

Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2017 – 2018



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Key points

- There were 659 new students to the District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification (DN SPQ) Programme in 2017/18, an increase of 108 students (19%) on the 551 new students in 2016/17.
- Of the 659 new students in 2017/18, 495 were full time and 164 were part time.
- 500 DN SPQs qualified in 2018, compared to 464 in 2017. This represents a significant increase of 8% newly qualified DN SPQs.
- There are 43 universities in the United Kingdom (UK) approved by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) to offer the DN SPQ.
- 39 universities responded to the survey; of these, two universities no longer run the programme.
- There has been a rise in the number of universities offering the V300 Independent Prescribing course as part of the programme from 12 in 2016/17 to 15 in 2017/18.
- 85% of university respondents had mapped their programmes to the QNI/QNIS Voluntary Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice (2015).
- As in 2016/17 almost all respondents have concerns about loss of funding, with the Apprenticeship model being a possible alternative to current funding arrangements in England. However over 50% of the respondents were involved in the application to form a 'trail blazer' group for the District Nurse Apprenticeship standards, which has now had formal approval.

Introduction

This is the sixth annual District Nurse (DN) Specialist Practitioner Qualification (SPQ) education audit, a review process that was established in 2013 and the third report since the publication of the Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI) and Queen's Nursing Institute Scotland (QNIS) Voluntary Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice in September 2015 (QNI/S 2015).

This report covers the four countries of the United Kingdom (UK) and summarises the results of an audit of District Nurse education in the UK during the academic year 2017/18. It highlights any changes or developments that have occurred since the QNI published similar reports in 2013 (QNI, 2013), 2014 (QNI, 2014a), 2015 (QNI, 2015a), 2016 (QNI, 2016) and 2018 (QNI, 2018).



Data collection

Programme Directors for Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) approved Specialist Practitioner programmes in District Nursing from across the four countries of the UK were invited to complete an online survey. Responses were collected between November 2018 and January 2019. All data has been treated as confidential and in line with GDPR (2018) regulations and individual universities have not been identified in the report.

Findings

Status of The Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse Programme in 2017/18

The Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme is offered in all four countries of the UK. According to the NMC website there are 43 universities approved to offer the Specialist Practitioner District Nurse programme; 39 responded to the QNI survey.

Table 1 shows the number of universities that were approved to run the programme in 2017/18. In Wales the number of universities offering the DN SPQ programme increased from 3 to 4. The number of universities in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland approved to run the programme remained the same compared to the previous year.

Table 1: Universities approved to run the Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme in 2017/18

Country	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
England	24	30	32	35	34	34
Wales	4	4	4	4	3	4
Northern Ireland	1	1	1	1	1	1
Scotland	N/A	4	4	4	4	4
Total UK	29	39	41	44	42	43

N.B. Scotland was not included in the 2013 annual audit.

Figure 1 shows the geographical location of the universities approved by the NMC to run the programme. There were 37 responses confirming that the DN programme ran in the academic year 2017/18 - these universities are highlighted in pink in figure 1.

There were two responses stating that the DN programme did not run in the academic year 2017/18 – these universities are highlighted in purple, as are the four universities that did not respond to the survey.

Figure 1: Location of Universities approved by the NMC to run the Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme

