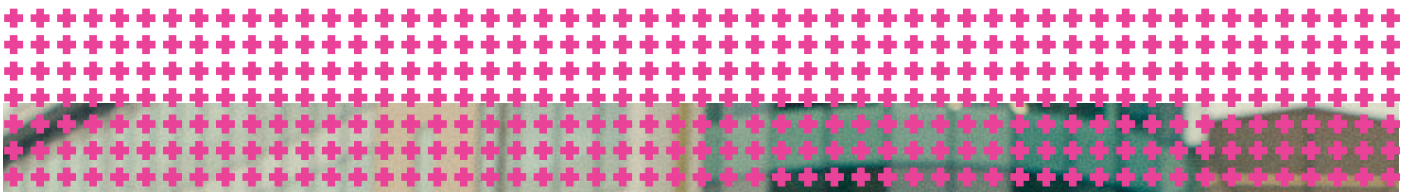


# Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2021 - 2022



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## Key points

- 668 District Nurses qualified with a Specialist Practice Qualification in the 2021/22 academic year; this is a decrease of 6% from the previous year.
- 647 new students enrolled on the DNSPO for 2022/23 54 are on the apprenticeship route (England only). This is a decrease of 9% on the previous year, representing a further decline in numbers of students.
- There are 32 universities registered to deliver the DNSPO programme with the NMC; five universities are delivering and awaiting revalidation using the new NMC post registration standards.
- 33 universities responded to the audit.
- There are widespread, ongoing concerns over central government funding of the DNSPO.

## Introduction

This is the tenth annual District Nurse (DN) Specialist Practitioner Qualification (SPQ) education audit, a review process that was established in 2013.

It is the seventh 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 2021/22.

The report highlights any significant 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), 2019 (QNI, 2019), 2020 (QNI, 2020) and 2021 (QNI, 2021).

## 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 November 2022 and January 2023. All data has been treated as confidential and in line with GDPR (2018) regulations. Individual universities have not been identified in the report.



## Findings

### Status of The District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification Programme in 2021/22

The District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification (DNSPO) programme is offered in all four countries of the UK. According to the NMC website there are 32 universities approved to offer the DNSPO programme across the United Kingdom, with 5 running courses but not on the NMC website at time of publication. 36 programme leads were sent the questionnaire and 33 responded.

Table 1 shows the number of universities across the UK who are approved by the NMC to run the programme in 2021/22.

**Table 1: Universities approved to run the Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme in 2020/21**

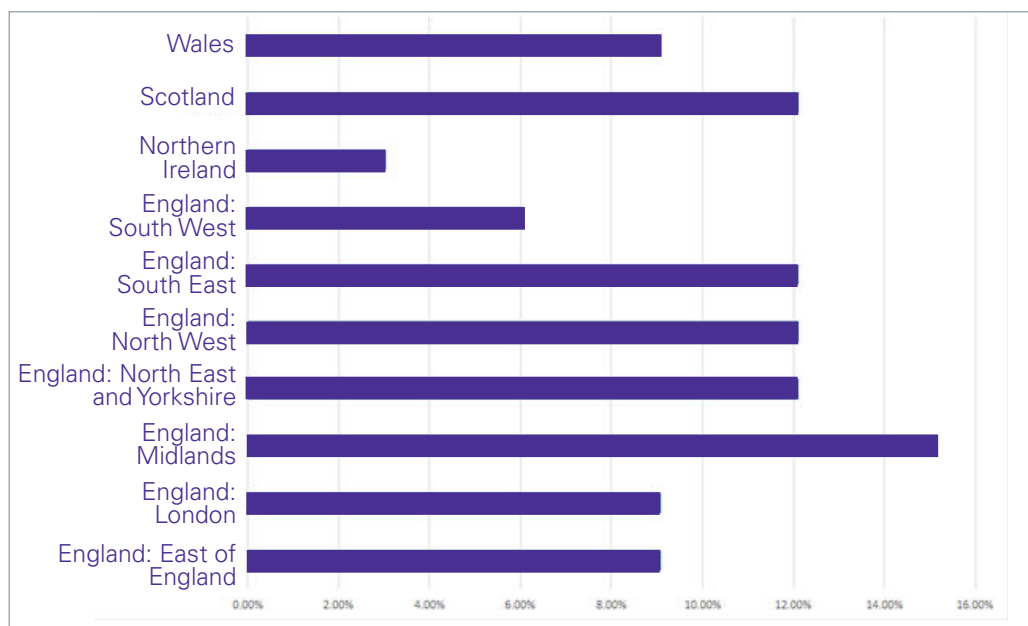
Country	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
England	24	30	32	35	34	34	33	34	32	25
Wales	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4
Northern Ireland	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Scotland	N/A	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3
<b>Total UK</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>33</b>

