

ION Access and Participation Statement

Institute for Optimum Nutrition

Introduction

This statement affirms the commitment of ION, through the leadership of its Trustees and Senior Management Team and participation of staff and students, to improve access and participation to Higher Education.

ION's courses are validated by the University of Portsmouth. We share similar values and missions. The University's overarching strategic aim is to ensure that students have a consistently outstanding and valuable experience and to eradicate unexplained gaps in access, performance and outcomes. ION aspires to develop a reputation as a transformational educator and will strive to widen participation and maintain a sense of belonging for all students. We will continue to learn about best practice, implement it according to our means and develop systems to improve the monitoring and evaluation of our actions and intentions. ION's focus is to promote opportunity, foster inclusion and integrity, value individual difference and create a safe positive learning culture. Inequality, discrimination and harassment in the staff and student population will be challenged and contraventions of our codes of conduct will result in disciplinary action.

ION's Strategy as a foundation to access and participation

The access and participation statement is informed by our strategic vision of 'Optimum nutrition for all throughout life' and our mission 'to educate and enthuse, instilling personalised nutrition as the foundation of health for all'. ION aspires to widen access to personalised nutrition services delivered by an increasingly diverse population of professionals.

ION's current student population

The majority of ION's students are mature females, either opting for a career change or taking the opportunity to embark on a career later in life. The average age of our students is 42. Anecdotally it is clear many ION students already have a degree or professional qualification.

A significant number of our students did not study science disciplines to A level (or equivalent) to meet the entry requirements of the degree course. ION's Level 3 Science Access course provides a tailored route onto the degree, opening new career paths for those returning to education. Currently 96% of ION's students are female, to diversify the population of Nutritional Therapists we seek to recruit a higher number of male students in the future. In England and Wales 82% of people are white, and 18% belong to a black, Asian, mixed or other ethnic group (2021 Census data). The number of students from minority ethnic groups currently form 15% of the ION student population – we aim to increase this to 18%.

The professional body for Nutritional Therapy is the British Association for Nutrition and Lifestyle Medicine (BANT). In January 2024, 52% of BANT's student members were studying at ION. We are therefore positioned to influence the composition of the profession through achieving strategic diversity outcomes.

At the end of December 2023, 96% of BANT's membership were female. No information on the age and ethnicity of members was available.

ION's Course Delivery

ION ensures that students are able to access studying with our flexible approach (students able to study part-time or full time and swap modes at certain points from part-time to full-time), manage the pace of study to accommodate life events. The academic team enable our students to be self-motivated and take responsibility for their learning and personal development and provide comprehensive support to facilitate this. We have an experienced staff team and protocols in place to ensure that students are supported throughout their journey and beyond. After graduating they join our alumni community. Teaching staff are all qualified nutritional therapists. Visiting lecturers are specialists in their field of practice.

Our courses interweave academic rigour with research and clinical skills to ensure that our students are prepared for practice on completion of their course. As most of our students are mature, we have developed our teaching and learning to enable opportunities for access and participation. Training is delivered online, and at synchronously at weekends (degree) and evenings (graduate diploma). During the week additional support is available. These delivery patterns have been shaped by the Student Voice, and support those that work or have family commitments.

In September 2023 we created an interim award for those students on the degree at the conclusion of level 4, so that they can commence practice as dietary and lifestyle educators

and earn whilst they learn. They are then able to build their business with a limited scope of practice and continue their studies.

Students on the degree commence their clinical practice training at level 4. In Level 5 role play and case review assessments develop the clinical skills. In level 6, students work with real clients in the Training Clinic under the supervision of qualified nutritional therapists.

We deliver high quality CPD for our graduate members and wider professional community, with nationally recognised and well-respected clinicians and theorists.

Progression to further study, employment, self-employment, and clinical practice

ION's courses are vocational and competency-based, meeting the National Occupational Standards for Nutritional Therapist programmes and accredited by the Nutritional Therapy Education Commission (NTEC). Employability skills such as clinical practice, business planning, research informing practice, critical thinking, coaching and behaviour change are embedded within the curriculum. These modules are integral to setting up in practice on completion of the course. The varied assessment menu will continue to be driven by the development of Nutritional Therapy competencies.