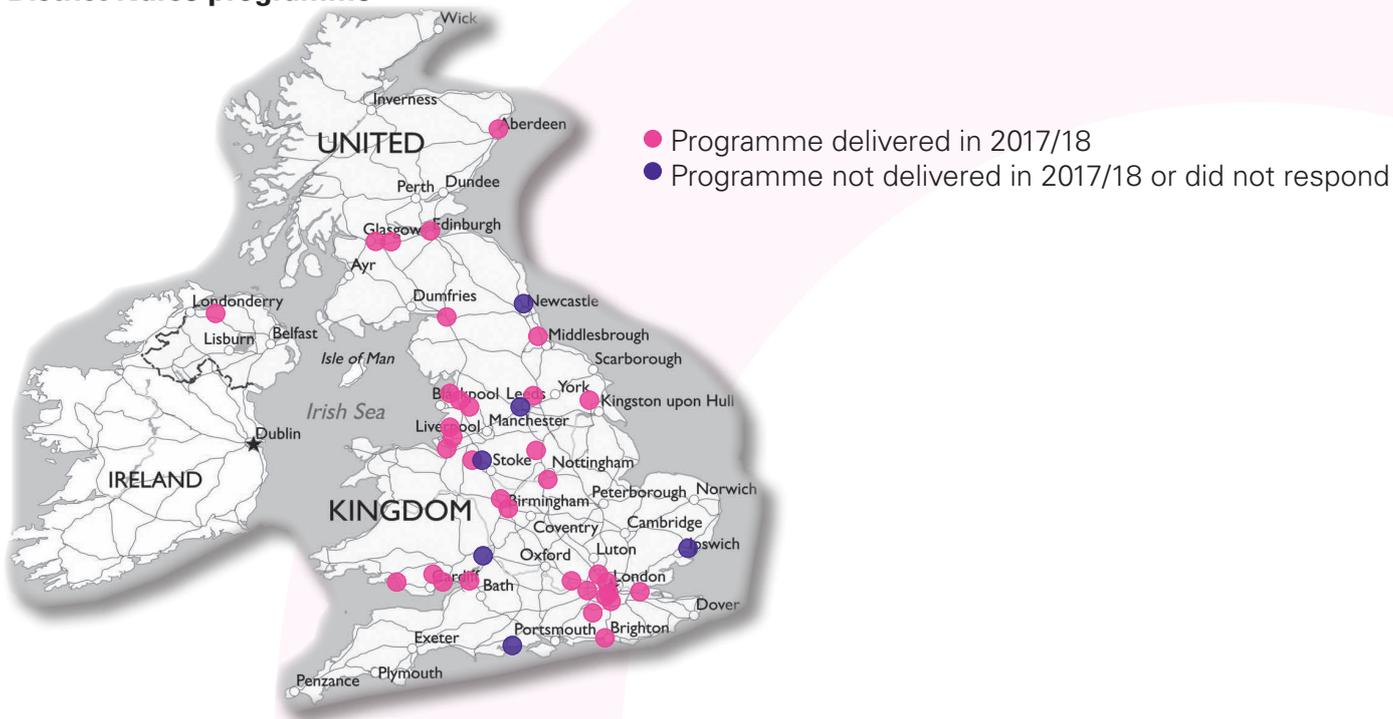


Table 2: Universities delivering the programme in 2017/18
 Survey question: *Did the programme run in the academic year 2017/18?*

Country	Yes	No
England	28	2
Wales	4	0
Northern Ireland	1	0
Scotland	4	0
Total UK	37	2

Table 2a: When did the programme last run
 Survey question: *If not, when did the programme last run?*

Year programme last ran	Number of responses
2014/15	1
2015/16	0
2016/17	1



Reasons for programme cessation

Survey question: *Why is the programme no longer running?*

Of the 39 responses, 37 respondents confirmed that the programme did run in 2017/18. Two respondents stated that the programme was no longer running. When asked why their programme was no longer being delivered, the two universities responded stating:

Response 1

'The local Community Trust has chosen to send students on a modular programme run by a neighbouring Higher Education Institution (HEI) rather than onto our programme, which is offered as a full-time one year or part-time two-year option. This move would avoid the need to 'backfill' the posts of those students taking the programme as they were 'work-based' and released only for their study days/sessions.'

Response 2

'Did not recruit.'

Table 3: Year SPQ programme had been last approved by the NMC

Survey question: *What year was your SPQ programme approved by the NMC?*

Time since NMC approval	Number of universities
0-3 years	18
4-6 years	16
7 years+	5

The majority of respondents indicated that the programme had been approved within the past six years.

Table 3a: When universities plan to apply for NMC approval

Survey question: *When do you plan to apply for re-approval? (Follow on question to : 'What year was your SPQ programme approved by the NMC?')*

Time to NMC re-approval	Number of universities
Next 3 years (2018-2021)	27
3 years + (2021 onwards)	8

There were 39 responses with 35 'year specific' responses. The remaining four responses listed the following comments:

- *'We had a periodic review completed and approved in March 2018.'*
- *'N/A - as the BSc (Hons) and PGDip: Community & District Nursing Specialist Practice programmes are being closed down.'*
- *'No current plan.'*
- *'We have been given advice from the NMC that we can revalidate once the SPQ Standards have been released.'*

Responses indicated that there are potential dependencies linked to re-approval and approval of the Apprenticeship:

NMC standards dependent - 5 responses
 Apprenticeship dependent - 4 responses.

Table 4: Practice provider partners

Survey question: How many practice provider organisations do you work with during the DN student recruitment process?

Number of practice provider partners	Number of Responses
1	2
2	6
3	11
4	3
5	7
6	5
7	1
8	2
9	0
10	1
Average number of provider partners	4

There were 39 responses, with 38 respondents stating that they do work with provider partners and one response stating 'Not applicable' as they are 'no longer running the programme'. The total number of practice provider partners was 157 and the responses indicate that the majority of universities partner with more than one provider organisation.

The average number of provider partners was four, which indicates that universities are working with a range of practice provider partners in the delivery of the programme, to provide choice to students and potentially to enable contingency planning for future DN SPQ courses.

Table 4a: Provider organisations requesting DN SPQ

Survey question: Are the provider organisations that fund students onto the DN course still requesting DN SPQ?

Response statement	Number of responses
Yes	33
Yes, but not all	2

The large majority of respondents (90%) indicated that provider organisations are requesting DN SPQ.



The comments below indicate the variations in responses:

- 'HEE funds it if they don't fund it organisations don't send people.'
- 'Funding from HEE via HEEM.'
- 'Not sure.'
- 'Just 1 of them.'
- 'Yes, in Wales it has become compulsory to hold, or be working towards, the SPQ in order to apply for band 6 and 7 positions within the district nursing teams.'
- '2 of 3 have commissioned this year.'

Table 5: V300 independent prescribing

Survey question: *Is independent nurse prescribing (V300) a part of the programme?*

Is independent prescribing (V300) part of the programme?	Number of responses by academic year			
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
No	35	31	23	24
Yes - optional	4	6	7	7
Yes - compulsory	4	3	5	8

Responses indicate that V300 independent nurse prescribing has been included in the programme (either as compulsory or as an option) more frequently than in previous programmes (15 in 2017/18 compared with 12 in 2016/17) representing a 25% increase. Over the past four years, there is a consistent trend for more courses to include a V300 component.

