

# Career and Education Framework For Diabetes Specialist Nursing

## Who is this framework aimed at:

This framework is aimed at registered nurses who provide diabetes care or specialist diabetes care, commissioners and providers of diabetes services and academic institutions who provide diabetes education for nurses.

## Introduction

The incidence of diabetes has increased significantly within the UK over the past decade. This rise has placed an enormous burden on the health service supporting those living with diabetes to self-manage their condition in order to avoid associated complications, and achieve the highest possible quality of life. The benefits of a diabetes specialist nurse (DSN) are well documented (DoH, 2012, Diabetes UK, 2018); they have an integral role providing care and support for people living with diabetes and their families over the life course of the condition. With ever advancing treatment regimens for diabetes, the role and responsibilities for a DSN have continued to evolve in order to reduce burden on the health service and provide the best possible care for individuals. This evolution has occurred in a fragmented manner across the UK, leading to a lack of clarity surrounding the DSN role and the qualifications that should underpin such a role. Employers, commissioners/providers, DSNs and higher education institutions (HEIs) have a vital role in supporting the development of the DSN role moving forward.

### The aim of the framework is to:

- Standardise job titles
- Differentiate levels of practice
- Inform academic provision
- Provide a standardised approach to the development of diabetes-specific nursing skills through competency assessment.

## Context

In response to the changing landscape of the NHS, nurses have historically adapted their roles in health care delivery to meet the demands of people living with diabetes. As a consequence, nurses are leading and delivering a range of generalist and specialist diabetes services across a diverse range of health care settings. New models of care provision require multi-disciplinary teams (including those working with enhanced or advanced practice skills) to treat, refer, order diagnostic investigations, prescribe medications and create a care plan. This has predominately been in the domain of medical professionals in the past. Due to the changes in the nursing roles, there have been increases in role descriptors and job titles.

The range of specialist job titles is of particular concern to practitioners, regulators and the public. The term 'specialist' is often used to describe the clinical role that nurses adopt in their practice. However, job titles do not consistently reflect the education or competency levels of the

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practitioner concerned. Across the UK, there appears to be disparity in the meaning of job titles and the role expectation of the nursing staff using them. (Diabetes UK, 2018; Gosden et al, 2010).

A collaborative approach between TREND-UK (Training, Research and Education for Nurses in Diabetes), Diabetes UK, WAND (Welsh Academy of Nurses in Diabetes), and representatives for DSNs and HEIs from England and Wales, has developed this framework. It incorporates diabetes-specific nursing outcomes within a clear pathway for career development.

The framework defines the development of knowledge, skills and competence needed to support people living with diabetes. It is recommended that nurses provide evidence to demonstrate their level of knowledge, skill and current practice. It should also link to personal development and support re-validation ensuring it is in line with the Nursing and Midwifery Council view of competence and skills (NMC, 2014; 2015).

The framework offers a number of potential benefits for commissioners/providers of diabetes services, employers, HEIs and nurses in response to recommendations made by Lord Willis (2015), and the charity Diabetes UK to promote a UK-wide career pathway for diabetes specialist nursing.

*NB. This Framework does not apply to diabetes nurses working in Northern Ireland (NI). Nurses working in NI should refer to the relevant Department of Health frameworks/competencies for Specialist Nurses, Advanced Nurse Practitioners and Consultant Nurses <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/clinical-career-pathway-nurses-and-midwives>*

### **The purpose of a diabetes nursing career framework**

It is anticipated that this framework will provide guidance leading to enhanced delivery of care for people with diabetes in both general; non-specialist and specialist diabetes services.

1. Provide a structure for career development, training and education of registered nurses who provide care for people living with diabetes.
2. Provide information relevant to higher education institutions (HEIs) in the development of diabetes nursing educational programmes.
3. Promote a standardised approach to diabetes education, enabling practitioners, employers, commissioners and people living with diabetes to have greater clarity about the role of the DSN, and level of education and competence which correlates to an individual's job title.
4. Provide a point of reference to help identify and develop the knowledge, skills and competence in the care and management of people with diabetes through accredited programmes, and development opportunities that target not only professionals but local service needs.

The recommendations should be applied to nurses beginning their career as a DSN. It would be impractical to back-date these to all existing DSNs. However, DSNs who are already practicing but do not have the pre-specified competencies should be encouraged and supported to achieve them. In addition DSNs should be encouraged and supported to seek continuous professional development above and beyond these minimum competencies.

## **The Framework**

Part of the framework gives recommendations for job titles, role descriptions, minimum qualifications and competencies linked to the relevant NHS Agenda for Change banding levels for those working entirely within diabetes services (Table 1). It places equal value on both practice and theory. Therefore, it is suggested that in order to satisfy the level of knowledge and skill required, an individual must complete both the academic and practice-based learning. Funding for appropriate training should be incorporated into all new posts.

