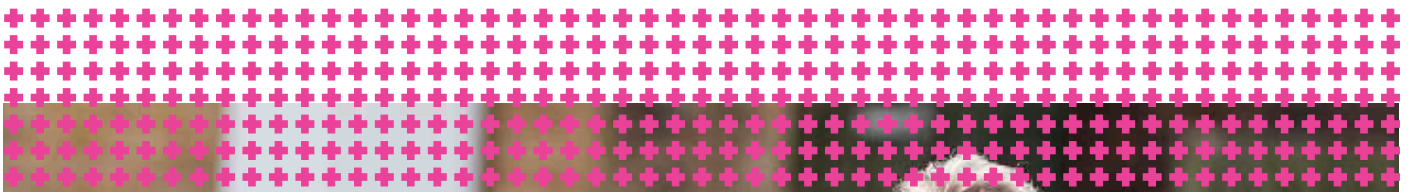


# Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2020 - 2021



## Contents

Key points .....	3
Introduction.....	3
Findings .....	4
Status of The Specialist Practitioner District Nurse Programme in 2020/21.....	4
Additional comments regarding the QNI/QNIS standards .....	9
Programme Funding and Future Funding Arrangements .....	10
Entry to the Programme.....	13
Nurses qualifying from the Specialist Practitioner District Nurse programme - London .....	15
Conclusion .....	17
References .....	17

*Copyright: The Queen's Nursing Institute 2022*



## Key points

- 709 DNSPO qualified in 2020/21 academic year; this is an increase of 28% from the previous year, although there have been many delays due to the pandemic.
- 710 new students are enrolled on the DNSPO for 2021/22 with 559 being full time, 168 part time and 90 apprenticeship students (in England). This is a decrease of 13% on the previous year.
- There are 41 HEIs registered to deliver the DNSPO programme with the NMC and 38 are currently offering the programme.
- 37 universities responded to the audit.
- There are still concerns over the funding of the DNSPO, as more funding is being made available for advanced practice and apprenticeships.
- Responses also highlighted that the delay in the publication of the NMC SPQ standards had added to the uncertainty of future programmes.

## Introduction

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

It is the sixth 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 2020/21, a second unprecedented year with the global pandemic that has undoubtedly impacted on District Nurse education and practice.

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 December 2021 and February 2022. 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 2020/21

The District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification (DNSPQ) programme is offered in all four countries of the UK. According to the NMC website there are 41 universities approved to offer the DNSPQ programme across the United Kingdom, with 3 not currently running. 38 programme leads were sent questionnaires with 37 responses. Table 1 shows the number of universities across the UK who are approved by the NMC to run the programme in 2020/21.

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

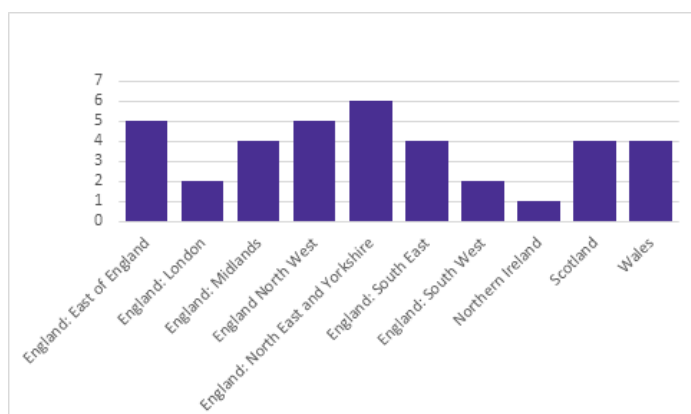
Country	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
England	24	30	32	35	34	34	33	34	32
Wales	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4
Northern Ireland	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Scotland	N/A	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
<b>Total UK</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>41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

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

There were 36 responses confirming that the DNSPQ programme ran in the academic year 2020/21

**Table 2: Regional distribution of universities delivering the programme across the UK**

*Survey question: Where is your university based?*



The table shows that in England, the North West, North East and Yorkshire and Midlands account for 38% of HEI coverage; East of England, London and the South East account for 30%; Scotland and Wales account for 11% each; England South West account for 5% and Northern Ireland 3%.

