



Animators can work in various branches of the media, from feature films to websites or computer games. While a very talented few become animators by building on an amateur interest, most entrants take an appropriate higher education course.

What is animation?

Animations are film sequences or videos containing moving, drawn or modelled images. They are constructed by running together thousands of separate photographed images, to convey an impression of movement. Traditionally, each image is hand drawn or models or puppets are used. The models/puppets are placed in a set and moved, and each movement is photographed. Sound effects, including speech, may also be incorporated into the final film.

Nowadays, animations are often produced much more quickly using specialist computer software packages. Images of models or drawings can be scanned into a computer and manipulated, or the images can be computer-generated. Computer animation has developed rapidly in recent years, helped by advanced digital technology – the films *How to Train Your Dragon*, *Up* and *Bolt* were made in this way. CGI (computer-generated image) techniques are also used in many different films, including recent blockbusters *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* and *Avatar*.

Animation can be divided into four broad areas:

- **2D drawn animation**– using traditional hand-drawn animation
- **2D computer animation**– creating animations using computer packages
- **3D computer animation**– generating three-dimensional images
- **stop motion/stop frame animation**– using models, puppets or clay – as seen in the films *Wallace and Gromit* and *Coraline*, for instance.

There are around 300 animation studios in Britain, many of which are very small. Most studios specialise in one of the above areas and, within that area, may focus on producing animations for a particular purpose, e.g. special effects for computer games, interactive website design or video production. Around 2,000 people work in the industry.

When is animation used?

In advertising

Adverts need to be attention grabbing, memorable and appealing, and animation is well suited to achieve this. Therefore, much of the work undertaken by the animation industry is in creating adverts that promote products or services for client companies. Although some animators are employed in-house by advertising agencies, experienced animators often work freelance, being contracted to work as and when required. Animated banners and sequences are commonplace on the internet, not only as adverts but also as a regular feature of website design.

For entertainment

- **Television** carries an increasing number of animated programmes. For children, animation may be used for entertainment or to get an educational message across, while animated shows and short films aimed at older people may have dramatic, comedy or satirical themes.
- Lately, with new digital technology, it has become easier to produce animated **feature-length films and DVDs/videos**, and such films even have their own category at the Oscars!
- One of the fastest-growing areas for animators is the field of commercial **music video** production. Videos can be completely animated or moving images can be used incorporating cartoon animation mixed with straight video footage of the band or artist.

- **Title sequences** for films and programmes and television channel 'idents' (short videos that identify the channel between programmes) often feature animation.
- Animation is used extensively in **computer and video games**.

For education and training

Animated sequences often work well within the field of education and training, when sensitive or thought-provoking treatments of a subject are needed. Hair-raising or funny images help convey messages that stick in the memory.

What jobs are there?

If you look at the credits list at the end of any animated film or video, you will be surprised to see how many people are involved in its production. Jobs range from those concerned primarily at the development and pre-production stages, through to jobs that are carried out at the post-production stage. Jobs, and job titles, also vary depending on the area of animation (computer animation, stop motion etc, as described earlier). They include:

- the **director**, in overall charge of a production, supported by the **assistant director** and the **producer** and **art director**
- the **scriptwriter**, who works alongside a **character designer** and the **actors** who provide the live voice dialogues
- the **storyboard and layout artist** – helped by the **background designer**
- **key animators**, who, in 2D animation, provide the first drawings that are filled out and completed by **assistants** and **inbetweeners** and, in 3D animation, work on screen to create and position the images
- **modellers**, who make the models and puppets
- the **special effects animator**, who can have an important role in adding a further dimension to the sound and imagery of the animation
- the **composer**, who brings together all the material, such as computer animation, special effects, live action etc, to create the final image.

New entrants to the animation industry may be employed as **runners** or **production assistants**, who undertake a wide range of supporting tasks, but can gain useful experience and, occasionally, on-the-job training for more specialised careers in animation.

What does it take?