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

There were 33 responses confirming that the DNSPO programme ran in the academic year 2021/2022; 29 having one intake a year and four having two intakes a year, 26 commencing in September, five with a January intake, two with February, and one each in March, April and August.

**Figure 1. Regional distribution of universities delivering the programme across the UK**

*Survey question: Where is your university based?*



**Table 2:***Survey question: What type of DNSPQ programme was delivered in 2021/22 (tick all that apply)*

Response		
Full time DNSPQ	25	12 only offer this programme
Part-time DNSPQ	14	3 only offer this programme
A two-year DNSPQ apprenticeship programme	7	3 only offer this programme
One year apprenticeship programme (England only)	1	2 only offer this route

**Table 3: Course duration***Survey question: What is the duration of the DNSPQ course (in weeks)?*

Response	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Less than 40 weeks	0	0	3	4	4	4	0	1
40 weeks	7	8	4	2	4	6	3	
42 weeks	3	1	2	3	2	2	2	
44 weeks	3	5	2	3	3	2	4	4
45 weeks	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	
46 weeks	1	1	2	0	1	1	1	
47 weeks	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
48 weeks	2	3	0	3	1	0	0	4
50 weeks	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	
52 weeks	24	20	19	18	20	18	15	17

\*Pro rata weeks for part-time programmes (week parameters changed for this year; colours indicate the range of weeks included).

Five universities said this was not applicable, the reasons provided included only having a part-time programme, or it being dependent on whether the student already had the V300.

The QNI has previously described the challenges for both educators and students to fit a programme into a shorter time period, given the increasingly complex skills, knowledge and expectations required in contemporary district nursing, in leading teams within challenging practice environments, while having sufficient time within the programme to be adequately supervised and supported to undertake learning to underpin multiple areas of decision making.

The DNSPQ apprenticeship programme varies in length between 78 and 104 weeks and many run over a 2-year period in eight of the universities that responded.

**Table 4 Survey question:** *How is the DNSPQ programme currently funded in your area? (Tick all that apply)*  
*How is the DNSPQ currently funded?*

How is the DNSPQ currently funded?	Number of responses 2020/21	Number of responses 2021/22
Centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments	15 (47%)	17 (51%)
Centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments: Secondment	12 (35%)	14 (42%)
Employer funded	5 (16%)	5 (15%)
Independent (self-funded)	0	1 (3%)
Apprenticeship funding	10 (29%)	9 (27%)
Variety	2 (6%)	0

*Survey question: What (if any) concerns do you have about the future funding of the DNSPQ programme?*  
*Typical comments included:*

- *Firstly, a current lack of clarity about what this might look like. A major concern is funding for one year which is restrictive. With the new standards, the requirement to deliver the programme at level 7, the inclusion of the independent and supplementary prescribing the programme should be eighteen months in length. However, there is pressure from practice to deliver a programme within one year as funding is currently for one year. There should be more flexibility and a future focus on the role of the DN going forward. We should not have to compromise quality for the shortest possible programme. It will be interesting to see how this pans out with the introduction of the new apprenticeship standard.*
- *The unpredictability of funding and the fact that decisions are made too late in the year for effective planning. Concerned that HEE funding will stop.*
- *I think central funding will stop, then the DN course will have to compete with all other courses for the apprenticeship levy.*
- *We now have a minimum number of 12 students set by the University and yet practice struggle to release staff as even with backfill money they can't always be replaced. Capacity within teams is limited as so many experienced staff left during covid therefore teams are young and inexperienced with managers reluctant to release more than one per area or team. I am concerned that this much needed training to up-skill practice is in jeopardy due to university minimal numbers based on finances.*
- *Clarity of HEE tapering from fees funded to apprenticeship. Lack of HEE leadership for this workforce stream, i.e., it does not belong to an identified individual portfolio at regional level.*
- *Following the publication of the new [NMC] SPQ standards it will be interesting to see if funding for all pathways will be created.*
- *When we go to apprenticeship at level 7, we may not have enough students to be able to run the programme.*
- *There has been no indication that funding will be withdrawn, but funding will only be available for the part time route DNSPQ as has been the case for some years.*
- *I anticipate that the funding will move from HEE funding to the apprenticeship. I hope that the NHS Trusts will be prepared to go down the apprenticeship route (2 of our 3 trusts have apprentices who started in September 2022).*
- *Transition from HEE funding to apprenticeships and the lack of employer engagement in apprenticeships for this role/course.*
- *We are hoping that HEE continue to provide funding.*

