

Lighting Technician

A lighting technician sets up the lights on stage, in a film or broadcasting studio or on location outdoors. They control the position, strength and colour of lighting during the production.

The Work

You could be:

- working closely with the director, the designer, the stage manager (theatre) or floor manager (TV), and the producer to decide how to light the scene or studio most effectively
- setting up (rigging) and operating computer controlled and manual equipment – such as floodlights, spotlights, searchlights, laser beams and strobes
- organising other special effects including pyrotechnics (firework effects), dry ice and smoke
- co-ordinating the technical crew and operating equipment, computers and software
- loading and programming automated colour change systems, so that they follow a 'lighting plot' for changes of mood and atmosphere during the show
- supervising the focusing of the lighting at rehearsals and shows
- sometimes working at height, on scaffolding or cranes
- working with the sound technician to ensure that the sound effect equipment is functioning well or do both sound and lighting in a small theatre
- taking down (de-rigging) the equipment after use, and making sure it's moved and stored safely.

You would usually specialise in film and TV or theatre and live events. Depending on the size and type of production, the lighting technician may also have responsibility for sound (see the [Sound Technician](#) job profile).

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual salaries may vary, depending on:

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

Most lighting technicians are freelance and earnings can vary widely depending on the job. The BECTU (Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union) website has details of recommended freelance pay rates.

Rates vary depending on the type of production you work on. The minimum rate is £301.60 - £315.20 for a 10-hour day working on a TV drama (January 2023 - January 2024); and £396 for lighting technicians working on commercials (2022). The current rates for working on a major feature film are £396.90 for a 10-hour day (£416.55 for April 2024 - March 2025) (BECTU website May 2023).

Conditions

- The working environment can vary widely. You might be in a hot, noisy, enclosed lighting cubicle in a theatre, on location in a city street or clambering about on scaffolding, ladders or walkways high above the stage.
- There is a lot of heavy lifting, often at heights working on a rig.
- Hours are usually unsocial and overtime is normal. You would install the equipment for daytime rehearsals and then use it again for the shows at night, staying behind to pack it away after everyone else has gone home.
- On tour with a live production or recording on location, you might be travelling the country for lengthy periods.
- You may need to wear protective gear: overalls, safety boots and hard hat.

Getting In

Traditionally, you get in through the route for an electrician (see [Electrician](#)). However, many entrants now do specialised training in lighting design or include the subject as part of a more general theatre studies course.

- Some television and theatre companies may run training schemes. You usually need to have had some practical experience and provide a portfolio of work.
- There are relevant NC, NQ, HNC and HND courses in technical theatre at several Scottish colleges.
- NC and NQ courses generally require 2-4 subjects at National 4 or 5, including English and perhaps Maths and a science or technological subject for entry. HNC and HND courses normally require 1-2 Highers plus some subjects at National 5, including a pass in English, or a relevant NC. For entry to degree courses, the requirements are 4-5 Highers and 2 subjects at National 5, including a pass in English, or a relevant HND.
- The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland offers a degree in Production Technology and Management which includes subjects in lighting and sound technology and lighting design.
- The work can be quite physical, so you should be fit enough to do it.

There are jobs with theatre, film and broadcasting companies in towns and cities, but vacancies are scarce and competition is fierce. You may have to move around for work.

What Does It Take

You need:

- creative flair with a good eye for visual effect and colour
- an interest in electrical and electronic work
- a head for heights and good level of fitness
- good communication skills
- organisational skills
- good practical skills
- a good awareness of health and safety
- business skills if you are freelance
- problem solving ability.

Training

- Trainee technician posts usually combine on the job training with part time study for relevant qualifications.
- The Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT) runs special courses. These offer training in specific skills together with knowledge of other theatrical departments.
- The BBC Academy runs some short courses which might be relevant. Find more information on the [BBC Careers](#) website.

Getting On

- You might eventually move on to positions such as chief electrician, lighting director or lighting designer.
- You can also work freelance.
- Some lighting technicians go on to work on indoor and outdoor exhibitions and events.

More Information

The [Network scheme](#) is run in connection with the Edinburgh TV Festival, where young people get the opportunity to work behind and in front of the camera and to make useful contacts in the industry. Find information on the next programme on the [Edinburgh TV Festival](#) website.

Trainee Finder is ScreenSkills flagship new entrant programme which offers paid work placements across a range of roles in film and TV. Recruitment will usually begin around September of the year before placement. Find out more and apply online by visiting the [Film Trainee Finder website](#).

Contacts

Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT)

Tel: 07443 380076

Email: admin@abtt.org.uk

Website: www.abtt.org.uk

X: @theabtt

Facebook: www.facebook.com/TheABTT

BBC Academy

Website: www.bbc.co.uk/academy

BECTU Scotland (Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union)

Tel: 0141 370 1590

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Website (2): careersmart.org.uk

X: @bectu

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BECTUOfficial

Edinburgh TV Festival

Website: www.thetvfestival.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/edinburghtvfest

ScreenSkills

Tel: 020 7713 9800

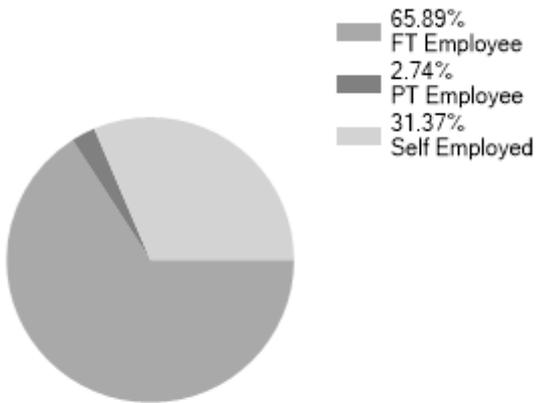
Email: info@screenskills.com

Website: www.screenskills.com

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Statistics

Employment Status UK %



Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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

Predicted Employment Statistics : Not available this career.