



## MusAbility

### Student FAQ Download

#### What is Music Therapy?

Music therapy is a psychotherapy...a bit like counselling. The most obvious difference is that a counselling session might rely entirely on words. Music therapy doesn't have to involve a single one! Most importantly, our clients lead our sessions, and music therapy is a joint exploration of instruments, sensory and experiential work, songs and many other things! Beside having a great time, we want to help our clients reach their therapy goals. These goals are different for everyone, therefore every session might be different! Some of our clients feel and act differently on every day of the week...that's OK. As a music therapist you need to be flexible.

Music is a universal language...you can be from anywhere in the world, with any history, in any current situation and you can still, in some way, press a note on a piano, or reach for a drum. Even just a breath is musical to us, and it's for this reason that we work with people of all ages, abilities and pathologies.

We work with other professionals, teachers, healthcare professionals and family members because people need to have the best possible support network. Our aim is to help our clients to develop and grow as individuals or groups.

#### What Qualifications do I Need to be a Music Therapist?

Music therapy is a protected title – which means that in the same way you can't claim to be a Paramedic without training to be one...you can't claim to be a music therapist either. It's illegal to do so! Music therapy is a postgraduate qualification – this means that (at the moment) you need to already have an undergraduate degree to start training. Universities don't necessarily mind what this qualification was in, but often music, teaching or some kind of psychology is a good thing to start with. Postgraduate degrees in music therapy are typically 2 years full time (or 3 years part time) to reach the required MSc or MA level...so expect to do a lot of studying.

#### Is it Hard to get onto a Music Therapy Course?

Yes! There are few places in the country that offer training, and not all of them even intake students every year...so obviously there's a lot of competition. If you're the right person for the job...you'll be fine.

### **Do I Have to be Able to Play Instruments?**

Absolutely! You'll typically need at least one instrument that you can play above Grade 6 (ideally higher) standard. Back in the day, you were only allowed to play piano as your primary instrument, but luckily now there are violinists, harpists, guitarists, the lot. It's also really important to not be afraid to use your voice. It doesn't have to be a good voice – but you need to be happy to sing in front of other people regardless! 90% of the work is improvised...and this can be really hard when you've trained in an instrument more classically...so practise sitting down without any music and just seeing what happens on your instrument.

### **Am I Guaranteed to Find a Job once I Qualify?**

No...well it's the same with any job really isn't it? Music therapy is available on the NHS in London and some areas of Scotland...but at the moment it isn't a widely known profession in the rest of the country! Many music therapists set up their own work (self-employed), which means using your powers of persuasion and skills in interviews to create posts. Luckily there are several organisations who employ music therapists now, such as Nordoff-Robbins, Chiltern Music Therapy, Chroma or us, MusAbility to name a few – but don't expect to fall into a full time job. Your week will most likely be split into several different settings, and you'll often drive between a few clients in one day. It's nothing like being stuck in the same office every day! If you like variation in your work, you'll love this.

### **What Kind of Salary can I Expect to Get?**

This really depends on the client group, whether you're working somewhere for one client or a full day, and whether you're self employed or employed by someone else. A full time basic rate music therapist on the NHS currently earns about £26,000/year (2019), whereas a private client might pay £40-£50 per hour...but it's different for different settings.

### **What is the Hardest Part of your Job as a Music Therapist?**

Great question. Music therapists work with people who are disabled...physically and mentally, who are traumatised or have very difficult backgrounds, who are grieving and in pain...so while there can be so much joy in our work, there can also be difficult times. Dealing with other people's problems can wear you down, so you need an upbeat, 'can-do' attitude, and be ready to accept help from a counsellor and/or clinical supervisor to make sure you're ok too.

### **Do MusAbility Provide Student or Work Experience?**

At the moment...it's not easy to do that. Our work is confidential, and our clients have to consent to exactly who sees their data. Apart from that, it's incredibly difficult to have people watching you while you're trying to be creative...or to have a different person in the room each week when you're upset or emotional. We do offer student days where we can show you footage and answer lots of questions – so feel free to drop us your email address if you're interested. Once you've been accepted onto a music therapy course however; we are able to provide placements for students and support them alongside their studies!

### **How can I get Experience Relevant to Music Therapy?**

If you can't volunteer in a school or setting that already has a music therapist you can chat to, then any experience with people with disabilities is great, or working with children with or without additional needs. If you're trying to get onto a music therapy course the most important thing is that you've worked with people (they tend to like work experience with children more!).

### **Are there any Books I can Read to get More Information?**

Of course...and the list would be huge. Have a read of Music Therapy Intimate Notes, by Mercedes Pavlicevic for an insight into some clinical work...anything 'light' you can find by John Bowlby (good luck finding something light by him...but his work is the basis of all child attachment, loss and separation so unbelievably important) or Daniel Stern about child psychology – this will give you a great insight into the beginning of a music therapy course.

Good luck in your studies, and please consider MusAbility for a role in the North-West of England and North Wales in the future!

Roz Whiteley MSc BHSc NMT

Director  
MusAbility Ltd