

Alternative degrees to massage the mind

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Education Editor

DEGREES with a difference will soon be available to Irish students, including BSc awards in aromatherapy, acupuncture, physical therapy, yoga and perhaps even Indian head massage.

They all come into the category of complementary therapies, which are about to get official academic recognition from the State's awarding body.

Eventually graduates will even be able to get a master's degree in a particular specialism.

HETAC, the Higher Education Training and Awards Council is currently engaged in a consultation process about interim standard for developing courses in complementary medicine.

Once the standards have been agreed by the Council, it will accept applications from course providers around the country.

Council Chief Executive Séamus Puirseil said last night that only properly run quality courses would qualify for approval.

The interim standards were drawn up by a working group comprising representatives of traditional and complementary medicines, assisted by an academic from the UK, which already gives academic recognition to alternative medical courses.

The draft sets out in general terms the skills, competences, range and depth of knowledge needed for the award of a national diploma, ordinary degree, honours level degree or a master's degree.



For instance, a person hoping to get an honours degree would have to demonstrate an understanding of relevant biological and related sciences, social and behavioral sciences as they apply to complementary therapy.

They would also have to show that they can act ethically and be accountable for ensuring the maintenance of ethical and professional standards within the sphere of practice.

Every week tens of thousands of people go to alternative medical therapists but the area is unregulated at present. Mr. Puirseil said a HETAC award would give the public assurance about the quality of the training and study undertaken by a practitioner.

Holistic

The move has been welcomed by Institute of Physical Therapy which runs a part-time, three-year course in Priory Hall, Stillorgan, Co Dublin.

Director John O'Sullivan said he hoped the Institute's graduates would be in the first batch to get awards from HETAC.

It would be an additional seal of approval for graduates and a further reassurance for the public about the Institute's courses, he added.

Physical therapy is described as an holistic and patient-centered approach focusing on the manual treatment of the soft tissue (muscles, tendons, ligaments, fascia).