

An investigation of the employment outcomes and perceived preparedness for employment of Irish dietetics graduates

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Introduction

- Dietetic education should be informed by evidence on the current practice and demands of the profession. However, information on the employment profile of dietitians in Ireland is lacking.
- The aim of this study was to establish the employment profile of graduate dietitians in Ireland and to assess their perceived preparedness for employment.

Methods

- A mixed methods study design was used.
- Graduates from Irish dietetic programmes between 2020-2024 were invited to participate.
- An online survey gathered information on employment profile and perceived preparedness for employment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain further depth on graduate experiences.

Results

Table 1: Characteristics of the survey sample (n=132)

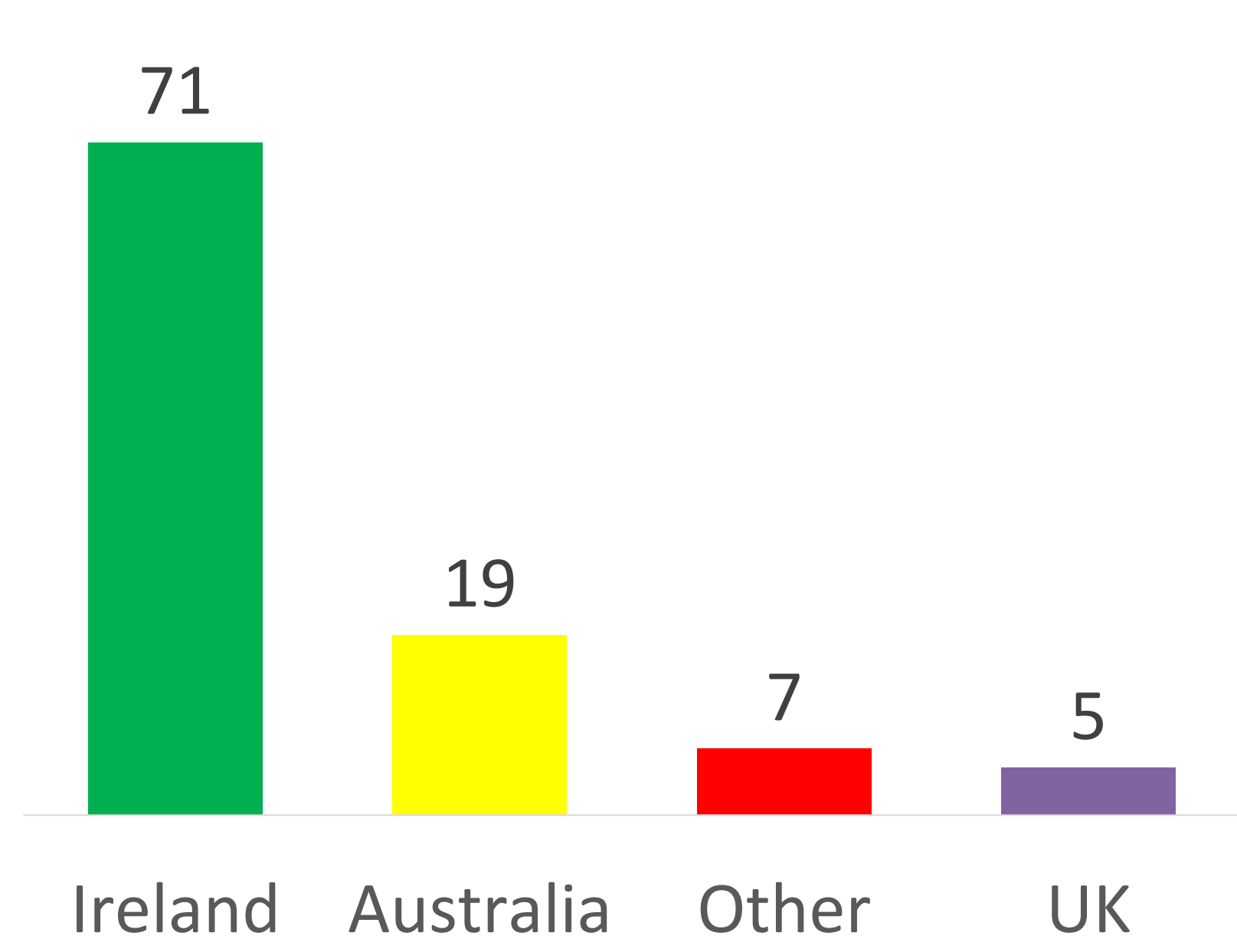
	n	%
Year of graduation		
2024	8	6
2023	27	20
2022	31	23
2021	32	24
2020	34	26
University graduated from		
Trinity College Dublin/Technological University Dublin	49	37
University College Cork	12	9
University College Dublin	36	27
University of Limerick	35	27
First employment sector post-graduation		
Hospital	90	67
Primary care/community	34	26
Private practice	4	3
Non-dietetic related role	3	2
Sports nutrition	2	1
Student	2	1
Industry	1	1
Current employment sector		
Hospital	76	58
Non-dietetic related role	25	19
Primary care/community	16	12
Private practice	7	5
Student	5	4
Industry	2	1
Sports nutrition	1	1

- There were 132 eligible responses to the online survey out of 271 total graduates giving a response rate of 49%.

Key survey findings

- While all respondents had hospital placements, 21% did not have any placement in primary care/community dietetics.
- Most graduates felt either slightly (40%) or very prepared (46%) for their first employment.
- Nearly half (49%) of graduates from 2020 and 2021 were currently residing outside of Ireland.
- For those living abroad, non-dietetic roles were the most commonly reported employment (60%), followed by hospital dietetics (28%).

Figure 2: Current country of residence (n=129)



Interview themes

(1) The value of placement

- Knowledge alone not enough
- High standards
- Inequity
- Lack of placement diversity

(2) Narrow career preparedness

- Closing doors rather than opening them
- Career blindspots
- Deficiency of practical experience
- The race for hospital experience

(3) Struggling with the transition to employment

- Imposter syndrome/lack of confidence
- Unfamiliar territory
- Non-clinical duties as an oversight
- Contrasting job-seeking skills
- Advice to a former self

(4) Workplace support

- Isolation
- Support systems
- Staff shortages

Action Points

- Increased placement diversity
- Ensure placement experiences reflect the increasing demand for dietitians in primary care/community settings.
- Enhanced focus on staff retention
- Establish a comprehensive mentorship programme for graduates

Conclusion

- This is the first study to establish the employment profile and perceived preparedness of Irish dietetic graduates. Ongoing graduate tracking/research is necessary to ensure that dietetic education aligns with workforce needs.