T he QNI has recently published two major pieces of work aimed at consolidating the academic and practice profile of district nurses. The district nursing profession has developed rapidly in recent years to keep pace with the growing complexity and acuity of care delivered in the home, and there was a growing fear that the supporting documentation had not kept pace.

New standards for district nursing education and practice

The official standards for district nurse education and practice had not been updated since 1994. The Queen’s Nursing Institute (QNI) and Queen’s Nursing Institute Scotland (QNIS) have therefore led a project to introduce new voluntary standards. These standards will enhance, not replace, the existing NMC standards and will support the development of education programmes for contemporary and future practice.

An advisory group of experts from each of the UK countries, including senior figures from education, commissioning, third sector, the NMC and the four national governments was convened to develop the standards. It is a testament to the work of the individuals and organisations involved that working collaboratively we have been able to create and agree a unified vision for district nurse practice across the UK.

The standards were developed with the active involvement and support of the Association of District Nurse Educators (ADNE) and have already been endorsed by Health Education England, Macmillan and Marie Curie Cancer Care. The QNI and QNIS are now calling for approved higher education institutions to work with their provider organisations to create programmes based on these standards.

District Nursing Specialist Practitioner Qualification Report

The second publication follows on from the major survey of district nurses published by the QNI last year (2020 Vision Five Years On), which identified that most DNs value the specialist practitioner qualification enormously, but also highlighted the lack of robust research evidence about its specific value to nurses and to patient care.

This new QNI study therefore aims to give a stronger articulation of the value of the specialist practitioner qualification. The report is based on a series of in-depth focus groups with Queen’s Nurses, nursing educators and students, an online survey completed by over 400 people, as well as literature search and data analysis. It identifies key themes that emerged during the information gathering and subsequent analysis. These themes include: direct benefits to patient care, personal and professional development, the benefit to employing organisations, and cost savings. The report will be shared with nurse educators, commissioners and policy makers.

One of the most important points emerging from the report is the complexity and high quality of nursing care delivered by district nurses in the community today. Advances in healthcare technology and the ability to deliver more care in the community mean that today’s district nurse must possess an incredibly broad range of skills, and a very high level of skill and expertise.

The QNI has campaigned in recent years for renewed investment in the district nursing specialist practitioner qualification, to reverse the decline in the number of courses being offered and the number of new district nurse students. As part of this work we undertake an annual audit of the number of students who are enrolled on the specialist practitioner qualification course at every university in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

To download the Value of the District Nursing SPQ Report please go to: www.qni.org.uk/for_nurses/policy_and_practice/district_nursing_spq

To read more about the new Voluntary Standards for District Nurse Education and Practice visit here: http://www.qni.org.uk/for_nurses/policy_and_practice/district_nurse_standards