



LHP Skillnet DiGNI Phase 2 Evaluation Report

September 2026



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1

Executive Summary

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the challenges posed by an ageing population and the need for enhanced gerontological expertise identified by the COVID-19 Nursing Homes Expert Panel, the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative (DiGNI) was established to strengthen specialist nursing skills within the long-term care sector.

The Minister for Mental Health and Older People established a Postgraduate Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative in early 2024, funded by the Department of Health and managed by LHP Skillnet. The initiative began in 2022 in public and voluntary nursing homes. Following its extension to the private nursing home sector in early 2024, LHP Skillnet was appointed to manage the programme on behalf of the Department of Health. Through DiGNI, one nurse from every private nursing home in Ireland is provided with access to QQI Level 9 postgraduate training within a two-year period. Following an open competitive tender process, LHP Skillnet partnered with four Higher Education Institutes to deliver on the initiative aimed at enhancing expertise in gerontological nursing across Ireland's private nursing home sector.

This report presents the Year 2 evaluation of the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative within the private nursing home sector, building on the findings from the Year 1 (Phase 1) evaluation, which can be accessed here: (www.lhpskillnet.ie/publications/digni-eva-report-1).

The Year 1 report gives a comprehensive background in the context of this programme. It provided strong early evidence of programme effectiveness, including high levels of participant satisfaction, significant knowledge application and early indications of improvements in care quality and workforce development across the sector.

Year 2 extends this evidence base through the evaluation of a new cohort of participants, offering an opportunity to assess the consistency and reproducibility of outcomes across different groups of nurses and nursing homes. This phase focuses on whether the positive impacts identified in Year 1 are sustained when the programme is delivered at scale to a separate cohort.



YEAR 2: KEY FINDINGS

1. High satisfaction - 82% of nursing homes and 82% of nurses reported being very satisfied with the DiGNI after completing the programme.
2. Knowledge application - 97% of nurses reported having successfully applied new knowledge in their workplace.
3. Practice transformation - 58% of nurses reported having implemented specific practice changes benefiting older person care.
4. Confidence boost - 96% of nurses reported feeling confident in gerontological nursing competencies after completing the course.
5. Career advancement - 31% of nurses experienced career progression through promotion or new roles in gerontology whilst on the programme.
6. Positive impact on recruitment and retention - 60% of nursing homes believed the initiative would positively impact recruitment and 63% believed it would positively impact retention.
7. Improved quality of care – at the time of the survey 63% of nursing homes reported improved quality of residents' care with a further 33% stating it was too early to judge the impact.



Responses from the nurses and nursing homes from Year 2 of the programme indicate that strengths of DiGNI include its offering of both online and blended learning format, high-quality curriculum and emphasis on leadership development. Areas for potential enhancement include expanding offerings to meet future potential demand, improving orientation processes and maintaining research and evaluation capacity.

This second phase evaluation provides strong evidence of DiGNI's effectiveness in enhancing professional competencies, supporting career advancement and improving quality of care for older adults. Comparative analysis between Year 1 and Year 2 findings indicates a high degree of consistency in programme outcomes.



2

Evaluation Framework

2. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

This evaluation report presents a comprehensive assessment of the experience to date of nurses enrolled and nursing homes. The evaluation framework incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to capture participant experiences, nursing home perspectives and broader sector-level impacts.

Data collection involved detailed surveys with all stakeholder groups, providing a multi-faceted view of the programme's effectiveness and areas for improvement.

This evaluation aims to inform future initiative development, support evidence-based decision-making regarding programme expansion and contribute to the broader understanding of effective workforce development strategies in long-term care settings.

Results will be made available to the Department of Health and Skillnet Ireland, with findings potentially contributing to academic publications and policy discussions regarding gerontological nursing education and long-term care sector development.



2.1 Methodology

The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating multiple data sources to provide a comprehensive assessment of the initiative. The methodology comprised four key components.

Survey of Participating Nursing Homes

A structured survey was circulated to nursing homes participating in DiGNI in year 2. The survey assessed the quality and structure of clinical placements, the learning environment, supervision practices and perceived impacts on both student learning and resident care. Survey items were adapted from validated instruments and tailored to the local context following consultation with clinical educators and programme staff.

Pre- and Post-Survey of Enrolled Nurses

To assess the impact of DiGNI on enrolled nurses, this evaluation used a pre-post design to examine programme effectiveness across multiple domains. The methodological approach combined descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative measures with systematic thematic analysis for qualitative responses. Data collection occurred at two critical time points; at programme commencement (Wave 1) and upon programme completion (Wave 2).

The analytical framework incorporated Kirkpatrick's four-level evaluation model as the primary organising structure, enabling systematic assessment of participant reactions, learning acquisition, behavioural changes and organisational outcomes. This established framework provides internationally recognised standards for educational programme evaluation while facilitating comparison with other professional development initiatives in healthcare settings.

Data Analysis

Data from all surveys was analysed. Quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics and frequency distributions. Qualitative data from open-ended survey responses were analysed thematically to identify key patterns and insights.

