

Special Report

The European Nutrition Leadership Programme – 10 years of cultivating future leaders in nutrition

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the European Nutrition Leadership Programme (ENLP), an initiative aimed at stimulating promising postgraduates to take an active lead in advancing human nutrition in research, government and industry throughout Europe. This week-long course is designed to assist participants in identifying and developing their own leadership skills and style by focusing on the core skills of leadership, team building, networking and communication. Uniquely, the course is also specific to the development of these skills within a scientific environment. It is aimed mainly at final-year PhD fellows and postdoctoral fellows studying or working in human nutrition science in Europe. Employers in industry and government are also welcome to propose promising recent postgraduates to attend this programme. Each year, some 30 participants are selected by an international committee, on the basis of written applications from candidates from all over Europe.

This initiative was started in 1994 by leading European nutritionists working closely with, and supported by the European Union, the food industry, and nutrition organisations and societies. The 8-day programme itself is highly interactive, and consists of an intensive series of activities that challenge participants as individuals and as team members. The programme is also well supported by many established leaders in nutrition, who share their career experiences as well as actively involving participants in discussion and debate on current topics in nutrition.

Many young scientists do not realise that developing leadership skills is an important part of career development, whether they are working in an academic or a commercial environment. The ENLP enables them to take time out to do just that, and will have important benefits for advancing nutrition in Europe. The ENLP shows the European ideal in action, with young scientists from across Europe working and socialising together and forming long-lasting networks that will benefit European nutritional sciences in the future. Over the years, the ENLP board has also invited participants from outside Europe to attend the course, many of whom have now initiated nutrition leadership programmes in their own specific regions: the South East Asian Nutrition Leadership Programme (SEANLP) and the African Nutrition Leadership Programme (ANLP).

In 1997/98, the ENLP Alumni Association (ENLPAA) was established to support the establishment of a

multidisciplinary and multicultural network of nutritionists from participants within the ENLP. Today, the ENLPAA represents a network of over 250 nutritionists working in industry, universities, research institutes and government organisations. The alumni association aims to stimulate international collaboration and exchange through regular and interactive communication via the ENLP website and newsletter. Scientific meetings and social get-togethers are arranged during national and international nutrition conferences such as the IUNS (Vienna, 2001) and this year's FENS meeting in Rome. The alumni association has an important spin-off function for both young nutritionists and potential employers. It is an invaluable recruitment source of promising young talent in nutrition science in Europe.

So how effective has the ENLP been? The real contribution of this programme to nutrition in Europe can only be evaluated in the longer term. However, a survey of ENLPAA members undertaken last year revealed that more than one-third of participants over the last nine years were currently occupying leadership positions in nutrition and, as expected, the majority of these had attended in the earlier years of the ENLP. This is expected to rise year on year as participants progress up the career ladder. Personal testimonies from many of those in the ENLPAA are highly supportive of the role of the ENLP as an inspirational and motivating force in their careers (see www.enlp.eu.com; also Kelly¹).

The next ENLP is to be held on 17–25 March 2004. For those interested in taking part in this seminar or for further information on the ENLP, please see our website (www.enlp.eu.com). A first-hand account of the seminar can be found in the *Nutrition Bulletin*¹ and an editorial by Professor Southgate can be found in the *British Journal of Nutrition*².

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References

- 1 Kelly C. The European Nutrition Leadership Programme: nurturing future leaders in human nutrition. *Nutrition Bulletin* 2001; **26**: 235–9.
- 2 Southgate DAT. Competition or... *British Journal of Nutrition* 1994; **72**: 171–2.