

PROSPECTS

Job profile

Art therapist

A career as an art therapist could be for you if you're sensitive, trustworthy, have excellent observation and listening skills and like the sound of helping people express their emotions creatively

Art therapists use visual art media to help people who may struggle to communicate verbally to express their feelings and confront difficult emotional issues.

Those who are referred to an art therapist don't need to have experience of - or be any good at - art. The aim is to use art as a medium to enable them to communicate and to help with awareness and self-development in a safe environment.

Therapy may be carried out in group or one-to-one settings and you may work closely with other healthcare professionals in a multi-disciplinary team.

Art therapists may also be known as art psychotherapists and both job titles are legally protected by the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC).

Responsibilities

As an art therapist, you'll need to:

- assess the needs of the client by listening and providing guidance
- work creatively with various client groups in a therapeutic setting, ensuring a safe and secure environment
- enable clients to explore their artwork and the process they used to create it
- assess and understand the feelings or temperament of others
- constructively challenge the behaviour and attitude of your clients
- attend meetings and case conferences to share ideas, expertise and good practice
- keep up to date with administration tasks
- maintain art therapy space and materials
- receive support and discuss ideas in individual supervision
- explore opportunities for work where they may not currently exist
- present a case to other professionals on reasons for employing an art therapist
- keep up to date with developments in the profession by attending seminars, lectures, and workshops.

Salary

- Jobs in the NHS are usually covered by the Agenda for Change (AfC) Pay Rates (<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/working-health/working-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates>) consisting of nine pay bands. As a newly qualified art therapist, your starting salary is likely to be £28,050 (band 6), rising up the pay scale to £36,644.
- Experienced NHS art therapists can earn between £33,222 and £43,041 (band 7).
- NHS senior and principal art therapists earn salaries of £42,414 to £49,969 (band 8a).

Salary levels outside the NHS can vary depending on your employer and whether you work part time or are self-employed.

Income figures are intended as a guide only.

Working hours

Working hours within the NHS are mainly 9am to 5pm. If you work in private practice, your hours may be more varied to fit around your clients and can involve some weekends and evenings.

Opportunities exist for part-time and portfolio working. Many art therapists are self-employed.

What to expect

- Some art therapists divide their working time between the NHS, private practice and teaching, and many combine art therapy with other types of related work.
- London and the South East employ the greatest number of art therapists. Jobs are also concentrated in cities and towns surrounding art therapy training courses, however they're available in most parts of the UK as key employers include social services, local authorities and the NHS. Art therapists in private practice may take referrals from these organisations, although you'll also have to generate your own work through a range of activities, including networking.
- You may have to travel between employers during the week. You may also have to travel to attend residential courses, seminars and workshops.
- Career breaks are possible but keeping up to date with developments in the profession through attending courses and maintaining established networks is vital.

Qualifications

To practise as an art therapist you must be registered with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) (<http://www.hpc-uk.org/>). In order to register, you must successfully complete an HCPC-approved postgraduate qualification in art therapy or art psychotherapy. All UK approved courses lead to a professional qualification and eligibility to apply for registration with the HCPC and membership of the British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) (<http://www.baat.org/>).

You'll usually need a first degree in fine art, visual arts or art and design to get a place on a postgraduate course. However, other graduates with experience of working in health, education or social care may be accepted if they have a commitment to the practice of the visual arts. Relevant degree subjects include:

- education/teaching
- nursing
- occupational therapy
- psychology
- social work.

Applicants without a degree may be accepted by some course providers if they have significant relevant work experience. Entry requirements vary between providers so check with them individually. Search the register of approved education and training programmes (<http://www.hcpc-uk.org/education/programmes/register/>) for an up-to-date list of course providers.

Course providers will require you to have experience of artistic practice and will ask to see a portfolio of recent artwork.

Full-time postgraduate courses usually take two years with part-time courses lasting three years. As part of the training, you'll undertake personal therapy and a clinical placement.

There are a range of introductory and foundation courses available, aimed at those thinking about a career in art therapy. For details, see BAAT - Introduction and Foundation Courses (<http://www.baat.org/Courses-Conferences/Introduction-and-Foundation-Courses>).

All students are subject to a Disclosure and Barring Service (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>) check.

Skills

You'll need to have:

- an interest in, and commitment to, the visual arts
- excellent communication skills
- excellent observation and listening skills

- the ability to gain your clients' trust, facilitate learning and encourage participation
- the capacity to empathise with people who may have difficulties in communicating either their feelings or their pain
- the ability to work effectively with individuals and in groups
- creativity and imagination
- an understanding of client confidentiality and dealing with sensitive issues
- a flexible and resourceful approach to work
- sensitivity, emotional stability and an ability to recognise your own strengths and weaknesses
- business, administration and entrepreneurial skills.