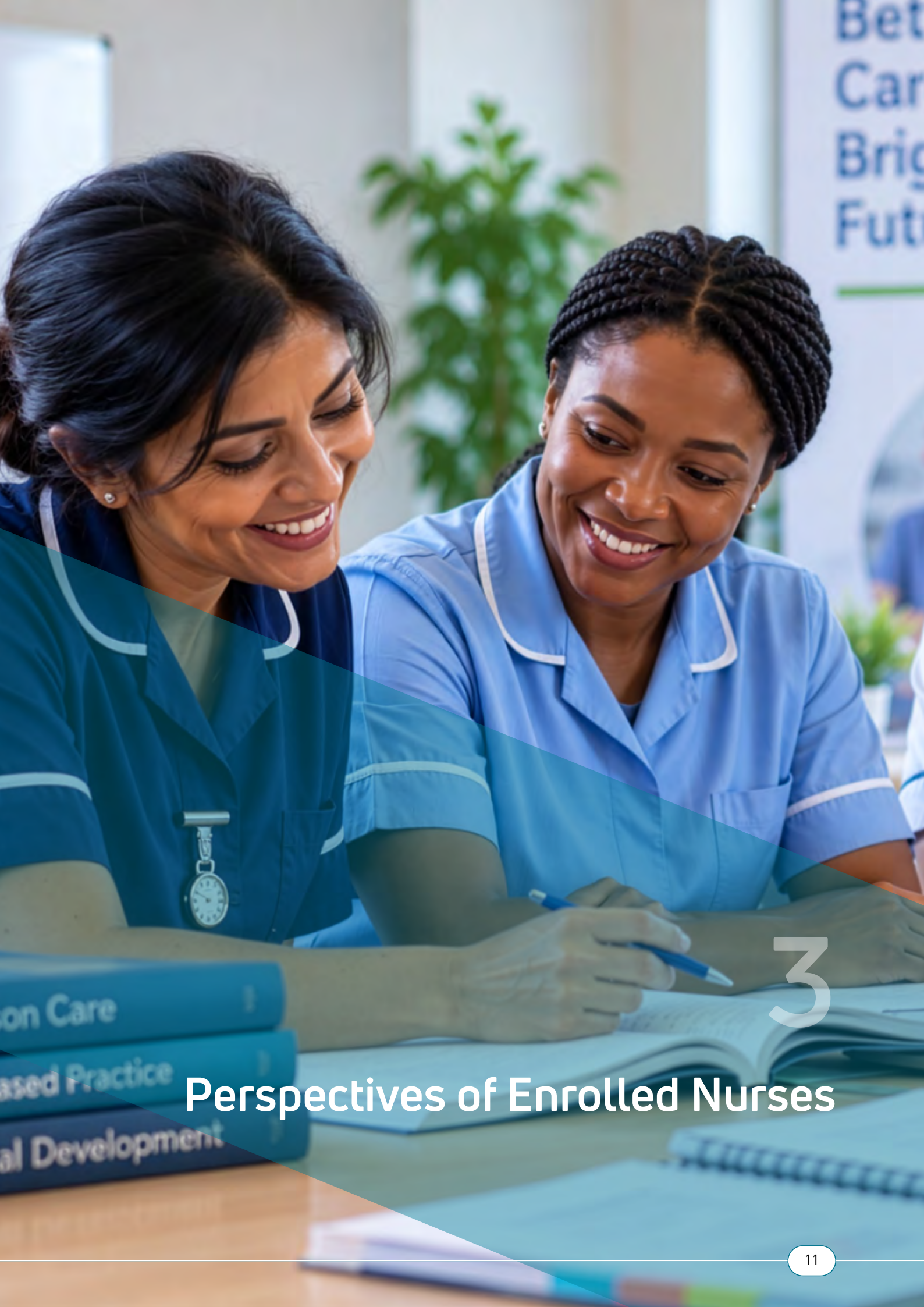
Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and all data was anonymised to ensure confidentiality. This multi-component methodology enabled a robust and nuanced evaluation of the programme, capturing the perspectives of students and nursing homes and grounding findings in both documentary evidence and stakeholder experience.

2.2 Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model

Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model is a widely used framework for evaluating education and training programmes. Developed by Donald Kirkpatrick, it proposes that learning interventions should be assessed on four dimensions.

Level	Focus of Measurement	Key Questions Answered
1. Reaction	Participants' immediate perceptions, satisfaction and engagement	<i>Did they like it? Was it relevant and engaging?</i>
2. Learning	Knowledge, skills, attitudes or confidence gained	<i>What did they learn? Can they demonstrate new competence?</i>
3. Behaviour	Transfer of learning to real-world practice over time	<i>Are participants applying new skills on the job?</i>
4. Results	Organisational or societal impact (quality, productivity, outcomes)	<i>What measurable improvements occurred because of the programme?</i>



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Perspectives of Enrolled Nurses

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3. PERSPECTIVES OF ENROLLED NURSES

This section presents an analysis of the survey responses from nurses. Of the 200 nurses enrolled and participating, 89 completed the first survey (Wave 1) and 65 completed the Wave 2 post-programme evaluation survey. 42 of the 65 who completed the Wave 2 survey also completed the Wave 1 survey.

This cohort represents a diverse group of nursing professionals, predominantly female (78%, n=69) and aged 30-39 years (60%, n=53), with significant prior nursing experience.

The majority possessed six or more years of nursing experience (87%, n=78), indicating that the programme attracted experienced professionals seeking to deepen their expertise in gerontological care.

As in Year 1, the programme's impact extends well beyond traditional educational outcomes, demonstrating clear evidence of career advancement and workplace change. Among respondents to the career progression question (n=65), 31% reported career progression, through promotions or new roles in gerontology. In addition, 91% felt better positioned to achieve their career aspirations, with a further 6% indicating that the programme may help them do so. This represents a notable improvement on Year 1, where 17.5% reported career progression and 81% felt better positioned to achieve their career aspirations.

TABLE 1: Has your employment status changed since you started the programme?

Response	Frequency	Percent
I am in the same role	42	65%
I was promoted	15	23%
I have a new role in gerontology	5	7%
I have a new role in a different specialty	1	2%
I am currently seeking employment	2	3%
Other	0	0%
TOTAL	65	100%

I would just like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to undertake this course. It has resulted in me receiving an amazing job offer, which I would not have had the skills or qualifications previously.
(Student, Year 2)

TABLE 2: Do you feel you are better placed to achieve the career aspirations you identified at the beginning of the programme?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	59	91%
No	1	2%
Maybe	4	5%
Other	1	2%
TOTAL	65	100%

97% of participants successfully applied their newly acquired knowledge in their workplace settings, which is an increase from 84% in Year 1, with 58% implementing specific practice changes that directly benefited older adult care.

Practice changes frequently mentioned included enhanced person-centred and evidence-based care, stronger clinical assessment and care planning and greater confidence in managing complex needs such as dementia, frailty, delirium, Parkinson's disease and polypharmacy. Many participants reported implementing quality improvement initiatives, strengthening auditing processes and developing in-house teams focused on areas such as Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), palliative care, antimicrobial stewardship and restrictive practice. Others highlighted improved staff education, better communication within multidisciplinary teams and more structured approaches to leadership, documentation and reflective practice.

The high satisfaction levels reflect the programme's quality and relevance to contemporary gerontological nursing practice. 82% of participants expressed satisfaction with the programme overall, while 85% rated the content as very relevant to their current roles, which is an increase from 73% in Year 1.

The programme's impact on professional confidence was equally impressive, with 96% reporting confidence in their gerontological nursing competencies.

TABLE 3: How confident do you now feel in your gerontological nursing role?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Extremely confident	40	61.5%
Somewhat confident	22	33.8%
Neutral	3	4.6%
TOTAL	65	100%

These outcomes are further validated by the programme's outstanding Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 80, based on 53 Promoters, 9 Passives and 2 Detractors.

3.1 Demographics and Career Trajectory Comparison

As in year 1, the pre-post analysis of participant demographics reveals important insights into programme effectiveness and participant outcomes. Career progression data demonstrates significant professional advancement amongst programme participants. The 31% who achieved promotion or new gerontological roles represents substantial career mobility in a relatively short timeframe and an increase on the 17.5% who reported a promotion in Year 1.

Career aspiration achievement data also provides evidence of programme effectiveness, with 91% of participants reporting improved standing to achieve their stated career goals. This outcome suggests that the programme successfully enhanced participants' qualifications, confidence and competencies in ways that directly support their professional development objectives.

