



LHP Skillnet DiGNI Phase 3 Impact Summary Report

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Executive Summary

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the recommendation by the Nursing Homes Expert panel, the Minister for Mental Health and Older People established a Postgraduate Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative in early 2022, funded by the Department of Health and managed by LHP Skillnet. The initiative commenced in 2022 in public and voluntary nursing homes and was extended to the private nursing home sector in early 2024. The Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative (DiGNI) offers QQI-Level 9 postgraduate training for a nurse from every private nursing home in Ireland over 2 years. 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.

LHP Skillnet commissioned evaluation reports for year 1 and year 2 of the course, which can be accessed here:

Phase 1 Report www.lhpskillnet.ie/publications/digni-eva-report-1

Phase 2 Report www.lhpskillnet.ie/publications/digni-eva-report-2

A final impact report was also commissioned that reviews the impact on the first cohort of students, one year post graduation and a summary analysis of the nursing home responses on impact across both years. This impact report provides a summary of the impact of the course focusing on post graduation impact for students and the combined responses of nursing homes that had students in cohort 1 and cohort 2.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Strong recommendation for the course by graduates:** 97% of nurses who responded to the post impact survey would recommend the course to other nurses, a near universal recommendation of the course. 88% of the nursing home respondents who sent students on the course were very satisfied with the course, and 11% somewhat satisfied. The evaluation reports for year 1 and 2 found that the course was seen as highly relevant to students, nursing home work, and professional development.
2. **High value of the course for students and nursing homes:** 91% of nursing home respondents wanted to see a scaling out of the initiative in future years, and 98% of post impact respondents saw it as extremely or very valuable to their professional development.
3. **Adequate support and effective collaboration by LHP Skillnet:** 86% of nursing home respondents stated that LHP Skillnet had provided adequate support throughout the initiative. 75% found the communication and collaboration between themselves, LHP Skillnet and the Higher Education Institute to be very effective, and 11% felt it was somewhat effective.
4. **Knowledge application:** 92% of nurses responding to the post-impact survey stated that they continued to use the skills gained very often or often in their clinical practice. The evaluation reports for year 1 and 2 found that the most valued skills by students were in leadership and management, but also in people-centred care.

5. **Practice transformation:** 75% of post-graduation impact respondents felt that the programme had a significant impact on the quality of care that they provided, and 75% of respondents provided examples of how it continues to influence their practice one year after completion.
6. **Career advancement:** 60% of nurses responding to the post-graduation impact survey experienced career progression through promotion or new roles a year after completing the course, and 85% stated that the programme had contributed to their career development a great deal or a lot.
7. **Positive impact on recruitment and retention:** 69% of nursing-home respondents stated that the initiative would positively impact recruitment and 68% believed it would positively impact retention. 80% of nurses responding to the post-graduation impact survey said they were very likely or likely to remain in the nursing home sector 3-5 years after completing the course.
8. **Improved quality of care:** 64% of nursing home respondents reported immediate improvements in the quality of care, and 42% reported positive changes in resident satisfaction with nurses who participated in the course.
9. **The key benefits for nursing homes:** The key benefits identified by nursing homes at a qualitative level were improved resident care through the application of the skills learned, increased knowledge and skills of staff and improved staff morale, professionalism and retention.
10. **The key benefits to students:** The key ways the course has positively influenced nurses responding to the post-graduation impact study based on qualitative feedback was improved knowledge, leadership and confidence, resident understanding and career progression.
11. **Strong educational outcomes:** 55% of nurses responding to the post-graduation impact survey undertook further education in the following year.

Overall, the findings were very positive, there was a strong demand for expanding the course to other specialisms and the majority of participants stated that would recommend the course to other nurses. Some areas for enhancement were identified around expanding access, enhancing logistical support from HEIs, integrating the programme with formal career progression frameworks and expanding the course offering.

This impact summary provides strong evidence of DiGNI's effectiveness in enhancing professional competencies, supporting career advancement, improving staff recruitment and retention and improving quality of care for older adults.





2

Context

2. CONTEXT

The Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative (DiGNI) was managed by LHP Skillnet and delivered in collaboration with four Higher Education Institutes - Atlantic Technological University (ATU), Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, University College Cork (UCC), and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The initiative aimed to provide every private nursing home in Ireland with access to one Post Graduate Diploma in Gerontological Nursing programme with the aim of enhancing the knowledge, skills and expertise of nurses specialising in gerontological care.

DiGNI was designed to build and retain nurse expertise within the private nursing home sector, addressing both immediate workforce development needs and longer-term sector sustainability. DiGNI specifically targeted nurses working in private nursing homes across Ireland, at various career stages, from those new to gerontological nursing to experienced practitioners.

