

Is it time to step up and act? Next steps for New Zealand Bachelor's Degree Qualified Massage Therapists.

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Mason, J., & Wilson, A. (2023) suggest that participants to work as a within New Zealand and no government or self-regulatory requirements. The incentive to study a bachelor's degree in massage therapy may be viewed as individually driven rather than industry driven. As the number of bachelor's degree massage therapy graduates increases, the representation of this group by a professional body/association or a register of degree qualified massage therapists (DQMTs) is essential to promote the profession and safety of the general public. [1] to explore whether DQMTs thought their qualification was worthwhile and [2] to determine whether opportunities, and interest to be part of a separate professional body for DQMTs.

The project used a mixed methods approach (online survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews) with New Zealand bachelor's degree massage therapy graduates. Results showed that most participants felt there was value in completing the third year of study and attaining their bachelor's degree. Over half of the participants indicated that a higher-level qualification enhanced their massage related opportunities. Almost all participants supported the need for a professional body/association or register of qualifications that would identify them from lower level qualified massage therapists. However, concerns were raised about this direction. DQMTs need to consider their future steps in shaping the professionalisation journey

Although there are two education providers offering bachelor's degree education for massage

understand and communicate in English and be over the age of 18 years. The study was approved by the Southern Institute of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee in April 2018.

Recruitment and Data Collection

Survey participants were recruited through the Massage New Zealand website, the New Zealand business directory (the Yellow Pages), and contacts known to the researchers. Other participants were recruited using snowball sampling, where “previously identified members of a group are asked to identify other members of the population” (Fink, 2003, p. 18). All participants were emailed an invitation to participate along with a request to pass the survey link onto to other prospective participants. The invitation email had a link to the survey. Survey participants were asked to leave a contact email at the end of the survey if they were interested in participating in phase 2 interviews.

Phase one: Online Survey

Table 1. Demographics of Survey Participants (n=64)

	Respondents	
	n	%
Gender – Survey participants (n=64)		
Male	13	20.3
Female	51	79.6
Age (n=63)		
20-29	23	36.5
30-39	22	34.9
40-49	6	9.5
50-59	10	15.9
60+	2	3.2
Ethnicity* (n=63)		
New Zealand European	52	82.5
Maori	10	15.9
Samoan	1	1.6
Chinese	2	3.2
Other (Australian 4; British 1; Croatian 1; Taiwanese 1; New Zealander 1)	8	12.7

Note: * Not mutually exclusive

Table 2. Employment Details (n=63)

	Respondents	
	n=63	%
Years spent in massage practice post bachelor's degree (n=63)		
0	3	4.7
6 months – 3 years	31	49.2
4 – 7 years	16	25.4
8 – 11 years	10	15.9
12 – 15 years	3	4.8
Current employment status* (n=63)		
Working in New Zealand	39	61.9
Working overseas	7	11.1
Employed or self-employed in a role related to massage degree	27	42.8
Employed or self-employed in a role NOT related to massage degree	12	19.0
Self-employed massage therapist	1	1.6

However, Jack was unsure of the benefits saying,

I'm already in the same job that I was before, which I got from a diploma, so at this point in time the degree has not been much more useful than the diploma. I gained academic knowledge and have a better understanding of academic writing and research.

Similarly, Annie said, "I actually get quite annoyed because I find that I've got the degree, but it doesn't mean I earn any more than anyone else who's got a diploma."

Opportunities and Benefits

Participants indicated in the survey that having a degree in massage therapy had given them opportunities that may not have been available with a lower level massage qualification. Approximately two-thirds of participants (67.7%, 40/59) indicated they had received massage related opportunities while non-massage related opportunities were noted by just over half (52.5%, 31/59) of participants (Table 3). The non-massage opportunities and the overall benefits of having a degree in massage therapy were further explored in the interviews. There were four main themes that were shared by participants: higher individual capability; higher standards and credibility; expanded opportunities in massage therapy; expanded opportunities outside of massage therapy. The narratives for the four themes are summarised in Table 4.