3.2 Programme Expectations Versus Reality

As was the case in Year 1, the analysis of participant expectations compared to programme delivery reveals continued positive alignment, with most participants reporting that the programme met or exceeded their initial expectations.

A question on content relevance showed that 85% of participants rated the programme as "very relevant" to their current roles, which is an increase on Year 1 responses, indicating strong alignment between curriculum design and workplace needs. The remaining 15% of participants rated the content as "relevant", with no participants rating the programme as irrelevant to their professional responsibilities.

Feedback on the programme learning format showed significant improvement from pre-programme confidence to post-programme satisfaction. Participants initially expressed some uncertainty about blended learning approaches, with 30% of respondents saying they are “somewhat confident” or “neutral” that the programme would be delivered effectively in a blended learning format but ultimately reported high satisfaction with the delivery format’s effectiveness for their learning needs. 94% of respondents reported the blended approach as being effective with 69% of these reporting it as “Very effective”.

TABLE 4: How effective was the blended learning format for your learning needs?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very effective	45	69.2%
Somewhat effective	16	24.6%
Neither effective nor ineffective	3	4.6%
Somewhat ineffective	1	1.5%
Very ineffective	0	0%
TOTAL	65	100%

This finding validates DiGNI’s pedagogical approach and suggests that concerns about online learning can be successfully addressed through programme design and implementation.

3.3 Knowledge and Skill Development Progression

As in Year 1 of the programme, the comparison between hoped-for learning outcomes and actual knowledge gained reveals success in meeting participant learning objectives. Person-centred care and Comprehensive Gerontological Assessment (CGA) were most frequently mentioned, with leadership, management and professional confidence following closely. The third major theme emerging was evidence-based practice, legislation and dementia-related knowledge.

DiGNI’s emphasis on critical thinking, research literacy and evidence-based practice resonated strongly with participants who sought to enhance their professional competencies beyond basic clinical skills.



3.4 Thematic Analysis of Professional Development Outcomes

3.4.1 Most Valuable Aspects

The thematic analysis of participant feedback indicates that, similar to Year 1, the programme continues to be perceived as highly valuable across all modules, with themes related to leadership, management and advanced professional practice. Participants consistently highlighted the programme's effectiveness in developing leadership competencies, particularly in clinical governance, quality improvement and team management, which they viewed as directly applicable to their current roles and future career progression. This shows the benefit of having a module on leadership and management embedded in the programme.

Clinical knowledge enhancement remained a core area of value for students, with strong emphasis on dementia care, biopsychosocial approaches, comprehensive geriatric assessment and the management of complex age-related conditions. Respondents also emphasised the importance of evidence-based practice, noting that the programme deepened their ability to critically evaluate research, apply best-practice guidelines and integrate contemporary gerontological science into daily decision-making.



“The programme enhanced my leadership, critical thinking and evidence-based gerontological nursing practice skills.” (Student, Year 2)



“I think the programme really improved my overall knowledge in terms of up to date best practice and guidelines. As well as this, the actual process of researching and completing assignments has really brought my own report writing at work to the next level and instilled great confidence in me.”
(Student, Year 2)

Specialist input was also identified as impactful. The course offered access to recognised leaders in gerontology and providing practical insights that complemented the academic content. Participants valued the opportunity to learn from diverse practitioners and to explore real-world case studies that strengthened the link between theory and practice.



“The collaborative discussions and real-world case studies were particularly beneficial in connecting theory to practice and enhancing my confidence in applying what I learned.” ***(Student, Year 2)***

Peer interaction and collaborative learning also emerged as sources of value, with participants reporting that discussions, shared experiences and networking enriched their understanding of common challenges in older person care. This was reported by nurses across both online and blended delivery formats, indicating that the programme's collaborative learning environment remains a key strength.



“The most valuable aspects of the programme were the focus on holistic care, management of chronic conditions, dementia care and understanding the physical, psychological and social needs of older adults. Learning evidence-based approaches to care planning and multidisciplinary teamwork greatly supported my professional development and improved my confidence in clinical practice.” ***(Student, Year 2)***

3.4.2 Knowledge and Skill Development

In Year 1, leadership and management skills were the most referenced skills developed by students, in Year 2, person-centred care and comprehensive gerontological assessment were the most frequently referenced theme.

Other themes mentioned included

- ▶ Dementia care and management
- ▶ Communication and interpersonal skills
- ▶ Leadership, management and teamwork skills
- ▶ Evidence-based practice, critical thinking and research skills
- ▶ Knowledge of legislation, safeguarding and professional responsibility
- ▶ Reflective practice and professional confidence

3.4.3 Commitment to Gerontological Nursing Specialty

The Year 2 analysis of commitment maintains significant positive impact, with participants describing enhanced understanding of gerontological nursing's unique value and professional identity. The programme appeared to strengthen participants' sense of professional purpose and commitment to excellence in older person's care.

Survey responses mentioned enhanced understanding of the multifaceted needs of older adults and the centrality of person-centred, dignity-driven care. Respondents reported that the programme broadened their perspective on ageing, improved their ability to conduct holistic assessments and strengthened their commitment to compassionate, evidence-based practice. Many described gaining a deeper appreciation of the physical, emotional, psychological and social dimensions of ageing, as well as the importance of communication, empathy and respecting residents' wishes.



"The programme has highlighted the vital role that gerontological nurses play in advocating for older people and improving care outcomes. It has also increased my passion for supporting best practice in the care of older adults and has inspired me to contribute to the development of the profession through leadership, education and potentially teaching and lecturing in the future." (Student, Year 2)



"Gerontological nursing has always been an area of particular interest to me. The programme has further strengthened my commitment to this specialty by deepening my knowledge and understanding of the unique needs of older adults. It has motivated me to continue developing my expertise in gerontological nursing and to advocate for best practices that promote dignity, independence and positive outcomes for older adults. The knowledge and skills gained through the programme will support me in providing high-quality, person-centred care and in contributing to the ongoing improvement of services for older people." (Student, Year 2)

Respondents also reported significant growth in confidence and professional capability, with participants frequently noting that the programme helped them feel more competent and equipped to manage complex clinical and managerial responsibilities. Respondents described increased confidence in decision-making, advocacy and leadership, as well as a clearer understanding of their professional role and responsibilities.



