

SUBMISSION ON:  
**GREEN PAPER ON ADULT EDUCATION IN AN ERA OF LIFELONG LEARNING**  
FROM:  
**FEDERATION OF IRISH COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY ASSOCIATIONS**

The Federation of Irish Complementary Therapy Associations is comprised of a representative from the professional associations and regulatory bodies in various fields of complementary therapy (see cover sheet for list of members). The following submission is the result of a consultative process among the member organisations.

**INTRODUCTION:** Complementary therapy is one of the fastest growing sectors of adult education as well as the economy. It accounts for approximately one quarter of all books published and is a growing sector of the music industry. The member organisations of the Federation of Irish Complementary Therapy Associations represent over 4,600 practitioners and members. There are approximately 1,350 teachers of complementary therapy in Ireland running short courses privately, in resource centres and in VEC's as well as professional training courses to qualify people as practitioners. Currently there are approximately 1,500 studying to be therapy practitioners in privately run courses as well as the PLC courses run in the VEC's (this does not include the thousands studying complementary therapy at introductory level or for private use). These figures represent the numbers of people involved with the member associations of the Federation of Irish Complementary Therapy Associations only. There is a vast array of other complementary therapies not represented here because of time constraints in the consultative process.

Complementary therapy is now the therapy of choice for a large section of the public. GP's are beginning to recognise this fact and either seek out training for themselves or refer to therapists known to them. Recently the medical profession has been lobbying the Dept. of Health and Children to draw up a register of complementary therapy practitioners and this in itself is recognition by the medical profession that complementary therapy is not a short lived fad.

BUPA now covers a range of complementary therapies in its health insurance scheme and Garda health insurance covers treatment by Cranio-Sacral therapists. The City of Dublin VEC has begun to recognise the demand for training and has included a limited range of complementary therapy in its PLC line up. Acupuncture is used in community drug treatment facilities and many of the Health Board financed family centres and women's groups supported by the Dept. of Social, Community and Family Affairs provide complementary therapy for their clients.

**WHAT IS COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY:** Complementary therapy uses a variety of techniques to promote the mental, physical and emotional health of clients. These techniques include hands on treatments, the prescription of homeopathic and herbal remedies, the use of oils, physical manipulation, yoga therapy and breathwork, etc. and can be used to treat a very wide range of physical, mental and emotional disorders.

While complementary therapy may be the first choice of consumers of the service,

complementary therapy practitioners see themselves as working in co-operation with conventional medical and psychotherapeutic practices. What all complementary systems have in common is a holistic approach to health. The starting point for complementary therapy may be the presenting symptoms but the therapist recognises the intimate connection between all aspects of the person - mental, physical, emotional and spiritual. Physical or emotional disorders have multiple causes, both material (bacterial infection, etc.) and non-material (emotional upset, stress, lack of meaningful existence, self-esteem, family problems etc.).

The successful treatment of disorders or the prevention of illness requires a multi-level approach addressing the whole person, not just the presenting symptoms and their material causes. It relies heavily on an empathetic and intuitive approach to the client and an ability to see beyond the material. The popularity of complementary therapy rests on the ability of practitioners to work with the whole person, not just their symptoms and to address the non-material - an aspect of complementary therapy less amenable to rational quantifiable methods of analysis. This approach requires extensive personal growth work on the part of the therapist and this personal development is a vital component of complementary therapy training.

Complementary therapy is practical, grounded in realistic expectations and based on tried and tested practice often thousands of years old. It is not the irresponsible prescription and use of powerful remedies and oils. It is not the manipulation of the vulnerabilities of clients and it is not something dabbled in by charlatans. The practitioners represented by the regulatory bodies responsible for this submission take their therapies and work very seriously and wish to provide the highest level of responsible service to their clients.

