

Art therapist/art psychotherapist

Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its main mode of expression and communication. Art therapists/art psychotherapists* use art as a medium to address emotional issues which may be confusing and distressing.

This page has information on the role of an art therapist with links to further information.

*The terms 'art therapist' and 'art psychotherapist' are interchangeable in the UK.

Working life

You'll use art to help people deal with complex and confusing emotional issues. There may be things which clients cannot say in words. This could be because the emotions are too distressing. Or it may be because the client has difficulties with communication.

Part of the role is to work in distinct ways with clients in different environments. You'll create a secure environment which helps people build their self awareness and self confidence.

You'll work with people of all ages - children, young people adults and the elderly. Your clients may have a range of difficulties such as emotional, behavioural or mental health problems, learning disabilities, life-limiting conditions, neurological conditions or physical illnesses. They also work in a variety of settings such as:

- NHS
- social services
- education (primary, secondary, further and special education)
- prisons
- private practice.

You'll work one-to-one or in groups, depending on the needs of the client. In a group, you'll encourage members to relate to each other through their art and help the group work through the images and their meanings.

You may work with other professionals including medical and health care staff, teachers or prison and probation staff.

Want to learn more?

- Find out more about the entry requirements for art therapy. [1]

- Pay and conditions

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Most art therapists in the NHS work part-time hours, pro-rata of a standard 37.5 hour week. Entry-level art therapy posts typically start at band 6 of the agenda for change pay rates [2]. Band 7 posts now include not only delivery of clinical work but also supervision and evaluation. These may be open to newly qualified art therapists with suitable pre-training experience. Art Therapists employed at Band 8 level are expected to work as clinicians, supervise art therapists and other staff members, as well as contribute to research, evaluation and strategic service development.

Art therapists may work some evenings. Elsewhere, the working hours will depend on where they work. In education, for example, they may work school hours. Prison work may involve early starts.

Self-employed art therapists' hours of work depend on client needs. They may work evenings and weekends to suit private clients.

Some art therapists have to travel between client appointments.

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- Where the role can lead

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Once qualified, art therapists often join the British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) [3]. Registered art therapists have to keep their skills and knowledge up to date with annual CPD (continuing professional development). BAAT runs courses, conferences and seminars where therapists can exchange ideas and update their skills.

You could specialise in a particular type of client such as children, the elderly or offenders. Or you could become a specialist in a particular issue such as dementia, mental health or palliative care.

You could decide to become self-employed and build up a private practice. You could do this alongside employed work.

As an experienced practitioner, you could become a senior or consultant art therapist, managing the work of a team of therapists. You could become the head of an arts therapy department, coordinating the work of therapists from other disciplines such as music [4] or dramatherapists [5]. You also train other art therapists.

Some art therapists complete further training in specialised areas of practice eg to work with people who have received a diagnosis of personality disorders or specifically with parents and children. Some art therapists complete further training in other modalities of psychotherapy or in evidence-based interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

- Job market and vacancies

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Art therapy is a very competitive field to get into. Therapists may work part time or on a voluntary

basis to build up experience before applying for full time employment. In November 2018, there were 4,363 arts therapists (including art, music and dramatherapists) registered with the Health and Care Professions Council [6]

Most NHS trusts advertise their vacancies on NHS Jobs [7]. Some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations NHS Choices [8].

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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The British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) [10]

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Other roles that may interest you

- Creative therapy support roles [11]
- Dramatherapist [5]
- Music therapist [4]
- Arts manager/arts co-ordinator [12]

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/roles-allied-health-professions/art-therapistart-psychotherapist>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/art-therapist/entry-requirements-and-training-art>

[2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates>

[3] <http://www.baat.org/>

[4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/roles-allied-health-professions/music-therapist>

[5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/roles-allied-health-professions/dramatherapist>

[6] <http://www.hcpc-uk.org>

[7] <http://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>

[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.baat.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/wider-healthcare-team/roles-wider-healthcare-team/corporate-services/arts-managerarts-co-ordinator>