**Table 3: Universities delivering the programme in 2020/21**

*Survey question: Did the programme run in the academic year 2020/21?*

Country	Yes	No/No response	New course 2021
England	27	2	1
Wales	4	0	0
Northern Ireland	1	0	0
Scotland	4	0	0
<b>Total UK</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>

Of the 37 responses 36 respondents confirmed that the programme did run in 2020/21, with one commencing in January 2021.

Sixty percent of applicants were offered a place on the programme, with the 40% being unsuccessful because of: limits on practice placements (12%); did not meet shortlisting criteria (26%); lack of skill or experience (30%); lack of recent study (18%). This is a high percentage of applicants being declined a place, which will require further investigation in future audits.

**Table 4: Year SPQ programme had been last approved by the NMC**

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

Year programme last approved by NMC	Number of responses
0 - 3 years	10
4- 6 years	15
7 years +	5
New Apprenticeship programme approval 2020/21 or 2021/22	8
New course in development for 2022/23	2

Those respondents that indicated 7 years or more were waiting for the publication of new standards for education and practice from the NMC. These have now been published.

**Table 5: 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 DNSPO programme last approved by the NMC?')*

Time to NMC re-approval	Number of universities
Next 3 years (2021-2023)	15
3 years + (2023 onwards)	2
Dependent on NMC Review of Post Registration standards	23
Extension granted due to pending NMC standards	1

Seventy five percent of providers are waiting for the pending NMC standards prior to re-applying for NMC approval. There were comments made by providers regarding the pending standards:

Typical responses included:

- *'My concerns are dependent on the outcome of the review of NMC post-reg standards. If there is a lack of structure, then the competition locally could mean a drive to a very compressed, scaled back offering.'*
- *'Concerns relate to the outcome of the NMC review of standards and the possible impact this may have on providers supporting DNSPO.'*

Since the start of the pandemic, the delivery of the DNSPO programme has shifted away from being mainly delivered face-to-face in a classroom, to 90% of providers using a blended learning approach, 22% virtually, 12% distance learning, with 29% delivering face-to-face only in the classroom. (Virtual teaching is online teaching within the classroom; distance learning indicates teaching delivered remotely using digital technology).



**Table 6: Practice provider partners**

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

Number of practice provider partners	Number of responses
1 only	2
2 to 3	11
4 to 6	17
7 or more	4
<b>Average number of provider partners</b>	<b>4</b>

There were 34 responses to this question, all confirming that they work with practice provider partners.

The total number of practice provider partners was 145, indicating that the majority of universities partner with more than one provider organisation.

The average number of provider partners was 4, 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 DNSPQ courses.

**Table 7a: Provider organisations requesting DNSPQ**

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

Response statement	Number of responses
Yes	28
Yes & No (as some provider organisations do, others do not)	4
No	2

Responses indicated that a large majority (94%) of provider organisations are requesting DNSPQ programmes.

**Table 7b: Apprenticeship programme (England only)**

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

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



**Table 8: V300 independent prescribing***Survey question: Is Independent Nurse Prescribing (V300) a part of the DNSPQ programme?*

Response	Number of responses by academic year						
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
No - only V100 community nurse prescribing is available	35	31	23	24	22	19	14
Yes - optional	4	6	7	7	8	6	6
Yes - compulsory	4	3	5	8	6	12	14

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. Over the past five years, there has been a consistent trend for more courses to include a V300 component, as either optional or compulsory.

**Table 9: Advanced clinical assessment/physical examination module***Survey question: Is an advanced clinical assessment/history taking/physical examination module part of the DNSPQ programme?*

Response	Number of responses by academic year				
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Yes	15	16	24	18	21
No	3	7	13	14	11
Optional				5	2

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.