By providing fully funded access to specialised education, the initiative sought to remove financial barriers that have historically limited professional development opportunities for nurses working in long-term care settings. The design of DiGNI reflected understanding of adult learning principles, workplace-based education, and the specific competency requirements for excellence in older adult care.

DiGNI included a comprehensive support structure with LHP Skillnet as the primary coordinator. Participating nursing homes demonstrated their commitment through various support mechanisms, including adjusted work schedules, paid study leave, and coverage of travel costs for their participating nurses.

Table 1: Number of participating nurses and nursing homes in the DiGNI programme

Participants	Year 1	Year 2
Nursing homes	198	200*
Students attending	198	200

*60 nursing homes had students attending in both year 1 and year 2, so the total number of nursing homes who participated overall is 338



3

Methodology of Impact Summary

3. METHODOLOGY OF IMPACT SUMMARY

The impact summary is based on the one year post-graduation impact survey of cohort 1 nurses and an analysis of the combined year 1 and year 2 nursing home surveys focused on impact measures. The results from evaluation reports for year 1 and year 2 were also reviewed to provide additional impact data as appropriate.

- ▶ **Post-graduation impact survey of enrolled nurses:** A survey of cohort 1 students was conducted one year after completion of the course. Of the original 198 nurses enrolled in the course, 64 responded to the post-graduation impact survey. Full tables are included in the appendix.
- ▶ **Combined analysis of impact data from participating nursing homes surveys:** Two structured surveys were circulated to nursing homes who participated in DiGNI in year 1 and year 2 on completion of the courses by staff members. The combined responses for both years have been analysed to provide a full picture of the impact across both the years. 82 out of the total 338 participating nursing homes responded to the survey. 60 nursing homes had students attending in both year 1 and year 2 and 8 of these nursing homes responded to the survey for both cohorts of students.
- ▶ **Review of evaluation reports for year 1 and year 2:** Two evaluation reports were completed based on survey data for students pre and post course completion for cohort 1 and 2 and nursing home surveys on course completion for cohort 1 and 2. The evaluation for year 1 also included interviews with the Higher Education institutions. The findings of these reports can be found here: www.lhpskillnet.ie/publications/digni-eva-report-1. These findings are referenced where appropriate in this impact summary.



Listening
Analysing
Learning
Improving
together

- People
- Practice
- Impact
- Future

4

Impact Summary
Report Findings

4. IMPACT SUMMARY REPORT FINDINGS

This impact summary report outlines the overall impact of the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative (DiGNI) on the first cohort of students one year post-graduation and an analysis of the full impact for nursing homes across both years.

The findings are presented in a progressive framework, moving from the participant and nursing homes immediate responses to the programme through to longer-term impacts on nurses, nursing homes, and residents. The results are structured under four key headings as follows:

1. **Reaction-** Satisfaction with the course and recommendations.
2. **Learning** – What knowledge and skills were transferred.
3. **Behaviour-** How participants' behaviours changed.
4. **Results-** What were the impacts for students, nursing homes and residents.

The year 1 and year 2 evaluation reports highlighted that students found the course highly relevant to nursing home practice and professional development, with positive feedback on its structure and delivery. The post-graduation impact survey of nurses from cohort 1 demonstrated a very strong endorsement of the programme, with participants reporting a significant positive impact on their professional development, knowledge, application of learning, and intention to remain working within the sector.

Nursing homes that had staff enrolled in the programme also reported very high levels of satisfaction, noting improvements in staff capability, quality of care, resident satisfaction, staff morale, and retention. Findings from both the cohort 1 post-graduation impact survey and the combined analysis of participating nursing homes reinforce the evaluation outcomes, demonstrating that the programme was highly relevant, enhanced staff knowledge and skills, supported improvements in care delivery and practice, and contributed to staff progression and retention within the sector in both the short and longer term.

4.1 Reaction: Satisfaction and recommendations

4.1.1 Satisfaction with the course

Nursing homes: The majority of nursing home respondents (88%) were very satisfied with the programme, with 11% reporting that they were somewhat satisfied. Only one respondent stated that they were 'dissatisfied' across both years, due to the participating student dropping out prior to completing.

The support provided by LHP Skillnet throughout was seen as adequate by 86% of nursing home respondents, with the remainder being unaware of the support. The collaboration between LHP

Skillnet, HEIs and nursing homes was seen as very or somewhat effective by 86% of nursing home respondents. In the qualitative responses the application process was frequently described as smooth and straightforward, with clear communication, timely responses, and a supportive environment.