Table 5a: Advanced clinical assessment/physical examination module

Survey question: *If V300 is part of the programme, is there an advanced clinical assessment / physical examination module within the course as well?*

Response statement	Number of responses by academic year	
	2016/17	2017/18
Yes	15	16
No	3	7

The inclusion of an advanced clinical assessment module would normally be considered a pre-requisite for V300 independent nurse prescribing and for enhanced clinical decision making.

The comments below indicate the additional comments made regarding the inclusion of an advanced clinical assessment/physical examination module:

- 'Every student undertakes this.'
- 'Compulsory if the student meets the pre-requisite of 3 years post qualifying.'
- 'Health assessment is compulsory.'
- 'Assessment for Clinical care; LTC based assessment.'
- 'The advanced clinical assessment is incorporated into a unit rather than a stand-alone module.'
- 'Core option at level 7 only.'

- 'We do have a skills week within the programme which does look at such assessments/examinations, but there is no accreditation for it.'
- '20 credit module with 100% OSCE assessment at level 6 and 7.'
- 'They do assessment and examination module although V300 is not currently available.'
- 'Advanced clinical assessment is included as core, however, V100 only is available within the one-year full time. A capped fee V300 is available post-course.'

Table 6: Mapping of QNI/QNIS standards

Survey question: Have you mapped the DN programme outcomes to the QNI/QNIS (2015) Voluntary Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice?

QNI/QNIS voluntary standards mapping	Number of responses by Academic year	
	2016/17	2017/18
Yes	32	33
No	2	4
Other	1	2

85% of responses indicated that the DN SPQ programme outcomes have been mapped to the QNI/QNIS Voluntary Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice.

The following comments were submitted:

- 'Yes - As part of the 2018 validation.'
- 'No - We were validated before the standards came out; however, we have made minor modifications which have utilised the standards.'
- 'No - My programme was part way through the validation process in 2014/15 so it was too late to add them.'
- 'No - as the QNI standards were published as the last cohort were completing.'

Table 6a: Usefulness of QNI/QNIS (2015) Voluntary Standard for District Nurse Education and Practice

Survey question: How useful have you found the QNI/QNIS Voluntary Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice?

How useful are the QNI/QNIS voluntary standards?	2017/18	2018/19
Extremely useful	21	24
Useful	13	10
Neutral	2	4
No response	2	1

90% of responses indicated that the QNI/QNIS voluntary standards are considered either extremely useful or useful.

The comments below indicate the range of responses, with some responders using the standards to map learning and keep up-to-date.

- *'Very useful in the absence of any updated NMC standards.'*
- *'Students find these useful to map their learning. They are encouraged to keep them visible.'*
- *'Up-to-date and specific to DN practice.'*
- *'Reflect contemporary practice unlike the outdated NMC 2001 standards.'*
- *'Comments from practice staff is that the language is much more specific and so enables assessment of achievement more effectively. Also reflect practice now.'*

Additional comments regarding the QNI/QNIS standards

Survey question: In what ways have you used the standards within your programme / with your students / provider organisations?

There were 33 responses to this question with a varied range of responses. Common themes indicate that universities are using the standards to aid curriculum design/information and practice assessment.

- *'To develop the clinical portfolio and meet the needs of new services being supported through contemporary DN Teams.'*
- *'The standards are mapped across the entire taught and practice elements of the programme.'*
- *'The standards form a part of the student's portfolio of evidence along with the NMC standards.'*
- *'The lectures have been mapped to the standards to provide a link between theory and practice for the student and show relevance to the student.'*
- *'To guide clinical assessment and role of Practice Teacher.'*
- *'Mapped all learning outcomes to QNI voluntary standards to enable content to be developed to meet the demands of contemporary practice.'*
- *'It's an excellent benchmark for the students, but more importantly, they see that there are national organisations working on their behalf. They seem to be cocooned within their own practice area which is understandable. By undertaking such programmes as well as looking to becoming mentors, they have better awareness.'*
- *'We have mapped them to our programme. We have used them for our Mentor update sessions and with our provider organisations. Our students undertake a class activity which involves exploring the QNI Standards.'*
- *'The students' portfolio is based on the QNI/QNIS standards and they have to demonstrate achievement in practice.'*
- *'The QNI/QNIS standards form the competencies that students achieve in their practice which is assessed by an e-portfolio.'*
- *'We discuss the standards as part of our specialist practice module to highlight the importance of education and discuss within our leadership and management sessions.'*
- *'Used to 'modernise' our offer, to focus students on the learning required within the programme.'*
- *'Mapping theoretical components and as a framework of achievement in the practice evidence tool.'*

Programme Funding and Future Funding Arrangements

Table 7: Current funding arrangement

Survey question: How is the DN SPQ programme currently funded in your area?