**Table 10: Mapping of DNSPQ***Survey question: Does the content of your DNSPQ programme map against or equate to the HEE advanced practice framework (England) or the Transforming Nursing Roles Programme (Scotland) or equivalent in Wales and Northern Ireland?*

Response	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Yes	9	16	12
No	28	20	16

A further 6 responses indicate that this has not been formerly mapped, or would partially map against these frameworks, or it was mapped against a leadership strategy.

**Table 11: 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	32
No	2

For students who have completed the Postgraduate Diploma DNSPO programme, 93% of responses indicated that they do offer a top up to a Masters degree following the successful completion of the Postgraduate Diploma.

**Table 12: Course duration**

*Survey question: What is the duration of the DNSPO course (in weeks)?*

Response	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Less than 40 weeks	0	0	3	4	4	4	0
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
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
50 weeks	0	1	2	0	2	0	0
52 weeks	24	20	19	18	20	18	15

\*Pro rata weeks for part time programmes

34 universities responded to this question. Almost half (48%) of universities have maintained a programme of 52 weeks. Eight universities ran programmes that were 40-46 weeks long, 2 of which included the V300 as a requirement. Apprenticeship programmes vary in length from between 60 and 91 weeks duration.

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.

**Table 13: 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?*

Response	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Extremely useful	28	27	16
Very useful	4	4	10
Somewhat useful	4	4	7
Not so useful	1	0	1
Not useful at all	0	0	0



75% of responses indicated that the QNI/QNIS Voluntary Standards for Education and Practice (QNI/QNIS, 2015) are considered either extremely useful or useful. This could indicate that the standards are due for a revision to update them for the current and future education and practice environment.

### **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 34 responses to this question with a range of responses. The main themes identified were mapping programme outcomes against the standards, to form the basis for the Practice Assessment Portfolio and for teaching and learning purposes and curriculum development.

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 individual students' practice assessment documentation, to enable students to present evidence that the standards for contemporary District Nursing practice have been met.

Typical comments include:

- *'Used as competencies for the e portfolio to demonstrate achievement of the DNSPQ' (this was the case for quite a few institutions)*
- *'To benchmark standards'*
- *'In the assessment document and leadership module'*
- *'Modules and content were aligned to these (and used to design curriculum)'*
- *'Awareness of the wider progression of the DNSPQ role'*
- *'The standards provide a further level of quality assurance that is respected by our commissioning partners, and provide additional support to the institution's own academic regulations and standards'*
- *'They fed into programme development'*
- *'The QNI/QNIS voluntary standards appear alongside the NMC standards in the overarching portfolio of learning. We refer to the NMC and QNI/QNIS standards together: the students are clear they are different and the NMC standards need to be achieved, but they can relate to the language in the QNI/QNIS standards with more ease'*
- *'The apprenticeship uses KSB and NMC standards. Another set of standards would be confusing in a new programme where PS and PAs are getting used to the new KSB [knowledge, skills, behaviours] in District Nursing'*
- *'When the course ran the lectures and unit delivery were mapped against the competencies'*



## Programme Funding and Future Funding Arrangements

**Table 14: Current funding arrangement**

*Survey question: How is the DNSPO programme currently funded in your area? Tick all that apply*

How is the DNSPO currently funded?	Number of responses
Centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments	15 (47%)
Centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments: Secondment	12 (35%)
Employer funded	5 (16%)
Independent	0
Apprenticeship funding	10 (29%)
Variety	2 (6%)

The majority of student places across the UK are centrally commissioned. There has been a 26% increase in the number of programmes in receipt of apprenticeship funding compared to last year.