### *Band 6 Diabetes Specialist Nurse*

At band 6, a recommended job title of diabetes specialist nurse (DSN) should be used for those that can demonstrate a comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within the field of diabetes. The nurse should commit to commencing a postgraduate diploma in a diabetes related subject within a year of appointment. In addition, completion of TREND-UK competencies using a relevant assessment tool (e.g. WAND band 6) must be achieved within 12 months of appointment.

### *Band 7 Senior Diabetes Specialist Nurse*

At band 7, a recommended job title of a senior diabetes specialist nurse should be used for those that can demonstrate critical application of detailed knowledge in the field of diabetes alongside management and leadership responsibilities, including completion of a postgraduate diploma. This should coincide with becoming an independent prescriber and completion of the TREND-UK competencies using a relevant assessment tool (e.g. WAND band 7) within 12 months of appointment. Opportunities should also be provided to complete a masters level qualification.

The minimum qualification for a DSN has been set at postgraduate diploma level, as it is believed that this would provide a well-rounded qualification with sufficient detail and information regarding diabetes to allow a DSN to practice at an appropriate specialist level. A postgraduate certificate in diabetes would be relevant for those healthcare professionals with a special interest in diabetes, but for whom caring for people with diabetes would not be their sole role (e.g. practice nurses or general practitioners).

In order to complete the competency assessment tools, an appropriately trained person (e.g. DSN/specialist dietitian/podiatrist) would be required to sign off each competency as it is achieved. This should be reviewed on a 3 monthly basis by the lead DSN to ensure sufficient progress is being made and that the signatories are of a suitable level of experience. The WAND competency assessment tool, developed from the TREND-UK competency framework for both band 6 and 7 positions have been piloted and implemented in Wales.

## **Diabetes Specialist Nurse Qualifications and Competencies**

Table 1 describes the title of the nurse and a brief job description to be expected of the person carrying out that role. Each role is linked to an NHS banding level and a minimum level of qualification that person should be working towards or have obtained prior to starting in the position. Please see the WAND competency document for further information on how to complete it and who can sign off as competent. These minimum standards should be applied for new to post DSNs and not those who have been undertaking the role for several years. However, they should be allowed the opportunity to complete both the qualifications and competency documents if they so wish. Completing the competencies and qualifications for a specific band does not automatically entitle a DSN to move up a band.

**Table 1: Diabetes Specialist Nurse minimum qualifications and competencies**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>NHS banding</b>	<b>Academic level</b>	<b>Competencies</b>
<b>Lead/Consultant DSN</b>	Highly specialised knowledge of diabetes used as the basis for original thinking or research. Leaders with considerable responsibility for strategic service improvement and development. Represents service through National and International collaborations	<b>Band 8</b>	Gained a MSc in a Diabetes related field, opportunities to work towards a PhD	
<b>Senior DSN</b>	Critical application of detailed knowledge in the field of diabetes. Be an independent prescriber. Has management and leadership responsibilities at the interface between different fields. Responsibility for developing and changing practice with advanced clinical responsibilities. Act as an accomplished educator. Beginning to develop National collaborations.	<b>Band 7</b>	Gained a PG Diploma in a Diabetes related field. Undertake independent prescribers qualification	Completion of WAND competencies band 7 within 12 months of appointment
<b>Diabetes Specialist Nurse (DSN)</b>	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within the field of diabetes. Use knowledge to solve clinical problems creatively and make judgements which require analysis and interpretation. Act as an education resource for both people with diabetes and HCPs.	<b>Band 6</b>	Committed to undertaking a PG Diploma in a Diabetes related field within 12 months	Completion of WAND competencies band 6 within 12 months of appointment
<b>General Nurse</b>	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of diabetes. Working to standard clinical operating procedures, protocols or system of work.	<b>Band 5</b>	BSc/undergraduate	3 years post-registration experience

## Summary

This framework document is an aid to standardising the education and development needs of nursing roles within diabetes. The document is not exhaustive, and has been deliberately kept succinct to facilitate ease of use. Forming a career and competency framework for diabetes specialist nursing will allow the establishment of a UK based standard for DSNs with a minimum level of diabetes specific knowledge and skills to deliver care to people with diabetes. In addition to supporting commissioners/providers of diabetes services, the document will offer guidance to registered nurses who aspire to a particular career level within diabetes, enabling them to identify learning opportunities to meet recommended requirements. Finally, by standardising the job title, role, education and competency of a DSN, people with diabetes will feel more confident in the care and support given in the clinical setting from their DSN.

## References

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