

Costume Designer

Introduction

Costume designers research and design costumes and accessories for theatre, film and television. Their designs must suit particular characters and settings. Costumes may be made, hired or bought from second-hand clothes shops.

Also known as

- Designer, Costume
- Theatre Costume Designer
- Film Costume Designer
- Television Costume Designer



Work Activities

As a Costume Designer, you will work in theatre, film or television production. You'll design costumes and select accessories to suit specific characters and settings.

Before beginning your designs, you'll read, analyse and interpret the script you are working on. You must spend a lot of time carrying out detailed research, especially if you are designing period costumes - somebody will notice if something is not right!

Following the research, you will present your design ideas in the form of drawings and fabric samples. Once ideas have been approved, you'll take measurements of the cast members. In some cases, you may then create the costumes yourself, although this is more often the role of a Costume Maker.

Normally, you will be given a budget that you use to buy fabric, or to hire/buy whatever cannot be made. You'll arrange costume fittings with the cast members, and make any alterations to the costumes, if necessary.

As a Costume Designer, you'll work closely with Directors, Producers, Technicians, Lighting and Set Designers as well as Performers. This helps to produce designs that suit the overall look of the production. It'll be down to you to manage the continuity of costumes - making sure everything fits together.

Directors usually have the final say about all aspects of production. Some may allow the Costume Designer to have a great deal of creative freedom. Others like to give detailed guidelines that they expect the Costume Designer to follow.

Once filming is completed, you will now be responsible for the storage of the costumes, the return of hired outfits, and the sale or disposal of any remaining costumes.

The work may involve local travel, or more extensive travel in the UK and possibly overseas. You may also go on tour with a production.

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 a Costume Designer, you need:

- an understanding of dressmaking
- to draw clearly and accurately
- to pay attention to fine detail
- good communication, presentation and negotiation skills
- an interest in theatre, drama, fashion, art or history
- to keep up to date with new design developments and fashions
- to work to deadlines and budgets

- knowledge of lighting techniques, camera angles and the overall production processes

Self-employed or freelance Costume Designers will need business and marketing skills.

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

The pay rates given below are approximate.

- Starting: £23,500 - £25,000
- With experience: £26,500 - £31,000
- Senior Costume Designers earn £33,000 - £35,500

Hours of work

As a Costume Designer, you will usually work 40 hours a week. However, early starts, late finishes, evening and weekend work may be required. You may also be required to work intensively for periods, especially in the run-up to a production.

Where could I work?

Employers are theatre, television and film production companies. There are a few opportunities with specialist costumiers.

Opportunities for Costume Designers occur with employers in large towns and cities throughout the UK, where major theatres/TV production centres are located, for example, London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds.

Self-employment

Most Costume Designers work on a self-employed, freelance basis. You are usually employed on short contracts and may move from production to production in theatre, television and film. You can obtain this work through specialist recruitment agencies.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised in local/national newspapers, on recruitment and employers' 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'

It's a good idea to build up a network of relevant contacts, as not all costume design jobs are advertised. Making speculative job applications can also be effective.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes

A common route into this career is via a foundation course in art and design followed by a degree, HNC, HND or foundation degree in a subject such as theatre, costume or fashion design.

An Advanced Level Apprenticeship is also great place to start.

Graduates often start work as Costume Design Assistants or Junior Designers and work their way up, gaining skills

along the way.

Training

Most of your training will be on-the-job.

Costume design courses are available at various colleges throughout the UK. These can be quite expensive, but they are often very popular and places fill up quickly.

If you would like some training, then the Wimbledon College of Arts offer a course in costume and set design for film and theatre. This is suited for people who are thinking of being a Costume or Set Designer and the units you could be studying include:

- story telling
- story boards and mood boards
- scale model figures
- character development
- 3D making/costume designing
- model making
- detailed costume sketches or collages
- surface textures for model making and costume painting

Check the website for dates and availability.

Other courses could be available in your area.

A great way to get into this career is through an internship. Take a look at our information article 'Internships', for more details.

Work Experience

Skills gained as an assistant in a design studio or workshop are valued. Experience gained in the costume department of an amateur or professional theatre is also useful.

Progression

Many Costume Designers become self-employed. With experience, some move into senior roles within an organisation.

Qualifications

To get onto an Advanced Level Apprenticeship, you'll usually need 5 GCSEs at grade C/4 or above, including English and maths, or to have completed an Intermediate Level Apprenticeship.

The usual entry requirements for a relevant HNCs, HNDs, Foundation Degrees and Foundation courses are:

- 1/2 A levels where you'll need an A level in art or in an art-based subject
- GCSEs at grade C/4 or above in 4/5 subjects

Some courses ask that you have a pass in English.

