

# Report on District Nurse Education in the United Kingdom 2019-2020



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## Key points

- 761 new students commenced the District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification (DN SPQ) Programme in 2019/20. This is an increase of 68 students (10%) on the 693 students who started the programme in 2018/19.
- Of the 761 new students in 2019/20, 600 were full time and 161 were part time.
- 554 District Nurses (DNs) with SPQs qualified in 2020, compared to 555 in 2019. This is an extraordinary figure, given that it has been an exceptional year necessitating delays and postponements to some HEI programmes.
- 121 students from 2019/20 still had outstanding modules, assessments or exams to complete at the time of the audit, largely due to delays in assessment and restrictions in practice due to the pandemic. If they all successfully complete the programme, this will increase the annual figure of District Nurses qualifying in 2020 from 554 to 675, which would equate to an overall increase of 22% on 2018/19 figures.
- There are 43 universities in the United Kingdom (UK) approved by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) to offer the DN SPQ programme.
- 38 universities responded to the survey; of these, 36 universities are running a programme, one of which is a new two-year apprenticeship programme and three universities have new programmes under development for 2021 and 2022.
- The number of universities offering the V300 Independent Prescribing course as part of the programme has increased from 15 to 16 in 2019/20.
- As identified in 2018/19 there remains uncertainty about the future funding of DN SPQ programmes and apprehension about the apprenticeship model being an alternative to current funding arrangements.

## Introduction

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

It is the fifth 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 2019/20, an unprecedented year with a 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) and 2020 (QNI, 2020).

## 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 2020 and February 2021. 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 2019/20

The District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification programme is offered in all four countries of the UK. According to the NMC website there are 43 universities approved to offer the District Nurse Specialist Practitioner Qualification programme across the United Kingdom and 38 of these (88%) responded to the QNI survey.

Table 1 shows the number of universities across the UK who are approved by the NMC to run the programme in 2019/20. The number has remained the same over the past year.

At least three universities in England that have not been running a programme in recent years are planning to run in 2021 or 2022; one university that does not yet appear on the NMC website has commenced a new apprenticeship programme in 2020 and another new HEI provider is planning to validate a DN Apprenticeship programme in 2021.

**Table 1: Universities approved to run the Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme in 2019/20**

Country	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
England	24	30	32	35	34	34	33	34
Wales	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4
Northern Ireland	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Scotland	N/A	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>

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

There were 36 responses confirming that the DN SPQ programme ran in the academic year 2019/20.

There are five universities in England not currently running a programme, two universities with programmes in development and one new programme that has commenced in 2020.

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

*Survey question: Where is your university based?*

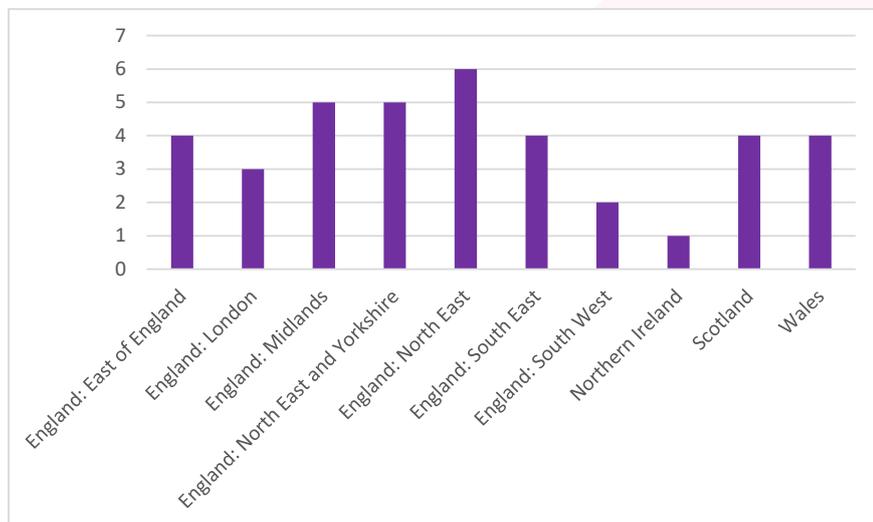


Table 2 shows the regional distribution of universities approved by the NMC to run the DN SPQ programme.

