

Art Therapist

Art therapists use art to help people of any age, who are experiencing physical, mental, emotional and social difficulties. They work with individuals or groups of clients in a safe, non-threatening environment. They do not judge the artistic standard of their clients' work.

The Work

You could be:

- assessing the needs of clients and deciding on the best approach to treatment
- encouraging clients to express their feelings and emotions through painting, drawing or other art work
- supporting clients as they create visual images, which may release distressing feelings, help them understand their problems and move on positively
- working with clients one-to-one or in small groups using different materials such as paint, paper and clay
- showing clients with speech problems how to use art as a form of communication
- finding different ways to work with clients
- working with medical staff to help diagnose mental or emotional disorders and identify problems
- keeping up to date with paperwork, writing reports and case notes, making phone calls and sending letters to other organisations.
- working with a client's family or carers to help them to understand the client's problems.

Pay

Art therapists within the NHS Agenda for Change start on Band 6, £43,169 to £52,603 a year. With experience this rises to Band 7, £52,769 to £61,377 a year. Principal art therapists are at Band 8a, £65,032 to £70,202 a year and Band 8b, £76,778 to £82,133 a year. The current pay scales are from April 2025.

Outside the NHS your income would vary according to whether you were freelance or employed.

Conditions

- You could work in hospitals, prisons, family centres, rehabilitation centres and additional support needs schools.
- Working hours are normally regular, but you may need to do some evening work.
- You could do part time or sessional work.
- A lot of the work is on a temporary project basis so that when the project is coming to an end you would have to look for another job.

Getting In

- You need a degree (SCQF Level 10), and a postgraduate qualification (SCQF Level 11) in art therapy approved by the British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT).
- Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh offers an MSc in Art Psychotherapy (International). For entry you need a degree in visual arts. A degree in psychology, social work, nursing or teaching will be considered if

supported by a substantial portfolio of artwork.

- Entry requirements for degree courses are 4-5 Highers, usually including Art and Design.
- You should ideally have one year's work experience or voluntary work in a health care, community or youth work setting.
- The BAAT run Introduction to Art Therapy courses. This one day course may help you decide if this is the career for you. They also run a one-week Art Therapy Foundation course.
- You will require a satisfactory criminal record check from Disclosure Scotland to show that you are suitable for this type of work. Contact Disclosure Scotland for details on the type you would need.
- When you complete the postgraduate course in art therapy you gain membership of the BAAT and UK state registration with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). You need this to work in the National Health Service (NHS) or with a local authority.
- For some applicants this is a second career.

This is a small profession and entry is competitive. Most art therapists work in the NHS but some work for local authority social work departments or voluntary organisations. This is also an expanding area in mainstream education and is developing in the museums and galleries sector. Other art therapists work freelance and are paid fees rather than a regular salary. Work is often based on fixed-term projects.

What Does It Take

You should have:

- a friendly, caring and sympathetic manner
- excellent observation skills
- patience and sensitivity
- an ability to put clients at ease and to encourage them
- excellent communication skills
- a willingness to persevere, as not all clients will respond quickly to treatment
- the ability to recognise your own strengths and weaknesses
- an understanding of client confidentiality.

Training

- Once you have gained state registration, training is on the job.
- Training includes psychology of image making, therapeutic relationships, the importance of boundaries, and psychological and psychotherapeutic practice.
- Throughout your career you will undertake a continuous professional development (CPD) programme by attending training courses and seminars.
- You may also have to write for journals and present papers at conferences.
- This is required to satisfy the BAAT that you are keeping your skills and knowledge up to date to a professional standard.

Getting On

- You might specialise in a particular group of people such as children, palliative care, or dementia patients.
- You may move on to lead a team of art therapists.

- You might do research work.
- You might become a teacher of art therapy.
- You could take further training to become a psychotherapist.

More Information

Competition for posts is strong but it is possible for UK-trained art therapists to practise in some overseas countries.

You can also visit this great resource [NHS Education Scotland Virtual Tour](#) to learn more about this job.

Contacts

British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT)

Tel: 020 7686 4216

Email: hello@baat.org

Website: www.baat.org

X: [@baat_org](#)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/thebaat

Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

Tel: 0300 500 6184

Email: education@hcpc-uk.org

Website: www.hcpc-uk.org

X: [@The_HCPC](#)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/hcpcuk

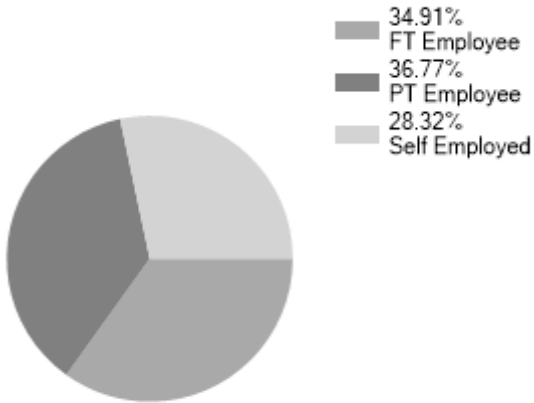
NHS Scotland Careers

Website: www.careers.nhs.scot

Website (2): jobs.scot.nhs.uk

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

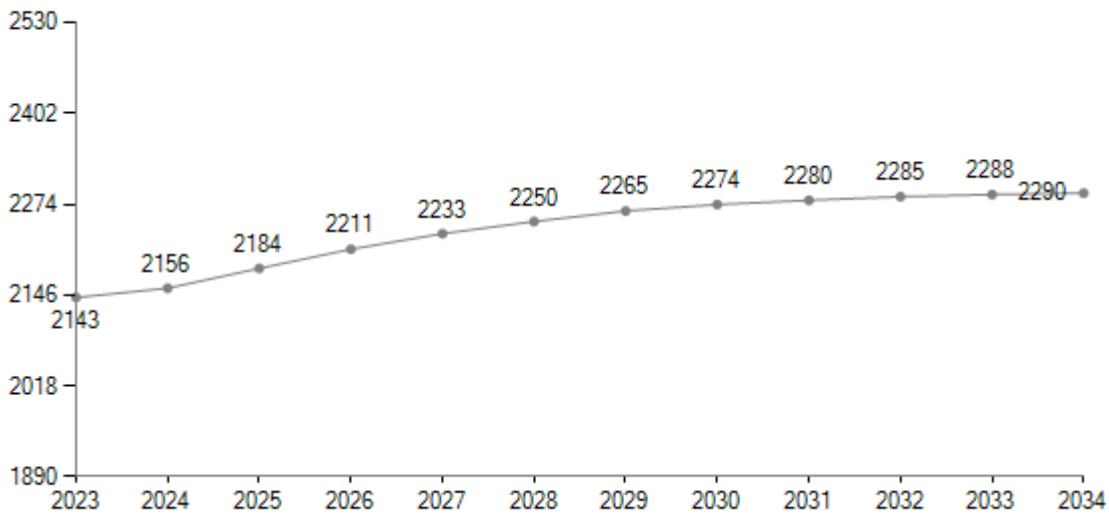


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)