

<b>Scholarship Project Title</b>	The Need for Policy Change and Regulation Regarding the Stability of Food Supplements for Human Health: The LABEL Study
<b>Advert Reference number</b>	<b>WD_2023_36_WSCH_3</b>
<b>Supervisor(s)</b>	Prof John Nolan. Co-PI/ Co-Supervisor Dr Anne Graham. PI/Lead Supervisor Dr David Phelan. Co-Supervisor Dr Warren Roche. Co-Supervisor
<b>Research Group</b>	<i>NRCI</i>
<b>Department /School/Faculty</b>	<i>Health Science &amp; Education &amp; Lifelong Learning</i>
<b>Duration</b>	48 Months
<b>Status: Full-time / part-time</b>	Full Time
<b>Funding information</b>	SETU PhD Scholarship Programme 2023
<b>Value of the scholarship per year</b>	Stipend: €18,500 Fees: up to a maximum of €5,750 (covered by scholarship) Research costs: €3,000 p.a.
<b>Closing date and time</b>	11 <sup>th</sup> December 2024 at 4pm Irish Time
<b>Interview date</b>	<i>TBC</i>
<b>PhD commencement date</b>	<b>02/01/2025</b>

**Project Key Words:** Food supplements, food supplement policy, carotenoids, omega 3 fatty acids, interdisciplinary research, mixed methods

### Post summary

The food supplement industry has seen substantial growth in recent years, particularly in the area of carotenoids and omega 3 fatty acid supplements. While specific food supplements can have a significant positive impact on human health as demonstrated by our laboratory, consumer knowledge and information about the active supplement ingredients and their stability over shelf life is limited. Carotenoids are permitted under Directive 2002/46/EC, however there are no statutory regulations for these supplements. This project will assess the food supplement industry regarding how products are regulated and tested in the Republic of Ireland. Our pilot data on products tested so far suggests major disparities between the label claim and the active ingredients measured, and issues with the degeneration of products during their shelf life.

The LABEL Study is an interdisciplinary mixed methods research project, with an exploratory sequential design that will use qualitative data collection and analysis followed by quantitative data collection and analysis to investigate the extent of consumer knowledge and understanding of the disparities between label claim, active ingredients and degeneration of products during their shelf life. It will explore Irish stakeholders' perceptions

of the benefits of supplements in general and their knowledge and understanding of these particular supplements that contain carotenoid and omega 3 fatty acids. Anticipated results from the study will identify gaps in the current Irish food supplement policy and procedures guidelines; highlight the need for greater regulation and policy changes in the industry; inform and raise awareness of these important issues for all stakeholders; and contribute to improved consumer knowledge and understanding of feed supplements to enhance health.

The aim of this research study is to explore Irish stakeholders' perceptions of the benefits of supplements and their knowledge and understanding of these particular supplements and to investigate the disparities in the quality and stability of carotenoid and Omega-3 fatty acid supplements and seeks

The proposed PhD seeks to:

1. Assess the extent of stakeholder knowledge of the discrepancies of stability in food supplements and supplement label claims
2. Explore the experiences and product knowledge of individuals, learning from them what led to their decision to buy and use food supplements,
3. Identify the factors that underpin individuals' engagement with these particular food supplements.
4. Assess the extent of the gaps in the current Irish food supplement policy and procedures guidelines.
5. Propose policy change regarding food supplements and more accurate labelling and testing in food supplements.
6. Develop a plan for raising consumer awareness and knowledge on food supplements to enhance health

## **Person specification**

### **Academic Qualifications**

#### **Essential**

- Appropriate first or second class Level 8 Degree or equivalent from a recognized degree awarding authority

#### **Desirable**

A further qualification of at least Postgraduate/Level 9 in an area relevant to carotenoid and Omega-3 fatty acid supplements, significant experience in a lab based setting OR consumer behaviour in addition to a Level 8 degree. Dissertation mark above 65%, or equivalent.