To be successful in the animation industry you need:

- creative and artistic ability
- a high level of technical and ICT skills
- a good eye for composition, motion, perspective etc
- storytelling skills
- a flexible, adaptable approach to work
- patience and good powers of concentration
- the ability to meet deadlines.

Animators often work in teams with other animators, so being able to take direction and work well with other people are also very important.

How to train as an animator

All creative animators start from an interest in art and design, 3D effects or modelmaking. Many show talent while still at school, and some are particularly interested in developing their design skills through

computer programs. To help develop your skills, it's best to take your education and training to degree level, if possible; most animators hold higher education qualifications.

There is a range of degree, HND and foundation degree courses that specialise in animation and related subjects, including computer animation. Many higher education institutions offer art and design courses that include animation studies. **Check the content of different courses**– some are very technical, others more creative. You need to decide which sort of course best matches your interests and skills. Skillset (the Sector Skills Council for creative media) currently accredits seven industry-endorsed animation courses at various higher education institutions, through the Skillset Tick scheme. See the Skillset website listed at the end of this leaflet.

For entry to a degree course in animation, you generally need at least two A levels (one may have to be in an art-, computer- or technology-related subject) or equivalent, such as a relevant BTEC Level 3 National qualification or Advanced Diploma, plus supporting GCSEs. Progression to a degree may also be from an art and design foundation course. Many courses require you to present a portfolio or showreel of your creative work, as part of the application process. **Check individual course entry requirements carefully, as they do vary.**

Graduates of more general art and design courses may specialise through a postgraduate course.

You can search for courses of any level in animation (and in other media-related subjects) on the *BFI/Skillset Media Courses and Multimedia Courses Directory*, which can be accessed from the websites of Skillset and the BFI. You can also search for full-time foundation degree, HND and degree courses on the UCAS website:

www.ucas.com

Prospects

Animation is a popular area of film work and British animators are amongst the world leaders. Just think of Aardman Animations' international success with *Wallace and Gromit*, *Chicken Run* and *A Matter of Loaf and Death*.

Competition for jobs is quite stiff, as animation has become a very popular career choice. Many of the new jobs are in the creation of computer games. Nearly half of those in the industry work on a freelance basis, undertaking projects on a short-term contract basis, as work becomes available with different organisations.

Some animators work as independent film makers – trying to win commissions from bodies such as television companies, to fund the production of short films.

Pay

Rates of pay can vary hugely. Starting salaries in animation studios are around £15-20,000. Senior animators might expect to earn around £25,000, rising to over £40,000 for very successful and experienced animators. BECTU (the Media & Entertainment Union) publishes a list of recommended freelance rates for those working in film and television, they recommend freelance 3D animators are paid £232 per day.

Adults: *Academic qualifications for entry to higher education courses may be relaxed for those with relevant experience, but a good portfolio of artwork or a showreel is vital.*

Further Information

Skillset– the Sector Skills Council for creative media. For information and advice, call the careers helpline on 08080 300 900 (in England and Northern Ireland) or 0800 012 1815 (in Wales), or see:

www.skillset.org/careers

There's a useful animation section on the Skillset website, which carries information on the various job roles in animation, details of accredited courses and a media courses search facility:

www.skillset.org/animation

BFI (British Film Institute)– the website has information about events for students and access to the *Media Courses and Multimedia Courses Directory*, from the BFI and Skillset:

www.bfi.org.uk/education

National Media Museum– tel: 0844 856 3797. Occasionally offers relevant workshops.

www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk

BECTU– tel: 020 7346 0900.

www.bectu.org.uk

The Knowledge— an online directory of contacts in the film, TV, video and commercials production industries. Click on 'Category' to search for companies involved in animation:

www.theknowledgeonline.com

The following website includes industry news, an online animation directory of companies involved in animation and information about the quarterly industry magazine *Imagine*:

www.imagineanimation.net

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Other leaflets that may be of interest

Cartoonist - Leaflet E 05

Art and design - an introduction - Leaflet E 01

Special effects work - Leaflet PA 05

**Work in multimedia and interactive media -
Leaflet D 04**

Website design and management - Leaflet D 03

Film making - Leaflet PA 02