The table shows that in England, the North West, North East and Yorkshire and Midlands account for 42% 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 2019/20**

*Survey question: Did the programme run in the academic year 2019/20?*

Country	Yes	No/No response	New course 2020	Course under development
England	27	8	1	4
Wales	4	0	0	0
Northern Ireland	1	0	0	0
Scotland	4	0	0	0
<b>Total UK</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>

Of the 38 responses, 36 respondents confirmed that the programme did run in 2019/20. From the respondents that stated no, one has not run a programme for at least 15 years and has now commenced a new apprenticeship programme in 2020. The remaining seven do not currently have a programme running. Two respondents are developing a programme to commence 2021 and another two universities are developing a programme to commence in 2022.

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

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

Year programme last approved by NMC	Number of responses
0 - 3 years	22
4- 6 years	11
7 years +	3
New Apprenticeship programme approval 2020	2
New course in development for 2021	1

Of the three respondents that indicated 7 years or more, one was granted an extension. It is not known why the remaining two have not had approval in this time.

**Table 4a: 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 to NMC re-approval	Number of universities
Next 3 years (2021-2023)	25
3 years + (2023 onwards)	4
Dependent on NMC Review of Post Registration standards	5
No response	3

There were 33 responses with 29 'year specific' responses. The remaining responses listed the following comments, illustrating their anticipation of the effect that the NMC review of post registration standards is currently having on HEIs.

Typical responses included:

- 'Depends on requirements of anticipated new SPQ standards'
- 'We may wait until the new SPQ-DN Standards are published'
- 'Currently plans are to approve once we have the new NMC standards and revised apprenticeship standards for a September 2022 start but will depend on HEE funding and our partner organisations'
- 'Awaiting the outcome of the NMC review of the post registration standards, extension approved.'

**Table 5: 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	10
4 to 6	16
7 or more	9
Average number of provider partners	5

There were 37 responses to this question, all stating that they work with practice provider partners.

The total number of practice provider partners was 185, indicating 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 5a: 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	31
Yes & No (as some provider organisations do, others do not)	4
No	1

Responses indicated that a large majority (97%) of provider organisations are requesting DN SPQ programmes, with at least four HEIs seeing increased demand.

The comments below indicate the variations in responses:

- *'There has been increased demand from 1 organisation'*
- *'We have an additional provider who requested places for 2020/21'*
- *'All remain enthusiastic'*
- *'Because of the reconfiguration of district nursing teams and issues with workforce capacity places have increased for 20/21'*
- *'Prerequisite qualification for role of caseload holder'*
- *'One trust did not take up the DNSPQ this year, however, one trust did return to the DNSPQ after a break of 2 years'*
- *'All 6 did in 2019-2020 but one has stopped for 2020-2021.'*

**Table 5b: 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:

- *'Some trusts concerned regarding the infrastructure required to support apprentices'*
- *'Some are keener than others. They are concerned about the length of the programme and the ability to support out in practice'*
- *'All the Trusts we work with are very clear that they want the HEE funding to continue but if it doesn't then would like the apprenticeship route.'*
- *'Some provider organisations do, others don't; the five who are continuing with the SPQ are looking to access the apprenticeship route although not necessarily from our University.'*
- *'Interest has been expressed by all organisations although requesting for changes after the NMC standards are published'*
- *'Yes, but they are proposing that the student places be split between the full time and the Apprenticeship route.'*



**Table 6: 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	2019/20
No - only V100 community nurse prescribing is available	35	31	23	24	22	19
Yes - optional	4	6	7	7	8	6
Yes - compulsory	4	3	5	8	6	12

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 (18 in 2019/20 compared to 14 in 2018/19). 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 6a: Advanced clinical assessment/physical examination module**

*Survey question: 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	2019/20
Yes	15	16	24	18
No	3	7	13	14
Optional				5

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 22 programmes offering this module and five universities offering this as an optional module, data that has not previously been captured.

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

- *'Students undertake an assessment at first contact and management of LTCs module but this does not include physical assessment skills'*
- *'Students who choose to undertake the V300 route have to do advanced clinical assessment/history taking. But those doing the integrated V100 route do not'*
- *'V300 is only from March 21 cohort, V100 for 09/20. Health Assessment module has and remains a key part of the course'*
- *'It is part of the specialist module'*
- *'We do have the option for this as an elective module however DN students have felt limited due to the support available within practice to undertake supervised practice. The module is therefore currently under review to be developed more specifically for community practice'*
- *'If a student undertakes the course without having a prescribing qualification they are required to complete the V100 module which does not allow for an option module to be chosen. However, if a student undertakes the course with a prescribing qualification they are able to choose a Same Day Consultation module as part of the option list. Within our new District Nurse Apprenticeship course, commencing 2021, a clinical examination module is undertaken in year one prior to V300'*

- 'No, however we do cover this within our skills week'
- 'No, but both V300 and this will be in our new programme'
- 'Not presently, but it is being discussed for when we revalidate; this will be one module.'