### Concerns regarding future funding arrangements

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

Typical comments included:

- *'Organisations will not want to pursue an apprenticeship route'*
- *'The future looks like Apprenticeship funding and not HEE funding'*
- *'A mix of funding could be problematic, either current route or apprenticeship route would be preferable for seamless delivery for all concerned'*
- *'There are concerns around the transition period between the apprenticeship and the possible ending of HEE funding'*
- *'It is becoming increasingly difficult for NHS Trusts to release students for a full year programme. While the commitment for the programme is currently there this is an exceptionally difficult time for the NHS Trusts that we work with and releasing staff is difficult. It is difficult to recruit students onto the DN programme even though funding is available. It is a tough programme at level 7 and with the V300 and potential students must meet the requirements as we don't want to set them up to fail. However if we don't have enough students on the programme we will not be able to continue indefinitely'*
- *'There is no one in region to approach to discuss (no HEE transformation manager). Communication from HEE is very poor and we only have 12 month contracting'*
- *'Funding is provided by Welsh Government and currently Welsh health policy would support the continuation of specialist community nursing education'*
- *'Currently my concern is the impact that the pandemic is having on retention, recruitment and progression. It has impacted on all of these as teams are so pushed and there isn't back fill available'*
- *'We have 2 concerns. Firstly, that the specialist nature of district nursing will not be recognised and it will be absorbed into 'just' another community role, with employers expected to fund staff. Secondly, Scotland has a different approach to the future with NHS NES driving the carefree progression pathway. The next step is for the development of programmes for senior practitioner [i.e. level 6 nurses] and these programmes are heavily subsidised and so are less of a financial burden on employers. Employers may choose to support*

staff on these programmes rather than the SPQ programmes and so by default, the SPQ qualification may become reductant'

- 'Yes, the future looks like Apprenticeship funding and not HEE funding'
- 'In Wales the PT [part time] programme continues to be funded but the students are juggling work and study. The programme would be better full time for 1 year as this would be less stressful on the students'
- 'My concerns are dependent on the outcome of the review of NMC post-reg standards. If there is a lack of structure, then the competition locally could mean a drive to a very compressed, scaled back offering'
- 'Uncertainty about whether HEE funding will continue and therefore the full time course can continue to be offered which is preferable to employing organisations due to back fill. Or if only the part time Apprenticeship route will continue with the Apprenticeship levy funding which does not cover back fill for staff and may reduce the numbers of potential students being enrolled and also the numbers of students that will graduate each year. Depending when HEE funding stops will this create a fallow year as will Trusts have been enabled to plan in advance. Also the new standards may cause Trusts to wish to delay recruitment to the course so that students are enrolled on the most up to date course'
- 'The move towards apprenticeship funding is a positive step, however practice partners continue to request a choice of SPQDN (HEE funded) and SPQ DN Apprenticeship programme places'
- 'Lack of NMP assessors dictate the number of DN students who can be supported'
- 'We have very small numbers of students on the course, about 14, this provides very little financial gain for the university'

### Plans for future funding

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

The lack of clarity with regard to funding with more institutions providing and validating 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:

- 'The mixture of funding from HEE, and employer funded places. Plans for apprenticeship come into effect following next NMC re-approval, so likely to be 23/24'
- 'Continue to work closely with practice partners to deliver flexible FT and PT programme and 2 intakes per year to help spread the cost of sending staff on the programme'
- 'No plans for funding, recruitment according to practice partners needs and funding'
- 'We expect that in 2022 there will be a combination of FT and PT students on the HEE funded route. Also we are now validated to run a 2 year apprenticeship route from September 2022 so will be offering this too'
- 'I would hope that the number of student places commissioned by the DoH will continue to be prioritised'
- 'We do not anticipate any change in funding or recruitment for 2022/23'
- 'To recruit as expected to the full time and part time routes in Sept 2022. No other guidance has been shared to the contrary at this time'
- 'We expect HEIW to continue funding the programme. Recruitment may be affected by the ongoing pressures within the district nursing teams to meet the ever-increasing needs of local populations'
- 'We are planning with practice partners hoping that HEE will still fund some places plus Apprenticeship funding'
- 'HEIW funding to continue for part time and modular study'

