Art Therapist

Introduction

As an Art Therapist, you will use art to help people with physical, mental, social and emotional difficulties. Art can help people to express themselves and explore their feelings. You'll work with individuals and groups, in areas such as mental health, learning disabilities, care services and prisons.

Also known as

- Therapist, Art
- Art Psychotherapist

Work Activities

Art Therapists use art to help people who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally or in understanding their own feelings. The aim of the therapy is to enable the client to change and grow on a personal level.

As an Art Therapist, you will work with a wide range of clients, including people with mental health problems, experience of abuse, learning disabilities, long-term and incurable illnesses, behavioural problems and addiction to drugs or alcohol.

When you first meet a client, you will listen and talk to them, assessing their problem and deciding on the most appropriate methods to use with them. You'll work closely with other professionals, such as Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Social Workers and Teachers, to assess the client and decide on the therapy.

Usually, you will have a caseload of clients. Depending on the methods you choose to meet the client's needs, you'll work either with small groups of clients or one-to-one.

You will need to create a safe, non-threatening environment, in which the client feels free to experiment with art, without their creative expression being judged as 'good' or 'bad'. The point is not about being a 'good' Artist. You must encourage the client to use a range of materials and artistic methods, including clay, paper, paint and collage.

These activities help clients to think about their experiences, express their feelings and emotions, relax, and to communicate. The social aspect of group artwork also enables clients to form supportive relationships with each other.

For some clients, expressing feelings can be very difficult through speech alone. Art therapy is particularly useful for clients who have little or no ability to communicate in speech. The creative process can also help to relieve feelings of frustration, anger or depression in all clients.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you're looking for work in Wales.

Personal Qualities and Skills

To become an Art Therapist, you'll need:

- very strong artistic skills and knowledge of art methods
- creativity and imagination
- a warm, friendly and supportive personality - sensitivity
- the ability to empathise with your clients
- emotional strength to deal with clients' problems and experiences
- patience: not all clients will respond quickly to the treatment
- teamwork skills to work with other professionals, for example, Psychologists, medical staff, Teachers and Prison Officers

Pay and Opportunities
Pay

NHS employees are paid on a rising scale within defined pay bands, according to their skills and responsibilities. The pay rates given below are approximate.

- Starting: Band 6 pay of £26,565 - £35,577
- With experience: Band 7 pay of £31,696 - £41,787

Hours of work

Art Therapists usually work 37 hours a week, which may include some evening and weekend work.

Where could I work?

Employers include the NHS and local authority social services departments. Art Therapists also work in special schools, where you help children who have learning disabilities or emotional problems.

Some Art Therapists work in areas such as child guidance, family therapy and marital therapy, drug and alcohol treatment units, and prisons.

Opportunities for Art Therapists occur in towns and cities throughout the UK.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Jobs are advertised on the NHS Jobs website, in the news bulletin of the British Association of Art Therapists (available to members).

Vacancies are also advertised in local/national newspapers, on recruitment websites, and on Find a Job (www.gov.uk/jobsearch).

Social media websites, such as LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook, are a great way to network, find vacancies and get in contact with possible employers. Make sure that your profile presents you in a professional manner that will appeal to potential employers.

Take a look at our General Information Article 'Finding Work Online'.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes and training

To work as an Art Therapist, you must be registered by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). This is a legal requirement.

HCPC registration is through a postgraduate masters degree in art therapy or art psychotherapy. The HCPC and the British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) have a list of approved courses on their websites. Courses are two years full-time and three years part-time.

To enter a postgraduate course, you'll usually need a degree in art (not just fine arts but other arts subjects such as ceramics, textiles and graphic design). It can also be possible to enter with a degree or background in a relevant area, such as psychology, nursing, education, occupational therapy or social work, if you can demonstrate an ongoing involvement in art-making.

To get onto a postgraduate course, you'll usually need a specified period of work experience, for example, in health, education or social services. This can include voluntary work experience. You should check this requirement carefully with the university you are interested in applying to.

You will usually have to submit a portfolio of artwork that demonstrates a long-term and serious commitment to visual arts.

A great way to get into this career is through an internship. Take a look at our information article 'Internships', for more details.
All students on BAAT approved courses must undertake regular personal therapy sessions.

Diploma courses include subjects such as human development, health, disability, psychodynamics and art therapy theory, together with art therapy training workshops and clinical experience.

Derby University has a three-year, full-time BA (Honours) degree in creative expressive therapies (art). The course provides a grounding for postgraduate training as an Art Therapist.

The University of South Wales has a BA (Hons) degree in creative and therapeutic arts which also provides a grounding for postgraduate study.

**Progression**

With experience, you could progress into a supervisory, management or teaching post.

**Work Experience**

Previous experience working in visual arts would be really useful for this career.

**Rehabilitation of Offenders Act**

This career is an exception to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This means that you must supply information to an employer about any spent or unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings, if they ask you to.