**Table 7: Mapping of DN SPQ**

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

Response	2018/19	2019/20	Percentage change
Yes	9	16	Increase 78%
No	28	20	Decrease 29%

44% of responses indicated that the DN SPQ programme did map against or equate to advanced practice. This represents an increase of 78% from 2018/19.

The following comments were submitted in response:

- 'There is no formal mapping against advanced practice, however, there are similarities: Leadership, clinical practice, research and professional practice'
- 'Currently those doing the V100 route and the SPQ at BSc level 6 do not map to advanced practice. Those who do the PG Dip programme and V300 route do map against advanced level of practice'
- 'The Level 6 pathway would not equate to Advanced Practice. The level 7 pathway prepares students for Advanced Practice roles but does not map directly to the ACP pathway within our university'
- 'Yes, for Health Assessment and V300 skills'
- 'The programme has not been formally mapped against advanced practice however clinical skills and diagnostics and V300 demands an advanced level of practice. This is something we need to map against'
- 'We haven't mapped the programme to advanced practice however it does include both advanced history taking and V300'
- 'We did not map to advanced practice in 2016 when the programme was revalidated, although arguably the context and level at which the DNs work, leading integrated teams to deliver complex and continuing care, exceeds the level of episodic care synonymous with what is known as advanced practice'
- 'I believe it would do but have not completed this process so could not be sure'
- 'Not formally mapped, although the content (with exception of the Specialist module) is the same as that for the ANP programme at our University'
- 'The SPQ -DN programme meets some of the Advanced level of practice standards but not all as we do not run the Independent prescribing Module V300. However they do meet the four pillars of Advanced practice: Clinical/direct care; Leadership and collaborative practice; Improving quality and developing practice; Developing self and others'
- 'On qualifying a number of students have been successful in seeking credentialing through the RCN'
- 'It has been mapped to the HEE standards 2017 and meets those'
- 'It hasn't been mapped but will be as part of the apprenticeship programme'
- 'This is difficult to answer as we deliver to both level 6 and level 7 students, we are about to introduce the 4 pillars of advanced practice into one of our modules.'

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

- 'We map to NMC SPQ Standards and QNI Voluntary Standards'
- 'None however HA and V300 map to ACP programme standards'
- 'QNI standards, NMC standards for District Nursing, QAA quality code'
- 'Advanced Care Practitioner'
- 'I don't map the programme to AP standards. I argue the SPQDN are working at advanced level'



- 'Apprenticeship 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'
- 'Plan to map to the NMC standards when approved'
- 'Four pillars of advanced practice'
- 'NES 4 Pillars'
- 'Nursing and Midwifery Council Standards of Education for Specialist Practice (NMC 2001), but also the Standards for Prescribing Programmes (NMC 2018a), QNI/QNIS voluntary standards, NES benchmarks for advanced practice'
- 'The Chief Nursing Officer Advanced Nurse Practitioner Transforming Nursing role competencies.'

**Table 7a: 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
Extremely useful	28	27
Useful	4	4
Neutral	4	4
Not very useful	1	0
Not useful at all	0	0

89% of responses indicated that the QNI/QNIS Voluntary Standards for Education and Practice (QNI/QNIS, 2015) 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:

- 'The apprenticeship standards also mean that there are a lot of new standards to map to'
- 'The standards are contemporary and much more applicable to today's practice. We have mapped these against the NMC standards from 2001 and the QNI/S standards are what we use in practice'
- 'The student's competencies are mapped to the QNI/QNIS standards'
- 'These form the basis of the students Practice Assessment Document'
- 'Current programme mapped to the QNI/S voluntary 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 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:

- *'Our learning outcomes for academic modules and practice assessment document are mapped against these standards. The 4 domains help to structure practice opportunities and assessment for our practice partners'*
- *'These Standards are deemed as more up-to-date, and the portfolio that the students have to complete to prove evidence of their competencies is based upon these'*
- *'Incorporated the standards into the SPQ portfolio of evidence with additional domains to be achieved. Incorporated into the SPQ module assignment to demonstrate achievement of these'*
- *'The QNI standards have been mapped to the 2001 NMC standards. We only include the QNI standards within our practice documentation. Students have to map and demonstrate their practice learning to the QNI standards'*
- *'These form the basis of the students Practice Assessment Document'*
- *'As the framework for the whole programme of academic and practice learning - all competencies based on this'*
- *'The current programme is mapped to the QNI Standards and students are therefore assessed against both. The standards have been used to develop a more contemporary approach to assessment and curriculum development'*
- *'An excellent foundation resource and it is extremely well utilised by students and staff'*
- *'The programme is mapped against these. Students look at these at the beginning of their course. Essentially, they have to be assessed against the old NMC standards'*
- *'Programme content and Practice Assessment, except for the Apprenticeship programme where KSB's are used'*
- *'The students are assessed against these in their Practice Portfolios as are our GPN and CCN students who are assessed against the equivalent discipline specific QNI/QNIS standards'*
- *'Helpful in curriculum planning'*
- *'These have supported us in developing the programme particularly as the current NMC standards are dated and limited'*
- *'Students are required to map their practice, development and evidence against the QNI/QNIS standards as well as the NMC standards'*
- *'All module learning outcomes are mapped against both the current NMC standards and the QNI/QNIS Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice. This is made evident in all programme documentation.'*