- We are concerned that this may be discontinued, and that the reliance will be on the apprenticeship route via the levy. Practice learning partners are not so keen on this route as there is no back fill and is more costly to them.
- The recent uncertainty about the ongoing funding from HEE has created significant challenges for Trusts in planning. Decisions from HEE regarding funding are being communicated later and later which compresses the time for recruitment and selection significantly. This gives the employer and the student a poor experience. Apprenticeship funding seems to be more consistently managed. There is still a demand for the HEE funded route so we are really hoping it will continue.
- The current funding only allows for a PGDip not a full MSc like the ACP programme. We are losing many students to the ACP programme who would traditionally have done a DN course. We are worried that the move over to apprenticeship funding only will mean less students as it costs the employing organisation more money to send students - we believe it is the backfill funding which is the main issue.
- We will be validating the apprenticeship programme and have taken the decision to delay validation until all standards are published. We have concerns re the funding for the traditional routes being withdrawn before we are validated. Also concerned about future withdrawal of apprenticeship funding.

**Survey question: What are your expected plans for funding and recruiting for the next intake of District Nurse students in 2023/24?**

The lack of clarity about funding with more institutions providing and validating for the apprenticeship route, and the anxiety for some HEIs and provider organisations is very clearly illustrated by some of the responses. The issue of staff shortages and problems with backfill for the programme continue.

Typical responses included:

- I anticipate that our numbers of apprentices will increase and the numbers of HEE funded places will reduce. I also expect that the majority or all our students/ apprentices will be on the 2-year (P/T) route.
- We have a cohort of 13 students for a 2023 spring start funded by HEE - this is the greatest number of students to date and may be unsustainable going forward.
- We will be offering the new NMC 2022 SPQ programme from Sept 2023, we hope this will attract more students. We will continue to use HEE funding until Sept 2024 when we expect the apprenticeship levy will 'take over'.
- HEE funded DNSPQ programme potential recruitment is underway with practice partners, however we are awaiting confirmation that HEE funded route will be available for 2023/24. Apprenticeship route recruitment is underway.
- We are scoping out with trusts about their interest in apprenticeships and the traditionally funded route. We will validate our programme based on this information. 2023/24 will run as it currently does.

**Table 5 Survey question: Is your university considering closure of the programme due to a lack of confirmed funding for the DNSPQ programme from 2023/24?**

Response	Number of responses
No	29
Yes	0
Unsure	4

**Table 6** Survey question: *When do you anticipate validating the programme with the new NMC post registration standards?*

Only 32 universities answered this question.

