



Art Therapist

using visual art media to help people who struggle to express their feelings verbally to confront difficult, and often distressing, emotional issues



[▶ Art Therapists Career Video](#)

Entry requirements:

To practise as an art therapist in the UK you must be registered with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC). 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).

You will 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 and personal involvement in art making. Relevant degree subjects include:

- education/teaching
- nursing
- occupational therapy
- psychology
- social work.
- Some courses may also accept graduates with degrees in the humanities, social sciences or sciences.

Applicants without a degree may be accepted by some course providers if they have an equivalent professional qualification and significant relevant experience. Entry requirements vary between providers so check with them individually. For an up-to-date list of course providers, search the list of HCPC-approved education and training programmes.

Skills required:

You will need to have:

- an interest in, and commitment to, the visual arts
- excellent communication skills
- strong observation and listening skills
- the ability to gain your clients' trust, facilitate learning and encourage participation
- analytical skills in order to assess clients for art therapy and other treatment interventions
- 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
- planning and organisation skills to manage a caseload of clients
- 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
- the ability to remain calm in distressing or emotionally charged situations
- business, administration and entrepreneurial skills.

You may need a full driving licence and access to a car.

What you will earn:

Jobs in the NHS are usually covered by the Agenda for Change (AfC) Pay Rates consisting of nine pay bands. As a newly qualified art therapist, your starting salary is likely to be £32,306 (band 6), rising up the pay scale to £39,027.

Experienced NHS art therapists can earn between £40,057 and £45,839 (band 7). NHS senior and principal art therapists can earn salaries ranging from £47,126 to £53,219 (band 8a).

Income figures are intended as a guide only.

What you will do:

As an art therapist you'll use art as a medium to enable clients to communicate in a safe environment and to help them reflect on emotional issues and gain confidence and self-awareness.

Clients can include children and adults with:

- emotional and behavioural difficulties
- learning or physical disabilities
- life-limiting conditions
- mental ill health
- neurological conditions
- physical illnesses
- speech and language difficulties.

Therapy may be carried out in group or one-to-one settings.

Those who are referred to an art therapist don't need to have experience of, or be any good at, art.

You may work closely with other healthcare professionals, such as psychologists, speech and language therapists, social workers and occupational therapists, as part of a multidisciplinary team.

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

Working hours and environment:

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.

Career path and progression:

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 consider 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 a broad portfolio of work experience 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.