## Programme Funding and Future Funding Arrangements

**Table 8: Current funding arrangement**

*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	14 (37%)
Centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments: Secondment	14 (37%)
Centrally commissioned places (FT and PT) from government departments: Sponsored	6 (16%)
Independent	1 (3%)
Self-funded	1 (3%)
Apprenticeship funding	1 (3%)
Variety	1 (3%)

The majority of student places across the UK are centrally commissioned, with the same number of responses also stating that some students in these cohorts are seconded or sponsored. There were also four universities that stated either they had independent or self-funded students, one accessing apprenticeship funding and another indicating a variety of funding approaches to include a service level agreement.

The comments present a mixed picture of funding arrangements, with practice provider organisations utilising the funding and offering flexibility according to need. This could also potentially create some confusion for organisations in the future if funding mechanisms change.

Typical comments include:

- *'Our practice partners receive HEE funding and will either second or sponsor students to undertake the programme'*
- *'Trusts apply for funding for places from HEE and then second their staff to the number of places for which they have received funding. Some Trusts give their staff a separate contract for the period of the course, others second them. However, there is significant variation between Trusts as to the rate of pay awarded to students whilst on the course which is not viewed positively by students'*
- *'Majority HEE funded places except for 2 Apprentices'*
- *'Students are seconded from their employing organisation on student contract (Funded by HEE)'*
- *'Students are funded through a variety of means including a Service Level Agreement'*
- *'Funded on a part time basis over two years and also modular so students can complete at a slower pace should they wish (the modular approach is usually no more than 4 years).'*

### **Concerns regarding future funding arrangements**

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

Typical comments include:

- *'I am worried about it going part time with the apprenticeship model. Having experience of running the course part time; students really struggle'*
- *'I am concerned that the HEE funding will no longer be provided and that the apprenticeship route will need to be reapproved following the publication of the NMC standards next year. This may well lead to a fallow year (or more)'*
- *'Not all organisations want (or have the resources) to support an Apprenticeship pathway. Apprenticeships are currently only available for Level 7. We have over half our students studying at Level 6 either because they only have a Diploma, their degree qualification was not high enough for Level 7 study, or they are unprepared for the high academic requirement of level 7. Without the standard programme, they will not be able to undertake the qualification at Level 6. If we move to Apprenticeships only, numbers will be lower which may make the programme financially unviable and there will be the first year with no students completing, resulting in potential high vacancies within partner organisations. Running the traditional programme alongside the apprenticeship will result in higher resourcing requirements'*
- *'Both NHS Trusts are ready to use the apprenticeship levy to fund students when the HEE funding has been removed'*
- *'Uptake of the apprenticeship using the levy as Trusts prefer the HEE funding and backfill'*
- *'Small intake numbers do always raise a concern re feasibility, however we remain committed to providing the DN programme. There is a concern should apprenticeship be the only funding source that student numbers could decrease further'*
- *'Decisions about ongoing funding is required on an annual basis and this is insufficient for strategic planning'*
- *'Both ourselves at the university and our provider trusts would like to see the options of centrally commissioned place funding to continue and to run alongside the introduction of the District Nurse Apprenticeship funding'*

- *'Yes, concerns with apprenticeships, trusts not deciding what process they wish to follow'*
- *'There is no clarity currently with regards to future funding from 2021 onwards'*
- *'That Trusts may not participate in the apprenticeship (and this will be the only form of funding)'*
- *'Thankfully it appears the value of the DN SPQ qualification has now been recognised and any such withdrawal of funding would be strongly contested.'*

In Wales there is a commitment to increasing the numbers of commissions for the DN SPQ programme and the qualification is required for all Caseload Holders in the country. In Northern Ireland, an investment into the commissioned places for the DN SPQ programme has been made to meet present and future population health needs. In 2020/21, the number of new entrants to the DN SPQ programme doubled in Northern Ireland. There were no funding concerns raised by respondents from Scotland.