This is different from other careers, where you only have to reveal information on unspent convictions if you are asked to.

**Qualifications**

To enter a postgraduate masters degree course in art therapy or art psychotherapy, you'll usually need a first (undergraduate) degree in art (not just fine arts but other arts subjects, such as ceramics, textiles and graphic design).

It can also be possible to enter with a degree or background in a relevant area, such as psychology, nursing, occupational therapy or social work, if you can demonstrate an ongoing involvement in art-making.

A BTEC level 1, level 2, or level 3 qualification in visual arts or fine arts could help you to stand out from the crowd.

**Adult Opportunities**

**Age limits**

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

**Courses**

Part-time postgraduate courses in art therapy/psychotherapy are available. For a full list of courses, please see the website of The British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) or Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

**Funding**

People on postgraduate courses usually fund their own studies. However, it's sometimes possible to get sponsorship from employers or to apply for financial help from relevant medical charities and trusts.

**Further Information**

**Professional institutions**

Professional institutions have the following roles:

- To support their members.
- To protect the public by keeping standards high in their professions.
For more information on the institution(s) relevant to this career, check out the contacts below.

**Contacts**

- **Health Careers**  

- **NHS Wales Careers**  
  Publisher: National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare  
  Email: abm.wedsteam@wales.nhs.uk  
  Website: [www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/829/page/36090](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/829/page/36090)

- **NHS Jobs**  
  Website: [www.jobs.nhs.uk](http://www.jobs.nhs.uk)

- **Step into the NHS**  
  NHS careers  
  Tel: 0345 6060655  
  Website: [www.stepintothenhs.nhs.uk](http://www.stepintothenhs.nhs.uk)

- **Skills for Health**  
  Skills for the health sector  
  Address: Goldsmiths House, Broad Plain, Bristol BS2 0JP  
  Tel: 0117 9221155  
  Email: office@skillsforhealth.org.uk  
  Website: [www.skillsforhealth.org.uk](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk)

- **ScreenSkills**  
  Skills for the creative industries  
  Email: info@creativeskillset.org  
  Website: [www.creativeskillset.org](http://www.creativeskillset.org)

- **Creative Choices**  
  Publisher: Creative & Cultural Skills  
  Email: info@creative-choices.co.uk  
  Website: [www.creative-choices.co.uk](http://www.creative-choices.co.uk)

- **Creative & Cultural Skills**  
  Skills for craft, cultural heritage, design, literature, music, performing arts and visual arts  
  Email: london@ccskills.org.uk  
  Website: [ccskills.org.uk](http://ccskills.org.uk)

- **University of Derby**  
  Address: Kedleston Road, Derby DE22 1GB  
  Tel: 01332 590500  
  Email: askadmissions@derby.ac.uk  
  Website: [www.derby.ac.uk](http://www.derby.ac.uk)

- **Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)**  
  Address: Park House, 184 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4BU  
  Tel: 0845 3006184  
  Email: education@hcpc-uk.org  
  Website: [www.hcpc-uk.org](http://www.hcpc-uk.org)

- **NHS Education for Scotland (NES)**  
  Scottish enquiries  
  Address: Westport 102, West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN  
  Tel: 0131 6563200  
  Email: enquiries@nes.scot.nhs.uk
• **Getting into Art & Design Courses**  
  Author: James Burnett  
  Publisher: Trotman  
  Website: [trotman.co.uk/our-books/getting-into-art-and-design-courses/](trotman.co.uk/our-books/getting-into-art-and-design-courses/)

• **British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT)**  
  Address: 24-27 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD  
  Tel: 020 7686 4216  
  Email: info@baat.org  
  Website: [www.baat.org](www.baat.org)

• **University of South Wales**  
  Address: Pontypridd, Wales CF37 1DL  
  Tel: 0845 5767778  
  Email: enquires@southwales.ac.uk  
  Website: [www.southwales.ac.uk](www.southwales.ac.uk)

• **Northern Ireland Group for Art as Therapy (NIGAT)**  
  Northern Ireland Enquiries  
  Address: c/o Centre for Psychotherapy, Shimna House, Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Saintfield Road, Belfast BT8 8BH  
  Email: info@nigat.org  
  Website: [www.nigat.org](www.nigat.org)

• **People Exchange Cymru (PEC)**  
  Public sector recruitment portal for Wales  
  Email: peopleexchangecymru@gov.wales  
  Website: [www.peopleexchangecymru.org.uk/home](www.peopleexchangecymru.org.uk/home)

### Related Careers

- Podiatry Assistant  
- Podiatrist  
- Dietitian  
- Physiotherapy Assistant  
- Speech and Language Therapy Assistant  
- Physiotherapist  
- Speech and Language Therapist  
- Sports Therapist  
- Dramatherapist  
- Music Therapist  
- Occupational Therapist  
- Occupational Therapy Assistant  
- Genetic Counsellor  
- Myotherapist