Students: Across years 1 and 2, 83% of students reported high levels of satisfaction with the programme. Evaluation Reports 1 and 2 highlighted that they found the course content was relevant to their roles, delivered to a high standard and made a meaningful contribution to participants' professional development. Participants also reported increased confidence in their practice, reflecting the programme's positive impact on both their knowledge and professional development.

4.1.2 Support and endorsement for the course

Participant likelihood to recommend: 97% of nurses responding to the post-graduation impact survey would recommend the programme to other nurses considering professional development. The near universal likelihood to recommend the course one year post-graduation completion reflects that the course had had a positive impact on the respondents' professional development and was seen to be relevant to their roles.

Nursing homes: The perceived value of the course to nursing homes is reflected in the support offered by nursing home employers to participants. 93% of responding nursing homes reported that they provided practical workplace accommodations to support the nurse's participation through schedule flexibility and paid study leave (note only asked in year 2 survey). Furthermore, 60 nursing homes who participated in year 1 supported staff members to take up a place in year 2 indicating a perceived benefit to having this specialist qualification for the nursing home.

4.1.3 Conclusion

Overall, satisfaction levels were very high across all groups, particularly in relation to programme delivery, support structures, and course quality. Students reported a strong likelihood to recommend the programme, while most nursing homes actively facilitated participation through workplace support.

Kirkpatrick Level	Dimension	Metric	Combined nursing home survey	Nurses' post-graduation impact survey	Outcome
Level 1: Reaction	Overall Programme Satisfaction	Very Satisfied	(65/74) 88%	-	Very satisfied with the course
Level 1: Reaction	Programme Recommendation	Yes, would recommend	-	(62/64) 97%	Outstanding recommendation score

4.2 Learning: Knowledge, skills and confidence

4.2.1 Knowledge and skill development

Students: 98% of respondents to the post-graduation impact survey saw the course as being extremely or very valuable to their professional development. 75% of respondents also outlined ways in which the skills gained continued to influence their role.

The qualitative responses highlighted the ongoing influence of the programme for nurses who participated. One year after completing the course, students responded that the skills gained continued to have a positive impact on their work in the following areas, similar to those identified in the evaluation reports for year 1 and 2:

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



“One way the programme continues to influence my work is through its emphasis on reflective leadership and continuous quality improvement. It has strengthened my ability to critically evaluate practice, make evidence-informed decisions, and foster a culture of learning and accountability within healthcare teams. This approach continues to guide my leadership practice and supports the delivery of safe, person-centred, and high-quality care.”

(Nurse, year 1 post-graduation impact)

One year after completing the course, the ability to train and transfer the skills to other team members also emerged as a benefit of the course.



“I am able to upskill my staff with knowledge gained from the course.” (Nurse, Year 1 post-graduation impact)

Nursing homes: Respondents across both years reported a significant increase in specialist gerontological knowledge and skills, which has been applied directly to improve day-to-day care and resident outcomes. Nursing homes valued having a qualified nurse on the team providing leadership and improved decision-making support.

4.2.2 Applying skills and knowledge from the programme

The knowledge gained during the programme was successfully applied to the workplaces by students, with 92% of nurses who responded to the post-graduation impact survey reporting that they continue to apply their learning in their roles. This finding demonstrates that the strong transfer of learning identified in the year 1 evaluation report, where 95% of students reported successfully applying their knowledge in practice, has been largely sustained over time. These results highlight the ongoing sustainability and relevance of the course content to workplace challenges in the nursing home sector.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very often	33	52%
Often	25	40%
Sometimes	4	6%
Rarely	1	2%
Never	0	0%
Total	63	100%

As well as enhancing skills, an improvement in professional confidence was mentioned in the qualitative section of the survey as a lasting impact of the course.

"I feel more confident in assessing residents and taking my clinical decisions. I believe that the course helped me to grow personally and a new insight into gerontology nursing. I am now confident to say that I am a Gerontology nurse." (Student, Year 1 post-graduation impact)

Participation in the programme was seen to develop students' confidence and appetite to develop skills and knowledge further. The post-graduation impact survey highlighted that over half (55%) of those who responded to the survey had undertaken further education or qualifications in the year since completing the course.

TABLE 3: Since completing the programme, have you undertaken any further education or qualifications?

Response	Frequency	Percent
PHD	1	2%
Masters degree	18	28%
Postgraduate certificate	4	6%
CPD/ Short course	12	19%
None	29	45%
Total	64	100%

4.2.3 Conclusion

Based on the responses from the post-graduation impact survey and nursing home surveys, participants gained valuable skills during the programme, the confidence to apply those skills to the workplace, and continue to improve their knowledge and skills with ongoing education.