### **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 half of the respondents stated that they would continue as usual with funding from HEE, although at least five HEIs would also be able to offer an apprenticeship route alongside their existing programme; three were pursuing apprenticeship programmes only and two were unsure of their plans for the next intake of DN students.

There were at least two HEIs that had delayed or postponed their programmes due to Covid-19 and four who were still waiting for confirmation of funding from HEE.

At the time of writing the report, HEE had recently completed a formal review of the funding of the DN SPQ programme. The concerns expressed by some HEIs about the lack of clarity with regard to funding these programmes year on year confirm the challenges they and the community service provider organisations face when planning and recruiting to the programmes.

It is evident that the apprenticeship route has gathered interest and pace since the last DN Education Audit report (2018/19), with at least 8 HEIs planning either a mixed approach or an apprenticeship route only.

Typical comments include:

- *'We are hoping the existing funding will continue for an additional year as plans to develop the Apprenticeship pathway were delayed due to Covid workload changes'*
- *'We are looking at another increase in student numbers and that we will have an apprenticeship route'*
- *'This will be a mix of applicants for the existing full time 44 week course at level 6 and 7 as well as applicants for the DN apprenticeship'*
- *'We will be looking at HEE funding as well as apprenticeship'*
- *'We are anticipating 75% funding for the DN SPQ via centrally commissioned funding and 25% funding via the apprenticeship levy'*
- *'For Jan 2021 we currently have recruited 41 students - moving forward to Jan 2022 we are awaiting HEE information for commissioned places, however some of our partner trust have indicated that they will have funding for the same number of places for Jan 2022'*
- *'Awaiting funding confirmation/availability; considering applying to introduce DN Apprenticeship route from 2022 if there is sufficient commitment from practice providers'*
- *'We have asked HEE to confirm funding for a 'traditional' route programme for 2021/22- they are currently scoping our local organisations for their requirements.'*



The lack of clarity with regard to funding and the anxiety for some HEIs and provider organisations is very clearly illustrated by some of the responses.

Typical comments include:

- *'Some of the trusts are recruiting in higher numbers for the course in anticipation of funding not being available in the future'*
- *'Providers prefer HEE funding with backfill and will not use levy whilst this is still available. Apprenticeship levy means the students will be part time which may affect cohort numbers as 2 cohorts will overlap with year 2 and year 1 commencing. This will potentially reduce the numbers qualifying each year'*
- *'Reduced staffing in DN teams will remain an ongoing threat to student numbers as practice areas cannot afford to lose experienced staff for training purposes despite the current provision of backfill monies provided to Trusts'*
- *'Trusts are generally doing their best to workforce plan as they need community nursing teams despite the challenges pressing on them from other issues'*
- *'Trust providers have expressed concerns that funding for the centrally commissioned route will cease'*
- *'Most provider organisations are in deficit and are reluctant to release students if funding is slow. Often the students start the programme in September and it is January at the earliest that organisations receive the funding'*
- *'Managers have shared with me that in terms of workforce planning, there is a huge deficit within district nursing and sustained numbers of places must continue to meet the need.'*

**Table 9: 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	33
Yes - due to student numbers/financial sustainability	2

There were 35 responses to this question, with 33 responses indicating no and two stating yes. The following comments were submitted:

- *'A decision will be made closer to the time of course commencement, based on indicative numbers. We are fortunate that modules are shared between other pathways and CPPD which reduces the risk of programme discontinuation'*
- *'No, but it depends on how many applicants we get. It is an issue, if we have less than 20, the VC may say it is not to run'*
- *'Yes due to student numbers/financial sustainability. We need to meet module viability numbers of a minimum of 15 students'*
- *'No absolutely not; they consider it a flagship programme. Overall, with 1st years, 2nd years and modular students we have approximately 60 students.'*

**Table 9a: The DN SPQ programme in 2021**

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

Response	Number of responses	
	For 2020 intakes	For 2021 intakes
Full-time DN SPQ	11	9
Both Full-time and Part-time DN SPQ	11	8
Full-time DN SPQ and a two-year apprenticeship route	7	1
Part-time DN SPQ	5	6
Both Full/Part-time DN SPQ and a two-year apprenticeship route	2	10
A two-year DN SPQ apprenticeship programme	1	2

There were 36 responses to this question, with 25% indicating that a full-time DN SPQ programme only is planned for 2020. This is a reduction of 18% from last year. A further 22% indicated that both a full and part-time DN SPQ programme is planned. This is a reduction of 27% from last year. 28% of respondents indicated they intended to run an apprenticeship route alongside their full and part time DN SPQ programme. This is an increase of 80% on last year, indicating an upward trend in the validation and delivery of an apprenticeship programme for the education and practice for District Nurses in England.