- MA/MSc or similar Level 9 equivalent in consumer behaviour, decision making, perception and/or mindset theory
- MA Research/MA/MSc Level 9 equivalent in food supplements or a similar Field of Study
- Publication in the proposed field of research

## **Experience**

### **Essential**

- Three years relevant post primary degree experience in collaborating/working in cross functional/cross-disciplinary project team environments.

### **Desirable**

- Experience of working on a research project in consumer behaviour in such fields as

business, healthcare, education, or social science

- Experience or knowledge of of lab techniques, analytical chemistry; HPLC research
- Familiarity with research activity within the Technology University sector
- Some experience and/or knowledge of working in research projects

## Specific Knowledge & Skills

### Essential

- An understanding of Carotenoid and Omega-3 fatty acid interventions for human health
- An understanding of the Irish regulatory environment on food supplement policy including regulation, statistics, law and directives established in Ireland that have been derived from European legislation
- An understanding of qualitative research methodologies
- Applicants whose first language is not English must demonstrate on application that they meet SETU's English language requirements and provide all necessary documentation. See Page 7 of the [Code of Practice](#)
- In order to be **shortlisted for interview**, you must meet the SETU English speaking requirements so please provide evidence in your application.
- I.T. Skills: proficiency in Microsoft Suite to include Word, Excel and Powerpoint

### Desirable

- Understanding of how to conduct stability studies that include testing of food supplement attributes
- Experience in using and interpreting linear/non-linear statistical regression techniques
- Good interpersonal skills with evidence of fieldwork experience in qualitative interviewing
- Knowledge of questionnaire design and implementation
- Knowledge and experience of group facilitation/qualitative research methods
- Good IT skills with some evidence of exposure in the use of qualitative data analysis
- Project management and organisation skills

## Specific Personal Qualities

### Essential

- **Communciation:** excellent communication and self-management skills.
- **Teamwork:** Strong team player who is resilient, robust and is committed to the highest professional standards
- **Task Management:** Ability to work completently and efficiently to achieve results
- **Adaptability:** Can deal effectively with the diverse working styles and differing environments of an inter-disciplinary supervisory team
- **Work Competently:** Works efficiently making efficient use of current technology, resources and time efficiently
- **Personal Development:** Displays commitment by maintaining a high level of energy, perserveres and remains positive

### Desirable

- **Communication:** processes information and listens openly to all viewpoints without interrupting.
- **Task Management:** Can quickly and competently apply new methods and new information to appropriate tasks
- **Adaptability:** Can deal with setbacks constructively and anticipates change
- **Work Competently:** Flexible and a strong problem solving approach to issues.
- **Personal Development:** Seeks improvement in personal development to learn positively from mistakes and constructive criticism. Sets no limits on personal potential.

### Further information

For any informal queries, please contact (1) Dr Anne Graham Cagney; OR (2) Professor John Nolan on email [anne.graham@setu.ie](mailto:anne.graham@setu.ie); [John.nolan@setu.ie](mailto:John.nolan@setu.ie);

For queries relating to the application and admission process, please contact the Postgraduate Admissions Office [researchadmissions@setu.ie](mailto:researchadmissions@setu.ie) or telephone +353 (0)51 302883.

For queries relating to the funding programme, please email [scholarships2023@setu.ie](mailto:scholarships2023@setu.ie)  
University Website <https://www.setu.ie/>

### Application procedure

Download the research PhD/MSc application form from the website and return the completed application form to [researchadmissions@setu.ie](mailto:researchadmissions@setu.ie) quoting **WD\_2023\_36\_WSCH\_3** in the email subject line.

**Please note that paper submissions will not be accepted.**

**The University may decide to interview only those applicants who appear from the information they provided, to be the most suitable in terms of experience, qualifications and other requirements of the post.**

**The University will short-list and interview those applicants who provide the most suitable information in terms of experience, qualifications and other requirements relevant to the post.**

**SOUTH EAST TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY (SETU) IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES EMPLOYER**