"This programme has strengthened my commitment to gerontological nursing by deepening my knowledge and understanding of the complex needs of older adults. It has enhanced my confidence in providing person-centred, evidence-based care and highlighted the importance of promoting dignity, quality of life and holistic support for older persons and their families. The programme has also inspired me to continue developing my skills and contribute to improving the standard of care for the ageing population." (Student, Year 2)

Another clear theme that emerged is the significant strengthening of students' long-term commitment to gerontological nursing. Many respondents described the programme as deepening their passion for the specialty, affirming their desire to remain in older-person services, or motivating them to pursue further specialisation, leadership, or educational roles. This heightened commitment is particularly notable given ongoing workforce challenges in the sector, indicating that the programme plays a meaningful role in supporting retention and professional identity within gerontological nursing.

"It is easy to become disillusioned when working in a nursing home, but this programme has re-energised me." (Student, Year 2)

"The programme has reinforced my commitment to gerontological nursing by deepening my understanding of older adults' needs and increasing my confidence in delivering high-quality, person-centred care. It has inspired me to continue developing my skills and career in this specialty." (Student, Year 2)

"I am already passionate about caring for the older adults not just physical health but also other aspects such as emotional and mental aspects. the programme has influenced me to do much more care inclined with the standards of HSE, HIQA and Irish culture." (Student, Year 2)



3.5 Suggestions from Participating Students

Feedback from across both Wave 1 and Wave 2 surveys highlights that while students are highly satisfied with the overall quality and relevance of the programme, there are consistent and practical suggestions to further enhance the learning experience. These focus primarily on improving workload balance, communication, flexibility and strengthening the application of learning and theory to practice.

- ▶ Improve workload balance by spacing assignments and allowing more time for completion.
- ▶ Ensure clear, consistent assessment guidance and provide timely, useful feedback.
- ▶ Strengthen communication and organisation, including earlier timetables and fewer schedule changes.
- ▶ Increase delivery flexibility with more recorded content and scheduling suited to clinical roles.
- ▶ Expand interactive, practice-based learning (e.g. live sessions, case studies).
- ▶ Enhance peer interaction through smaller groups and more discussion opportunities.
- ▶ Further develop leadership, management and practical clinical content.
- ▶ Address logistical challenges such as travel, locations and access to resources.

People
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Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model



4

Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Analysis

4. KIRKPATRICK'S FOUR-LEVEL ANALYSIS

The Kirkpatrick Levels Analysis at this stage indicates that the DiGNI successfully achieved its objectives across all evaluation dimensions. The programme demonstrates

- ▶ Exceptional participant satisfaction with outstanding recommendation scores
- ▶ Successful knowledge acquisition with high application rates in practice
- ▶ Widespread behavioural change leading to improved quality of care
- ▶ Significant organisational impact through career advancement and continued professional development

Level 1 – Reaction (Participant Satisfaction and Engagement)

Participants reported consistently high satisfaction with the programme, with “very satisfied” ratings increasing from 72% pre-programme to 82% post-programme. Content relevance remained high, with 85% rating the content as “very relevant”. The programme achieved an exceptional mean recommendation score of 8/10. These findings demonstrate that the DiGNI was both engaging and perceived as directly applicable to participants’ professional contexts.

Kirkpatrick Level	Dimension	Metric	Pre-Programme Year 2 (Wave 1)	Post-Programme Year 2 (Wave 2)	Outcome
Level 1: Reaction	Overall Programme Satisfaction	Very Satisfied	64/89 (72%)	53/65 (82%)	Significant improvement in satisfaction
Level 1: Reaction	Content Relevance	Very Relevant	81/89 (91%)	55/65 (85%)	High relevance maintained
Level 1: Reaction	Programme Recommendation	Mean Score (0-10)	Not measured	53/64 (83%) Active Promoters	Outstanding recommendation score

Level 2 – Learning (Knowledge, Skills and Confidence)

The programme significantly enhanced participants' professional confidence, with 62% rating themselves as "extremely confident" by programme end. Substantial skill gains were reported, with 71% noting that their expertise had "much improved." Most notably, 97% of participants indicated they had successfully applied the knowledge gained directly in their workplace, reflecting strong learning transfer.

Kirkpatrick Level	Dimension	Metric	Pre-Programme Year 2 (Wave 1)	Post-Programme Year 2 (Wave 2)	Outcome
Level 2: Learning	Professional Confidence	Extremely Confident	Not measured	40/65 (62%)	Enhanced professional confidence
Level 2: Learning	Expertise Development	Much Improved	Not measured	46/65 (71%)	Significant skill enhancement
Level 2: Learning	Knowledge Application	Applied in Workplace	Not measured	62/65 (97%)	Excellent knowledge transfer

Level 3 – Behaviour (Application in Practice)

Behavioural change was evident, with 58% of participants implementing tangible changes in their practice following the programme. The impact on care quality was particularly strong, with 92% reporting improvements attributable to the training. This demonstrates that learning outcomes translated effectively into real-world practice, leading to meaningful changes in service delivery.

Kirkpatrick Level	Dimension	Metric	Pre-Programme (Wave 1)	Post-Programme (Wave 2)	Outcome
Level 3: Behaviour	Practice Changes	Implemented Changes	Not measured	38/65 (58%)	High rate of practice transformation
Level 3: Behaviour	Quality of Care Impact	Reported Improvements	Not measured	59/65 (92%)	Widespread care quality improvements

Level 4 – Results (Organisational and Career Impact)

The programme yielded measurable benefits at the organisational and professional levels. Almost one third of participants (31%) reported career progression through promotion or new roles. Furthermore, 91% felt better positioned to achieve their career goals and 83% intended to pursue further education, indicating that the programme acted as a catalyst for sustained professional growth and sectoral capacity building.

Kirkpatrick Level	Dimension	Metric	Pre-Programme (Wave 1)	Post-Programme (Wave 2)	Outcome
Level 4: Results	Career Progression	Promoted/ New Role	Not measured	20/65 (31%)	Significant career advancement
Level 4: Results	Career Aspirations	Better Placed to Achieve	Not measured	59/65 (91%)	Strong career goal advancement
Level 4: Results	Future Development	Planning Further Education	Not measured	49/59 (83%)	Sustained professional development



5

Perspectives of Participating Nursing Homes

5. PERSPECTIVES OF PARTICIPATING NURSING HOMES

This section of the report focuses on the views of participating nursing homes in Year 2. The survey included responses from both individual nursing homes and nursing home groups at the beginning phase of the initiative. Most respondents represented single nursing homes (30), with a smaller proportion from larger groups (1). Respondents held a variety of roles, including Directors of Nursing/Persons in Charge and other senior management positions.

5.1 Overall Satisfaction

Of the 31 nursing homes that submitted survey responses, 26 also had one or more nurses participate in the first year of the programme. Although 31 nursing homes submitted survey responses, not all respondents answered every question. As a result, the total number of responses varies across survey questions.

As in Year 1, a significant majority of respondents reported being very satisfied with the participation of their nurse(s) in the initiative.

TABLE 5: How satisfied are you with the participation of your nurse in the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative?