## Entry to the Programme

**Table 10: New entrants**

*Survey question: Please indicate the number of students (by gender type) on the DN SPQ programme in 2019/20.*

Academic year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
New entrants	427	566	565	551	659	693	761
Change		Increase 33%	No change	Decrease 3%	Increase 20%	Increase 5%	Increase 10%

**Figure 1: New entrants by gender**

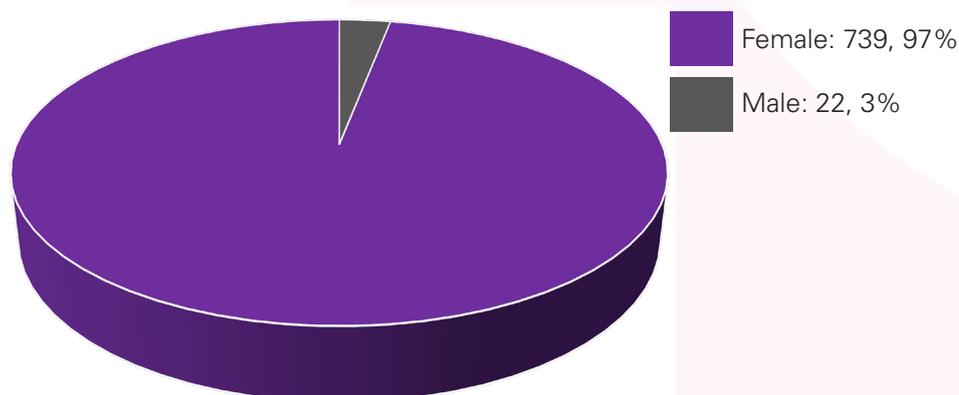


Table 9 shows the number of students enrolled onto Specialist Practitioner District Nurse programmes across the whole of the UK from 2013/14 – 2019/20.

The number of new entrants to programmes increased by 5% from 2017/18 to 2018/19 with a further increase of 10% from 2018/19 to 2019/20.

Of the 761 new entrants to the programmes in 2019/20, 600 were full-time students (585 female, 15 male) and 161 were part-time (154 female, 7 male). The split between full-time and part-time has remained roughly the same at 79% / 21% respectively.

It is very noteworthy that since the QNI started publishing these figures in 2013/14, the number of students has increased by 78% compared to that academic year. However, although encouraging in the context of increasing numbers, this needs to be read with caution, as the increase may not accurately reflect what the actual need is. Population demographics have changed, the number of hospital beds has reduced, discharges are quicker and more complex care is now delivered in homes and communities rather than in hospital.

**Table 11: Unsuccessful applicants**

*Survey question: Were there any applicants who did not receive an offer of a place on the DN SPQ programme in 2019/20?*

Response	Number of responses
Yes	26
No	11

There were 37 responses to this question with 75% indicating that not all applicants received an offer of a place on the DN SPQ programme.

**Table 11a: 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	12
Failed criteria/interview	6
Skills, experience or qualifications related	5
Lack of recent study/commitment	1
Not specified	2

There were 26 responses to this question (with some responses indicating multiple reasons for applicants not receiving an offer). Almost half of responses indicated that a lack of funding, organisational cap on numbers or inability to release staff for study were the main reasons that students were not offered a place on a DN SPQ programme. Responses also indicated that some applicants did not meet the criteria or failed at interview and others that they were deemed to have insufficient skills and experience for the role at this time.



**Table 12: 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
Right attitude, values and beliefs	100
Sound knowledge and understanding of the role	97
Preparation of the course	81
Previous community experience	78
Leadership experience	49
Mentorship experience	41
Management experience	27

