

# Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2018 – 2019



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## Key points

- There were 693 new students who commenced a District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification (DN SPQ) Programme in 2018/19, an increase of 34 students (5%) on the 659 new students in 2017/18.
- Of the 693 new students in 2018/19, 527 were full time and 166 were part time.
- 518 DN SPQs qualified in 2019, compared to 500 in 2018. This represents an increase of 4% newly qualified DN SPQs.
- There are 42 universities in the United Kingdom (UK) approved by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) to offer the DN SPQ.
- 37 universities responded to the survey; of these, one university is no longer running the programme.
- The number of universities offering the V300 Independent Prescribing course as part of the programme has remained constant at 15 in 2018/19.
- 85% of university respondents had mapped their programmes to the QNI/QNIS Voluntary Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice (QNI/QNIS 2015).
- As found in 2017/18 almost all respondents have concerns about the loss of funding with the apprenticeship model being a possible alternative to current funding arrangements; 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 seventh annual District Nurse (DN) Specialist Practitioner Qualification (SPQ) education audit, a review process that was established in 2013 and the fourth 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/QNIS 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 2018/19. 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), 2018 (QNI, 2018) and 2019 (QNI, 2019).



## Data collection

Programme Directors for Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) approved Specialist Practitioner Qualification programmes in District Nursing from across the four countries of the UK were invited to complete an online survey. Responses were collected between January 2020 and March 2020. All data has been treated as confidential and in line with the new GDPR (2018) regulations and individual universities have not been identified in the report.

## Findings

### Status of The District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification Programme in 2018/19

The District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification programme is offered in all four countries of the UK. According to the NMC website there are 42 universities approved to offer the District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification programme and 37 of these (88%) responded to the QNI survey.

Table 1 shows the number of universities who are approved to run the programme in 2018/19. The number of universities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland approved to run the programme has remained the same over the past year.

**Table 1: Universities approved to run the Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme in 2018/19**

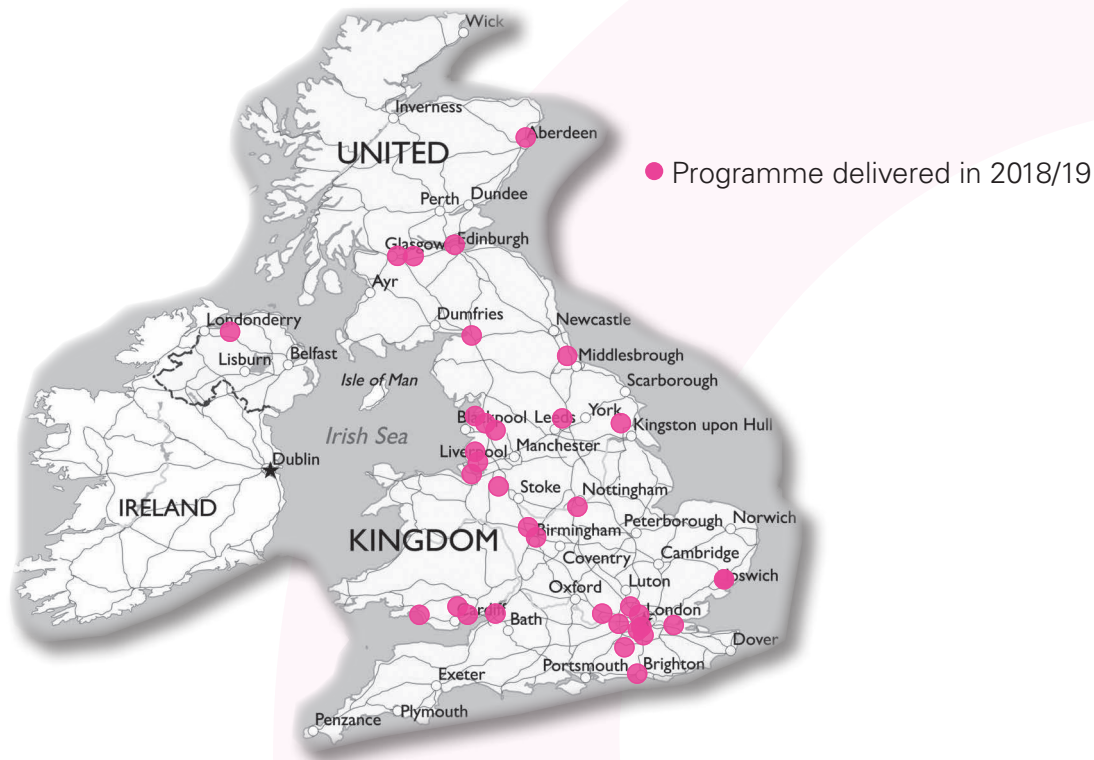
Country	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
England	24	30	32	35	34	34	33
Wales	4	4	4	4	3	4	4
Northern Ireland	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Scotland	N/A	4	4	4	4	4	4
<b>Total UK</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>42</b>

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 36 responses confirming that the DN SPQ programme ran in the academic year 2018/19 .