**RECOGNITION:** The value and efficacy of complementary therapy is recognised by the general public and in many cases practitioner services are being paid for indirectly by statutory bodies. Yet complementary therapy is still not given official recognition by the Dept. of Education and Science, the Dept. of Health and Children, the health boards and the public colleges and universities. This lack of recognition leads to the following problems:

- \* Lack of standardisation and quality assurance in training and practice
- \* Difficulty in accessing affordable, quality training in Ireland.
- \* Limitations in the range of employment available on graduation - mostly free-lance or self-employment.
- \* The limitation of the services to those who can afford to pay for them.
- \* The limitation of training to those who can afford to pay for it.
- \* Hard earned qualifications with no official currency and no transferability in Ireland.
- \* Highly skilled therapists with no access to recognised training which would qualify them to be registered with the health boards or the Dept. of Health and Children. Yet those statutory agencies are coming under increasing pressure to regulate and draw up registers of complementary therapists.

Complementary therapy is a large and growing sector of education, the economy and of Irish life in general. That it will continue to grow as the choice of a substantial section of the

population, must be recognised by statutory authorities. To achieve recognition for the sector and to address these difficulties, the Federation of Irish Complementary Therapy Associations wishes to make the following points:

1. That complementary therapy be recognised as an extensive and essential component of adult education making an invaluable contribution to the upskilling of the workforce.

Complementary therapy represents a huge sector of adult education activity in Ireland as well as a rapidly growing sector of the economy. The economic trends seem to be towards small enterprises and self-employment. Thousands of people in Ireland now make a living from complementary therapy either through self-employment in the sector or within small health centre businesses employing several people. To date this has been done largely without any form of state support.

Complementary therapy is now an essential element of a growing economy and the path through which substantial numbers of people have upgraded their skills to the level of economic self-sufficiency. Recognition by the state through the Adult Learning Council and Education Boards would support and foster this still growing sector of the economy through making the education that is essential to upskilling potential practitioners more accessible to a wider range of people, particularly those on social welfare assistance.

2. Members of the complementary therapy associations should be recognised as providers of further and higher education and should be eligible for funding, access to venues and school facilities in the way other education providers are funded and supported.

At the moment, apart from a limited range of therapies available as PLC courses, practitioner training in complementary therapy is offered exclusively through private schools. This means that this avenue of career training is closed to people who cannot afford to pay for it i.e. the people who most need to upgrade their skills to make themselves employable or self-employable. This situation is undemocratic, discriminatory and extremely limiting to the growth and prosperity of the sector.

The VEC's are not necessarily the most suitable providers of complementary therapy education so the Federation of Irish Complementary Therapy Associations recommends that funds and facilities be made available to the various schools and colleges of complementary training and subsidise the cost of training for those who are not able to pay for it.

3. That the unique role complementary therapy has to play (and is already playing) in community education be recognised, fostered and expanded.

Community education differs greatly from conventional education in its approach to learning. To make education accessible to people in their own communities education providers need to develop a wide variety of approaches, methods and means of assessment. These already exist in

complementary therapy education. This makes complementary therapy a very user friendly point of entry to education for the consumers of community education who are not sufficiently empowered to access mainstream systems. This is already happening in community education groups around the country but the state recognition and support for such education is lacking.

Complementary therapy practitioners and trainers have a unique and invaluable contribution to make to the development and expansion of community education. They can provide the skills, expertise, experience and leadership in developing approaches to education that suit the needs of the consumers of community education.

4. That a competent and qualified complementary therapy practitioner be appointed to the National Adult Learning Council and the Adult Learning Boards to facilitate the role that complementary therapy plays in fostering a return to education for substantial numbers of people within communities.

Complementary therapy and therapy education is provided within communities, often with the practitioner charging only nominal fees or nothing at all for their services. As a result many people who would otherwise have no employable skills go on to train as practitioners and establish employment for themselves. This is often done at great financial hardship to themselves and their families or at the expense of the livelihood of the course tutors and organisers who offer low cost tuition to those who can't afford it. This in turn limits the viability of the sector.

Because of the unique learning modes and the essential fostering of self-esteem inherent in complementary therapy training, complementary therapy empowers people who would otherwise remain unemployed and unemployable, to access further training and education, often within the mainstream sector. One of the essential roles of any adult education body is to expand accessibility and progression routes and provide the nurturing of self-esteem and empowerment among education consumers. Complementary therapy by its nature, structure and approach to learning does this and practitioners skilled in providing such comprehensive systems have an invaluable role to play in the Adult Learning Council and all Learning Boards

5. That the existing associations in the sector be recognised and acknowledged as the experts in the development of the criteria, modes of learning and assessment for their own training courses. That all bodies governing or influencing the development or accreditation of adult learning draw on the support of competent and qualified practitioners in the field of complementary therapy when appropriate.