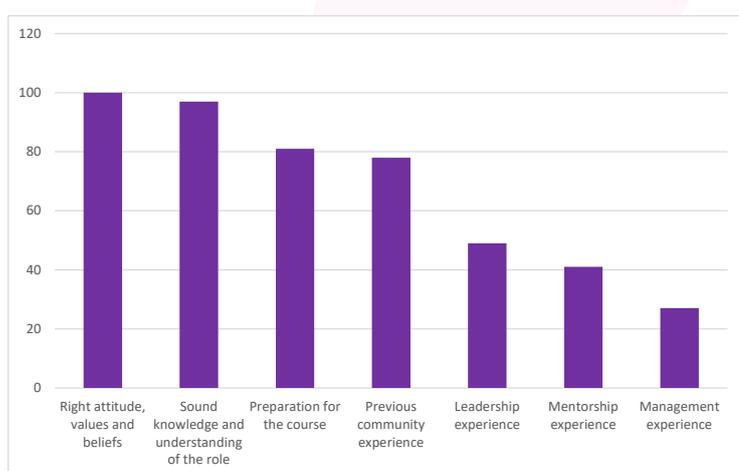


Table 12 shows a summary of responses received, indicating that right attitude, values and beliefs remains the highest response (100% of responses indicated this requirement). Sound knowledge and understanding of the role was also indicated as a requirement by 97% of respondents.

**Table 13: 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)	8
Both	28

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



**Table 14: Students and supernumerary requirement**

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

Response	Number of responses
Yes	28
No	8

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).

36 universities answered this question and 78% stated that they do require students to be supernumerary, but that there were some exceptions and particularly the challenges this year related to Covid-19, including redeployment, sickness and other staffing issues. HEIs would usually recommend that students are supernumerary; full-time students are more likely to be supernumerary than part time students, although these decisions rest with the employing organisations. Where HEIs work with several service provider organisations, there can be differences in organising supernumerary status for students and an increasing challenge to maintain it over time. Some HEIs refer to the supernumerary status as 'protected learning time'.

Typical comments were:

- *'I recommend this but cannot enforce it; one NHS Trust encourages this much more than the other'*
- *'The supernumerary status has been a concern during the current health crisis'*
- *'Students have always been awarded supernumerary status, however we reinforce that students should look at every visit undertaken as a learning experience building towards their competency achievement'*
- *'The current pressures in practice are making this even more difficult this year. Practice Assessors and Supervisors are working hard to ensure supernumerary status. This has impacted on DNSPQ students settling into teams in such pressured times'*
- *'Protected learning rather than supernumerary'*
- *'Students must be supernumerary in practice learning and not in paid employment and in their previous role'*
- *'Full time students are supernumerary; Part-time students are not supernumerary'*
- *'This would not be possible without backfill as they are employed by the [Community services provider]'*
- *'Would prefer them to be supernumerary however it is not wholly available.'*

**Table 14a: 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	19
No	8

19 (70%) of the 27 responses who stated that they do require students to be supernumerary stated that all providers do request this consistently.

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:

- *'There are times that we have to remind practice that they are not another pair of hands'*
- *'Due to covid measures there have been times when students were unable to remain supernumerary for the duration of their course. However this was agreed by the university. Covid NMC emergency standards changed this for 2019-20'*
- *'Mostly practice supervisors and assessors ensure the student is supernumerary although the negative impact of Covid on the workforce has made this more challenging'*
- *'Mostly yes - as all practice providers take this requirement very seriously and set up their teams and rotas accordingly. Occasionally there is a need to deploy students in response to service need but students and practice leads work together to ensure learning time is fully compensated and this is monitored by the academic team'*
- *'Whilst supernumerary status has been consistent, our new provider has highlighted difficulties in maintaining supernumerary status with the DN SPQ students. As a course team we have worked hard to support this in practice'*
- *'Some providers leave students in their previous post and so are part of the numbers'*
- *'Some students are already in a caseload holder post.'*

**Table 15: 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	1

For students who have completed the Postgraduate Diploma DN SPQ programme, 97% of responses indicated that they offer a top up to a Masters degree following the successful completion of the Diploma. Comments relating to the take up of this option remain varied and actual numbers are quite low, as indicated below:

- *'Students can contact the professional navigators should they wish to top up to masters'*
- *'There are always small numbers on this programme although this has increased year on year'*
- *'The students are signed up for the MSc at the start of the programme and step off at PG Dip if they decide they don't want to complete the dissertation module'*
- *'Although students must source their own funding for that. That could be from the Health Board or their own money.'*



**Table 16: 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	2019/20
Less than 40 weeks	0	0	3	4	4	4
40 weeks	7	8	4	2	4	6
42 weeks	3	1	2	3	2	2
44 weeks	3	5	2	3	3	2
45 weeks	0	0	0	0	0	4
46 weeks	1	1	2	0	1	1
47 weeks	0	0	0	0	0	1
48 weeks	2	3	0	3	1	0
50 weeks	0	1	2	0	2	0
52 weeks	24	20	19	18	20	18

\*Pro rata weeks for part time programmes

38 universities responded to this question. Almost half (47%) of universities have maintained a programme of 52 weeks.

