

Spreading the Massage Message

Whenever I talk to other massage therapists I am amazed at the wide range of backgrounds from which we come. For many people, massage is their second (or even third) career and in almost every case it forms part of a conscious decision to improve their life and lifestyle. I was introduced to massage by an Australian friend who specialised in deep tissue massage. Inspired by her example, I eventually retrained and plucked up the courage to leave my desk job for a new career in massage - and have never looked back since.

To help spread the massage message further, I have answered some of the most common questions asked about training in massage therapy below.

Why choose massage therapy?

Massage is an ancient and natural form of bodywork, ranging widely from relaxation to sports, lomi lomi to thai massage. Whatever form it takes, massage is the only bodywork therapy which specialises in treating soft tissue (muscles and connective tissues). Damage to soft tissue is a common cause of many chronic and acute pain conditions so, whatever level you work at within your massage practice, you will be easing restrictions and tensions in the tissues and therefore helping your client's wellbeing.

Starting out - what kind of qualification do I need?

To become a massage therapist you need a qualification from one of the 3 main awarding bodies – ITEC, VTCT and MTI – all of which award NVQ Level 3 qualifications (Diploma level). Most people first qualify in Holistic or Swedish massage which then allows you to work as a fully insured massage therapist.

What sort of training does it involve?

Your training will include practical massage techniques, anatomy & physiology and business studies. Assessment usually takes the form of client case studies and written assignments, followed by multiple choice written exams in the three main subjects and a practical exam. Depending on where you choose to train, you can qualify in as little as 3 months, although the average is 9 months doing a part-time course which enables you to continue to work while you train.

Where can I train and how much will it cost?

There are many private and public training schools across the UK registered with ITEC, VTCT or MTI – details can be found on their websites. Shop around to find the school which best suits your needs. It is always a good idea to check with them about their student retention rate (ie how many students finish the course) and their exam pass rates. You can expect to pay £1,500 - £2,000 on average for the full course including exam fees.

What kind of work can I do when qualified?

Once qualified, you have a huge range of options open to you, both in the UK and abroad. Many people choose to continue working in their current job while they build up massage experience, perhaps then moving to part-time work before becoming a full-time massage therapist. Options for massage work include spas, hotels, the NHS, in businesses, complementary health clinics, other bodywork clinics (eg osteopaths and physiotherapists) or working from home. You can choose to be either an employee or self-employed, working the hours to suit your lifestyle. You may wish to develop your bodywork skills further so that you can become more specialist in your work - for example, training in sports, hot stone or pregnancy massage.

What else should I do when I qualify?

It is essential that you are insured and advisable to join a professional body. The two main bodies are the CThA (Complementary Therapists Association) and the FHT (Federation of Holistic Therapists) who, between them, represent over 30,000 out of the 50,000+ complementary therapists in the UK. Both bodies provide comprehensive insurance cover, practical support, marketing campaigns and encourage all members to undertake CPD (continuing professional development). Although not compulsory, anyone who is serious about developing their massage work should regularly undertake further CPD training.

What is so important about a qualification?

The only regulation and registration of complementary therapists in the UK is voluntary self-regulation, which means there are currently no laws in place to protect the public from unqualified or incompetent therapists. The government and professional bodies are working together to improve standards and to provide a register of qualified therapists for the public. The latest step towards this was the launch of the CNHC (Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council) this year, backed by the Department of Health. The Council is building a register of qualified therapists in the 12 main complementary therapies, starting with massage, and membership of the CThA or FHT means automatic qualification for registration. It is early days for the CNHC, but it is hoped that this will provide a future quality benchmark which will be recognised by the NHS, medical profession, other bodywork therapists and even private health insurers.

I hope this article has given you a taste of massage therapy and that you may decide to join us on your new, exciting and very rewarding career in massage.

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