There was one response stating that the DN programme did not run in the academic year 2018/19.

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



**Table 2: Universities delivering the programme in 2018/19**  
*Survey question: Did the programme run in the academic year 2018/19?*

Country	Yes	No
England	27	1
Wales	4	0
Northern Ireland	1	0
Scotland	4	0
<b>Total UK</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1</b>

**Reasons for programme cessation**

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

Of the 37 responses, 36 respondents confirmed that the programme did run in 2018/19. There was one respondent who stated that the programme did not run. When asked why their programme was no longer being delivered, the university responded stating:

*'Because of poor uptake - only 5 people when it last ran making it not viable for the university to run.'*

This university is now offering only Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN) – Health Visiting/School Nursing as post registration community nursing education.



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

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

Time since NMC approval	Number of universities
0-3 years	22
4-6 years	14
7 years+	0

All respondents indicated that the programme has 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 DN SPQ programme last approved by the NMC?')*

Time since NMC re-approval	Number of universities
Next 3 years (2019-2022)	29
3 years +	2

There were 37 responses with 31 'year specific' responses. The remaining responses listed the following comments:

- 'We are waiting for a date for re-approval to the new NMC standards.'
- 'Major modification to adopt Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment (SSSA) this year, then pending new standards.'
- 'We are currently seeking a one-year extension while we await the publication of the Standards.'
- 'Unsure, Apprenticeship dependent.'
- 'No plans at present' (Response from the University no longer running the DN SPQ programme).

Responses indicated there are potential dependencies linked to re-approval as per below:

Apprenticeship dependent - ten responses

NMC standards dependent - eight responses

**Table 4: Practice provider partners**

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

Number of practice provider partners	Number of responses
1 only	2
2 to 3	12
4 to 6	17
7 plus	5
<b>Average number of provider partners</b>	<b>5</b>

There were 37 responses to the question, with 36 respondents stating that they work with practice provider partners and one response stating, 'None presently as we did not recruit for this academic year' as they are no longer running the programme. The total number of practice provider partners was 162 and the responses indicate that the majority of universities partner with more than one provider organisation.

The average number of provider partners was five, which indicates that universities continue to work with a range of practice provider partners in the delivery of the programme, potentially enabling choice for students and contingency for future DN SPQ courses.

**Table 4a: Provider organisations requesting DN SPQ**

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

Response statement	Number of responses
Yes	35
Yes & No (as some provider organisations do, others do not)	1

Responses indicated that a large majority (97%) of provider organisations are requesting DN SPQ programmes.

The comments below indicate the variations in responses:

- *'SPQ is a requirement of the band 6 caseload holder role.'*
- *'...and asking for an increase in numbers.'*
- *'most wish to transfer to apprenticeship asap.'*

**Table 4b: Apprenticeship programme (England only)**

*Survey question: Are the provider organisations that support students onto the DN SPQ course requesting the DN SPQ apprenticeship programme (England only)?*

Response	Number of responses
Yes	9
No	7
Yes & No (as some provider organisations do, others do not)	11

Responses vary between organisations in England, as indicated by the comments received below:

- *'They have all engaged with the university about apprenticeships but as yet are unclear as to how this will work in practice. We are meeting the stakeholders regularly to provide updates as we move forward. Still awaiting End Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) confirmation.'*
- *'They don't like part time but if HEE doesn't fund that's what we will have.'*
- *'When new specialist standards are published by NMC.'*
- *'Scoping at present.'*
- *'Requested for September 2021 start.'*
- *'Unsure at this present time.'*
- *'Some are more 'organised' in their plans, than others but all are informed.'*
- *'All providers we work with want to continue with the programme. Many do not want it over 2 years.'*
- *'Though concern that this will be the only funding source, rather than with a willingness to have an apprenticeship.'*
- *'Not so far.'*
- *'Some trusts concerned regarding infrastructure required for Apprenticeship.'*
- *'Some interest but meetings suggest that the HEE funding will be utilised.'*



**Table 5: V300 independent prescribing**

*Survey question: Is Independent Nurse Prescribing (V300) a part of the DN SPQ programme?*

Response	Number of responses by academic year				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
No - only V100 community nurse prescribing is available	35	31	23	24	22
Yes - optional	4	6	7	7	8
Yes - compulsory	4	3	5	8	6

Responses indicate that V300 independent nurse prescribing has been included in the programme (either as compulsory or as an option) slightly less frequently than in previous programmes (14 in 2018/19 compared to 15 in 2017/18). Over the past five years, there has been a consistent trend for more courses to include a V300 component.

Respondents were asked to confirm the number of students who selected V300 as an option in 2018/19, but the responses did not provide clear information and have not been included in this report.