How is the DNSPO currently funded?	Number of responses
Centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments	24
A combination of CPD funded places and commissioned places	6
Other	9

The comments relating to the 'other' responses are listed below:

- *'Funded by NHS Boards at the moment, but it (or similar programme) is likely to be funded by NHS Education for Scotland in the near future.'*
- *'HEE but often there is no backfill which has prevented organisations sending people.'*
- *'Accept commissioned places (DH) and self-funding students.'*
- *'Welsh Government Funded'*
- *'Not sure of current funding arrangements'*
- *'Health Education Midlands and East funding for course fees and salary support.'*
- *'Part funded by self and employer.'*
- *'The majority of the students were from centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments, however for 2017/18 we had two employer funded places as well'.*

Table 7a: Concerns regarding future funding arrangements

Survey question: What (if any) concerns do you have about the future funding of the SPQ – District Nurse Programme?

What concerns do you have regarding future funding?	Number of responses
Loss of funding/programme cessation	17
Apprenticeship related	11
No concerns	7
NMC standards review related	2
Supernumerary related	2
Annual contract issues	1
Community Nursing recruitment levels	1
Lack of HEE buy in	1
No plan to continue programme	1
Role related	1
Uncertainty	1

The highest number of responses (17 responses, 38%) mention funding or cessation of the programme as a major concern. The new Apprenticeship model for England was also mentioned frequently (11 responses, 24%).

Respondents in England had concerns with regard to future funding arrangements after 2019/20 for the DNSPO if HEE no longer provides any funding; this would mean that the only route into District Nursing would be through an Apprenticeship model. The District Nurse Apprenticeship programme has been approved at level 7 only and the implications of this have not yet been fully realised, as many existing programmes deliver at both level 6 and 7.

Many community nurses who are thinking of progression into a DN role have a diploma level qualification and may not yet have been able to 'top-up' to a degree, so a move to Masters level study might deter some applicants, especially as the Apprenticeship programme will be part time over two years. There has been concern expressed that the loss of degree level study would also deter some mature level and experienced community nurses and will remove their opportunity to become a District Nurse.

It is not known for certain how many HEIs are considering a DN Apprenticeship programme or if this could lead to further programme closures in the future, particularly when Apprenticeship funding is in direct competition with other health and social care Apprenticeship funding. Two HEIs have indicated that they are supporting an Apprenticeship route in future for their DN SPQ programme.

If the only route to obtain a DN SPQ is via an Apprenticeship route and if HEIs in England commenced Apprenticeship programmes in 2020, this would mean that there would be no District Nurses qualifying in England in 2021 as the courses under the Apprenticeship model will be offered as part time over two years.

The QNI has been clear that providers of District Nursing services in England require a Health Education England funded full-time route to continue alongside the Apprenticeship route. This will support the workforce planning that is required for patient safety in the community, whilst building the capacity and capability to deliver the ambitions of the NHS Long Term Plan for more care – and more complex care – to be delivered in peoples' homes and communities.

There were also some comments about the lack of value placed on the DN role and specialist practice qualification by employers where they are employing people in 'case manager' roles without the DN SPQ. There is also the issue of providing salary support to enable staff to be released for the programmes and of finding suitably qualified staff to work in the community when there is a shortage of nurses in general.

A review of specialist practice was being undertaken by the Nursing and Midwifery Council at the time of this audit and some respondents had concerns about the outcome should specialist practice qualifications no longer be regulated and if employers remove the requirement for a DN SPQ in the job specification. There would then be no incentive to complete a DN SPQ programme and this could lead to further course closures, even if an Apprenticeship route was available.

Some typical comments include:

- *'We are very concerned about future funding. Whilst all the work around Apprenticeships is good it will limit who can access the programme.'*
- *'I am very concerned that the outcome of the current NMC review will be that the NMC will abdicate responsibility for regulating the SPQ. If this happens, the logical consequence would be for local*



employers to remove the requirement for the SPQ in their job specifications. If this happens, even if the Apprenticeship is available, they will not access it as it will not be an essential qualification. Hence end of course.'

- 'The funding seems very uncertain and while hopefully there will be funding for 2019 and beyond that is an unknown. Our local trusts seem committed to the DNSPQ however the Apprenticeship model will be expensive for the trusts. Also, so many pathways are going down the Apprenticeship route e.g. nursing associates, advanced practitioner that there are concerns heard that there might be a scramble internally amongst the trusts as to which Apprenticeship pathways they will want to support and pay for.'

The picture in Wales is more positive, with respondents saying that the DN course and funding is fully supported and programmes are commissioned on a part time, flexible basis with the potential to consider a full-time route in the future.

Table 7b: Plans for future funding

Survey question: What are your expected plans for funding and recruiting for the next intake of District Nurse students?

What are your expected plans for funding and recruitment?	Number of responses
Apprenticeship (England only)	12
Business as usual	1
Funding in place	8
Government funded	3
HEE funded	3
Unknown	7
No response	2

In England, the majority of respondents state that they are at various stages of preparing a potential Apprenticeship route, with other responses from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland indicating no changes to the existing arrangements for 2019/20.