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. Therefore, it is encouraging to see that the number of HEIs offering a 52-week programme has only decreased by one.

**Table 17: Nurses qualifying from the Specialist Practitioner – District Nurse programme***Survey question: How many students from the 2019/20 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	2020
Total	254*	382	479	517	464	500	555	554**
Increase/decrease from previous year	N/A	Increase 50%	Increase 25%	Increase 8%	Decrease 10%	Increase 8%	Increase 11%	No real change

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

Although the audit has recorded a similar number who have successfully completed the DN programme from the 2018/19 intake of students, this figure must be set against the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At least six universities have had to delay or postpone their programmes leading to a delay in qualification and capturing the final figures. There is at least one January to January cohort that is also not included in these figures

and another HEI in the first year of their new part-time programme.

\*\* 121 students from 2019/20 still have outstanding modules, assessments or exams to complete, according to data gathered during this audit process. If they all successfully qualify as district nurses, this would increase the annual figure from 554 to 675, which would show an increase of almost 22% from 2018/19 figures.

## 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 in 2020 increased to 79 from three universities based in London, with one university reporting that the DN SPQ programme did not run in 2019/20. This is the highest figure across London since the QNI began its annual audit in 2013.

Figures for London universities increased consistently year on year until 2016 when the numbers are seen to decrease, but now appear to be increasing once again.

**Table 18: Number of students qualifying**

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

**Table 19: Reasons for leaving the DN SPQ programme**

*Survey question: How many students withdrew from the DN SPQ programme 2019/20 and what were the reasons for this?*

Reason for withdrawal	Number of responses
Combination of reasons	11
Personal reasons	9
Health related	3
Covid related	3
Stress related	2
Change of employment	1
Withdrawn by trust	1
Interruption of studies	3

There were 37 responses to this question, stating that a total of 30 students had withdrawn from the programme in this academic year with three additional students interrupting their studies but planning to return at a later date. 18 responses indicated that there had been no student withdrawal from their programme and 19 responses indicated the reasons for students withdrawing from the programme: 37% of responses indicated a combination of reasons including ill health, bereavement, and failure to achieve the academic standard required. 30% of responses indicating personal reasons for withdrawal from the DN SPQ programme.

**Table 20: Entrants for 2020/21**

*Survey question: For the current academic year 2020/21, 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 (Yr 1 Male)	Total
England	572	10	22	1	605
Wales	3	0	58	2	63
Northern Ireland	55	0	0	0	55
Scotland	65	2	29	0	96
<b>Total</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>819</b>

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 2020/21. There were 38 responses to this question, with a total number of 819 new students (707 full-time and 112 part-time). This figure indicates an increase of 11% in the number of new students between the academic years 2019/20 to 2020/21.

In addition, there were 12 responses indicating that 127 students were progressing into Year 2 of their part time programme. If they all successfully qualified, this would make a combined total of 931 students potentially qualifying as District Nurse Specialist Practitioners in 2021.

The largest cohort size was reported as 55 with at least three HEIs having cohort sizes above 40 and a further five with cohort sizes above 30.

**Table 20a: Cohort sizes reported**

Cohort size	Number of responses	
	2019/20	2020/21
0-10	6	4
11-20	16	15
21-30	9	8
31-40	2	5
41-50	3	3
50+	0	1

## Conclusion

This was an exceptional year for the 2019/20 intake of DN SPQ 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. However, the audit has demonstrated that when the students whose programmes have been delayed complete their qualifications, the largest increase in District Nurses since the annual QNI audit commenced in 2013 will be recorded. 819 new DN SPQ students commenced the programme in 2020/21 and an additional 127 part time students progressed into year two. 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. A separate piece of work is being undertaken in 2021 in England only with Directors of Nursing and Chief Nurses of community service providers and this will assist in understanding this aspect of supply, demand and their ability to undertake workforce planning for the DN SPQ.

The audit has also revealed that community service providers continue to request the DN SPQ programme and, in England, they are navigating 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. Against this uncertainty of funding and the review of SPQ standards by the NMC, new DN SPQ programmes are under development, again demonstrating the need for the qualification which has been articulated by the community service providers. It is clear that many DN SPQ programmes reflect an advanced level of practice and many have been mapped to demonstrate this level. This is excellent news, given that it has been proposed that the NMC review of all SPQ post registration standards will form a bridge to the possible regulation of advanced practice by the NMC, should the professional regulatory body for the Nursing and Midwifery professions progress to regulate advanced practice in the future:

<https://www.nmc.org.uk/about-us/consultations/current-consultations/future-community-nurse/>



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## Additional Resources

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