**Table 5a: Advanced clinical assessment/physical examination module**

*Survey question: If V300 is part of the programme, is an advanced clinical assessment/history taking/physical examination module part of the DN SPQ programme?*

Response	Number of responses by academic year		
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Yes	15	16	24
No	3	7	13

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. Respondents' whose programmes do not include the V300 also responded to this question, with a total of 24 programmes offering this module.

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

- *'If students choose the V300 then they would do this module as part of the programme.'*
- *'It is in the new programme commencing Sep 2020.'*
- *'Usually if the students are taking V300 and have not already completed this module.'*
- *'Available as an elective module.'*
- *'We do have a module called Diagnostic Reasoning in Clinical Practice that is a core module if a student is doing V300.'*
- *'It is an optional module choice which many students choose.'*
- *'Students undertake a Clinical Assessment module as part of their programme but it is not considered advanced clinical assessment - we have a 30-credit module which addresses this level.'*



- *'There is not a module titled this, but the year-long module for the Specialist Practitioner Community District Nursing (SPCDN) module incorporates this.'*
- *'This is a pre requisite for the V300 module.'*
- *'Not within a module but we run a skills week and it is within that.'*

**Table 6: Mapping of DN SPQ**

*Survey question: Does the content of your DN SPQ programme map against or equate to advanced practice?*

Response	Number of responses
Yes	9
No	28

24% of responses indicated that the DN SPQ programme did map against or equate to advanced practice.

The following comments were submitted in response:

- *'We are very clear that our programme is about advancing practice, not advanced practice.'*
- *'Some elements map to Advanced Practice, particularly for M level students, but not all.'*
- *'We have not mapped it to advanced practice.'*
- *'The programme does not include a research module which would be needed to equate to advanced practice but research is embedded throughout the programme. The option to complete their MSc does include a research module and thesis so equivalent to advanced practice.'*
- *'It might but mapping against advanced practice standards has not been done.'*
- *'The only exception is V100. From 2020 we will only offer the V300, the programme will then map to advanced practice with a 30-credit community-specific module in addition.'*
- *'We are looking for this within the revalidation, but concerns are it is following a medical model and not a holistic model. The students are against this, they see what the social determinants are doing to people and as district nurses we are constantly picking up the secondary tertiary end of care and have less to do with primary prevention. We have a lot to offer to this as we are picking up the problems of prevention not being carried out sufficiently.'*

The comments below indicate the additional comments made when asked, 'What advanced practice standards do you map your programme against?':

- *'V300 module outcomes are in line with advanced practice.'*
- *'NES four pillars, QNI/QNIS Voluntary Standards.'*
- *'QNI/QNIS (2015) Voluntary Standards.'*
- *'We do not formally map against any standards however, are aware that our students have been able to successfully credential with the RCN upon completing.'*
- *'QNI NMC.'*
- *'Not mapped against standards but the view is that the programme prepares students to become advanced practitioners in line with the 4 pillars of advanced practice.'*
- *'RCN.'*
- *'QAA Quality Code section A1 (The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications) at Level 7 (QAA, 2014) <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>.'*
- *'Key themes of advanced practice – NHS Education for Scotland (2010) Advanced Practice Development Needs Analysis Tool Scottish Government (2010) Advanced Nursing Practice Roles: Guidance for NHS Boards. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.'*



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

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

Response	Number of responses
Extremely useful	28
Useful	4
Neutral	4
Not very useful	1
Not useful at all	0

86% of responses indicated that the QNI/QNIS Voluntary Standards for Education and Practice 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:

- *'It would be useful if the mentorship standard could be updated to reflect the NMC changes so that they remain contemporary.'*
- *'They informed our last revalidation in conjunction with the outdated NMC standards.'*
- *'Practice staff find the language used is more accessible and the concepts better describe the work of the district nurse.'*
- *'They need to be adopted by the NMC and used as the new standards.'*
- *'We now have 3 sets of standards, only 1 is mandated by the NMC.'*
- *'Assists with the preparation of students to meet current workforce demands and role requirements.'*
- *'Wish the NMC would adopt in replacement of their standards.'*

## 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 37 responses to this question with a range of responses. The two main themes identified were mapping programme outcomes against the standards and for teaching and learning purposes.

The majority of the respondents stated that they have used the standards to map against their programme outcomes for validation purposes alongside the NMC standards.

The standards are also incorporated into academic and practice teaching and learning, with many universities using them within the student's practice assessment documentation to enable the student to present evidence that the standards for contemporary District Nursing practice have been met.