Kirkpatrick Level	Dimension	Metric	Post-graduation Impact Survey	Outcome
Level 2: Learning	Expertise Development	Ongoing learning	(35/64) 55%	Increased skill enhancement
Level 2: Learning	Knowledge Application	Applied in Workplace	(58/63) 92%	Excellent knowledge transfer

4.3 Behaviours: Transfer of learning to the workplace

A key element of the design of DiGNI was to combine experience-based wisdom with current best practice approaches. Findings from the year 1 and year 2 evaluations indicate that this comprehensive professional development programme has significantly influenced participants' practice and has been directly applied within workplace settings. The post-graduation impact survey and review of the impact from nursing home respondents highlights that this approach has led to sustained transfer of learnings by participants, practice changes across nursing homes and an immediate improvement in quality of care across both years.

4.3.1 Practice changes

Students: The evaluation report for year 1 found that on completion of the course 95% of respondents successfully applied their new knowledge to their workplace settings. The post-graduation impact study found that the programme continued to influence the work of nurses who participated, and 75% mentioned specific examples of how they applied their learning.

The key areas of influence identified by participants included the adoption of best practice approaches to elder care (21%), the introduction of more person-centred models of care (17%), and the increased use of evidence-based approaches in practice (15%). Participants also highlighted a significant cultural shift as a lasting outcome of the programme. Over one-third (35%) reported increased confidence in their leadership capabilities, including greater confidence in leading teams, sharing knowledge with colleagues, and making informed decisions.

These findings reflect the practice changes mentioned in the evaluation reports for year 1 and 2. The practice changes mentioned centred on adopting a more person-centred, holistic approach to caring for older adults. Other common themes included;

- ▶ Improving dignity, independence, and meaningful engagement with residents.
- ▶ Tailoring care plans to individual preferences.
- ▶ Integrating evidence-based interventions such as falls prevention programmes, dementia care frameworks, dietary and dining experience enhancements.



"I have further enhanced my person-centred approach to care by applying evidence-based practice to the assessment and management of older adults with complex physical, cognitive, and psychosocial needs. The programme continues to influence my work by supporting clinical decision-making, improving care planning, and promoting a holistic approach to maintaining residents' independence, dignity, and quality of life." (Student, Year 1 post-graduation impact)

4.3.2 Quality of care improvements

Students: There was universal agreement that the course had a positive impact. 97% of post-graduation impact survey respondents stated that it had an impact on quality of care, with 3% saying it had a minor impact. In the evaluation report for year 1, 92% reported impacts on quality of care after staff completed the course, indicating that the improvements in quality of care were sustained.

TABLE 4: In your view, has the programme had a lasting impact on the quality of care you provide?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Significant impact	47	75%
Moderate Impact	14	22%
Minor impact	2	3%
No impact	0	0%
Total	63	100%

Nursing homes: 64% of nursing homes reported an improvement in the quality of care of residents provided by those who had participated in the course, with 32% saying it was too early to tell. It is notable that the impact of the course was seen to be relatively immediate by two thirds of nursing homes.

Of those who responded with specific examples of improvements (58%) a range of clear, tangible impacts arising from the programme was reported, with strong evidence of learning being transferred into practice and contributing to measurable improvements in resident care. Many respondents noted concrete clinical enhancements. It was also noted that staff had a better understanding of elderly care and more confidence in decision making.

Nursing home respondents were asked if they had noticed improvements in a number of key skills since participating in the programme. Many of the responses listed multiple skills being gained by participants, with enhanced resident assessment skills, improved communication with residents and use of evidence based practices being the most common skills mentioned.

TABLE 5: Have you observed any of the following changes since your nurse(s) participated in the Initiative?

N=72

Changes in nurse(s) observed	Frequency	Mentioned by x% of respondents
Enhanced resident assessment skills	59	82%
Improved communication with residents	53	74%
Increased use of evidence-based practices	54	75%
Improved dementia care	48	67%
More effective fall prevention strategies	42	58%
Better medication management	34	47%
Other	6	8%

4.3.3 Conclusion

Based on responses from students and from nursing homes, the course significantly improved gerontological care through implementing changes to practice and sustaining the changes. A positive Impact on quality of care, reported both by students and nursing homes, is one of the most significant benefits of the programme.

