

Ultimate beginners' guide to theatre jobs 2016

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There are so many different professions in the theatre industry that whether you love being home behind the scenes, there's a career for you. Here we present an introduction for begi

Entry-level difficulty ratings

- ★★★★★ Extremely difficult
- ★★★★ Very difficult
- ★★★ Difficult
- ★★ Relatively straightforward
- ★ Easy

Pay/salary expectations are at the lowest level and the difficulty of getting a job assumes a drama school, other training or on the job

Backstage

Stage management

The team usually consists of three people, although on big shows there may be more. The the props, the deputy (DSM) takes notes in rehearsal and cues the show in performance. Between them they cover all aspects of the production and during performance they are in

Pay: About £400 per week minimum for a new ASM.

Training: Drama school is best – most run a stage management course.

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Wardrobe, wigs and make-up

Roles range from casual work as a dresser or make-up assistant to head of wardrobe or w. Many costume-makers are freelance and often specialise in particular fields such as knitwe theatres have a making wardrobe department where skilled tailors, cutters, and costume a manufacture but wigs need careful maintenance from skilled wig dressers and stylists. Dur for the show, cover quick-changes and wash and maintain costumes and wigs. Wardrobe s and buyer to manage the budget, fittings and deadlines.

Pay: About £7-£8 per hour.

Training: Specialist courses in costume and/or media make-up at University of the Arts Lo Nottingham Trent University. Smaller academies offering intensive training in wigs and mak Brushstrokes.

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Stage crew

The stage crew is responsible for getting the scenery into the building, putting it together, flying and scene changes during the performance. Permanent staff at a theatre will be supplemented by 'casuals' for busy times or heavy shows. A knowledge of stage technology, tools and safety at work practices is important.

Pay: About £7-£8 per hour.

Training: An ABTT bronze award might be a good way to start. It is also possible to get casual work on fit-ups and most reputable employers will provide a basic induction session.

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Electrics

You can be a resident electrician in a theatre or work freelance. At the basic level, the work includes rigging and operating the lighting. Increasingly there is a specialist role for moving light programmers.

Pay: About £7-£8 per hour.

Training: An ABTT summer school course is a good start. Most drama schools offer training and others, such as Central and Rose Bruford College, have specialist courses. A diploma in the safe use of electricity is very useful.

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Sound

The basic job is to set up and maintain equipment, run checks and operate sound during p technicians work on stage in charge of the radio mics and other onstage equipment. There sound technician will work closely with the sound designer to realise their design, while oth musicals.

Pay: About £7-8 per hour – but skilled operators are at a premium.

Training: ABTT silver award for sound technicians. Many drama schools have a sound ele

How hard is it to get into? ★★★

Construction, props and scene-painting



Almost every practical skill and material is used to create theatre at one time or another, from paint. Some skills allow you to work as a freelance, others can be used in a scenic workshop.

Pay: About £100 per day.

Training: Most skills are variations on those used in other industries. A design college or a technical school can be a good basis. RADA runs specialist courses in construction and scene painting.

How hard is it to get into? ★★ ★

Specialists

Video and automated scenery are new areas of employment. Video can include the preparation of video for stage. Automation operators are only the norm for West End musicals, but the job involves a work of precision. There is also work for electronic engineers with manufacturers creating the hardware, software and permanent installations, such as powered flying.

Pay: £500-plus per week.

Training: Few drama schools provide training: some video technicians come from film schools, others from video in performance courses. Automation operators have often been stage managers or workshop assistants. Stage Technologies are often willing to train such people.

How hard is it to get into? ★★ ★

Technical management

A production manager is responsible for putting the whole production together, working with all the technical departments. A technical manager is likely to be based in a theatre, leading the technical staff, the building and equipment.

Pay: From £27,000 per year – more in larger companies.

Training: Get as much working experience of all aspects of production as you can.

How hard is it to get into? ★★ ★★

AK Bennett-Hunter

Creatives

While all those working in theatre are, by their nature, 'creative', these are the people who create the production. They also tend to instigate projects.

Writer

The writer has overall responsibility for the narrative of the play. A theatre may commission or, occasionally, a writer will be commissioned to write a script based on a format from a project on a project instigated by a director.

Pay: £5,000-£12,000 per commission, depending on the size of the theatre and level of success. They may also receive rehearsal attendance fees and royalties.

Training: There are a number of well regarded writing MA courses, but this is not a necessity. A number of theatre companies run playwriting schemes. In either case it is best to look at recent 'graduates' to give you an idea of the course.