Typical comments include:

- *'The programme is mapped to the QNI standards. They have been used to develop the practice assessment document and are also used to develop the academic content for each module.'*
- *'The programme is validated using these standards alongside the NMC standards. They are used in the practice evidence tool to ensure that students are able to meet the clinical competencies required.'*
- *'Our programme is mapped to the QNI voluntary standards. This assures us that the programme is future-proofed.'*
- *'We share the standards with our students at the start of the specialist practice module to introduce them to the concept of specialist practice. We are continuing to align them to our course content'*

- *'The students practice portfolio is based upon evidencing that the standards have been met.'*
- *'They are part of the Practice Assessment Handbook and mapped to all Core modules in the Programme.'*
- *'These standards are the basis of the portfolio which has been mapped to the NMC standards and moving forward will remain the basis of the portfolio mapped to both the NMC standards and the apprenticeship standards.'*

## Programme Funding and Future Funding Arrangements

**Table 7: Current funding arrangements**

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

How is the DNSPQ currently funded?	Number of responses
Centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments	21
Centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments: Secondment	3
Centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments: Sponsored	2
Secondment	9
Sponsored	8

The majority of student places across the UK are centrally commissioned, with some universities also stating that some students in these cohorts are seconded or sponsored, whilst other universities solely have seconded or sponsored students. There were no independent or self-funded students identified from the responses. The comments present a mixed picture of funding arrangements, with practice provider organisations utilising the funding and offering flexibility according to need.

Typical comments include:

- *'Funded through Health Education England sponsorship. The practice partners then provide supervision and backfill.'*
- *'Sponsored by each individual health board and some funding from NES (Nurse Education Scotland).'*
- *'Students are offered a place by a local Trust on a sponsorship basis, with the Trust being enabled to do this as they have received funding from HEENE (HEE North East) to cover the cost of the place. Backfill funding is no longer provided.'*
- *'A variety of means, including Government funding, the Service Level Agreement and in some cases local monies.'*
- *'One trust has a mixed funding pot this year, 2 students funded by HEE and 1 student funded from trust budget. All other students funded by HEE.'*
- *'Utilising HEE funding. The number of places are requested and approved by HEE.'*
- *'HEWM funded and staff are directly seconded by Trusts.'*

### Concerns regarding future funding arrangements

*Survey question: What (if any) concerns do you have about the future funding of the DN SPQ programme?*

More than 50% of respondents (19) stated that their future funding concerns were related to the implementation of apprenticeship routes to District Nursing. However, almost 20% stated that they had no concerns at all about future funding, particularly in Wales and Scotland.

Respondents in England said that their concerns were about moving to an apprenticeship model and the impact this might have on commissioned places. There is also anxiety about the End Point Assessment (EPA) process of the Apprenticeship programme, with few if any HEIs putting themselves forward as EPA Organisations for this currently. However, without this, the apprenticeship route cannot be delivered. HEE has announced that they will

continue to fund places for the DN SPQ for 2020/21 and 2021/22 but with even greater emphasis on care delivery at home and in the community, some respondents questioned why DN student places are at risk of being compromised.

The apprenticeship levy is also not only for DN SPQ students and there are concerns that larger organisations will not prioritise the funding of DN students over other apprenticeships required, while smaller organisations may lack the infrastructure to support the apprenticeship route. One respondent for example stated that provider organisations could prefer Nursing Associate apprenticeships in place of DN apprenticeships.

The apprenticeship route to a DN qualification has been designed to take place over two years part time, however many employers have stated a preference for a one-year programme. The concern is that a two year course would be more expensive for some organisations, which could mean that fewer students could be funded. The implications for HEIs with smaller student numbers could mean that their courses become unviable and lead to course closure.

Given that the NMC are also reviewing post registration education at the same time, the concern is that many HEIs will not pursue the apprenticeship route at this time until the future of the DN SPQ and new or updated standards are secured.

With the uncertainty and some confusion around funding at the present time, organisations are unlikely to put forward a business case to develop an apprenticeship route that may never be used.

Some typical comments include:

- *'We are very concerned regarding the future funding - it has been suggested that limited funding will be available for 20/21 however, there is no further funding information available and given the NMC's recent announcement it does not seem prudent to pursue the DN apprenticeship at this time.'*
- *'The challenges around writing the new Apprenticeship programme and continuation of the DN SPQ programme with the new standards/updating the standards pending.'*
- *'The speed at which the apprenticeship has been thrust upon organisations has created enormous challenges and the EPA appears to have significant flaws which have yet to be resolved. The collaboration between IoATE [Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education] and NMC could have been much more constructive and has led to a position of an EPA which creates added burden for the student and those involved. Given the complexity of the apprenticeship, I am concerned that Trusts may not see it as worth the hassle and we move to a position where staff are promoted to a role where they are responsible for a team and a caseload without the DN SPQ.'*
- *'I continue to be astonished that government policy is driving care to be delivered at home but DN places are being compromised. I believe that HEE will withdraw all funding once the DN Apprenticeship is in year 2. Nurses who are Dip HE level will have no funding for CPD and they will not be able to apply for DN Apprenticeship.'*

There were additional concerns around the lack of value placed upon the District Nurse role and their unique contribution to providing care and support to some of the most vulnerable people and their families in community settings.