Current support initiatives and activities

ION will continue to provide an academic support service offering academic and study skills resources via the following mechanisms: - eLearning units, bookable one-to-one meetings, webinars, email support, specific learning difficulty peer support group, recordings and guidance documents.

From 2022 recordings have been made with Closed Captions and this will continue.

Level Leaders offer pastoral support and signposting to external resources as required. Wellbeing resources are provided on the academic and study skills pages of our virtual learning platform.

Online forums for each module and assessment are provided.

Opportunities for feedback are provided using formative assessments which allow for learning and improvement before the submission of formally assessed coursework.

ION's ambitions

We have identified the following strategic aims to enhance equity in access and participation.

Access

- Outreach: To enhance the representation of men on our courses through outreach activities using case studies of the success male graduates have had in building a career in nutritional therapy – using targeting marketing and events. To encourage more applications from BAME students (currently the proportion of BAME students in England and Wales is 18%, at ION our BAME students make up 15% of the student body).

Undertake graduate outcome survey after completion of BSc (Hons) Nutritional Therapy and Graduate Diploma Integrative Functional Nutrition to support our student data on progression.

- Evidence-based action: Students are active partners in the development and delivery of ION courses. Two representatives are nominated from each cohort, they receive student representative training and attend Student Voice Committees. Students provide feedback through module and course surveys as well as ad hoc surveys around specific projects.

To scale up our data collection and interrogation to inform targeted recruitment and admissions interventions.

- Recruitment: We have a rigorous application and admissions process to ensure applicants meet the entry requirements to the course. Applications are reviewed by the admissions team and where necessary referred to the Dean or Head of Courses. Our admissions approach is inclusive and not solely based on academic ability.

To train key staff involved in attracting, processing and enrolling students in diversity and cultural competencies. To review our marketing, recruitment and admissions activity and implement changes to ensure equity of access into our courses.

As a small institute we are seeking registration with the Office for Students to support our ambition to widen and priorities access and participation on the courses by being able to offer eligible students student loans.

- Diversity of entry pathways and exit points: To continue providing flexible, alternative pathways to qualifications through stackable Credit Bearing Short Courses, part-time options, exit option at Level 4 with a CertHE Personalised Diet and Health qualification, and online provision.
- Student support: Academic Support Lecturers provide a comprehensive support service to students on all areas of academic skills such as essay writing, academic integrity, and referencing.

Successful participation

- Inclusion and belonging: To maintain and further develop inclusive learning activities and an environment that provides a sense of being part of a learning community, making a difference to each other's success and that of the profession. We will engage our highly engaged Student Voice committee in the development of enhanced access and participation.
- Mental health and wellbeing: To continue to embed these topics in the curriculum and ensure the student experience, and provision of study-related resources, supports the maintenance of mental health and wellbeing.
- Financial support: To fundraise to create bursaries and a student support fund for socioeconomically disadvantaged applicants, and students impacted by cost pressures that affect course completion. The process of seeking donations has commenced as part of our 40th anniversary initiatives.
- Adult learning focus and support: To address the needs of adults returning to study and the variety of student lifestyles, including working and family responsibilities, through course delivery and design, and targeted academic support.
- Needs analysis: We will develop a system to record student demographic and assessment data and analyse these to identify performance gaps and create action plans to remove them.

Monitoring

ION will introduce additional monitoring to enable tracking and evaluation of initiatives aimed for example at increasing access and reducing non-continuation rates in minority ethnic groups and those with disabilities. ION will consider where initiatives can have the most impact, being mindful of BAME communities, people with disabilities, people estranged from their families, care leavers, carers, people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, refugees, people with socioeconomic disadvantage and people with specific learning difficulties.

Statement review and evaluation

- ION will review, update and republish this Access and Participation Statement annually, as required by condition A2 of the Office for Students Regulatory Framework. This version was published in July 2024.
- Progress will be evaluated by the Senior Management Team and the trustees who form the Education Committee.