The comments below indicate the range of responses given:

- 'We have funding for 2019/2020 but don't know about 2021 as Apprenticeships due to start.'
- 'As there is Scottish Government funding for DN education, it is likely we will have students undertaking modules Jan-Sept 2019 in preparation for 2019/20 intake in September.'
- 'We intend to re validate a level 6 and 7 programme as well as the Apprenticeship route and we are discussing offering a modular option to be as flexible as possible. We remain unsure of the funding; we will not be able to recruit unless funding becomes available.'
- 'The University has been approached by the DH to inquire if more than one intake could be facilitated in one academic year.'
- 'The demand for the SPQ locally is very positive and I expect to see similar - perhaps slightly fewer places for the next academic year.'



- 'We have had a significant hike this year of 100%. In terms of part time places we generally have approximately 8-12 funded places however this year we received 31 funded part time places.'
- 'We have been informed that funding from HEEM is available for 2019/20, course fees and salary support. The process is already underway with the Trust around recruitment.'
- 'We plan to recruit with all 5 Health Boards for the September 2019 intake.'
- 'I have no idea but wait for the outcome of the NMC review, the approval of the Apprenticeship and the outcome of the HEE Community Nursing review. Then I will need to restructure the course to fit with the Apprenticeship structure and the new NMC standards replacing practice teachers. I am keeping my fingers crossed that the NMC will continue to provide a regulatory role.'
- 'We expect that the HEE will be funding the next intake of DNs and would anticipate similar numbers to this year.'
- 'Currently the Welsh Government is committed to continue funding places.'
- 'HEE - increased numbers due to employer demand. Working on being prepared for a Degree Apprenticeship route.'

Table 8: The future of the DN SPQ programme

Survey question: Is your university considering closure of the programme due to a lack of confirmed funding for the DN SPQ programme?

Response selection	Number of responses
No	27
No (dependent on numbers)	6
Yes	1
Yes (programme not running)	2
Supporting Apprenticeship route	2

There were 38 responses to this question with 33 responses indicating no and three stating yes. Two other respondents stated that they are supporting the Apprenticeship route. One respondent checked the 'other' category. The majority of responses indicate that universities are not considering closure of the programme (87%) although programme cessation is mentioned as a major concern in relation to the future funding arrangements in England.

Table 9: Involvement in trail blazer group application for Apprenticeship standards for District Nursing

Survey question: Have you or your university been involved in the application to form a trail blazer group for Apprenticeship standards for District Nursing?

Trail blazer group application involvement	Number of responses
Yes	20
No	13
Aware but not directly involved	4
N/A	1

There were 39 responses, with one blank response being excluded from the results.

There was an increase of 11% over the previous year in the number of universities involved in the trail blazer group application, which has now been approved.

As previously stated, the QNI has observed that the implementation of a two-year part-time Apprenticeship programme in England, (with no other funded full-time DN SPQ programme available) will lead to a shortage of DN SPQs qualifying in 2021, with potentially no District Nurses qualifying in England in 2021 if the Apprenticeship is the only funded route available. This will leave a deficit legacy for community services in England from which it could take more than a decade to recover.

Entry to the Programme

Table 10: New entrants

Survey question: Please indicate the number of students on the programme in 2017/18. (Please give exact numbers).

Academic year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
New entrants	427	566	565	551	659
Change from previous year		Increase 33%	No change	Decrease 3%	Increase 20%

Table 10 shows the number of students enrolled on DN SPQ programmes across the whole of the UK from 2013/14 – 2017/18.

The numbers of new entrants to programmes remained virtually the same between 2014/15 and 2015/6 with a 3% decrease in 2016/17. There was an increase of 20% in the 2017/18 intake.

Of the 659 new entrants to the programmes in 2017/18, 495 were full-time students and 164 were part-time (75%/25% full-time/part-time split) indicating a small reduction in the percentage of part-time entrants from the 2016/17 cohort (72%/28% full-time/part-time split).

Respondents were also asked "How many full and part time students have you enrolled onto the DN programme for the academic year 2018/19?". There were 36 responses to this question, with a total number of 741 students, which would include continuing part-time students from the 2016/17 entry. This figure indicates an increase of 13% in the number of new students between the academic years 2017/18 to 2018/19. The QNI will explore this data further as part of the 2018/19 education audit.

Table 10a: Reasons for applicants not receiving an offer

Survey question: Why did unsuccessful applicants not receive an offer of a place on your programme in 2017/18?

Reasons for applicants not receiving an offer	Number of responses
Failed criteria/interview	11
Skills, experience or qualifications related	7
Lack of understanding of the role	4
Academic ability or requirements	3
Lack of recent study/commitment	3
Trust decision or unable to release from practice	3
Lack of funding/places	3
Quality of candidate	2
Shortage of practice educators	2
Lack of readiness	1

There were 39 reasons submitted from 24 universities about why candidates did not receive an offer. The majority of responses indicated that applicants not receiving an offer failed the criteria/interview. The reasons cited included a lack of recent study, a lack of understanding of the DN role, not being adequately prepared for the interview and not demonstrating leadership potential.

In some instances, employing organisations select and interview their own candidates, but this can be limited by the numbers of staff that can be released from practice, the amount of backfill that they are able to access and whether there are sufficient practice educators to support students in practice.

