

Costume Designer

Costume designers create costumes for film, television or theatre productions. In small companies they will also fit, alter and repair and clean them.

The Work

You could be:

- reading the script and doing research on the decade or period the production is set in to make sure the styles of clothes and accessories are exactly right
- working closely with the producer, artistic director and set designer to agree suitable costumes within the overall budget
- designing costumes and accessories, shopping for vintage clothes on the internet and perhaps at charity shops
- drawing the costumes, by hand or using a computer, so that dressmakers can follow the designs
- taking actors' measurements for clothes, wigs, shoes and hats, drafting patterns, making and fitting costumes, and altering them if necessary
- hiring or buying costumes and accessories, where required by the script, perhaps making them look older or worn in
- repairing and cleaning costumes or packing them up, when on tour
- attending performances to deal with any costume problems that arise
- supervising costume design assistants, dressmakers and wardrobe staff.

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 qualified costume designers in the UK tend to be around £16,000 to £18,000 a year. Some experienced designers may be able to earn between £18,000 and £28,000 a year with highly experience designers earning £35,000.

Freelance costume designers charge a fee, which varies depending on the production and their reputation. The better known they are, the more they can charge. The trade union Equity can help with negotiation. The BECTU website lists starting pay rate desirable for costume designers on a feature film (£1-4 million) as about £329.90 for a 10-hour day and £1,649.50 for a 5-day week (50 hours). For a TV Drama this can range from £275.00 to £367.00 an hour (depending on budget) for a 10-hour day and between £1,375 and £1,835 for a 50 hour week.

Conditions

- You would do work for theatre, ballet or opera companies, television, video or film companies or for

advertising firms.

- Self-employment and freelance work is common.
- You would be based in a studio or office. Sometimes you may work from home.
- You might spend lengthy periods on your own when working on designs.
- At times, your hours could be long or irregular. Evening and weekend work will be necessary.
- You may have to travel while researching styles and materials.
- You may have to go on tour with a production or work away from home on location.

Getting In

- You usually need an HND (SCQF Level 8) or a degree (SCQF Level 9-10) in art and design or fashion design, preferably including costume design, which is sometimes an option in theatre production courses.
- Edinburgh College offers an HND in Costume for Stage and Screen. The University of Edinburgh (Edinburgh College of Art) offers a degree in Performance Costume and Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh runs a degree in Costume Design and Construction.
- The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) offers a degree in Production Arts and Design which includes costume construction and set and costume design.
- For entry to an HND you need 1-2 Highers or a relevant NC or NQ, and for a degree, usually 4-5 Highers, usually including English and Art and Design.
- You need to present a portfolio of art or design work to get into college or university.
- If you are very talented and have an exceptionally good portfolio, you might get into college or university without the necessary Highers.
- You could start by taking an NC or NQ (SCQF Level 4-6) (formal entry requirements not always needed) or an HNC (1-2 Highers for entry) in similar subjects. This might get you a job, perhaps as an assistant designer, or lead on to an HND or degree.
- Experience of dressmaking is helpful and previous experience, perhaps with an amateur drama group, would be helpful.

For art school courses you need to apply through UCAS.

Application to the RCS is through UCAS Conservatoires. The application date can differ from other courses. Details are on the RCS website.

Entry to this work is very competitive. You need to build up contacts through amateur and voluntary work. You can advertise yourself and your specialist skills on the [Society of British Theatre Designers \(SBTD\) website](#).

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- artistic and creative
- imaginative, with original ideas for new designs
- able to plan and work within a budget
- ambitious and energetic as this is a highly competitive area
- adaptable
- able to work calmly under pressure to meet deadlines

- able to accept criticism of your work.

You need to have:

- good communication skills
- a good eye for colour and design
- good sewing and practical skills
- attention to detail
- drawing skills
- knowledge of fashion and the history of costume.