An example of a typical comment:

- *'The variability of provision will this lead to a variable service where the profession loses its identity, particularly with the move to a variable funding and provision route.'*

Wales has committed to continued training; commissioned numbers have remained the same for 2020 and there are no funding concerns in Scotland currently. At the time of writing the report, Northern Ireland has announced a doubling of funded places for the DN SPQ programme in 2020/21.





## Plans for future funding

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

More than 55% (20 respondents) stated that they had secured funding for students commencing in 2020/21, some with similar student numbers as previously enrolled, but at least three with increased numbers and one with reduced numbers. One area of England felt unsupported, with course provision historically inaccessible and another was still waiting for clarity on what funding will be available. HEE has confirmed that funding of the current programmes will continue until an apprenticeship route is in place. Provider organisations, however, are unlikely to be able to release students for both routes.

At the time of writing the report, HEE is undertaking a formal review of the funding of the DN SPQ programme. The concerns expressed by both service provider organisations and HEIs during the review mirrors precisely the findings of this audit report.

There are some respondents who work with provider organisations that have expressed an interest in commissioning both traditional and apprenticeship routes, although this could be at different HEIs. At the present time, this is also dependent on validation and approval from the NMC, which would seem very unlikely to happen in any significant number for courses commencing in September 2020. One respondent stated that their university planned to commence an apprenticeship route in January 2021 (pending NMC approval) and to revalidate a non-apprenticeship route to commence September 2020. In time, they would likely phase out one of the two routes, in accordance with the availability of future funding and demand.

### 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 from 2021/22?*

Response	Number of responses
No	35
Yes - due to student numbers/financial sustainability	2

There were 37 responses to this question, with 35 responses indicating no and two stating yes. The following comments were submitted:

- *'We are committed to moving towards Apprenticeship provision for 2021/22.'*
- *'Despite the uncertainties we face we are committed to the DN SPQ programme.'*
- *'The Programme is buoyant and does not struggle to recruit.'*
- *'The University intends to have the apprenticeship route available and are hoping to run a DN programme in 2020/2021. However, the change to the apprenticeship pathway could mean that our numbers are too small for a viable programme so 2021/2022 does look uncertain.'*
- *'We are actively pursuing the development of the apprenticeship route.'*
- *'There is a concern about the apprenticeship being financially viable, especially as it contains the V300 and the end point assessment portion being taken from the overall funding. If it is not financially viable it is less likely that we will run but it is run at a deficit currently.'*

**Table 8a: The DN SPQ programme in 2020**

*Survey question: What type of DN SPQ programme are you planning to deliver in 2020?*

Response	Number of responses
Full-time DN SPQ	11
Both Full-time and Part-time DN SPQ	11
Full-time DN SPQ and a two-year apprenticeship route	7
Part-time DN SPQ	5
Both Full/Part-time DN SPQ and a two-year apprenticeship route	2
A two-year DN SPQ apprenticeship programme	1

There were 37 responses to this question, with 30% indicating that a full-time DN SPQ programme only is planned for 2020 and a further 30% indicating both a full and part-time DN SPQ programme is planned. 27% of respondents indicated they intended to promote a DN SPQ programme following the apprenticeship route.

## Entry to the Programme

**Table 9: New entrants**

*Survey question: Please indicate the number of students (by gender type) on the DN SPQ programme in 2018/19.*

Academic year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
New entrants	427	566	565	551	659	693
Change		increase 33%	no change	decrease 3%	increase 20%	increase 5%

**Figure 2: New entrants by gender**

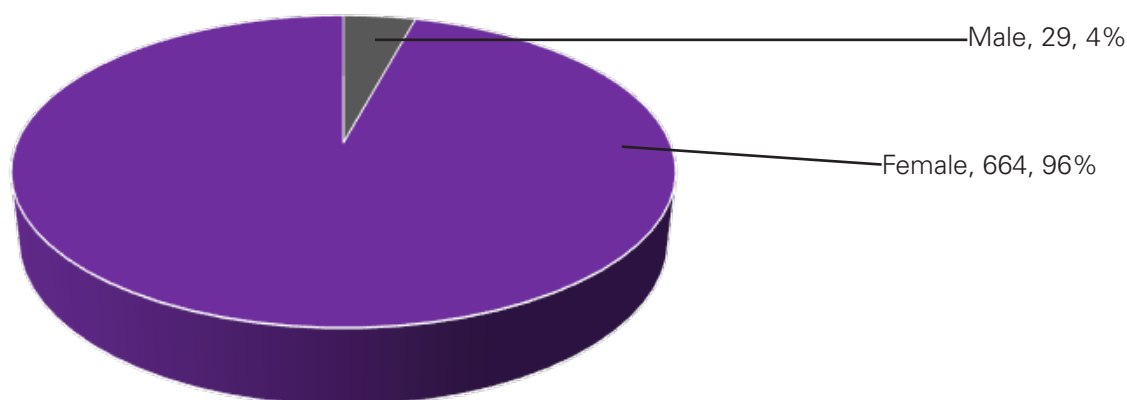


Table 9 shows the number of students enrolled onto Specialist Practitioner District Nurse programmes across the whole of the UK from 2013/14 – 2018/19.