Alternatives to A levels include:

- BTEC level 3 qualifications in 'art and design' or 'apparel, footwear, leather or textile production'
- City and Guilds level 3 qualifications in 'design and craft'
- a design Advanced Level Apprenticeship
- the International Baccalaureate Diploma

Many other qualifications are also accepted so check college/university websites carefully for more details.

To enter any course in art and design, you'll need a portfolio of your work.

Some universities accept the Welsh Baccalaureate as equivalent to 1 A level.

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.

Skills/experience

Skills gained as an assistant in a design studio or workshop are valued. Experience gained in the costume department of an amateur or professional theatre is also useful.

To enter the work or relevant courses, you need to have a portfolio of work showing your creative ability.

Courses

If you don't have the qualifications needed to enter your chosen degree or HND course, a college or university Access course (eg, Access to Art and Design) could be the way in. No formal qualifications are usually required, but you should check individual course details.

They can lead to relevant degree/HND courses.

It's also possible to do a part-time Art Foundation course, which leads to a degree or HND course. Higher National Certificate (HNC) courses are also available part-time, often in the evenings and/or in the daytime.

Part-time foundation degrees, in relevant subjects, are available from numerous colleges and universities.

Universities and colleges of higher education (HE) will usually consider applications from candidates who don't meet their usual entry requirements, especially those with experience in arts, crafts or design. You should check the admissions policy of individual universities and HE colleges.

The Arts University Bournemouth offers a part-time postgraduate degree in costume design.

Further Information

Contacts

- **Apprenticeships: Get In. Go Far**
National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)
Tel: 0800 015 0400
Email: nationalhelpdesk@findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk
Website: www.apprenticeships.org.uk
- **ScreenSkills**
Skills for the creative industries
Email: info@creativeskillset.org
Website: www.creativeskillset.org
- **Creative Choices**
Publisher: Creative & Cultural Skills
Email: info@creative-choices.co.uk
Website: 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

- **Chartered Society of Designers (CSD)**

Email: info@csd.org.uk

Website: www.csd.org.uk

- **Getting into Art & Design Courses**

Author: James Burnett Publisher: Trotman

Website: trotman.co.uk/our-books/getting-into-art-and-design-courses/

- **Get into Theatre**

Email: info@getintothatre.org

Website: www.getintothatre.org

- **London College of Fashion**

Address: 20 John Princes' Street, London W1G 0BJ

Tel: 020 7514 7400

Email: enquiries@fashion.arts.ac.uk

Website: www.fashion.arts.ac.uk

- **National Theatre**

Tel: 020 7452 3400

Email: info@nationaltheatre.org.uk

Website: www.nationaltheatre.org.uk

- **The Stage**

Entertainment and performing arts news

Website: www.thestage.co.uk

- **StartinTV**

Website: www.startintv.com

- **Equity**

Tel: 020 7379 6000

Email: info@equity.org.uk

Website: www.equity.org.uk

- **Equity (Scotland)**

Scottish enquiries

Tel: 0141 2482472

Email: scotland@equity.org.uk

Website: www.equity.org.uk

- **Federation of Drama Schools (FDS)**

Tel: 020 7529 8794

Email: info@dramauk.co.uk

Website: www.dramauk.co.uk

- **Arts University Bournemouth (AUB)**

Address: Wallisdown, Poole, Dorset BH12 5HH

Tel: 01202 533011

Email: general@aub.ac.uk

Website: aub.ac.uk

- **BBC Design**

Website: www.bbc.co.uk/design/

- **Careers Wales - Welsh Apprenticeships**

Tel: 0800 028 4844

Website: ams.careerswales.com/

- **Wales Screen**
Website: www.screenwales.com
- **National Theatre Wales (Welsh Enquiries)**
Tel: 029 2035 3070
Email: info@nationaltheatrewales.org
Website: nationaltheatrewales.org
- **Equity (Wales)**
Address: Third Floor, 1 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9SD
Tel: 029 2039 7971
Email: wales@equity.org.uk
Website: www.equity.org.uk
- **Hiive**
Hiive is the online professional network for creative people.
Website: app.hiive.co.uk/

Related Careers

- Medical Illustrator
- Design Assistant
- Fashion Designer
- Graphic Designer
- Artworker
- Metal Engraver
- Visual Merchandiser
- Commercial Illustrator
- Signmaker
- Ceramics Designer
- Footwear Designer
- Furniture Designer
- Product Designer
- Vehicle Designer
- Interior Designer
- Jewellery Designer
- Packaging Designer
- Textile Designer
- Theatre Designer
- Musical Instrument Technician
- Picture Researcher
- Technical/Scientific Illustrator
- Model Maker
- Picture Framer
- Designer
- Illustrator
- Artist
- CGI Artist
- VFX Artist
- Nostalgist