In England there is an opportunity for community provider organisations to offer all unfilled places on their commissioned SPQ programmes to other community providers within the same region. Work by the QNI has revealed that this is not always known within the region and that in previous years, unfilled places may have been left vacant despite there being unmet need for funded places beyond commissioned numbers in a neighbouring provider organisation.

It is interesting to note that at least one organisation is aware of this opportunity, as illustrated by this comment:

‘Basically, the competition was extremely high. The candidates were fairly marked and the highest marks got a place. Concerns were regarding one trust which had 4 potential places but only one practice educator, thus they only could have one place. The remaining 3 places were used by other trusts.’



Table 11: Qualities/experience looked for in applicants

Survey question: *In addition to academic entry requirements, what other qualities / experience do you look for in applicants?*

Experience looked for in applicants	Ranked responses
Right attitude, values and beliefs	36
Preparation for the course	34
Sound knowledge and understanding of the role	33
Previous community nursing experience	28
Mentorship experience	20
Leadership experience	17
Management experience	15
Other (please add a comment below)	3

Table 11 shows a summary of responses received, indicating that right attitude, values and beliefs, and preparation for the course were the highest stated requirement. This position is supported by the lack of understanding of the role being one of the more frequently stated reasons for applicants not receiving an offer.

The following comments illustrate the wide variety of approaches used in the selection of students:

- *'At least 3 years community nursing experience.'*
- *'All students are supported by their Health Boards and are working as community nurses.'*
- *'All of the above although none are pre-requisites. Leadership potential is very high on our priority, including political awareness and good clinical judgement and decision-making.'*
- *'Generally, applicants have got community experience but we would consider them if they were committed and passionate about the role.'*
- *'Usually two years community experience and mentorship qualification. If a while since study, then evidence of recent study at level 6. Generally, to undertake MSc then a good first degree (2:1 or above) but this is negotiable on an individual student basis.'*

Table 12: Academic level of the programme

Survey question: *What is the academic level of the programme?*

Academic level	Number of responses
BSc (Level 6, or equivalent SCQF level) - ONLY	0
Postgraduate Diploma (level 7, or equivalent SCQF level) - ONLY	8
Both -	29

Most universities offer the DN SPQ programme at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as shown in Table 12.



The recently approved District Nurse Apprenticeship programme in England is set at level 7. This may have implications with potential students being unable to access the programme if they have not experienced level 6 academic study and if this is the only route to gaining a DN SPQ in England in the future.

Table 13: Students and supernumerary requirement

Survey question: *Do you require students to be supernumerary?*

Do you require students to be supernumerary?	Number of responses
Yes	32
No	5
Yes (with down-banding)	1
Yes (with consolidated practice)	1

39 universities answered this question and 34 said that they do require students to be supernumerary, but some respondents commented that the supernumerary status was conditional.

Feedback from those respondents who stated that they did not require students to be supernumerary, highlighted major differences and approaches between countries of the UK, and regions within each country.

The QNI has previously reported that many DNSPO students, particularly those studying part time, continue in their usual place of work as both a student and a team member, which can be problematic for both the student and their colleagues (QNI, 2014a).

Table 13a: Providers and supernumerary requirement

Survey question: *If yes, does this happen consistently across all practice providers? (follow on question to students being supernumerary)*

If yes is this consistent across all providers	Number of responses
Yes	22
Yes (with supernumerary time in lieu)	1
No	10

Responses to this question present a mixed picture, with some HEIs stating that it is vital, while others only recommend it. 23 (70%) of the 34 respondents who stated that they do require students to be supernumerary also said that provider organisations request this consistently.

Giving supernumerary status to students is also proving challenging for some employer organisations. The following comments illustrate some of the issues and variations around this:

- *‘Last year (2017/18) the DN student could choose to stay in their band 6 role and NOT be supernumerary; but now one Trust demands that the DN student works at a band 5 for the duration of the programme and IS supernumerary.’*
- *‘This is strongly encouraged and evidence is required in Portfolios to show they have had opportunities for supernumerary practice. Most of the students undertake the programme whilst in their existing’*



place of work with 3 months at the end of the programme for consolidated practice where they move to another base.'

- 'This is proving very challenging in reality.'
- 'Only FT students are supernumerary. PT students can still shadow key health and social care professionals but have to undertake normal duties of a community staff nurse.'
- 'We encourage supernumerary status but it is up to the Trust if they do this.'

Table 14: Availability of 'top-up' credits

Survey question: Is a top up of 60 credits to MSc available after students have completed the Postgraduate Diploma?

Top up of 60 credits to MSc available?	Number of responses
Yes	38
No	1

For students who have completed the Postgraduate Diploma during the District Nurse programme, 38 respondents indicated that they do offer a top up. However, comments relating to the take up of this option remain varied, as indicated below.

- 'Very few students do this as they are not funded on-the-whole.'
- 'Students do 1-year FT or 2 years PT to achieve PGDip and Specialist qualification and then convert to being a part time student to complete their MSc dissertation.'
- 'Less popular with the students as many want the professional qualification and only a couple per year return to complete the full masters. Presently in North Wales, students require the DN SPQ to obtain the Band 6 post.'

Table 15: Course duration

Survey question: What is the duration of the course?