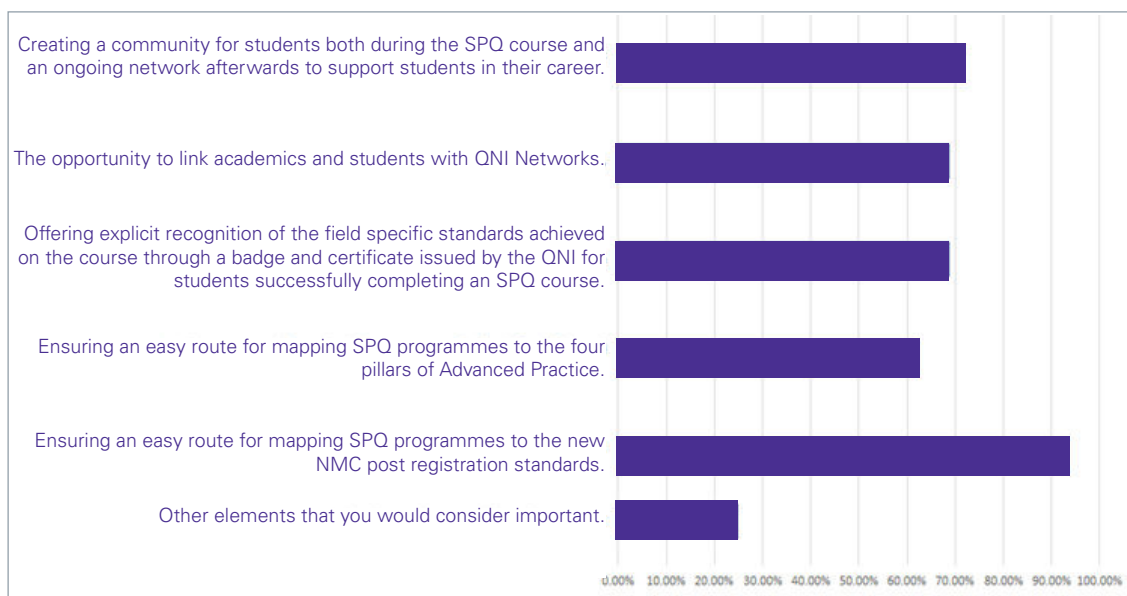
Time to NMC re-approval	Number of universities
May - December 2023	12
January - June 2024	20

13 English universities are intending to apply for apprenticeship validation at the same time; five already have approval and 10 will not be applying to run the apprenticeship.

*Survey question: Are you aware of the current QNI Voluntary Standards for District Nursing (published in 2015)?*

All respondents are aware of the standards with all but one university using them on the programme, including them in teaching, mapping with the NMC standards, in practice assessment and as a benchmark standard. All respondents are aware that the QNI is updating those standards with new Field Specific Standards for District Nursing that map to the new NMC post registration standards as well as the four pillars of advanced practice.

*Survey question: The QNI is looking to endorse universities who use its standards and create an offer around that for those Universities and their post registration SPQ students. What would you consider the most important elements of such an offer? (tick all that apply)*



Comments on other elements that are important:

- *The most important element of re-approval is to meet the NMC standards. I would not be looking to increase the resource needed to meet the requirements for QNI endorsement. The resource required when preparing for re-approval must prioritise regulation. I would need to know what benefit it would provide from an education and regulatory perspective.*
- *It can be challenging on a part time programme for students to fully engage with the wider community of community nursing and having the standards endorsed within our programme would add value for students completing the programme and raise awareness of their role as leaders in practice.*
- *I think all these elements would boost the recognition and relevance of the course and qualification.*