How hard is it to get into? ★★★★★

Director

The director has the overall vision for the production, and is responsible (usually in collaboration with the producer) for bringing together the cast and creative team. They lead the rehearsal process up to opening night. In long runs they will often have an assistant or associate working alongside them).

Pay: £3,500-£20,000, with little or no fee on the fringe. Directors also get a royalty for commercial productions.

Training: There are a number of directing MA courses, of which Birkbeck's is the most prestigious qualification, and most directors learn by being an assistant, but an MA creates a bridge into the profession. The Directors Scheme runs placements across the country and has an excellent website detailing opportunities.

How hard is it to get into? ★★★★★

Designer

A production designer is responsible for the overall look of a production, and is usually responsible for creating a scale model of the set and detailed sketches of costumes for the production team. They may be expected to help build the design.

Pay: £1,500-£6,000 for a design, with royalties for commercial productions.

Training: Several art schools offer degrees in theatre design – notably Central Saint Martin's (part of the University of the Arts London). There are also design degrees at drama schools such as the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA).

How hard is it to get into? ★★★★★

Lighting designer

Lighting designers ensure the action can be seen, while creating atmosphere and helping to locate scenes. The job is both creative and technical. A good lighting designer needs to be able to talk about the look and feel of a play, and dissect and analyse a script, as well as understanding the technicalities of a lighting rig.

Pay: £600-£3,000, with more for very big commercial projects and royalties paid on commercial productions.

Training: Most lighting designers come through a degree in technical theatre, specialising in lighting design from a drama school, or occasionally a university. Many lighting designers begin their careers as theatre technicians, often taking on fringe design work on the side, and assisting established lighting designers.

How hard is it to get into? ★★★★★

Sound designer

Sound designers work with the designer and the lighting designer to create the world of the play – responsible for sound effects, but also creating atmosphere, helping to locate a scene, and composing soundscapes. Thanks to advances in technology, sound design has recently become much more ambitious as programmes such as QLab allow for much more control and flexibility. On musicals the sound designer is responsible for mixing the production, finding the right balance between band and singer. They work closely with music directors and composers.

Phot

Pay: £600-£3,000, with larger fees and royalties paid on commercial productions.

Training: There are a number of good technical theatre courses, but very few places to study. The leading course in sound design is at RCSSD.

How hard is it to get into? ★★★★★

Choreographer/movement director

Choreographers play a key role in musicals, in which they are responsible for the staging of the director. Choreographers or movement directors will also be used on many straight plays, and the role will vary enormously depending on whether they are a co-director, to coming in for a couple of sessions to choreograph a piece of period dance

Pay: For a non-musical production, about £1,300, or a day rate of £136-£200. Choreographer fee closer to that of a director – and royalties on commercial productions.

Training: Most (but not all) choreographers start as dancers, and train on a dance or music course. Some include London Contemporary, Millennium Dance College and London Studio Centre.

How hard is it to get into? ★★★★★

Composer

A composer for a musical will share responsibility for the overall narrative, and may also take on the role of a playwright. A composer will write 'incidental' music to underscore scenes.

Pay: A composer for a musical will share a commission with a writer – usually split 50:50. A composer would be paid for a musical, but you could expect between £3,000 and £5,000. A composer of a musical would receive a royalty. £1,500 to £7,500 (usually about £2,500).

Training: Most composers come through music college. A talent for composition and an understanding of music is a qualification.

How hard is it to get into? ★★★★★

Producer

A producer instigates a production, raises the money, and oversees the marketing. At other times, a producer should not be confused with an investor, although sometimes (especially in New York) they are the same person.

Pay: Anything from bankruptcy to becoming a millionaire.

Training: There are MAs at RCSSD, Mountview and Birkbeck, as well as the Stage One A Level.

How hard is it to get into? ★★★★★

Casting director

Casting directors know every actor out there. When a production is being cast they work alone or with a team to find the actors – they make suggestions, introduce the director to actors and they organise the casting process.

Pay: £30,000-£50,000.

Training: There are no set routes into casting, nor any specific qualifications. Many casting directors start as agents, and there is some crossover between agents and casting directors. An internship in an agent's office is a good place to start.

How hard is it to get into? ★★★

Literary manager

Sometimes known as a literary associate or a dramaturg, this role focuses on writing. This ethos of producing new work, though a literary manager may also be hunting out forgotten with an artistic director to programme productions at the theatre.

Pay: £30,000-£50,000.

Training: A degree in English or theatre studies would help. Many literary managers start work by writing to theatres' literary departments.