Course duration	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Less than 40 weeks	0	0	3	4
40 weeks	7	8	4	2
42 weeks	3	1	2	3
44 weeks	3	5	2	3
46 weeks	1	1	2	0
48 weeks	2	3	0	3
50 weeks	0	1	2	0
52 weeks	24	20	19	18

*Part-time courses are included in the 52 weeks count.

33 universities responded to the question. The number of universities with a programme duration of 52 weeks decreased from 24 universities in 2014/15, to 18 in 2017/18, indicating a trend towards shorter programmes, including those of under 40 weeks duration.

The QNI has previously described the challenges for both educators and students to fit the required content of the programme into a limited timescale (QNI, 2014a). The trend towards shorter programme duration is therefore concerning, given the increasingly complex skills, knowledge and expectations required in leading teams in challenging practice environments and having sufficient time within the programme to be adequately supervised and supported to learn in practice.

Table 16: Nurses qualifying from the Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme

Survey question: How many students from your intake 2017/18 have now successfully completed the DN programme and qualified this year? (Please give exact numbers).

Year of qualification	2013 (Estimated number)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total	254*	382	479	517	464	500
Increase/decrease from previous year	N/A	Increase 50%	Increase 25%	Increase 8%	Decrease 10%	Increase 8%

*N.B. Scotland was not included in the 2013 review

Nurses qualifying from the Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme – the situation in London

The number of District Nurse Specialist Practitioners who qualified in 2018 in London has increased to 64 students, from four universities based in London (City University, King’s College London, London South Bank University and University of Greenwich). This figure would be higher if student numbers qualifying from the University of Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire New University were included (as there is evidence that some London service providers send their students to these universities). Figures for London universities increased year on year until 2016, but decreased in 2017.

In 2013, there were 100 commissioned places for the DN programme in London, which has provided a benchmark level of need from the community service providers in London, but which has never been achieved. The total number of commissions for District Nurse places in London in 2017/18 is not known, or if the number of commissioned places were filled.

This annual report was originally instigated because of the very low number of DNs qualifying in London in 2013. This extremely low figure for 2013 served as a ‘wake up call’ to commissioners, service providers, educators and staff themselves, and has led to sustained work by The QNI and other organisations to help raise awareness of the potential impact that the very low number of new District Nurses could have on the ability of community healthcare services to manage constantly rising patient demand.



Figure 2. Numbers of SPQDN students qualifying each year in London



Table 16a: Reasons why students withdrew from the programme

Survey question: How many students withdrew from the programme and what were the reasons for this?

Reason submitted	Number
Personal reasons	7
Health reasons	6
Failed the programme	2
Failed the practice component	2
Carers leave	1
Maternity leave	0
Total	25

15 universities submitted responses, giving a number of reasons why students typically withdraw from the programme. Some of these were not included in the count, as these were interruptions, as opposed to complete withdrawals.

A few respondents cited students not being able to cope with the academic demands of the course as a reason for withdrawal. In England this is a cause for concern if the only course option available in the future is a level 7 Apprenticeship programme.

Other respondents attributed student withdrawal to the DN role being the wrong career choice, or that the DN role was too autonomous for some students, factors that could potentially be explored at interview but may not be realised until tested on the programme.

Table 17: Entrants for 2018/19

Survey question: How many full and part-time students have you enrolled onto the DN programme for the academic year 2018/19?

Academic year	2018/19
Number of students	741
Average cohort	21

39 responses were received; three universities responded stated zero as the enrolled number. The smallest cohort size was reported as two with the largest cohort size 53. 11 respondents gave cohort sizes of less than 15 entrants. The total number of students enrolled represents a significant increase of 12% from the 2017/18 academic year.

Conclusion

Recent policy refers to the need for more nursing care to be delivered in homes and community settings, to reduce or prevent hospital admission and so that more people can be supported with complex, long term conditions and experience excellent end of life care at home by appropriately qualified specialist nurses.

The recently published Long Term Plan for England states that community health teams will need to expand to accommodate more rapid support for people at home as an alternative to hospitalisation and to give additional support to people living in a care home. District Nurses deliver their services to individuals, carers and families in every village, town and city across the United Kingdom and it is a service that needs to be acknowledged, valued and invested in. The recent QNI and RCN report (QNI/RCN, 2019) presents the ways in which outstanding models of District Nursing services can support the ambitions of the Long Term Plan.

To create a workforce to deliver this plan, it is essential that nurses continue to be able to access and gain a post qualifying DN SPQ. This course develops the necessary personal and professional growth, enhances their knowledge and clinical skills so that they are able to lead and educate teams, patients and families and deliver high quality care and improved patient outcomes. However, there remain concerns about the declining numbers of District Nurses with a 46% reduction in total recorded workforce over the past nine years. This has serious implications if we do not increase the numbers to meet the growing demand, to meet the aims of the plan and to provide high quality, personalised care in homes and communities.

In Wales, the Nursing Staffing Levels (Wales) Act (2016) applies to all healthcare settings including the community. The Healthier Wales policy and the principles of prudent healthcare also underpin district nursing as a universal, core service for the whole population. The Welsh government has doubled the number of commissioned DN SPQ places in Wales to meet the growing service requirements and has also maintained the nursing student bursary. Wales has seen an increase of almost 124% in the number of new entrants enrolled on the DN SPQ, from 42 in 2014/15 to 94 in 2017/18.