- 'Awaiting target numbers - usually around 38 PT however not generally able to recruit to all these numbers due to issues with backfill'
- 'Greater links with practice, roadshows to showcase the course, working with workforce development of trusts to ensure the course responds to local need'
- 'Funding will continue to be via apprenticeship levy. Backfill hopefully via HEE. Recruitment may be slightly lower in 2022 due to higher numbers in 2020 and 2021 so approx 15-20'
- 'We are of the understanding that HEE funding will continue to support the DN programme until the new standards are published allowing HEIs and their practice partners to continue the traditional programmes until then'

**Table 15: The future of the DNSPQ programme**

*Survey question: Is your university considering closure of the programme due to a lack of confirmed funding for the DNSPQ programme from 2021/22?*

Response	Number of responses
No	33
Yes	1

**Table 16: The DNSPQ programme in 2021**

*Survey question: What type of DNSPQ programme are you planning to deliver in 2021?*

Response	For 2022 intakes	
Full-time DNSPQ	24	12 only offer this programme
Part-time DNSPQ	12	3 only offer a part time programme
A two-year DNSPQ apprenticeship programme	10	3 only offer this programme
One year apprenticeship programme (England only)	4	2 only offer this route
Offers both apprenticeship and DNSPQ	8	

Apprenticeship programmes in England continue to increase due to the Government apprenticeship levy, providing a funded route into DNSPQ programmes. Eight (32%) of the English universities who responded are offering both full and part time traditional and apprenticeship routes and 5 (20%) are only offering apprenticeships. Only part time routes are offered in Wales and both full and part-time routes are offered in Scotland and full-time only in Northern Ireland.

## Entry to the Programme

**Table 17: 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	Percentage response
Professional attitude, values and beliefs	100
Sound knowledge and understanding of the role	97
Preparation for the course	88
Previous community experience	67
Leadership experience	38
Mentorship practice assessor and supervisor experience	35
Management experience	9
Other	41

**Table 18: Unsuccessful applicants**

*Survey question: Were there any applicants who did not receive an offer of a place on the DNSPQ programme in 2020/21?*

Response	Number of responses
Yes	20
No	14

There were 34 responses to this question with 41% indicating that not all applicants received an offer of a place on the DNSPQ programme.

**Table 19: 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
Limits on funding or places	0
Limits on practice placements	4
Failed criteria/interview	9
Skills, experience or qualifications related	10
Lack of recent study/commitment	6
Not specified	16

**Table 20: Academic level of the programme**

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

Response	Number of responses
BSc (Level 6, or SCQF level 9/10)	0
Postgraduate Diploma (level 7, or SCQF level 11)	14
Both	19

Most universities offer the DNSPQ programme at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as shown above. There are no universities across the UK that offer DNSPQ education at undergraduate level only.

**Table 21: Students and supernumerary requirement**

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

Response	Number of responses
Yes	24 (70%)
No	10 (29%)

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). This has been exacerbated by the pandemic with many students being redeployed and the unprecedented demands on the DN service has made supernumerary status very difficult to maintain.

**Table 22: 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	14
No	5
Other	20 (includes not applicable answers)

There is a mixed picture however, with some HEIs stating that it is vital, while others only recommend it. This year has proved particularly challenging for those organisations where Covid-19 emergency standards became operational.

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

- *'Recommend students are supernumerary but this is dependent on the needs of the service'*
- *'Practice assessors are increasingly advocating for this to happen'*
- *'There is a consensus and discussion if we feel this is not adhered to in general to cascade and ensure best practice experience for our students'*
- *'All trusts do their best but during the pandemic this has been compromised at times. We work with the PPFs [practice placement facilitators] to ensure that this is not a sustained situation and that students are able to learn in practice'*
- *'This aspect has been challenging during Covid for all our partner organisations. However, we have held regular meetings and have been able to support them in maintaining supernumerary status for students ensuring that learning has continued. The responses from students and organisations has been that this has been maintained.'*

**Table 23: Nurses qualifying from the Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme**

*Survey question: How many students from the 2020/21 cohort (both full and part-time, year 2) have now successfully completed the DNSPQ programme and qualified this year?*

Year of qualification	2013 (Estimated number)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	254*	382	479	517	464	500	555	554**	709
Increase/decrease from previous year	N/A	Increase 50%	Increase 25%	Increase 8%	Decrease 10%	Increase 8%	Increase 11%	No real change	Increase 28%**

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

\*\* This figure includes some deferred students from the previous year due to delays associated with the Covid-19 pandemic

Six of the responding universities had to delay the programme until later in the year, which may contribute to the increased completions in the academic year 2020/21.