Satisfaction Level	Count	Percentage
Very satisfied	23	82%
Somewhat satisfied	4	14%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0	0%
Somewhat dissatisfied	0	0%
Very dissatisfied	1	4%
Total	28	100%

Some of the benefits cited by nursing homes include the significant increase in clinical knowledge, skills and evidence-based practice. Other benefits include increased confidence, leadership capacity, improved teamwork, communication and organisational culture and a greater capacity to meet the complex needs of older adults.

The sole reason cited for dissatisfaction was that the participating nurse had withdrawn from the programme



"I feel there is no fault with the course, but staff commit themselves without gauging the commitment and academic ability required. Maybe there should be more rigorous screening." (Nursing Home, Year 2)

5.2 Support Provided

Similar to the feedback from Year 1, 90% of nursing homes indicated that LHP Skillnet provided adequate support throughout the programme. Only a small number reported uncertainty regarding the support provided. The application process was frequently described as smooth and straightforward. Respondents highlighted clear communication, timely responses and a supportive environment. LHP Skillnet was praised for providing funding, guidance and responsiveness.

5.3 Quality of Care

63% of responses noted having observed improvements in the quality of care provided by the nurse(s) who are participating in the initiative, with a further 33% noting that it is too early to tell. One response noted there was no improvement in quality of care, but this was due to the student dropping out of the course before completion.



"[The nurse] started delivering more person centred trainings and orientation to the staff members, care with integrity and active staff huddle sessions which is beneficial for the residents." (Nursing Home, Year 2)

As in Year 1, respondents in Year 2 reported a range of tangible impacts arising from the programme, with strong evidence of learning being transferred into practice and contributing to measurable improvements in resident care. Managers highlighted that participating nurses introduced new practices such as person-centred staff training, structured orientation sessions and active daily huddles, all of which strengthened communication and consistency of care. Several noted concrete clinical enhancements, including updated personal-preference care plans, improved use of geriatric care pathways (e.g., ICPOP, ANP referrals, community integrated care teams) and more proactive comprehensive assessments and Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) collaboration.

Leadership development was also evident, with nurses demonstrating increased responsibility and management capability. One home reported the rollout of a falls-prevention programme, dementia-care improvements, pressure ulcer prevention protocols and medication-review processes. Overall, the Year 2 data show that the programme continues to drive practical, evidence-based improvements across clinical care, leadership and organisational practice.

TABLE 6: Have you observed any of the following changes since your nurse(s) participated in the Initiative?

Changes in nurse(s) observed	Frequency	Percentage of responding Nursing Homes mentioning observed change
Increased use of evidence-based practices	24	83%
Enhanced resident assessment skills	23	79%
Improved dementia care	21	72%
Improved communication with residents	20	69%
More effective fall prevention strategies	18	62%
Better medication management	14	48%
Other	4	14%
Total	29	-

5.4 Study-Work Balance

93% of nursing homes that responded to the survey reported that they provided practical workplace accommodations to support the nurse's participation, with the most common measures cited being adjusted work schedules/rosters, paid study leave (often ranging from a few days to 10 days) and flexible working hours.

A few noted additional supports such as mentorship, academic support and provision of study facilities at work, while a small number reported providing no support. Overall, the main form of assistance was enabling attendance through schedule flexibility and paid study leave.



5.5 Impact on Recruitment, Retention and Staff Morale

60% of respondents believed that the initiative would have a positive impact on both recruitment and 63% believed it will improve retention of gerontological nurses.

TABLE 7: Do you feel that the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative will have a positive impact on your ability to recruit gerontological nurses?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	18	60%
Too early to tell	11	37%
No	1	3%
TOTAL	30	100%

TABLE 8: Will the Initiative have a positive impact on your ability to retain gerontological nurses?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	19	63%
It is too early to tell	9	30%
No	2	7%
TOTAL	30	100%

43% of respondents also observed a positive effect on staff morale, with another 43% stating it was too early to tell.

TABLE 9: Has participation in the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative affected staff morale?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	13	43%
Too early to tell	13	43%
No	4	13%
TOTAL	30	100%

The qualitative feedback reinforced the quantitative findings, with respondents citing increased knowledge, confidence and leadership among participating nurses. Overall, the initiative was seen as a valuable tool for professional development and staff retention.

5.6 Expanding to Other Specialisms

The majority of respondents felt the initiative should be expanded to other specialisms, with Dementia Care and Tissue Viability most frequently mentioned, followed by Palliative/End-of-Life Care, nurse prescribing and other areas relevant to gerontological nursing.

“I believe this initiative could be successfully scaled to other nursing specialisms such as Dementia Care, Tissue Viability, Palliative Care, Infection Prevention and Control and Clinical Leadership. Providing fully funded postgraduate education supports the development of specialist knowledge and skills, which can directly improve the quality and safety of resident care.” (Director of Nursing, Year 2)

Participants highlighted that broadening access to funded postgraduate education would enhance staff knowledge and skills, improve resident outcomes, particularly in areas such as dementia management and wound care and support professional development. Many also noted that increasing access to such opportunities could help address barriers such as cost, while improving staff retention, job satisfaction and career progression. Overall, there was clear consensus that extending this model across additional specialisms would be highly beneficial for both staff and resident care.