Training

- You would train and gain experience on the job with your employer.
- You would normally start out as a costume or wardrobe assistant and work your way up. See job profile for [Wardrobe Assistant - Film, TV or Theatre](#).
- You will need to keep your portfolio of design work up to date for each new job.
- The website of the [Society of British Theatre Designers \(SBTD\)](#) gives details of training courses.
- Skillset can provide information on short training programmes, including costume design, for those working in the film and broadcasting industries.

Getting On

- In larger organisations, such as the BBC, you may be able to gain promotion to senior costume designer or head of department.
- After suitable experience, you may move on to more general design or production work within the industry.
- You might move into lecturing work in colleges and drama schools.
- You could work for organisations on a freelance or self-employed basis; many costume designers do so.
- Getting on as a freelance costume designer means working to constant high standards, becoming well known and established. This can take time.
- You must work to build up contacts and keep in touch with them to find work.

More Information

Take a look at [The Stage](#) online magazine for information on jobs and auditions.

For more information on creative careers see [Discover Creative Careers Finder](#)

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

Discover Creative Careers Finder

Website: discovercreative.careers/#

X: [@CreativeCareer5](https://twitter.com/CreativeCareer5)

ScreenSkills

Tel: 020 7713 9800

Email: info@screenskills.com

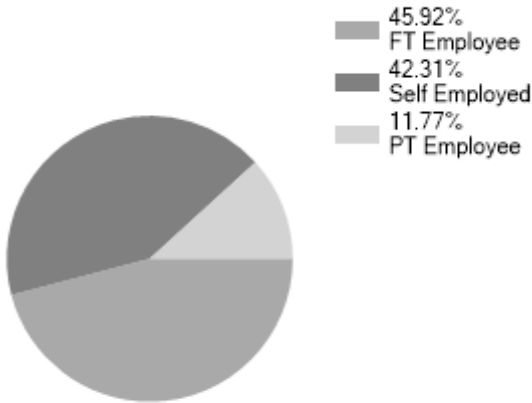
Website: www.screenskills.com

X: [@UKScreenSkills](https://twitter.com/UKScreenSkills)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/UKScreenSkills

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

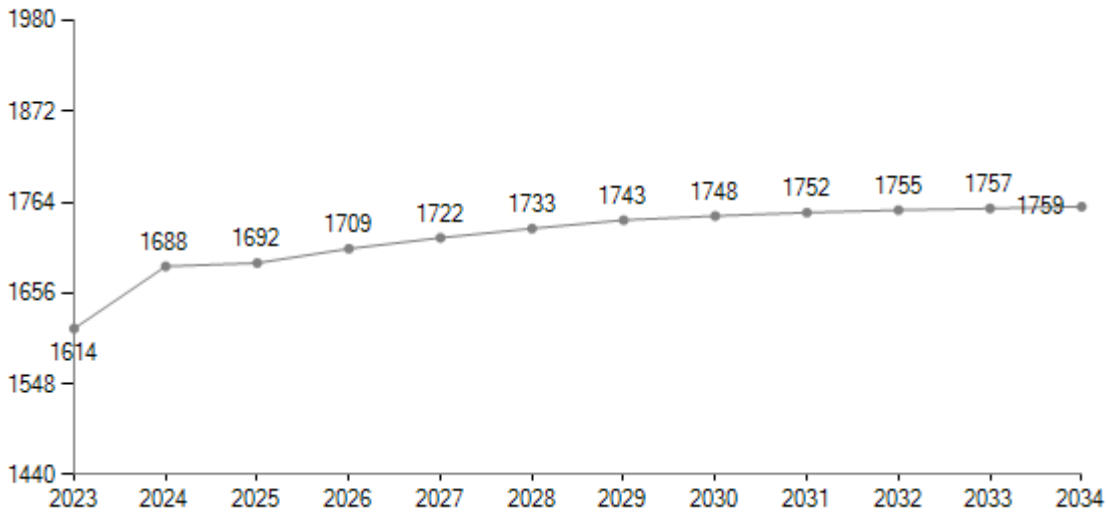


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)