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

The QNI published its first annual District Nurse education audit in 2013 when the extremely low figure of District Nurses undertaking the programme in London in 2012/13 was identified. This first report on the low numbers of 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 meet policy aspirations and to manage the constantly rising demand, acuity and complexity of the people in need of the District Nursing services within the communities served.

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 five students.

The number of District Nurse Specialist Practitioners who qualified in London decreased from 79 in 2020 to 46 in 2021, with only 2 of the 3 NMC approved universities in London responding to the survey. This is the lowest figure since 2014.

**Table 24: Number of District Nurse Specialist Practitioners who qualified in London from 2013 - 2021**

Year	Number of students qualified
2013	5
2014	25
2015	64
2016	74
2017	63
2018	64
2019	61
2020	79
2021	46



## Reasons for leaving the DNSPQ programme

*Survey question: How many students withdrew from the DNSPQ programme 2020/21 and what were the reasons for this?*

**Table 25: Reasons that students left the programme**

Reason for withdrawal	Number of responses
Combination of reasons	11
Personal reasons	9
Health related	11
Covid related	7
Stress related	
Change of employment	3
Withdrawn by trust	1
Interruption of studies	6

There were 33 responses to this question, stating that a total of 45 students had withdrawn from the programme in this academic year with 6 additional students interrupting their studies but planning to return at a later date. Eleven responses indicated that there had been no student withdrawal from their programme.

**Table 26: Entrants for 2021/22**

*Survey question: For the current academic year 2021/22, how many new full-time and part-time (year 1 only) students have enrolled onto the DNSPQ programme?*

Country	Number 2020/21	Number 2021/22
England	605 (562 FT 23 PT)	517 (408 FT 19 PT 90 apprenticeship)
Wales	63 (3 FT 60 PT)	60 (60 PT)
Northern Ireland	55 (55 FT)	47 (47 FT)
Scotland	96 (67 FT 29 PT)	86 (44 FT 42 PT)
Total	819 (687 FT 132 PT)	710 (559 FT 168 PT and 90 apprenticeship)

Respondents were asked to submit the number of full and part-time (Year 1 only) entrants who have been enrolled onto the DN programme for the academic year 2021/22. There were 37 responses to this question, with a total number of 710 new students (559 full-time and 112 part-time and 90 apprenticeship students). This figure indicates a decrease of 13% in DNSPQ students for the 2021/22 academic year.

The largest cohort size was reported as 47 with only 2 HEIs with a cohort of 30 or above, 2 with 20 or above and the remainder had less than 20 DNSPQ students.

## Conclusion

This was another exceptional year for the 2020/21 intake of DNSPO students and those continuing their two-year programmes, with the programmes for all students in higher education being interrupted and impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The 2020/21 intake showed the highest number of DNSPO students recruited, but these numbers are not reflected in the number of those who qualified from the data collected, and there is now a 13% reduction in DNSPO students for the year 2021/22.

It is not possible to demonstrate through the audit data whether these figures reflect the actual demand for the programme or whether the figures are limited by the supply of funding, the opportunities available to release existing employees to undertake the programme and the attractiveness of the programme to prospective District Nurses.

The audit has also revealed that community service providers continue to support the DNSPO programme and, in England, they are continuing to navigate an unclear future where Apprenticeship and HEE funded places will need to be carefully balanced to continue to meet the needs of the communities served. The focus on advanced practice, and an emphasis on skills rather than roles and the delay in the publication of the NMC standards for post registration SPQ have added to this uncertainty.