Kirkpatrick Level	Dimension	Metric	Nursing home survey	Post-graduation impact survey	Outcome
Level 3: Behaviour	Quality of Care Impact	Reported Improvements	(52/81) 64%	(61/63) 97%	Widespread care quality improvements

4.4 Results: Participant, organisational and societal impacts

The post-graduation impact survey and the nursing home survey responses highlight positive impacts for participants, employees and residents across a number of key areas. The post-graduation impact survey highlighted that 60% of participants reported career progression through promotion or new roles within a year of finishing their course. Furthermore, 98% felt better positioned to achieve their career goals, and 55% were pursuing further education, indicating that the programme acted as a catalyst for sustained professional growth and sectoral capacity building.

4.4.1 Career progression

Students: The programme's impact extends far beyond traditional educational outcomes, demonstrating tangible career advancement opportunities and workplace transformation. The course has led to significant career advancement within a short time frame with 59% of post-graduation impact respondents replying they had received a promotion or started a new role a year after completing the course.

The evaluation report for year 1 assessed pre-course expectations. Many participants who initially expressed interest in management roles, specialised positions, or advanced practice opportunities reported concrete progress toward these goals following programme completion. The post-graduation impact evaluation one year after the course further indicates that the programme met the career progression goals of participants.

TABLE 6: Since completing the course, have you experienced the following?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Increased responsibilities in my role	10	15.6%
Leadership or supervisory roles	9	14.1%
Move to a new organisation	5	7.8%
Promotion to a new role	14	21.9%
No Significant change	26	40.6%
Total	64	100%

84% of students from year 1 who experienced progression in the year since completing the course, responded that the course was a key contributor to this advancement. The qualitative feedback reinforced the quantitative findings, with respondents citing increased knowledge, confidence and leadership among participating nurses.

TABLE 7: To what extent did the programme contribute to your career development?

Response	Frequency	Percent
A great deal	21	32.8%
A lot	33	51.6%
Somewhat	8	12.5%
A little	1	1.6%
Not at all	1	1.6%
Total	64	100%

Overall, 98% of the post-graduation impact survey respondents found the programme to be extremely or very valuable to their professional development in the year since they had completed the course. This indicates that the value was greater than just career progression for the nurses who responded one year after completing the course.

TABLE 8: Looking back, how valuable was the programme for your professional development overall?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Extremely valuable	38	59%
Very valuable	25	39%
Moderately valuable	1	2%
A little valuable	0	0%
Not valuable	0	0%
Total	64	100%

4.4.2 Recruitment and retention

Nursing homes: Most nursing homes (69%) that responded to the survey believed that the initiative would have positive impact on recruitment, with 29% of respondents stating that it is too early to tell. Furthermore, 68% of respondents stated that the programme would have a positive impact on their ability to retain nurses, with 26% saying it is too early to tell. As well as improving recruitment and retention, most nursing homes respondents (52%) reported an immediate improvement in staff morale, with the remaining respondents stating that it was too early to tell.

TABLE 9: 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	56	68.9%
No	2	2.5%
Too early to tell	23	28.8%
Total	81	100%

TABLE 10: Will the initiative have a positive impact on your ability to retain gerontological nurses?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	55	68%
No	5	6%
Too early to tell	21	26%
Total	81	100%

Students: The post-graduation impact survey highlighted that 80% of nurses were very likely or likely to remain working in the nursing home sector for the next 3-5 years, one year after completing the programme. The evaluation reports for year 1 and year 2 highlighted that participating in the course indicated a renewed commitment to working in Gerontology. This arose from a better 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. It also supported a renewed enthusiasm for continued specialisation.

TABLE 11: How likely are you to remain working in the nursing home sector over the next 3-5 years?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very likely	32	50%
Likely	19	30%
Unsure	10	16%
Unlikely	1	1%
Very unlikely	2	3%
Total	64	100%

To support the retention of the upskilled staff, expanded career progression opportunities appear to play a key role in retention in the nursing home sector. 75% of post-graduation impact survey respondents stated that expanded career progression opportunities would encourage them to continue within the sector a great deal or a lot.

TABLE 12: To what extent would expanded career progression opportunities (such as nurse specialist roles or pathways to advanced nursing and prescribing) within the long-term care sector encourage you to continue?

Response	Frequency	Percent
A great deal	27	42%
A lot	21	33%
Somewhat	11	17%
A little	3	5%
Not at all	2	3%
Total	64	100%

4.4.3 Conclusion

The initiative was seen as a valuable tool for professional development by the post-graduation impact survey respondents. For the nursing home sector the benefits were clear in terms of recruitment, retention and staff morale, as well as improving the quality of care and staff professional development.