The number of new entrants to programmes increased by 20% from 2016/17 to 2017/18 and has seen a small further increase of 5% from 2017/18 to 2018/19.

Of the 693 new entrants to the programmes in 2018/19, 527 were full-time students (506 female, 21 male) and 166 were part-time (158 female, 8 male). The split between full-time and part-time has remained roughly the same at 76%/24% respectively.

**Table 10: Unsuccessful applicants**

*Survey question: Were there any applicants who did not receive an offer of a place on the DN SPQ programme in 2018/19?*

Response	Number of responses
Yes	22
No	14

There were 36 responses to this question with 60% of responses indicating that not all applicants received an offer of a place on the DN SPQ programme.

**Table 10a: Reasons for unsuccessful applicants not receiving an offer**

*Survey question: Why did they not receive an offer? (please specify all reasons)*

Response	Number of responses
Failed criteria/interview	14
Lack of funding/places	6
Skills, experience or qualifications related	2
Lack of recent study/commitment	2
Lack of understanding of the role	1
Lack of community experience	1
Shortage of practice educators	1
Not specified	1

There were 21 responses to this question (with some responses indicating multiple reasons for applicants not receiving an offer). The majority of responses indicated that applicants not receiving an offer failed the criteria/interview. Responses also indicated that the lack of funding/places was a contributing factor.



**Table 11: Qualities and experience looked for in applicants**

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

Response	Number of responses
Right attitude, values and beliefs	37
Sound knowledge and understanding of the role	35
Preparation for the course	27
Previous community nursing experience	25
Leadership experience	23
Mentorship experience	12
Management experience	9

Table 11 shows a summary of responses received, indicating that right attitude, values and beliefs remains the highest response (100% of responses indicated this requirement) as indicated in the 2017/18 results. Sound knowledge and understanding of the role was also indicated as a requirement by 95% of responses.

**Table 12: Academic level of the programme**

*Survey question: What are the academic levels of the DN SPQ programme?*

Response	Number of responses
BSc (Level 6, or SCQF level 9/10)	0
Postgraduate Diploma (level 7, or SCQF level 11)	9
Both	28

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

**Table 13: Students and supernumerary requirement**

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

Response	Number of responses
Yes	30
No	7

The QNI has previously reported that many DN 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).

37 universities answered this question and 81 % stated that they do require students to be supernumerary, but that there were some exceptions. HEIs would usually recommend this and full time students are more likely to be supernumerary and move to a new practice area, although these decisions rest with the employing organisations. Where HEIs work with several service provider organisations, there can be differences in organising this process and it can be an increasing challenge to maintain. Some HEIs referred to the supernumerary status as ‘protected learning time’.

Typical comments were:

- *‘However, this is extremely difficult to achieve and there are occasions when it is about negotiation. In general the part-time route is NOT funded to receive backfill however NMC dictate supernumerary status.’*
- *‘One provider maintains supernumerary status, the other has a modified approach. The latter Trust state at the start that the student won’t be supernumerary and their grade/salary is maintained for the programme. In reality, these students have had as much flexibility during the programme as those who have previously been assured supernumerary status.’*





**Table 13a: Where students are supernumerary do all practice providers request this?**

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

Response	Number of responses
Yes	20
No	10

20 (67%) of the 30 respondents who stated that they do require students to be supernumerary stated that providers do request this consistently.

This is a mixed picture, with some HEIs stating that it is vital, while others only recommend it. This policy is also proving challenging to adhere to for some provider organisations.

The following comments illustrate some of the issues and variations when asked if students' supernumerary status happens across all practice providers consistently and why:

- *'Providers are advised that this is a requirement of the programme. However, student feedback suggests it is sometimes difficult due to workload pressures.'*
- *'All providers intend for the students to be supernumerary and work towards this but sometimes, staffing levels are such that they get drawn into delivering the service.'*
- *'The purchasing arrangements in one trust mean that backfill monies are unavailable. This makes protecting supernumerary status more difficult. Significant progress has been made and in 2018/19 the majority of students were supernumerary.'*
- *'Occasionally you have students who perhaps feel guilty when the team are busy; sometimes it is the student not being clear and assertive and also not selecting the right visits/ patients.'*

**Table 14: Availability of top up credits**

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

Response	Number of responses
Yes	35
No	2

For students who have completed the Postgraduate Diploma during the District Nurse programme, 95% of respondents indicated that they do offer a top up to a Masters degree. Comments relating to the take up of this option remain varied as indicated below:

- *'But currently not funded by HEE.'*
- *'Rarely is this route taken due to difficulty funding it.'*
- *'Not specifically for District Nursing, however, students can access our professional navigators to identify appropriate modules to enable top up to Masters.'*



**Table 15: Course duration***Survey question: What is the duration of the DN SPQ course (in weeks)?*

Response	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Less than 40 weeks	0	0	3	4	4
40 weeks	7	8	4	2	4
42 weeks	3	1	2	3	2
44 weeks	3	5	2	3	3
46 weeks	1	1	2	0	1
48 weeks	2	3	0	3	1
50 weeks	0	1	2	0	2
52 weeks	24	20	19	18	20

\*Pro rata weeks for part time programmes

37 universities responded to the question. The number of universities with a programme duration of 52 weeks had decreased from 24 universities in 2014/15, to 18 in 2017/18, indicating a trend towards shorter programmes in that period. However, 52 week courses have increased to 20 in 2018/19.