Work experience

You'll need to have at least a year's relevant work experience (either paid or voluntary) for entry on to a postgraduate training course. This can include working with vulnerable people, such as children with learning or behavioural challenges, the elderly, homeless or adults with mental ill health, in a professional capacity in a variety of settings such as health, education or youth work.

Consider approaching the art therapy departments of NHS trusts, prisons and special hospitals, special needs schools and hospices to see if they provide work experience or work shadowing opportunities. Be aware, however, that art therapy is practised in a confidential setting and so work shadowing may not always be possible.

Previous experience of working on community arts projects is also useful.

Employers

Many art therapists start their career as self-employed and generate their own work through networking, making speculative applications, writing business proposals and giving presentations to potential employers. Find out more about self-employment ([/jobs-and-work-experience/self-employment](#)).

You may often work for more than one organisation. The availability of jobs may depend on organisations gaining funding for particular projects.

Employers include:

- charities
- children, adolescent and adult services
- community centres
- drug and alcohol dependency treatment units
- education services
- hospices and other therapeutic centres
- mental health projects
- museums and galleries
- the NHS and the private health sector
- the prison and probation service
- private practice work
- schools (pre-school, primary and secondary)
- school support centres (special and mainstream)
- social services.

Look for job vacancies at:

- BAAT (<http://www.baat.org/>) - jobs are circulated monthly to members.
- Local Government Jobs (<http://www.lgjobs.com/>) and the job pages of local government websites.
- NHS Jobs (<http://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>)
- NHS Scotland Recruitment (<https://jobs.scot.nhs.uk/>)

Professional development

Continuing professional development (CPD) is an essential part of continuing registration with the HCPC, and you must keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date. Registered art therapists must also undergo regular clinical supervision from a recognised supervisor.

Membership of the BAAT is useful for career development and networking opportunities and they offer a number of relevant CPD opportunities, including a range of psychotherapeutic training and related courses. Courses on setting up in private practice are also available.

BAAT also offers accredited post-qualification training at Level 6, in areas such as art therapy supervision and working with children in art therapy, and advertises courses run by external providers. See BAAT - Courses & Conferences (<http://www.baat.org/Courses-Conferences>).

It's also possible to undertake art therapy research at PhD level.

Career prospects

Although there isn't one fixed career path within the profession, with experience you may move into a management role, leading a team of therapists or managing a therapy unit. You may also look into going into training roles alongside your usual therapy work and run short courses for other art therapists.

There are opportunities to combine work with different client groups and organisations, as well as combining art therapy with other roles such as community artist, teacher or professional artist.

Many therapists progress by developing expertise in areas such as:

- the autistic spectrum
- children with learning difficulties
- forensic medicine
- palliative care
- stroke and head injuries.

You can also join regional groups of therapists, which focus on the needs of art therapy in a particular field, and exchange ideas and methods of working through peer review. It's usual to get as broad a portfolio of work experience as possible before deciding to specialise.

There are also opportunities for research and to work in higher education with trainees on one of the postgraduate training courses.



Written by AGCAS editors

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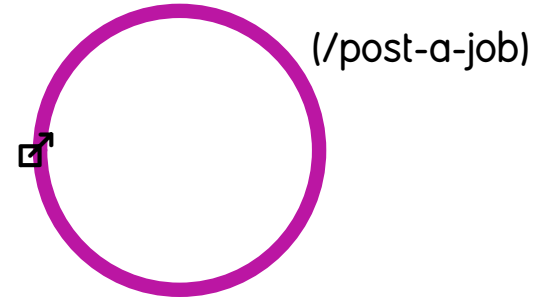


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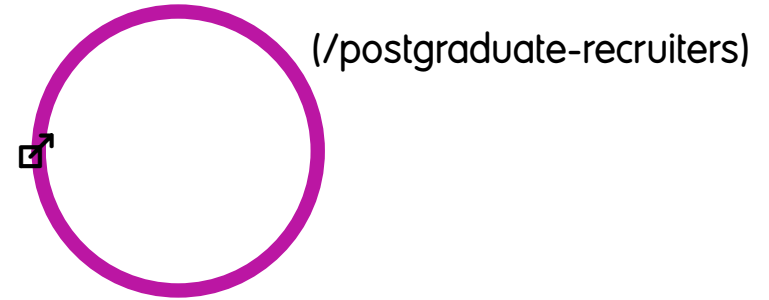
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