Kirkpatrick Level	Dimension	Metric	Nursing home surveys	Post-graduation impact survey	Outcome
Level 4: Results	Career Progression	Promoted/ New Role		(38/64) 59%	Strong career advancement
Level 4: Results	Career Aspirations	Valuable for professional development		(63/64) 98%	Strong career goal advancement
Level 4: Results	Staff retention	Positive impact on ability to retain	(56/81) 68%	-	Supporting retention in sector

4.5 Suggestions for the future

Overall the feedback by the post-graduation impact survey nurses and the nursing home respondents was positive with some mentioning suggestions for future improvement. Most suggestions focused on expanding the programme to other areas. The key suggestions were:

Overcoming logistical challenges: Addressing logistical challenges around scheduling to ensure minimum disruption to staffing schedules. They also suggested sending class schedules to managers, allowing time off for assessments, tailoring placements to learner needs, and improving communication between the college and participants.

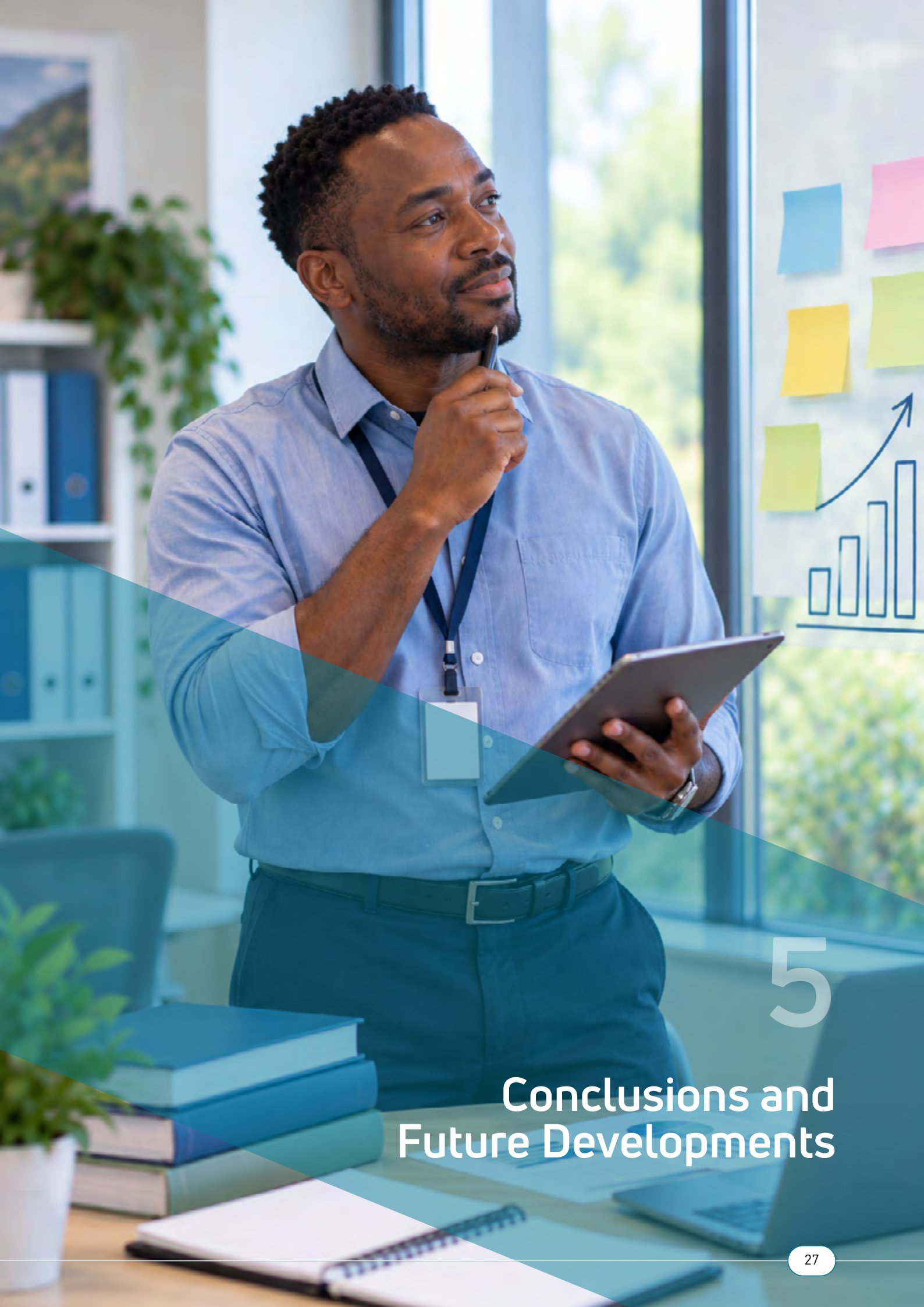
Improving access to suitable candidates: This included increasing the number of funded places, allowing more than one participant per nursing home (particularly large homes), and making the programme available annually to support ongoing staff development and retention. One home suggested improving the screening approach to ensure students are able to cope with academic and work commitments and will not drop out.