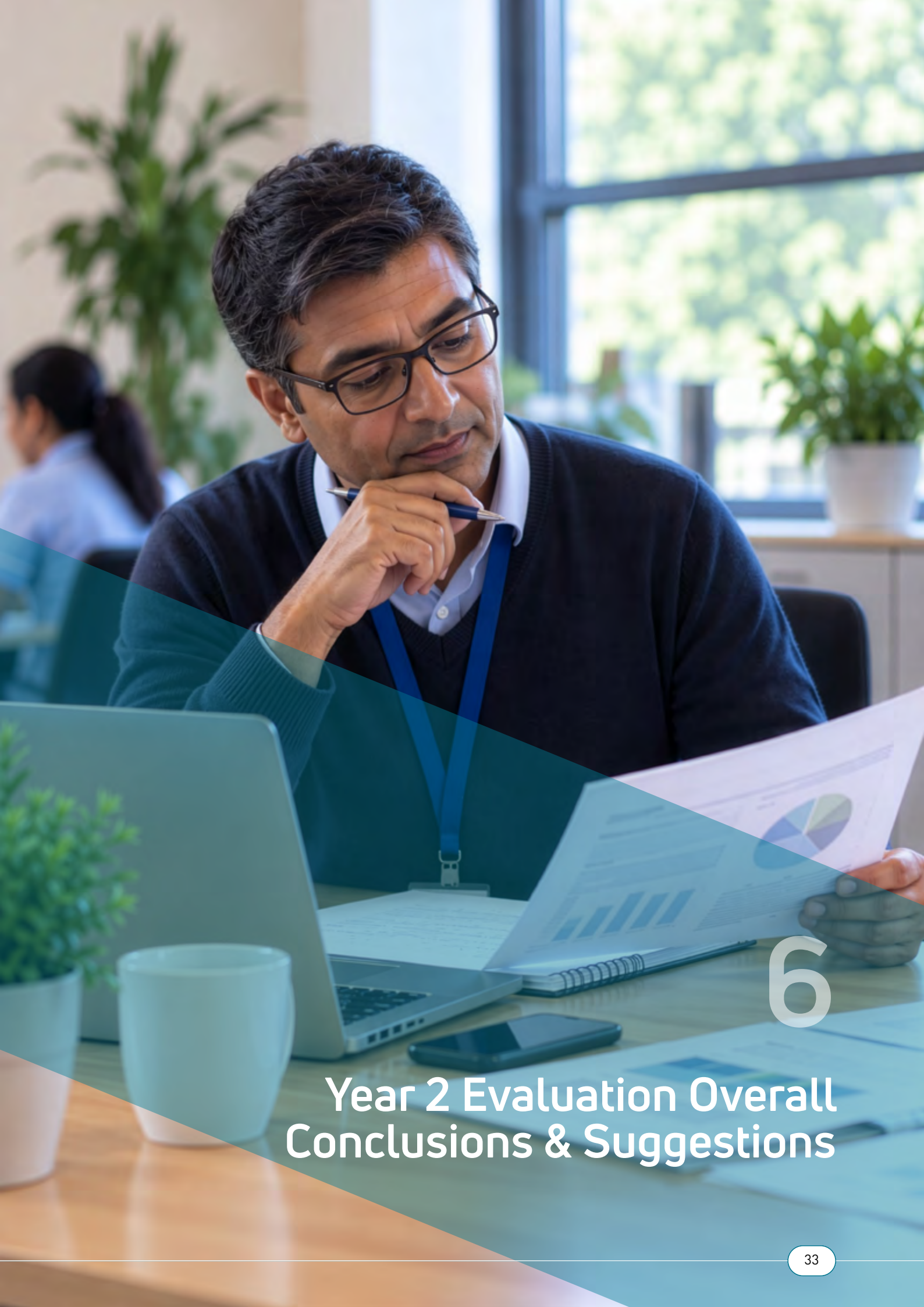
5.7 Suggestions by Nursing Home Respondents

The Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative is highly valued among participating nursing homes, with strong satisfaction reported regarding nurse participation and the support provided by LHP Skillnet. The programme has led to perceived improvements in care quality, staff knowledge and morale. Placements have been impactful, though some logistical challenges remain, particularly around scheduling, timetabling and the limited number of funded places.

Respondents offered a range of suggestions to improve the initiative, with several key themes emerging. Many emphasised the need for greater flexibility, including set schedules, blended or online learning options and protected study time to better support those balancing full-time work. Increased funding and a higher number of funded places were also mentioned, as well as the importance of maintaining equitable access for nursing home staff.

Participants also suggested enhancing practical learning through hands-on sessions and stronger links between theory and practice. Improvements in organisation and communication, particularly between colleges, employers and students, were noted, as well as the value of clearer progression pathways and career recognition following completion.

Additional recommendations included better screening of candidates and slower course pacing (possibly offering the course over 2 years instead of 1). Overall, respondents viewed the initiative positively and felt these enhancements would strengthen participation, learning outcomes and impact on practice.



6

Year 2 Evaluation Overall Conclusions & Suggestions

6. YEAR 2 EVALUATION OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The Year 2 evaluation provides strong evidence that the DiGNI programme continues to deliver meaningful impact across participants, organisations and the wider long-term care sector. High levels of satisfaction, coupled with strong knowledge application and practice change, demonstrate that the programme is effectively translating learning into improved care delivery. Evidence of career progression and increased professional confidence further highlights its value as a workforce development initiative.

While it remains early to fully assess long-term system impacts, the findings indicate that DiGNI is contributing positively to care quality, staff development and workforce sustainability and represents a scalable model for specialist education in the sector.

Year 2 findings build on strong Year 1 results, showing a transition from early indicators of impact (e.g. knowledge application and satisfaction) to more embedded practice change and emerging organisational benefits across the sector.

Suggestions

1. Supporting Nursing Homes and Participants

- ▶ Enhance onboarding and early-stage support to improve participant readiness and navigation of programme requirements.
- ▶ Maintain the blended delivery model, while strengthening access to protected study time and reinforcing employer support mechanisms.

2. System-Level Improvements: Leadership and Programme Expansion

- ▶ Sustain and scale the programme to meet growing demand, including expansion into additional clinical specialisms.
- ▶ Increase capacity and funded places to maximise reach and sector-wide impact.
- ▶ Strengthen leadership development pathways to support career progression and build leadership capability within the sector.
- ▶ Continue evaluation and longitudinal tracking of outcomes, particularly in relation to workforce retention, leadership progression and resident care quality, to inform ongoing system improvement and scalability.

APPENDICES

6.1 Wave 1 Survey

1. What is your first name?
2. Unique ID [do not reply to this question]
3. What is your age range?
4. What is your gender?
5. How many years of experience do you have in nursing before starting this programme?
6. Briefly describe your prior experience in gerontological nursing.

Your motivation for joining the Gerontological Nursing Postgraduate Programme

7. What prompted you to consider further education in gerontological nursing?
8. What are your career aspirations and how do you believe this Postgraduate Programme will help you achieve them?
9. How did you first become aware of this Postgraduate Programme?
10. Rank the factors that you consider most important when choosing this Gerontological Nursing Postgraduate Programme over others?
11. Did you consider any alternative Postgraduate Programmes or career paths? If so, what were they?

Your Expectations and Goals

12. What were your initial impressions of this Postgraduate Programme based on the information available?
13. What are your expectations of your postgraduate diploma in gerontological nursing?
14. What specific knowledge or skills are you hoping to gain from this Postgraduate Programme?

Application Process

15. Were the application requirements clear and easy to understand?
16. On a scale of 0 - 10, how would you describe your experience of the application process? Net Promoter Score.
17. Did you receive adequate support or guidance from the following during the application process?
18. Did you encounter any challenges or obstacles during the application process? If so, what were they?

Onboarding Experience

19. How would you describe your onboarding experience?
20. Was the information provided during onboarding clear and helpful?
21. Do you think that the orientation adequately prepared you for the programme?

Learning Experience (Initial Impressions)

22. How relevant do you expect the programme content to be to your current or future role as a gerontological nurse?
23. How confident are you that the Gerontological Nursing Postgraduate Programme will be effectively delivered in a blended learning format?
24. Is there sufficient interaction with faculty and other students so far?
25. How satisfied are you with the online learning platforms and resources?
26. Are the learning materials accessible and easy to navigate?

