

Music therapist

Discover how music therapists use the power of music to help people deal with feelings they cannot put into words.

Music therapists use music to help their clients achieve therapeutic goals through the development of the musical and therapeutic relationship. The role of the music therapist is not to teach clients how to play an instrument, and there is no pre-requisite to 'be musical' to engage in music therapy.

[Download transcript \[1\]](#)

Music therapy is a psychological therapy that aims to facilitate positive changes in emotional wellbeing and communication through the engagement in live musical interaction between client and therapist.

Central to music therapy is the relationship that is established and developed between client and therapist. A wide range of instruments can be used, including the voice, and the music created is often improvised. Using music in this way, clients can create their own unique musical language in which to explore and connect with the world and express themselves.

You'll work with the natural musicality of clients and offer a client-led approach. You'll use a wide range of musical styles and genres including free improvisation to offer appropriate, sensitive and meaningful music interaction with their clients. Therapists also work one to one or in groups, depending on the needs of the client.

Music therapy can be particularly helpful when emotions are too confusing to express verbally. This could be because of communication difficulty or when words are too much or not enough.

You'll work with people of all ages:

- children
- young people
- adults
- the elderly

You'll use music to help clients through emotional or mental problems, learning and/or physical disabilities, developmental disorders, life-limiting conditions, neurological conditions or physical illnesses. As a music therapist you could work in a variety of health, social care and educational settings including:

- hospitals (NHS and private)
- social services such as day centres
- education (primary, secondary, further, special education and pupil referral units)
- child development centres
- children's centres

- hospices
residential setting including care homes
- prisons and forensic units
- acute and post-acute rehabilitation centres
- community spaces
- third sector organisations
- private practice

Will I work with other staff?

Yes, you will work with other health professionals as part of a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) to provide a holistic [2], joined up approach to clients' care. Music therapists provide a valuable insight into MDT assessment and contribute to care plans.

Want to learn more?

- Find out about the entry requirements and training to be a music therapist [3]
- Pay and conditions

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Music therapists work part time and in some cases full time in the NHS. They usually start at band 6 of the Agenda for Change [4] pay rates. Their working hours will generally be from 9am to 5pm but this may vary depending on their service and role. In other settings, their working hours will depend on where they work. For example, in education, they may work school hours, and during term time only.

Self-employed music therapists' hours of work often depends on their client's availability and needs. They may work evenings and weekends to suit some private clients. Travelling time, particularly for those therapists working in private practice or in more remote settings, has to be factored in to a therapist's daily schedule.

- Where the role can lead

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The British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT) is the professional body for music therapists and a source of information, support and involvement for the general public.

It is a requirement for all HCPC [5]-registered arts therapists to keep their skills and knowledge up to date through continuing professional development (CPD). BAMT offers courses, conferences and seminars where therapists can maintain and develop their skills through a range of learning activities.

Some music therapists choose to specialise in a particular clinical area of interest such as child development, neuro-disability, mental health or palliative care. Dementia is an increasing area of specialisation for music therapists. Other music therapists choose to work in two or three clinical areas depending on their interests.

New developments in the UK for music therapy include working with children pre-operatively and in special care baby units.

Music therapists hold both employed and self-employed posts, with some choosing to work both for an employer and at the same time offering a private practice. They will involve carers in their work where it is appropriate, such as working with children or clients with dementia.

As an experienced practitioner, there are opportunities to develop your skills and take on more managerial roles such as consultant music therapist, where a key task is managing a team of music therapists. Music therapists also hold posts such as head of arts therapy, managing a team of therapists including music therapy as well as other therapists such as art therapists or dramatherapists. In some contexts there are opportunities to take up lead roles within a multi-disciplinary team.

Experienced music therapists may choose to train and supervise other practitioners and students or develop their academic and research interests by undertaking further study through a PhD.

- Job market and vacancies

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In November 2018, there were 4,363 arts therapists (including art, music and dramatherapists) registered with the Health and Care Professions Council [6]

The British Association for Music Therapy provides a job advertising service for its members. It is free for employers to advertise with BAMT and helpful guidelines are offered to help with putting together job descriptions and person specifications.

NHS trusts advertise their vacancies on NHS Jobs [7] and some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations on the NHS Choices [8] website.

If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values apply in your everyday work. The same will be true if you are applying for a university course funded by the NHS.

Find out more about NHS values [9].

- Further information

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- British Association for Music Therapy [10]

Other roles that may interest you

- Creative therapy support roles [11]
- Dramatherapist [12]
- Art therapist/art psychotherapist [13]
- Dentist [14]

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/roles-allied-health-professions/music-therapist>

Links

- [1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/resources/transcript-music-therapist-film>
- [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Holistic>
- [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/music-therapist/entry-requirements-and-training-music>
- [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates>
- [5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#HCPC>
- [6] <http://www.hcpc-uk.org>
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- [8] <http://www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/howthenhsworks/authoritiesandtrusts/Pages/Authoritiesandtrusts.aspx>
- [9] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution>
- [10] <http://www.bamt.org>
- [11] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/Explore-roles/wider-healthcare-team/roles-wider-healthcare-team/clinical-support-staff/creative-therapy-support-roles>
- [12] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/roles-allied-health-professions/dramatherapist>
- [13] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/roles-allied-health-professions/art-therapistart-psychotherapist>
- [14] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/dental-team/roles-dental-team/dentist>