

Isabel Ferris – 2020 Alumni

Hi, I'm Isabel and I left Spalding High School in 2020 to study Dietetics at Coventry University.

My A-levels.

I chose to study Biology, Chemistry and Maths. When I started Sixth form, I thought I would want to go to university, but I wasn't sure what course I wanted to do. I chose subjects that I was interested in, and that kept my options open.

For Dietetics, at least one science-based subject is required, and some universities ask specifically for Biology or Chemistry.



Coventry Cathedral.

What is Dietetics?

Dietetics links food, nutrition and diet with health and wellbeing, and involves holistic, lifestyle-related elements as well as scientific and medical knowledge. The course is career-focused, largely in the NHS, leading you to work as a dietitian, although the degree is also relevant in other roles. This is usually in a hospital, but could be in the community, catering or food technology or product development. It may involve giving dietary guidance, analysing an individual's diet, menu planning (e.g. for those with health conditions such as chronic kidney disease, Crohn's disease, IBS or allergies), large scale catering, evaluating blood tests to identify deficiencies, or developing new food products.

I chose this course because I have a passion for cooking and baking, and I had an interest in health and wellbeing / lifestyle, but I was also interested in sciences and wanted to study an academic course. I hadn't heard of Dietetics until I was doing research on the Fast Tomato website and it was suggested based on the information I had entered on my interests and qualifications!

Dietetics courses need to be accredited by the HCPC and the BDA, as this allows you to register as a dietitian (a protected title) when you complete the degree. This means all the universities must cover specified content and include a set number of hours of work experience. At Coventry, this is provided by 4 work placements – 2 weeks, 12 weeks, 14 weeks and 2 weeks – spread over 3 years.

Choosing a University.

I chose to study at Coventry because it is a three-year course (it varies between universities from 3 to 4 years), and all the content required to register as a Dietitian is covered in a condensed, intensive format. I was also attracted by the practical aspects on the course such as work placements, lots of cooking sessions in the specialised kitchens, and role plays in the simulated hospital wards. I liked the idea of living in a city, and all the buildings are very close and accessible. There are also lots of places to work or socialise such as the Student Hub. I met both staff and students on the open day, and found them very helpful, approachable and friendly.



Hospital Ward Simulation

How am I getting on?

I am really enjoying the course, particularly practical work. So far this has involved lots of taste testing (for example, cheeses with varying fat contents, probiotics, insect flour cookies and organic products), body measurements, cooking workshops and consultation roleplays on the simulated hospital wards. I have found the content interesting and varied, involving elements of sciences, psychology and food technology as well as nutrition. I am looking forward to my first work placement, in June.

My Future Plans.

I am not sure what area of Dietetics I would like to specialise in yet, and I don't know whether I would like to be based in a hospital, community setting, catering or food manufacture. The course involves several work placements which allows you to experience different roles, so I will use these to gain insight into different areas and identify my strongest interests.

Tips and Advice.

- Visit lots of universities and go to open days if possible. This helps you to get a sense of the atmosphere at the university and to get an impression of the current students and lecturers – their attitudes are important and help you 'get a feel' of the university. Be open minded – initially I had ruled out Coventry before I went to the open day!
- Research funding and scholarships. As Dietetics is a subject linked to the NHS, students can apply for the NHS support fund.
- Dietetics is only offered at limited universities so there is high competition for places. An interview is almost always required, so make sure that you are prepared – research the university, course specification and the role of a dietitian beforehand. Doing practice interviews and answering example questions online is really useful.
- Getting work experience really helps to support your application and is required by many universities. Visiting a Dietetics department in a hospital is helpful, but also consider private dietitians, food technology / manufacturing businesses, catering businesses or care-related settings such as care homes.
- Don't forget to consider practicalities when choosing a university, such as whether you would prefer to live on a campus or in a city, the distance to travel from home, and the accessibility of the university buildings, other facilities and amenities.
- Research the course in detail, but also consider other facilities and opportunities such as clubs, societies and events. I really liked that there were plenty of newly refurbished study areas, social spaces and catering outlets around the University, including bookable rooms for group projects, enclosed study pods with computers and cosy bean bag lounging areas!



Coventry Student Hub.