The QNI has previously described the challenges for both educators and students to fit the programme into a limited timescale (QNI, 2014a). The trend towards shorter programme duration was therefore concerning, given the increasingly complex skills, knowledge and expectations required in leading teams in challenging practice environments, while having sufficient time within the programme to be adequately supervised and supported with multiple areas of decision making. Therefore, it is encouraging to see that the number of HEIs offering a 52 week programme has increased to 20 in 2018/19.

**Table 16: Nurses qualifying from the Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme***Survey question: How many students from the 2018/19 cohort (both full and part-time, year 2) have now successfully completed the DN SPQ programme and qualified this year?*

Year of qualification	2013 (estimated number)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total	254*	382	479	517	464	500	555
Increase/decrease from previous year	N/A	Increase 50%	Increase 25%	Increase 8%	Decrease 10%	Increase 8%	Increase 11%

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

## Nurses qualifying from the Specialist Practitioner District Nurse programme – London

The QNI commenced the annual District Nurse education audit in 2013 when the extremely low figure of District Nurses undertaking the programme in 2012/13 was identified.

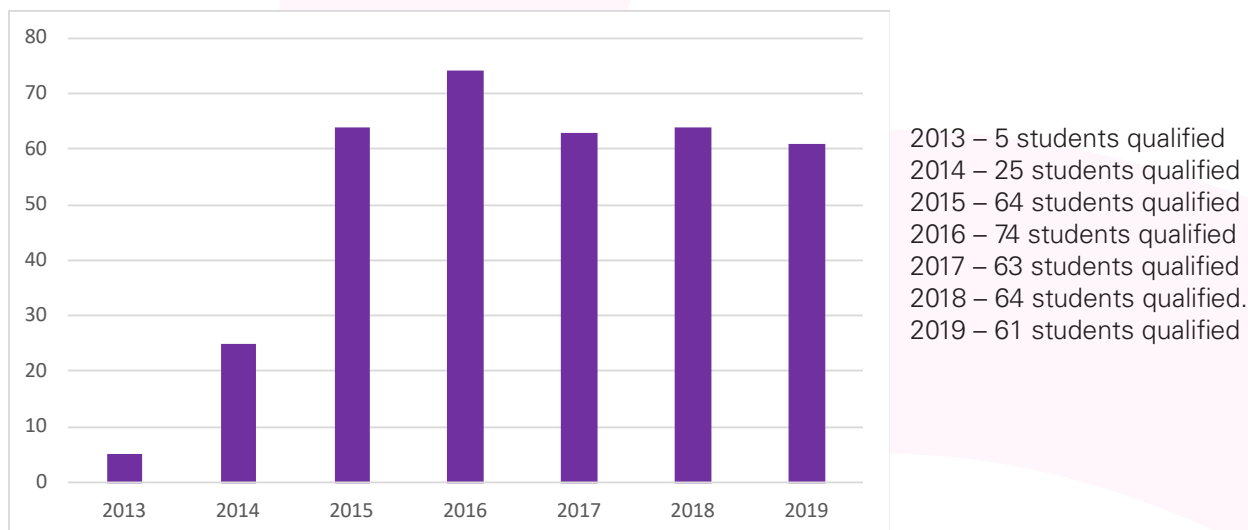
The first report by the QNI on District Nurses qualifying in 2013 served as a ‘wake-up call’ to commissioners, service providers, educators and staff themselves, and has led to sustained work by the QNI and other organisations to help raise awareness of the potential impact that the very low number of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

London has remained of particular interest in the annual audit as in 2012/13 there were 100 commissioned places for the DN programme, filled by just 5 students. The annual number of District Nurses qualifying has never reached more than 74 in London.

The number of District Nurse Specialist Practitioners who qualified in London in 2019 remained at 61 from three universities based in London, with one university reporting that the DN SPQ programme did not run in 2018/19.

Figures for London universities increased consistently year on year until 2016 when the numbers are seen to decrease.

**Figure 3: Figures for London universities 2013-2019**



### Reasons leaving the DN SPQ programme

*Survey question: How many students withdrew from the DN SPQ programme 2018/19 and what were the reasons for this?*

There were 33 responses to this question, with 45% of responses indicating that no students had withdrawn from the DN SPQ programme in 2018/19. 19 responses indicated that at least one student had withdrawn from the programme.