Because complementary therapy is such a large and growing feature of adult education all accreditation bodies will in the future be faced with the necessity of developing modes of accreditation for complementary therapy training. The essence of complementary therapy as described in the introduction to this submission does not always lend itself to the criteria and modes of learning and assessment applicable to more conventional topics of learning. It is impossible for someone not versed in the theory and practice of the particular therapies to fully

understand the nature of the structures required to teach and to assess the effectiveness of therapy training. For this reason it is essential for the provision of quality education and training programmes that the sponsoring associations and course tutors and designers be free to develop the modes of learning and assessment as well as the criteria for learning.

These would have to coincide with criteria set up by the NALC and Adult Learning Boards and the bodies established under the Qualifications Bill, therefore it is important that any relevant bodies would draw on the support of members of the relevant complementary therapy associations. It is also vital that such statutory bodies provide assistance for adult education groups in understanding and meeting these criteria. Such support should be accessible, free of charge and user friendly.

6. That all accreditation be by an accreditation panel of peers with the providing organisation being able to appoint panel members to complement members from related fields. This mode of accreditation to be on the model of the Open College Network in England and Northern Ireland.

Because of the holistic and unique nature of complementary therapy, it is not possible for those not versed in the field through both study and experience to fully appreciate the structures of learning and modes of assessment required. Therefore it is vital that the accrediting panel be drawn from the discipline being accredited and related fields.

7. That any mode of accreditation be flexible, accessible and learner centred.

The current modes of accreditation through the NCVA has been one of long delays and the development of a training programme which were not flexible enough to take into account the unique and definitive aspects of complementary therapy outlined above. Any accreditation of complementary therapies needs to be learner centred with the modules designed to suit the needs of the participants, not bought pre-designed by someone else or designed to suit the needs of the accreditation body.

Any accreditation body should be open to the accreditation of a broad range of subjects, rebirthing, yoga, reflexology, massage, body harmony, etc. that do not fit into the conventional concept of acceptable subjects for education and training. Within the accreditation system there needs to be accessible and affordable support from a development officer to guide providers through the accreditation process. The model of the Open College Network meets all of these requirements.

8. That all bodies governing or influencing the development of adult education including the National Adult Learning Council and the Adult Learning Boards adopt a policy of inclusiveness broad enough to encompass complementary therapies.

Complementary therapy is the first choice of a large segment of the population and now forms an integral part of Irish life and learning. Any bodies governing or influencing the development of adult education in Ireland need to accept this fact and to guard against a conservative approach to the recognition of the subjects and types of courses that are offered and attended by adults.

The NALC and the Adult Learning Boards need to be open to accepting a broad range of subjects - yoga, rebirthing, reflexology, massage, body harmony, etc. that do not fit into the conventional concept of acceptable subjects for education and training.

9. The Complementary Therapy Associations have input into the training of all career guidance counsellors.

Complementary therapy is now a viable career option. However, if career guidance counsellors have no knowledge of the field, they will not be able to give their clients suitable guidance and may even deny them the option of working in an area which they might find rewarding and profitable.

10. That the complementary therapy associations be given time to develop a body of recognised and accredited training to use as a benchmark for the professionalisation of trainers through the accreditation of prior learning and learning accredited outside the state.

Complementary therapy associations currently offer high quality training programmes but these programmes are largely accredited by the bodies themselves or through schools and bodies outside the state. It is vital that the associations be given time to develop state accredited training so that they may then develop the criteria and standards for the professionalisation of existing trainers and practitioners.

11. That the complementary therapy associations be grant aided to develop a comprehensive system of data collection and research in line with the recommendations of the Green Paper.

Complementary therapies are greatly hampered by the lack of funds to undertake systematic and scientific research and data collection. This lack of research affects the public perception as well as the development of the therapies and therefore the training of practitioners. Such funds are at the disposal of other sectors of adult education and training . Complementary therapy now forms such a large sector of the adult education field that to further deny access to research funds and facilities is undemocratic.