

Set Designer

Set designers design and organise sets for theatre, ballet, opera, and television or film productions. They find suitable locations if filming outdoors. They read the script and plan the set design that best suits the production.

In film they can be called production designers and in theatre, stage designers.

The Work

You could be:

- researching historical periods or futuristic ideas and suitable locations, after reading the script
- choosing furniture, props and colour schemes suited to the period and location
- considering and dealing with practical matters such as safety, scene changes, lighting and the positions of cameras
- sketching design ideas or using computer-aided design (CAD) to produce a 'storyboard' showing each scene
- building and photographing scale models showing what the sets will look like scene by scene
- discussing your ideas with the producer, director, costume designer and other staff
- calculating costs, keeping within a budget, and producing a work schedule
- supervising joiners, scene painters, riggers, design assistants and others during construction and painting of the set
- adapting the scenery during rehearsals as the actors move around it.

Pay

Pay rates vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

Starting salaries for set designers might be between £15,000 and £20,000 a year.

However, most set designers work freelance. They charge a fee, which varies depending on the work and their reputation. There are guidelines on the website of BECTU and other unions which might help you negotiate a freelance rate of pay.

The latest guidelines from ITC (Independent Theatre Council) and Equity recommend the following for 2023/24:

- Design fee: £2,983.93
- Weekly fee for building set and other duties: £584.61.

Conditions

- You would work alone when designing and as part of a team, with other production staff.
- You would work in design offices, theatre back stages or film or television studios.
- You may work both indoors and outdoors.
- You may be away from home for long periods when on tour.
- Hours are irregular and long, including evenings and weekends.
- You must meet strict deadlines.

Getting In

- You usually need an HND (SCQF Level 8), degree (SCQF Level 9-10) or postgraduate qualification in theatre design, technical theatre, interior and 3D design or a similar subject, preferably with a specialism in set design.
- To get into a suitable HND you need 2-3 Highers, for a degree 3-5 Highers, normally including English and Art and Design.
- The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) offers a degree in Production Arts and Design, with specialisms in scenic art or set design.
- Entry is with 3 Highers, usually in art and design and a related subject.
- You need a good portfolio of designs or showreel to get into college or university.
- If you are very talented and have a really good portfolio, you might get into college or university without the necessary Highers.
- You need to get relevant experience and make contacts in the industry.

Applications for the RCS go through UCAS Conservatoires.

All applications to Art Schools (Duncan of Jordanstone at Dundee University, Edinburgh College of Art at Edinburgh University, Glasgow School of Art, Gray's School of Art at Robert Gordon's and Moray School of Art at UHI) are through UCAS. Closing dates can vary depending on the course. Check with UCAS.

There are very few permanent jobs and entry into this career is very competitive. You might find them advertised in the specialist press, online and through the BECTU website, but many posts are filled by word of mouth. A lot of set designers work freelance.

What Does It Take

You should be:

- artistic, creative and imaginative
- interested in the technical and production processes
- accurate and good at drawing
- able to use computer aided design (CAD) and 3D software
- ambitious and energetic
- able to supervise others
- adaptable and able to work under pressure
- able to meet deadlines and keep within budget
- able to accept criticism of your work.

You should have:

- a good eye for 3D design, detail and colour
- research skills
- a knowledge of lighting processes
- an understanding of safety and construction methods
- good practical and model making skills
- tact and teamworking skills.

Training

Training is through experience, on the job.

Getting On

- You might start as an assistant set designer, and progress to being a set designer.
- There are few permanent posts and no standard career structure. Promotion prospects are limited.
- With experience you might work freelance. If you do this you may find you have gaps between jobs.
- You may work in other areas such as exhibition design or museum work.

Getting work as a freelance set designer depends on becoming well known and established. This can take some time. You might need to take other jobs to make an income. Building up a good portfolio of work and making personal contacts are most important in getting work.

Contacts

BECTU Scotland (Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union)

Tel: 0141 370 1590

Email: info@bectu.org.uk

Website: www.bectu.org.uk

Website (2): careersmart.org.uk

X: @bectu

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BECTUOfficial

Creative Scotland

Email: enquiries@creativescotland.com

Website: www.creativescotland.com

Website (2): opportunities.creativescotland.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/CreativeScotland

Society of British Theatre Designers (SBTD)

Tel: 07809 721047

Email: admin@theatredesign.org.uk

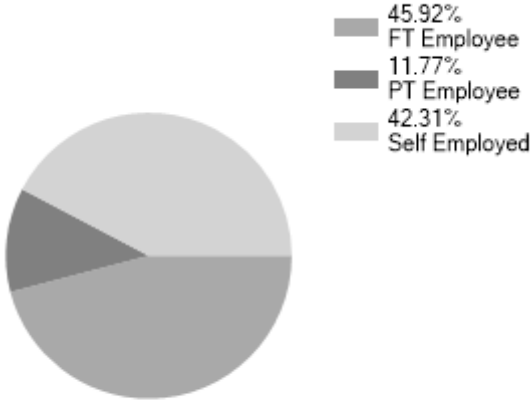
Website: www.theatredesign.org.uk

X: @weareSBTD

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/46932887747

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

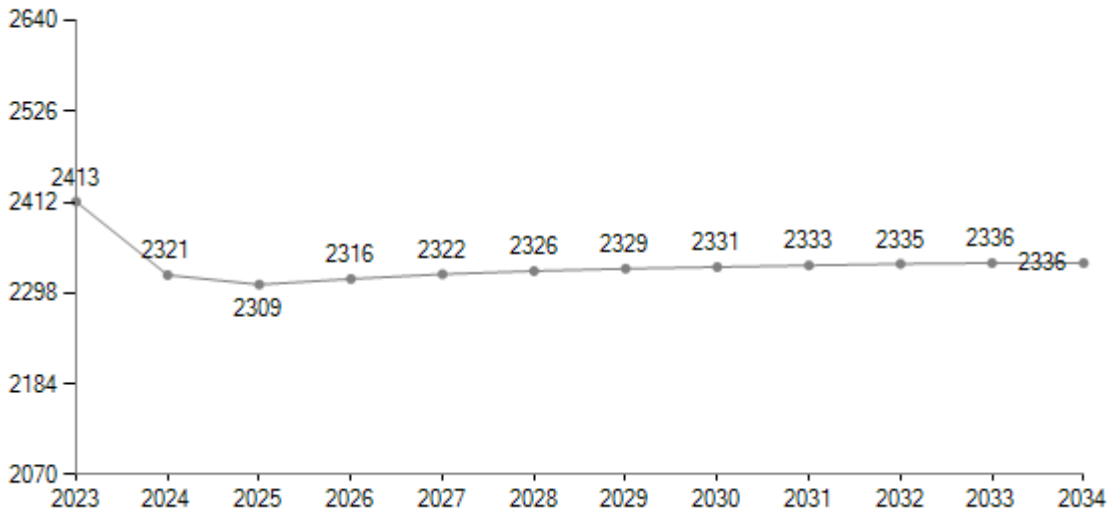


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)