The National Health Service is now three years into its Long Term Plan, published in January 2019 and supported by the NHS People Plan. Longer term visions for the growth of the NHS workforce are to be encouraged and the number of qualified District Nurses are a key component of the workforce. However, central funding for post registration nurse education is agreed only on an annual basis by the Treasury, which appears to contribute to a climate of uncertainty for HEIs and may act as an unwarranted brake on investment in the system. Education is necessarily an investment in the future and is crucial if the NHS is to achieve its long term goals of improved population health.

In February 2022 QNI Workforce Standards for District Nursing were launched (QNI 2022) which highlight the workload and capacity issues faced by district nursing services using data collected over 7 years. These standards will help commissioners to plan their future workforce and may have an impact on the number of future community nurses supported to undertake the DNSPO. (<https://www.qni.org.uk/news-and-events/news/new-workforce-standards-for-district-nursing-launched/>).

It is clear that many DNSPO programmes reflect an advanced level of practice, with many having been mapped to demonstrate this level. The NMC post-registration standards for Specialist Practice Qualifications (SPQ) and Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN) were approved by NMC Council on 22/05/22. These reflect an advanced level of practice and programme providers will need to revalidate their DNSPO programmes against these new standards by September 2024.

Whilst the new SPQ standards comprise a single set for all fields of practice in the community, the annotation of 'District Nursing' will continue to be recorded by the NMC. The QNI will be developing field specific standards for District Nursing to support the annotation, alongside a number of other standards to reflect additional fields of practice.

## References

- Department of Health NI (2020) Health and Wellbeing 2026 Neighbourhood District Nursing Interim Report <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2021-04/Final%20Neighbourhood%20District%20Nursing%20evaluation%20report%20Dec%202020%20.pdf> accessed 9/3/22
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2018)
- HEE (2021) Recovery and Delivery Business Plan 2021/22



- King's Fund (2016) Understanding Quality in District Nursing Services
- Labourne, P. (2018) District Nursing reascent as Wales adopts safe staffing levels. British Journal of Community Nursing. Vol. 23. No. 5.
- National Quality Board (2017) An improvement resource for the district nursing service NHSI
- NMC (2001) Standards for Specialist Education and Practice
- NMC (2019) Standards for prescribing programmes
- NMC (2019) Standards for student supervision and assessment
- NMC (2019) Standards for Pre-Registration Nursing Education
- QNI (2013) Report on District Nurse Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2012-13
- QNI (2014a) Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2013-14
- QNI (2015a) Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2014-15
- QNI/QNIS (2015) The QNI/QNIS Voluntary Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice
- QNI (2016) Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2015-16
- QNI (2018) Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2016-17
- QNI (2019) Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2017-18
- QNI (2020) Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2018/19
- QNI (2020) Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2019/20
- QNI (2022) Workforce Standards for the District Nursing Service
- Welsh Government (2018) The parliamentary review of health and social care in Wales. A revolution from within: transforming health and care in Wales. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-01/Review-health-social-care-report-final.pdf> accessed 1/3/2021

## Additional Resources

- Health Education England's Strategic Framework 2014-2029 [https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/HEE%20strategic%20framework%202017\\_1.pdf](https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/HEE%20strategic%20framework%202017_1.pdf) accessed 9/3/2022
- Hughes, D. (2017) District nurse numbers under pressure: Health Correspondent BBC news
- NHS (2019) The NHS Long Term Plan <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-long-term-plan/> accessed 1/3/2022
- NHS (2021) 2021/22 priorities and operational planning guidance <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/2021-22-priorities-and-operational-planning-guidance/> accessed 9/3/22
- Green, J., RCN reveals relentless pressures on district nurse services Primary Health Care 03.2021 vol 31 in 2
- Nuffield Trust (2021) NHS Workforce in Numbers – Facts on staffing and staff shortages in England, Nuffield Trust <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/public/resource/the-nhs-workforce-in-numbers> accessed 9/3/22
- Robertson R., Wenzel L., Thompson J., Charles A. (2017) Understanding NHS financial pressures: How are they affecting patient care? The King's Fund <http://bit.ly/2zfyNAh> accessed 1/3/2022.



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

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