Overall Experience (Initial)

27. How satisfied are you with this Postgraduate Programme overall so far?
28. What aspects of this Postgraduate Programme could be improved?
29. What are the most valuable aspects of this Postgraduate Programme so far?

Phase 2

6.2 Wave 1 Survey of enrolled Nurses - Data Tables

What is Your Age Range?

Response	Percent	Frequency
20-29	8%	7
30-39	60%	53
40-49	23%	20
50-59	9%	8
60+	0%	0
TOTAL	100%	88

What is your gender?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Man	20.5%	18
Woman	78.4%	69
Prefer not to say	1.1%	1
TOTAL	100%	88

How many years of experience do you have in nursing before starting this programme?

Response	Percent	Frequency
0-2	5.6%	5
3-5	6.7%	6
6-10	39.3%	35
11-15	24.7%	22
16+	23.6%	21
TOTAL	100%	89

How did you first become aware of this Postgraduate Programme? (multiple-response question)

Response	Frequency
Professional association	8
Social media	7
Colleagues	26
LHP Skillnet	52
University website	7
Other	6

Rank the factors that you consider most important when choosing this Gerontological Nursing Postgraduate Programme over others?

Response	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Fees covered by LHP Skillnet	36	10	10	7	15
Flexibility	15	23	16	14	10
Reputation	15	16	17	17	13
Curriculum	10	19	21	20	8
Location	2	10	14	20	32

Were the application requirements clear and easy to understand?

Response	Percent (valid)	Frequency
Yes	97%	83
No	1%	1
Partially	2%	2
TOTAL	100%	86

On a scale of 0 - 10, how would you describe your experience of the application process?

Response	Frequency
Promoter	61
Passive	21
Detractor	6
TOTAL	88

Did you receive adequate support or guidance from the following during the application process?

	Yes	No	SD (samp.)	N	Missing	Missing (%)
LHPSkillnet	98.9%	1.1%		89	0	0%
University	92.7%	7%		82	4	4.5%
Colleagues	93.4%	6.6%		61	5	5.6%

Did you encounter any challenges or obstacles during the application process? If so, what were they?

Response	Percent	Frequency
No	90%	76
Yes	10%	8
TOTAL	100%	84

How would you describe your onboarding experience?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Very welcoming	85.4%	76
Somewhat welcoming	9%	8
Neutral	4.5%	4
Somewhat unwelcoming	0%	0
Very unwelcoming	1.1%	1
TOTAL	100%	89

Was the information provided during onboarding clear and helpful?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	86%	97
Partially	3%	3
No	0%	0
TOTAL	89%	100

Do you think that the orientation adequately prepared you for the programme?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Yes	84.3%	75
Partially	13.5%	12
No	2.3%	2
TOTAL	100%	89

How relevant do you expect the programme content to be to your current or future role as a gerontological nurse?

Response	Percent (valid)	Frequency
Very relevant	91%	81
Neutral	1%	1
Somewhat relevant	8%	7
TOTAL	100%	89

How confident are you that the Gerontological Nursing Postgraduate Programme will be effectively delivered in a blended learning format?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Extremely confident	70%	62
Somewhat confident	22%	20
Neutral	8%	7
Somewhat not confident	0%	0
Extremely not confident	0%	0
TOTAL	100%	89

Is there sufficient interaction with faculty and other students so far?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Yes	87.6%	78
No	4.5%	4
Too early to say	3.4%	3
Other	4.5%	4
TOTAL	100%	89

How satisfied are you with the online learning platforms and resources?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Very satisfied	72%	63
Somewhat satisfied	26%	23
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	2%	2
Somewhat dissatisfied	0%	0
Very dissatisfied	0%	0
TOTAL	100%	88

Are the learning materials accessible and easy to navigate?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Yes	85%	76
Partially	15%	13
No	0%	0
TOTAL	100%	89

How satisfied are you with this Postgraduate Programme overall so far?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Very satisfied	72%	64
Somewhat satisfied	22%	20
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	6%	5
Somewhat dissatisfied	0%	0
Very dissatisfied	0%	0
TOTAL	100%	89

6.3 Wave 2 Survey

1. What is your first name?
2. Has your employment status changed since you started the programme (same role, promoted, new role in gerontology, different specialty, seeking employment)

Expectations and Experience

3. Do you feel you are better placed to achieve the career aspirations you identified at the beginning of the programme?
4. How would you rate the relevance of the programme content overall to your current role as a gerontological nurse?
5. How did the full programme content compare to your initial expectations?
6. Which aspects of the programme were most valuable to your professional development?
7. What specific knowledge or skills did you gain from the programme that you use most frequently in practice?
8. How effective was the blended learning format for your learning needs?
9. Rate your satisfaction with support from academic staff and peer interaction
10. Rate your satisfaction with quality of online learning materials and platforms
11. Rate your satisfaction with support from LHP Skillnet
12. How satisfied are you with the programme overall?
13. What aspects of the programme would you change or improve?

Confidence, Skills and Future Career Developments

14. How confident do you now feel in your gerontological nursing role?
15. Rate your current level of expertise in specific role to before the programme
16. Have you been able to apply the knowledge and skills gained from the programme in your workplace?
17. Have you implemented any specific changes in your practice as a result of the programme?
18. If yes, can you share some details?
19. How has the programme impacted the quality of care you provide to older adults?
20. What additional professional development, if any, do you plan to pursue as a result of this programme?
21. How has the programme influenced your commitment to gerontological nursing as a specialty?
22. How likely are you to recommend this programme to other nurses?
23. Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not asked?

6.4 Wave 2 Survey of enrolled Nurses - Data Tables

Has your employment status changed since you started the programme (same role, promoted, new role in gerontology, different specialty, seeking employment)

Response	Percent	Frequency
I am in the same role	64.3%	42
I was promoted	23.1%	15
I have a new role in gerontology	7.69%	5
I have a new role in a different specialty	1.5%	1
I am currently seeking employment	3.1%	2
TOTAL (valid)	100%	65

Do you feel you are better placed to achieve the career aspirations you identified at the beginning of the programme?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Yes	90.7%	59
Maybe	6.2%	4
No	1.5%	1
Other	1.5%	1
TOTAL	100%	65

How would you rate the relevance of the programme content overall to your current role as a gerontological nurse?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Very relevant	85%	55
Relevant	15%	10
TOTAL	100%	65

How effective was the blended learning format for your learning needs?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Very effective	69.2%	45
Somewhat effective	24.6%	16
Neither effective nor ineffective	4.6%	3
Somewhat ineffective	1.5%	1
TOTAL	100%	65