Table 3 Has your massage therapy bachelor's degree given you any massage therapy related or non-massage therapy related opportunities that would not have been available with a lower level massage therapy qualification? (n=59)

	Respondents	
	n	%
Massage related opportunities (n=59)		
Yes	40	67.8
No	16	27.1
Not applicable	3	5.1
Non-massage related opportunities (n=59)		
Yes	31	52.5
No	21	35.6
Not applicable	7	11.9

Table 4. Benefits and opportunities related to completing a bachelor's degree in massage therapy: Themes and quotes from participants. (n=28)

Theme	Participant quotes
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Table 4 cont. Benefits and opportunities related to completing a bachelor's degree in massage therapy: Themes and quotes from participants. (n=28)

Theme	Participant quotes
Expanded opportunities in massage therapy	<p>“It’s benefitted me really well. I’ve travelled to quite a few different countries and worked over seas. Having a degree in massage has always made it very easy to get a job because most places don’t have quality training. So, you get hired pretty quick” (Sophie).</p>
	<p>“My job I have now, I got as a direct result of having a bachelor’s degree in massage. My employer was really pleased to have the chance to employ someone with a bachelor’s degree” (Martha).</p>
	<p>“I’ve been offered a teaching position. I’m taking that position up, so I teach massage two days a week, I don’t know if I would’ve got that opportunity without my bachelor’s degree” (Tamati).</p>
	<p>“It certainly has with job opportunities and working within the health industry and the clientele I get to work with. It’s definitely propped up more opportunities for other colleagues that I have worked with who haven’t been as qualified” (Kim).</p>
	<p>“It’s opened doors that I think would not have opened otherwise. So, I’ve had opportunities with professional sports teams, professional athletes, and job offers left right and center that weren’t as forthcoming when I had a diploma” (Ruth).</p>
Expanded opportunities outside of massage therapy	<p>“I guess it has expanded opportunities in a professional sense, branching out into the teaching side of things. I feel that my ability to do that was facilitated by having the bachelor’s degree” (Maggie).</p>
	<p>“My job at the hospital, and a lot of what I do there was based on the fact that I had a degree and probably got paid more because I had a degree. I don’t think I would have been given the opportunity without it” (Jasmine).</p>
	<p>“I’m about to head overseas and do a teaching English course and a requirement of that is that you need a degree. That is another way that is has benefited me” (Alice).</p>
	<p>“Out of the jobs I’ve had since graduating, two of them have not been massage related but have been related to the degree course and the learning background that I had” (Christine).</p>
	<p>“Since graduation I went on to do further study. I was able to cross credit a lot of my prior learning into that degree as well. I only had to do a year, which was pretty fantastic” (Bethany).</p>

A separate professional body to represent DQMTs: survey findings

Participant responses were mixed when asked whether MNZ did meet or does meet their needs (n=43): findings were ‘never’ (25.6%), rarely’ (20.9%), ‘sometimes’ (30.2%), usually (18.6%), always (4.7%). Participants were asked if they would like to see the development of a professional body, solely to represent DQMTs. They were also asked if they would consider joining a separate body if costs and benefits met their needs. Just over eighty seven percent (87.3%, 48/55) were in favour of the dev()-10 (w)2 tn

Table 5. Importance of possible functions of a new professional body.

Ranking	Functions	Level of Importance		No. of Respondents
1	Increasing public/health professionals' awareness of DQMTs	94.3%	(283/300)	60
2	Promote massage as a health service	93.7%	(281/300)	60
3	Professional credibility	93.2%	(275/295)	59
4	Promotion of DQMT massage therapy qualifications to the public	91.3%	(274/300)	60
5	Providing access to online research articles	87.0%	(261/300)	60
6	Providing training / CPD resources	86.4%	(255/295)	59

A separate professional body to represent DQMTs: interview findings

The majority of interviewees agreed with the need for the development of a new professional body to represent DQMT's. Analysis of reasons why they agreed identified three themes: 'create an identity', 'greater promotion', and 'perceived benefits'. Each theme contained several subthemes ()]5s.4 (t)-66 (e)(r)3 ((-1 (i5co)-4.) 6 ((-1).s)-1 (ubt)-2 (h3.943 Tc 0.003 T BDC /TT0 1 T

A separate professional body: disagreement themes

A small number of DQMT's were unsure and raised concerns against the development, and one person was against the development of a new

reported as a benefit of higher education by other health professions (Kelner, Wellman, Welsh

could embrace the value of a bachelor's degree in massage therapy and set degree level education as the minimum educational requirement for practising remedial massage therapists. After all, higher education practices have been central for the professionalisation of many CAM occupations; degree level education is now the minimum educational requirement for allied health professionals such as osteopaths and physiotherapists (Smith, 2015) within New Zealand. Regulation via the multi-category model, where categories of regulated massage therapists were formed based on levels of education and therapeutic intention (Gowan-Moody & Baskwill, 2006) may be possible.

Implications and Conclusion

A conceptual model has been proposed that suggests a coalition is needed between degree-based education and a strong professional association to advance the massage therapy industry if credibility, best practice, and a professional identity are to be achieved (Smith, 2015). The findings within this study suggest that MNZ may not be meeting DQMTs needs.

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