Scottish Government policy acknowledges District Nurses as 'pivotal' professionals in leading and managing integrated community healthcare teams, providing 24 hour care as needed. Work that began in 2015 in light of recommendations from the national out-of-hours services review outlined the future role of a senior practitioner/district nurse. The work emphasised district nurses' leadership role in areas such as anticipatory, palliative and end-of-life care. Scotland has seen an increase of less than 9% in the number of new students



enrolled on the DN SPQ, from 57 in 2014/15 to 62 in 2017/18. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/transforming-nursing-midwifery-health-professionals-roles-district-nursing-role-integrated/>

In Northern Ireland, the District Nursing Framework 2018-2026 (NI Department of Health 2018) confirmed District Nursing as an indispensable part of the country's community and primary care service, with the aim of providing 24 hour care to the population, aligned with General Practice. The Queen's Nursing Institute was a significant contributor to the development of the Framework and is also closely involved in the delivery of key actions arising from it, including the Team Transformational Leadership Programme. In order to deliver on the national policy, Northern Ireland has seen an increase of 71% in the number of new entrants enrolling on the DN SPQ from 21 in 2014/15 to 36 in 2017/18.

Over the same period, England has seen an increase of under 5% in the number of students enrolled on the DN SPQ programme, from 446 in 2014/15 to 467 in 2017/18.

In England, substantial, secured investment in District Nurse education is required, that is sufficiently flexible to enable both full and part time options. Approval for an Apprenticeship route for District Nursing is a positive move; however, funding needs to be accessible for both the Apprenticeship route and the fulltime programme. In order to guarantee a sustainable workforce, we cannot afford to close off any avenues of District Nurse recruitment, particularly given the wider economic and workforce challenges. Accessing funding also needs to be simplified and standardised with support for providers to predict the numbers required based on their workforce projections.

It is clear that provider organisations are still requiring the DN SPQ and there has been an increase in DN SPQ students from previous years, but this is set in the context of significant changes to future funding, which has still not been assured, as well as some HEIs no longer running the programme and some uncertainty about the future of their DNSPO programmes.

The QNI will continue work to influence appropriate investment into the District Nurse leadership role and ensure that Specialist Practitioner programmes continue to be offered, which maintain and protect the highest standards of high quality nursing care for people, families and carers at home and in the community. The current model of District Nurse education within universities has a long and successful track record of delivering highly skilled and knowledgeable practitioners, capable of leading teams in every community of the UK. If the numbers of students currently being enrolled remains the same or reduces, it is not because of a lack of demand or patient need, but rather reflects current concerns and future doubts about higher education funding for post registration nursing programmes.

Providers and Higher Education Institutions require clarity regarding the funding levels and systems, so that they can work together and have the confidence to invest in the professional development of the District Nursing workforce, now and in the future to deliver excellent healthcare in people's homes and communities.



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Appendix 1

The participants were asked to submit responses to the following questions:

What is the name of your university?
What year was your SPQ programme approved by the NMC?
When do you plan to apply for re-approval with the NMC?
Did the DN programme run in the academic year 2017/18?
If not, when did the programme last run?
Why is the programme no longer running?
Please indicate the number of students on the programme in 2017/18. (Please give exact numbers)
How many practice provider organisations do you work with during the DN student recruitment process?
Are the provider organisations that fund students onto the DN course still requesting DN SPQ?
How many students from your intake 2017/18 have now successfully completed the DN programme and qualified this year? (Please give exact numbers)
How many students still have outstanding modules, exams or assessment to complete?
How many students withdrew from the programme and what were the reasons for this?
Why did unsuccessful applicants not receive an offer of a place on your programme in 2017/18?
How many full and part time students have you enrolled onto the DN programme for the academic year 2018/19?
In addition to academic entry requirements, what other qualities / experience do you look for in applicants?
What is the title of the DN award(s) at your University
What is the academic level of the programme?
Is a top up of 60 credits to MSc available after students have completed the Postgraduate Diploma?
What is the duration of the course?
Do you require students to be supernumerary?
If yes, does this happen consistently across all practice providers?
Is independent nurse prescribing (V300) a part of the programme?
If yes, is there an advanced clinical assessment / physical examination module within the course as well?
Have you mapped the DN programme outcomes to the QNI/QNIS (2015) Voluntary Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice?
How useful have you found the QNI/QNIS Voluntary Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice?
In what ways have you used the standards within your programme / with your students / provider organisations?
How is the SPQ DN currently funded in your area?
What (if any) concerns do you have about the future funding of the SPQ - District Nursing programme?
What are your expected plans for funding and recruiting for the next intake of District Nurse students?
Do you have any examples of the impact of funding uncertainty on the DN workforce for provider organisations?
Is your university considering closure of the programme due to a lack of confirmed funding for the DN SPQ programme?
Have you or your university been involved in the application (led by Stephanie Lawrence, Deputy Director Nursing Integration and Primary Care Nursing, NHS Leeds CCG) to form a trail blazer group for Apprenticeship standards for District Nursing?
Do you have any other questions / comments / concerns?

Notes





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