Adapting and extending the course structure: It was suggested to offer the programme annually, allowing modular or two-year formats to ease workload, and extending funding to support progression to master's level.

Improved communications and career recognition: 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.

Applying the model to other specialist fields: Overall, respondents saw strong value in applying this fully funded postgraduate model across other specialist fields in older person's care. 94% of nursing home respondents (n=77) who sent students in year 1 or year 2, 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.





5

Conclusions and Future Developments

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

This summary impact report highlights that the DiGNI programme has delivered strong benefits to students, nursing homes and residents within a very short time period. The post-graduation impact survey and nursing homes surveys provide evidence of the impact of the course on enhancing nursing staff skills in gerontology and on building confidence in their roles. Both students and employers were highly satisfied with the programme and would strongly recommend it to other students. The evidence indicates the effectiveness of DiGNI in enhancing professional competencies, supporting career advancement, and ultimately improving the quality of care provided to older adults. For the nursing home sector there is also evidence that it improves the ability to retain and recruit staff.

Using the Kirkpatrick education evaluation framework, it is clear the programme delivers from the design and delivery of relevant skills and knowledge, to the enhancement of skills through to the application of the skills for quality care and ultimately benefits to the residents of the participating nursing homes. This success also demonstrates comprehensive impact that extends from individual satisfaction to organisational and career outcomes. At a system level, it appears to be supporting the recruitment and retention of skilled staff in the sector, and a reinvigoration of the gerontology discipline through increased networking and professional pride in the role.

The high levels of knowledge application and practice change implementation indicate that the programme successfully bridged the theory-practice gap that often challenges professional development initiatives.

The role of LHP Skillnet as a key stakeholder in shaping the course with the Higher Education Institutions to ensure relevance, supporting students and liaising with the nursing homes and colleges appears to have been a key factor in driving satisfaction and optimising completion.

Participants' ability to translate learning into meaningful workplace improvements represents the ultimate validation of programme effectiveness and relevance to contemporary gerontological nursing practice.

Career advancement outcomes provide tangible evidence of programme value for individual participants while addressing sector needs for qualified nursing leadership.

The substantial percentage of participants who have experienced career advancement highlights real and rapid opportunities for professional growth.

5.1 Key learnings for the future

- ▶ Providing accessible learning formats: The combination of blended and online learning allowed nurses to participate while continuing to work and could be considered for future courses in healthcare settings.
- ▶ Support and screening: Several participants noted challenges with programme navigation during early stages, suggesting opportunities for improvement in participant preparation by the HEIs through onboarding webinars and other supports. Nursing homes suggested improved screening of participants to support completion of the course.
- ▶ Leadership and career focus: A key benefit of the course was seen to be leadership development, and career progression was a key motivator in participation. Potentially the course could be integrated with career pathway development and professional recognition systems. This would provide both an upskilling benefit for participants and strong support for commitment and retention across the sector.
- ▶ Expand the programme: Potentially increase the number of places and expand the programme to meet other specialisms.

5.2 Future development

Overall the programme appears to have provided strong benefits for participating students, nursing homes and residents in the nursing home. Findings suggest that the programme contributed positively to professional development, with many participants reporting the immediate application of learning in practice and enhanced opportunities for career progression. The evidence also indicates a positive contribution to staff retention, although participants highlighted that broader factors, including career development pathways and organisational supports, remain important influences on workforce retention.

The impact of the programme appears to have been realised relatively quickly. Most participants reported applying newly acquired knowledge and skills in their workplace shortly after completing the course. Similarly, the majority of responding nursing homes identified positive changes in care practices, staff morale, and workforce stability following staff participation in the programme.

Taken together, these findings provide a strong rationale for the continuation, and potentially the expansion, of the initiative. The evidence suggests that the programme has supported improvements in professional practice, leadership capability, and quality of care across participating nursing homes. Participants also identified opportunities for extending this educational model to other areas of specialist practice, most notably dementia care, tissue viability, and palliative care.





6

Appendix – Data Tables

6. APPENDIX – DATA TABLES

Note: Totals may vary due to rounding

Year 1 post-graduation impact survey data tables

What is your current job role?