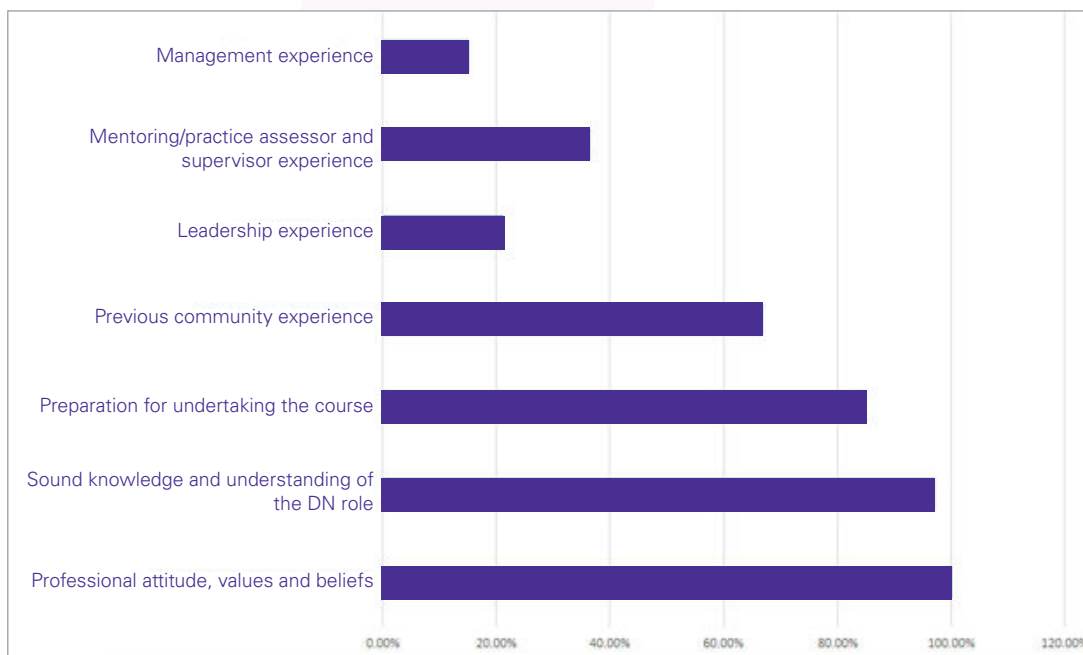


- *Explicit award of the title of District Nurse.*
- *Associated cost.*
- *It is linked to key drivers in advancing District Nursing and involving students in how they can play a part in this. Enhancing career pathways and retention within district nursing following completion of the SPQ.*
- *Standards for Supervision and Assessment and Practice Teacher Award to ensure quality in the Assessment and Supervision of students.*
- *Unlikely to be applicable in Scotland.*

*Survey question: Are the provider organisations that support students on the DNSPQ course still requesting the DNSPQ?*

Twenty nine universities responded yes with three indicating organisations that do and some not requesting the DNSPQ. Six universities work with partners who also support the apprenticeship route, 14 (English) universities have both providers who do and those that don't support the apprenticeship route and five have providers that do not support the apprenticeship route.

**Table 6** *In addition to academic entry requirements, what other qualities /experience do you look for in applicants? (Tick all that apply)*



*Survey question: Were there any applicants who did not receive an offer of a place on the DNSPQ programme in 2021/22? (Tick all that apply)*

Twenty seven universities had applicants who did not meet the criteria, five responded that this was due to limited funds, 10 said candidates did not meet the shortlisting criteria, 22 said candidates did not have the skills or experience and seven said candidates had a lack of recent study.

Comments on the application process indicated that staffing capacity and the banding of students also contributed to candidates not being offered a place, and a lack of practice assessors and supervisors for DNSPQ students also posed a problem for having more students on the programme.



*Survey question: How many students from the 2021/22 cohort (both full and part-time, year 2) have now successfully completed the DNSPQ programme and qualified this year?*

Five hundred and sixty six. An additional 102 students qualified outside of the standard academic year up to and including May 2023.

39 students had withdrawn from the programme with a variety of reasons including personal family issues, academic failure, maternity leave, health issues and deciding to leave district nursing altogether.

For the current academic year 2022/23 (all intakes), 593 new full-time and part-time (year 1 only) students have enrolled onto the DNSPQ programme and 54 DN apprenticeship students are enrolled.

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

Twenty respondents work with up to four provider organisations, nine respondents with five or six providers, and four between eight and 10 providers.

Supernumerary status is required by 24 of the universities but only 16 say this happens consistently across the practice providers.

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

Nine respondents said it was not part of the programme but the V100/V150 was; in seven cases it was optional and compulsory in 13 universities and no prescribing was included in four universities. However clinical assessment skills modules were compulsory for 23 universities but not in 10. In England 10 respondents stated that the DNSPQ programme maps against or equates to the HEE advanced practice framework. Twenty nine universities offer DNSPQ students the opportunity to undertake a further 60 credit module to achieve an MSc following the PGDip.

Survey question: Any further comments on the DNSPQ please add here.

- *The new programme will include the V300 and advanced clinical assessment/history taking or physical examination.*
- *Please continue to support us to keep this vital education going.*
- *We require some of their time to be supernumerary.*
- *We will request reapproval of the DNSPQ apprenticeship once the apprenticeship standards have been mapped to the new NMC standards.*
- *Our DN Apprenticeship contains Advanced Clinical Examination Skills module and V300 Integrated Independent prescribing. At revalidation of the SPQ DN both the V300 and Advanced Clinical Examination Skills will be included in the SPQ DN programme.*
- *Looking to develop a top up but need numbers so going to develop once we have run apprenticeship cohorts. Struggle to enforce a supernumerary status in practice. Ongoing issues prioritising DN apprentices on the NMP unit over standalone students.*



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