP certification of accurate declaration is desirable.
 2. An interview with an occupational health nurse to clarify any answers on the health questionnaire and to undertake

specific tests and vaccinations where appropriate.
 3. Onward referral to an Occupational Physician if this is appropriate.
 4. A health clearance certificate issued before commencing clinical placements, stating whether the student is fit to

train, and any adjustments necessary to allow the student to fulfil the required competencies by the completion of the training programme, in order to start professional practice. This should be issued to appropriate managers or the head of course. This will not include any clinical information, is sufficient proof of health clearance for all UK universities and NHS Trusts, and should prevent the need for repeat screening for all placements and electives, in accordance with DH guidance.²

References

1. Standards of proficiency for Dietitians – HCPC 2016
2. Health Clearance for TB, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV – DH 2007
3. Immunisation against infectious disease – DH
4. The Management of Health, Safety and Welfare issues for NHS staff - DH 2005
5. Mental Health and Employment in the NHS - DH 2008
6. Work Health Assessments – NHS Employers 2013
7. The Data Protection Act 1998
8. International English Language Teaching System.
9. HEOPS Guidance on Fitness to Study for Students with Severe Eating Disorders:

http://www.heops.org.uk/HEOPS_Guidance_Fitness_to_Study_with_Severe_Eating_Disorders_v2.pdf

10. Jones v Post Office [2001] EWCA Civ 558, [2001] IRLR 384, Court of Appeal
11. Kloss D Occupational Health Law ISBN 978-1405185905

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Appendix 2

Health screening and immunisation requirements for all MNutr students

The HEOPS (2016) criteria for medical fitness to train are in place for all MNutr students.

Health assessments and screening

All MNutr students are required to have undertaken health screening prior to commencing their course and as required during their course, to meet the Higher Education Occupational Physicians / Practitioners (HEOPS) dietitian students - standards of medical fitness to train (2016).

Immunisation requirements

Testing for immunity and infection

This should be in accordance with current Department of Health (DH) guidance or an equivalent evidence-based standard. Students should protect service users, colleagues and themselves by being immunised against serious communicable diseases when vaccines are

available. The current DH guidance recommends the following, and are required by all students that are undertaking the MNutr course:

1. TB – Evidence of immunity and freedom from TB disease
2. Measles, Rubella and Chickenpox – Evidence of immunity
3. Hepatitis B – Immunisation is only indicated for those exposed to unfixed human blood or tissues.

On commencement of the course and prior to each practice placement, all MNutr students are expected to provide a list of their full immunisation history list (in English) from their family doctor and/or Optima Health.

During their first year of the MNutr course, all students are expected to engage with the required MNutr immunisation programme with Optima Health.

Ownership and version control

Relevant To:	B401 Master of Nutrition and Dietetics (MNutr) Course
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