Rate your satisfaction with support from academic staff and peer interaction

Response	Percent	Frequency
Very satisfied	75.4%	49
Somewhat satisfied	18.5%	12
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	4.6%	3
Somewhat dissatisfied	1.5%	1
TOTAL	100%	65

Rate your satisfaction with quality of online learning materials and platforms

Response	Percent	Frequency
Very satisfied	78%	51
Somewhat satisfied	20%	13
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0%	0
Somewhat dissatisfied	2%	1
TOTAL	100%	65

Rate your satisfaction with support from LHP Skillnet

Response	Percent (valid)	Frequency
Very satisfied	95%	62
Somewhat satisfied	3%	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	2%	1
TOTAL	100%	65

How satisfied are you with the programme overall?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Very satisfied	82%	53
Somewhat satisfied	15%	10
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3%	2
Somewhat dissatisfied	0%	0
TOTAL	100%	65

How confident do you now feel in your gerontological nursing role?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Extremely confident	61.5%	40
Somewhat confident	33.9%	22
Neutral	4.6%	3
TOTAL	100%	65

Rate your current level of expertise in specific role to before the programme

Response	Percent	Frequency
Much improved	70.8%	46
Improved	26.2%	17
The same as when I started	3.1%	2
TOTAL	100%	65

Have you been able to apply the knowledge and skills gained from the programme in your workplace?

Response	Percent (valid)	Frequency
Yes	96.9%	62
Maybe	3.1%	2
TOTAL	100%	64

Have you implemented any specific changes in your practice as a result of the programme?

Response	Percent	Frequency
Yes	58%	38
Maybe	20%	13
No	22%	14
TOTAL	100%	65

How likely are you to recommend this programme to other nurses?

Response	Percent (valid)	Frequency
Promoters (8-10)	83%	53
Passives (6-7)	14%	9
Detractors (1-5)	3%	2
TOTAL	100%	64

6.5 Nursing Home Survey

1. Are you responding on behalf of an individual nursing home or a Nursing Home Group?
2. What Nursing Home are you representing?
3. What is your role in your Nursing Home?
4. How satisfied are you with the participation of your nurse in the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative?
5. Did you encounter any challenges in supporting your nurse to participate in the Initiative?
6. If yes, please describe the challenges
7. How did you support your nurse's participation? (e.g., adjusted work schedules, paid study leave, covered travel costs, etc.)
8. Did LHP Skillnet provide adequate support throughout the Initiative?
9. If no, please explain
10. What Nursing Home Group are you representing?
11. What is your role in your Nursing Home Group?
12. What Nursing Homes within your group are participating on the Initiative? (list all and separate with a comma)
13. How satisfied are you with the participation of your nurse(s) in the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative?
14. Does your reply to the last question apply to all participating nursing homes in the group?
15. If no, please describe the differences in satisfaction across the nursing homes.
16. Did you encounter any challenges in supporting your nurse(s) to participate in the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative?
17. If yes, please describe the challenges²
18. How did you support your nurses' participation? (e.g., adjusted work schedules, paid study leave, covered travel costs, etc.)
19. Did LHP Skillnet provide adequate support throughout the Initiative?²
20. If no, please explain²
21. Have you observed any improvements in the quality of care provided by the nurse(s) who are participating in the Initiative? (do you expect, early indications of impact, improvement)
22. If yes, please provide specific examples
23. Have you observed any of the following changes since your nurse(s) participated in the Initiative?
24. Have you noticed any changes in resident satisfaction since the nurses participated in the Initiative?
25. If yes, please describe
26. Do you feel that the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative will have a positive impact on your ability to recruit gerontological nurses?
27. Will the Initiative have a positive impact on your ability to retain gerontological nurses?
28. Has participation in the Diploma for Gerontological Nursing Initiative affected staff morale?
29. Do you feel that this Initiative (i.e. a fully funded place on a postgraduate qualification) could be scaled out to other specialisms, for example Dementia Care or Tissue Viability.
30. How effective was the communication and collaboration between the Higher Education Institute, LHP Skillnet, and your participating nursing home(s)?

31. What has been the biggest benefit of the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative for your nursing home so far?
32. What are your suggestions for improving the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative?
33. Do you have any other comments or feedback you would like to share about the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative?

6.6 Nursing Home Survey – Data Tables

Are you responding on behalf of an individual nursing home or a nursing home group?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Nursing home group	1	3%
A Single Nursing Home	30	97%
TOTAL	31	100%

What is your role in your Nursing Home?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Director of Nursing	14	48%
Person in Charge	5	17%
Assistant Director of Nursing	3	10%
Practice development Nurse/co-ordinator	2	7%
Clinical and operational director	1	3%
Other	4	14%
TOTAL	29	100%

Did you have nurse(s) in the first Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	26	90%
No	3	10%
I don't know	0	0%
TOTAL	29	100%

Did you offer any supports to your nurse (s) so they could participate in the Initiative? (e.g., adjusted work schedules, paid study leave, covered travel costs, etc.)

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	27	93.1%
No	1	3.4%
Don't know	1	3.4%
TOTAL	29	100%

Did LHP Skillnet provide adequate support throughout the Initiative?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	26	90%
No	0	0%
Don't know	3	10%
TOTAL	29	100%

How satisfied are you with the participation of your nurse(s) in the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very satisfied	23	82.1%
Somewhat satisfied	4	14.3%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0	0%
Somewhat dissatisfied	0	0%
Very dissatisfied	1	3.6%
TOTAL	28	100%

Have you observed any improvements in the quality of care provided by the nurse(s) who are participating in the Initiative? (do you expect, early indications of impact, improvement)

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	19	63.3%
It is too early to tell	10	33.3%
No	1	3.3%
TOTAL	30	100%

Have you noticed any changes in resident satisfaction since the nurses participated in the Initiative?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	51.7%
Maybe	9	31%
No	5	17.2%
TOTAL	29	100%

Do you feel that the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative will have a positive impact on your ability to recruit gerontological nurses?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	18	60%
Too early to tell	11	36.7%
No	1	3.3%
TOTAL	30	100%

Will the Initiative have a positive impact on your ability to retain gerontological nurses?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	19	63.3%
It is too early to tell	9	30%
No	2	6.7%
TOTAL	30	100%

Has participation in the Diploma for Gerontological Nursing Initiative affected staff morale?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	13	43.3%
Too early to tell	13	43.3%
No	4	13.3%
TOTAL	30	100%

How effective was the communication and collaboration between the Higher Education Institute, LHP Skillnet, and your participating nursing home(s)?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very effective	20	66.7%
Somewhat effective	5	16.7%
Neither effective nor ineffective	5	16.7%
Somewhat ineffective	0	0%
Very ineffective	0	0%
TOTAL	30	100%

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