N=64	Frequency	Percent
Director of nursing	18	28%
Person in charge	7	11%
Assistant director of Nursing	12	19%
Clinical Nurse manager/ Senior nurse manager	19	30%
Staff nurse	8	13%

Since completing the course, have you experienced the following?

N=64	Frequency	Percent
Increased responsibilities in my role	10	15.6%
Leadership or supervisory roles	9	14.1%
Move to a new organisation	5	7.8%
Promotion to a new role	14	21.9%
No Significant change	26	40.6%

Do you currently supervise, mentor, or manage other staff or students?

N=64	Frequency	Percent
Yes	58	91%
No	6	9%

Since completing the programme, have you undertaken any further education or qualifications?

N=64	Frequency	Percent
PHD	1	2%
Masters degree	18	28%
CPD/ Short course	12	19%
Postgraduate certificate	4	6%
None	29	45%

To what extent did the programme contribute to your career development?

N=64	Frequency	Percent
A great deal	21	33%
A lot	33	52%
Somewhat	8	13%
A little	1	2%
Not at all	1	2%

How often do you still use knowledge or skills gained from the programme in your work?

N=63	Frequency	Percent
Very often	33	52%
Often	25	40%
Sometimes	4	6%
Rarely	1	2%
Never	0	0%

In your view, has the programme had a lasting impact on the quality of care you provide?

N=63	Frequency	Percent
Significant impact	47	75%
Moderate Impact	14	22%
Minor impact	2	3%
No impact	0	0%

Please briefly describe one way the programme continues to influence your work

N=64	Frequency	Percent
Any comment	48	75%

How likely are you to remain working in the nursing home sector over the next 3-5 years?

N=64	Frequency	Percent
Very likely	32	50%
Likely	19	30%
Unsure	10	16%
Unlikely	1	1%
Very unlikely	2	3%

To what extent would expanded career progression opportunities (such as nurse specialist roles or pathways to advanced nursing and prescribing) within the long-term care sector encourage you to continue?

N=64	Frequency	Percent
A great deal	27	42%
A lot	21	33%
Somewhat	11	17%
A little	3	5%
Not at all	2	3%

Looking back, how valuable was the programme for your professional development overall?

N=64	Frequency	Percent
Extremely valuable	38	59%
Very Valuable	25	39%
Moderately valuable	1	1.6%
A little valuable	0	0%
Not valuable at all	0	0%

Would you recommend this programme to other nurses considering professional development?

N=64	Frequency	Percent
Yes	62	97%
Not sure/ No answer	2	3%

Nursing Home Cohort 1 and 2 Combined Impact Data

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

N=74	Frequency	Percent
Very satisfied	65	88%
Somewhat satisfied	8	11%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied		0%
Somewhat dissatisfied		0%
Very dissatisfied	1	1%

Did LHP Skillnet provide adequate support throughout the Initiative?

N=74	Frequency	Percent
Yes	64	86%
No	0	0%
Don't know	10	14%

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)

N=81	Frequency	Percent
Yes	52	64.2%
No	3	3.7%
Too early to tell	26	32.1%

If yes, please specify

N=82	Frequency	Percent
Any comment	47	57%

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

N=72	Frequency	Percent
Enhanced resident assessment skills	59	81.9%
Improved communication with residents	53	73.6%
Increased use of evidence-based practices	54	75%
Improved dementia care	48	66.7%
More effective fall prevention strategies	42	58.3%
Better medication management	34	47.2%
Other	6	8.3%

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

N=79	Frequency	Percent
Yes	33	41.8%
Maybe	33	41.8%
No	13	16.5%

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

N=81	Frequency	Percent
Yes	56	69%
No	2	2%
Too early to tell	23	28%

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

N=81	Frequency	Percent
Yes	55	68%
No	5	6%
Too early to tell	21	26%

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

N=81	Frequency	Percent
Yes	42	52%
No	14	17%
Too early to tell	25	31%

Do you feel this initiative should be scaled out to other specialisms

N=81	Frequency	Percent
Any comment	74	91%

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

N=81	Frequency	Percent
Very effective	61	75%
Somewhat effective	9	11%
Neither effective or ineffective	10	12%
Somewhat ineffective	0	0%
Very ineffective	1	1%

What has been the biggest benefit of the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative for your nursing home so far?

N=82	Frequency	Percent
Any comment	75	91%

What are your suggestions for improving the Diploma in Gerontological Nursing Initiative?

N=81	Frequency	Percent
Recommendations	41	51%

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