How hard is it to get into? ★★ ★

Artistic director

Artistic directors are almost always theatre directors, but they can be producers, and every directors. An artistic director is in charge of the creative life of the company, often working performing the role of chief executive or the joint chief executive, he or she holds an enormous balance and looking after the welfare of the staff and visiting professionals.

Pay: £40,000-£100,000.

Training: Most artistic directors start as freelance directors. RTYDS and Birkbeck offer apprenticeship grounding in the administrative and producing side of an artistic director's job.

How hard is it to get into? ★★ ★★ ★

Thomas Hescott

Onstage

Actor

An actor's workplace can range from a wide variety of stage and studio settings to outdoor be found in specialist sectors such as voice-overs, corporate role play or theatre in education. Lead and character parts to supporting roles and walk-ons, may vary considerably at different effect on pay levels. Although a relatively small number of high-profile actors get the bulk of that many actors struggle – regardless of talent or experience – to earn a sustainable income with other jobs, ranging from table waiting and call centre work to temping or teaching than getting unpaid work. A well-connected agent can advance an actor's career, but when market oneself and self-generate work is becoming increasingly important.

Pay: Many acting jobs on the fringe pay nothing, 'profit-share' or expenses only. The 2016/ commercial theatre production in a venue of less than 250 seats is £350 (higher rates apply to separate rates for TV and film work – uktheatre.org is a useful source for rate information). actor's agent.

Training: Although it is possible to begin an acting career with no training, Drama UK research had professional training at a university or drama school. Full-time training is expensive and competitive, so part-time training is a route taken by many. Relevant subjects include performance and musical theatre.

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Singer

Singers in the charts or headlining West End musicals represent the tip of the iceberg in terms of the profession as a whole. In addition to the many singers performing solo in venues from opera houses to cruise ships, those employed most regularly are often backing vocalists and session singers.

Pay: A West End cast member could expect to earn a minimum of £545.19 and upwards depending on the size of the venue, and number of shows per week. The minimum weekly rate for an opera singer is currently £360. A singer on a cruise ship might earn between £1,200 and £2,500 per month. An experienced vocalist playing functions or corporate events can earn significantly more for one booking – although the responsibility of sourcing and paying the musicians is often part of that fee.

Training: Proper vocal and performance training is important, from a health point of view as much as from an employability perspective. Singers who wish to specialise in a particular field, such as musical theatre or opera, can pursue a formal qualification at a drama or music school. Private vocal coaching is also an ongoing training option and one that even experienced singers sometimes return to, either as a refresher or in preparation for specific auditions and roles. For singers whose ambitions include musical theatre, additional dance and acting training is also advisable.

How hard is it to get into? ★★★

Dancer



Phot

Due to its physical nature, there is often a limit on how long a dancer can sustain a perform dancer started as a child, it is probably the hardest career to get into if you have not been p disciplines such as ballet. Although many dancers specialise in a particular style, versatility are the key skills needed to attract regular employment. As their career develops, many da choreography and teaching and continue in these roles once they hang up their dancing sh

Pay: An experienced dancer can earn £450-£500 per week, either in a specific show or fro many dancers are freelance, there are some opportunities for full-time work with companie

Training: Most dancers take classes from childhood, often taking graded exams from awar Organisation or the Royal Academy of Dance, before moving on to vocational training at a theatre course. The training route into the commercial dance industry can be less formal b key part of all successful dance careers.

How hard is it to get into? ★★ ★

Musician

There have been many great self-taught musicians, but in order to make a living in theatre, well as to play with other musicians in an orchestra or band in a variety of different styles. l musician in theatre is often an invisible one, whether playing in a West End orchestra pit, ir the studio orchestra for recordings and broadcasts.

Pay: A musician in a commercial production can expect to earn a weekly minimum rate of £ several instruments.

Training: Formal training and qualifications are available in a variety of musical styles and i role of technology in music production, many professional musicians advise students to un along with more traditional music studies.

How hard is it to get into? ★★ ★

Comedian

Standing up at an open mic night is within most people's capabilities, making this perhaps a long-term sustainable comedy career is a much tougher and very competitive process of established clubs or the comedy 'shop window' of a one-person show at Edinburgh and oth Although stand-up is the most common comedy format, improvisation and sketch groups a actors, and regular comedy circuit performances can include everything from ventriloquism

Pay: A short spot at a smaller club can earn anything from a pint of beer to £50 depending on the venue. Established comedians can expect to earn from £100-£500 and upwards per gig. Access to circuits usually requires TV exposure via promotion from specialist agencies with a track record.