The reasons for students withdrawing from the programme are indicated in the table below:

**Table 17: Reasons that students left the programme**

Reason for withdrawal	Number of responses
Personal or health reasons	17
Failing to achieve	5
Not known	3
Lack of support	2
Too much pressure	2
Withdrawn by trust	1
Caring responsibilities	1
Job change	1
Relocation	1

There were 19 responses, indicating 33 reasons for students withdrawing from the programme: 51% of responses indicated personal or health reasons for withdrawing from the DN SPQ programme.

**Table 18: Entrants for 2019/20**

*Survey question: For the current academic year 2019/20, how many new full-time and part-time (year 1 only) students have enrolled onto the DN SPQ programme?*

Country	Full-time (female)	Full-time (male)	Part-time (Yr 1 female)	Part-time (Yr1 male)	Total
England	504	22	6	0	532
Wales	23	1	74	2	100
Northern Ireland	33	0	0	0	33
Scotland	27	1	41	4	73
<b>Total</b>	<b>587</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>738</b>

Respondents were also asked to submit the number of full and part-time (Year One only) entrants who have been enrolled onto the DN programme for the academic year 2019/20. There were 36 responses to this question, with a total number of 738 new students (611 full-time and 127 part-time). This figure indicates an increase of 6.5% in the number of new students between the academic years 2018/19 to 2019/20.

The largest cohort size was reported as 45 with at least three HEIs having cohort sizes above 40. Cohort sizes are reported below.

**Table 18a: Cohort sizes reported**

Cohort size	Number of responses
0 to 10	6
11 to 20	16
21 to 30	9
31 to 40	2
40 plus 3	3



## Conclusion

There continues to be uncertainty about the future security of central funding for District Nurse education in England in particular. Many provider organisations state that they have low numbers of qualified District Nurses, because of the lack of funding for training places in HEIs. However, there is an absolute imperative to raise these numbers, in the interests of patients, families and carers who require highly skilled nursing care to be provided in the home.

There needs to be greater recognition by policy makers and service planners of the unique and highly skilled care that District Nurses provide and their potential to deliver safer, more efficient and effective person-centred care. An investment into the District Nursing services by funding more DN SPQ places would enable the growth of a nurse-led service to deliver the aspirations of every country in the UK to increase the levels of care in the home including, importantly, end of life care.

In England, there is a mixed picture around education funding, particularly with regard to the apprenticeship route into District Nursing, and how this funding will be accessed and prioritised when competing against other healthcare apprenticeship roles. The apprenticeship programme for District Nursing has been set at 24 months at postgraduate level, which may preclude some candidates from applying. Only nine universities currently offer a post graduate diploma programme only, with 28 still offering the course at both undergraduate and post graduate levels.

Some educational organisations state they would prefer an apprenticeship route, partly because it includes V300 prescribing, whereas others are reluctant to commit, questioning whether it is actually the prescribing qualification they require for the District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification.

Several Universities are working with their stakeholders to ensure that a District Nurse apprenticeship could be supported in practice, but respondents required confidence that the NMC, HEE and DHSC were working together to provide a clear overall strategy. The whole question of workforce supply falls to some extent between departments, further undermined by the theory that the nursing workforce should be left to the open market.

In England, several educational organisations currently profess not to recruit students until HEE funding is secured, whereas some have indicated they will take a risk and go ahead dependent on demand, hoping to secure the funding they require subsequently. Confirmation of HEE funding has traditionally been communicated very late in the recruitment cycle, creating instability for HEIs, with unfilled places or a last minute rush to recruit students who may then not have had adequate time to prepare for the demands of the course. This very regrettable situation is set against some community services that are struggling to recruit and retain staff in general and never more so than at the present time. We understand however, that in 2020/21 HEE are now actively engaged in resolving this issue for future intakes.

In Wales and Northern Ireland, where the political commitment has been clearer, recent numbers enrolling on the DN programme have remained relatively constant, with an increase anticipated in order to deliver on national plans to support more care in the community.

In Scotland, there appears to be greater stability within HEIs, with the Scottish Government providing a clear commitment to the development of the Nursing workforce, including District Nursing.

The Covid-19 pandemic has amply demonstrated that the health service as a whole system, in all parts of the UK, depends on the quality and supply of its District Nursing workforce, with its training in public health and infection control, rehabilitation and end of life care in the home – including care homes.

As we move forward in managing the pandemic and protecting our communities from the effects of new and existing diseases and social conditions, the QNI calls on all UK governments and stakeholders to work collaboratively and creatively to ensure a growing supply of District Nurses to meet patient need in communities everywhere.



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## Additional Resources

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The Queen's Nursing Institute  
1A Henrietta Place  
London  
W1G 0LZ

020 7549 1400  
mail@qni.org.uk  
www.qni.org.uk

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