Training: There is no recognised formal training route, although Kent University offers a comedy degree. Some comedians like John Mannard are graduates of Salford University's performance course.

How hard is it to get into? ★

John Byrne

Other jobs

You don't have to be onstage or backstage to work in theatre. There are many other ways to be professionally involved.

Agent

An agent is contractually responsible for an actor's career and arranges for him or her to be in the theatre to support his or her clients at the opening of their shows although the agent also does a similar job for playwrights.

Pay: Depends entirely on the list of actors and their earning capacity. The agent typically takes 10-15% of the actor's earnings.

Training: Many agents have been to drama school and trained as performers. Others have not. Some operate as part-time agents alongside other professional work. The traditional route in is to start as a junior.

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Marketing and PR

Every theatre has someone responsible for promoting its wares – including projects and opening nights. Many theatres often outsource this function. In larger theatres there is a department with several staff. Theatres with a full-time team on its staff.

Pay: High if you're managing a big department. Modest if you're a freelancer taking small c
£30,000 to marketing managers.

Training: A university degree in marketing, PR or other subject. There can be a career prog
larger organisations. Some PR people start as journalists.

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Front of house

Front of house staff manage seating, sales, tickets and audience safety, overseeing
facilities such as lavatories and everything thing else to do with ushering the
audience in and out of the theatre. Big theatres have a duty front of house manager
and a number of part-time staff.

Pay: £34 for a three-hour stint at a West End Theatre. Full-time managers can earn
up to £50,000 in prestigious venues.

Training: On the job. It's a favourite source of extra income for drama students and
actors.

How hard is it to get into? ★

Box office

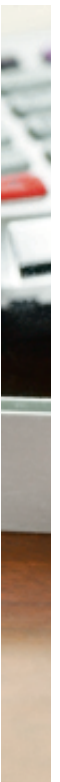
The box office manager and staff are a specific branch of front of house. They are
responsible for the management of all ticket sales, although some of this is usually
contracted out to agencies in large theatres and theatre groups.

Pay: Up to £30,000 full-time, though many box office staff work part-time.

Training: Many universities run arts management courses which include placements and ir
learn as they go along.

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Education



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The education manager or department in a theatre runs youth theatre, outreach and comm programmes to take out to schools. Many actors and teachers are employed as part-time f

Pay: The going rate for a two-hour facilitation session is £80 if you're working for a compar independently with the client. Education management pays roughly the same as mainstrea depending on location and scale.

Training: Most education managers are former teachers or actors with associated degrees.

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Finance

The finance department manages the accounts with responsibility to the owners, trustees c structure. Large companies might employ a team of accountants but in smaller theatres thi management role.

Pay: High for a qualified accountant. More modest for accounts-related clerical work.

Training: University degree and professional training, usually through the Institute of Chart

How hard is it to get into? ★★★

Stage door

Working on the stage door is a form of reception work: overseeing theatre arrivals and dep as well as taking in mail, calling taxis for actors and, occasionally, managing crowds of ado

Pay: £19,000 plus overtime in central London, working full-time.

Training: You learn on the job – advertisements tend to stipulate at least five GCSEs and g

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Catering

Almost every theatre has an on-site cafe or bar. In larger venues, catering is big business, at every level from top chefs and experienced restaurant managers to kitchen porters and

Pay: Good chefs and restaurant managers can earn £40,000 a year depending on scale of contracts and the national minimum wage.

Training: Chefs train in the kitchens of other chefs and have high-level qualifications. Many subjects. Casual staff usually learn on the job.

How hard is it to get into? ★ (lowest levels) to ★★ ★ (highest levels)

Chaperone

A chaperone is a legally accredited adult responsible for the welfare of one or more children. A parent or guardian can be a paid professional who is legally required to defend minors against exploitation and abuse.

Pay: About £50 per show or for half a day, £80 for an eight-hour day or £100 for a 12-hour day. Expenses only.

Training: Learn on the job. Many chaperones start by looking after their own children before becoming professionals.

How hard is it to get into? ★★

Publications

Programmes, flyers, digital content and other company publications such as newsletters are produced. Large theatre companies have a publications department to manage this and the smaller ones often do it themselves. For example, programme notes.

Pay: A publications manager in a big company could earn about £40,000 a year. A freelance theatre programme might be paid £250 depending on length and experience.

Training: A degree in English, media or arts and then start in a junior post and learn as you go.

How hard is it to get into? ★★ ★

Susan Elkin

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