



**THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
HUMANITIES  
BIRKBECK COLLEGE**

**MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
IN  
THEATRE DIRECTING**

**GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS 2012-13**

# CONTENTS

<b>General Introduction to the Programme</b>	<i>page 4</i>
<b>Year One and Year Two</b>	<i>page 5</i>
<b>Programme Units</b>	<i>page 5</i>
<b>Brief Descriptions of the Programme Units</b>	<i>page 7</i>
<b>Some Aspects of the Programme</b>	<i>page 9</i>
<b>The Admission Process</b>	<i>page 11</i>
<b>Notes on Making an Application</b>	<i>page 13</i>

## **SPECIAL NOTE**

This Guide provides general information about the Masters of Fine Arts programme in Theatre Directing. Students will be admitted to the programme in September 2012.

There are two rounds of interviews: one in the middle of February, with a closing date for applications of Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2012 and one at the beginning of June 2012, with a closing date for applications of Friday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

Candidates may apply for either round but if candidates wish to apply to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding in spring 2011 they **must** apply in January.

**If you have any questions about the programme or the application process you should contact the Programme Director, Rob Swain, by email at [r.swain@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:r.swain@bbk.ac.uk) or write to him at Birkbeck College, University of London, Department of English and Humanities, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX. Please include a contact 'phone number in your email or letter.**

**Applications should be made online by going to <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/study/pgform.pdf> and scrolling down to Theatre Directing (MFA) Full-time. If you cannot make an online application and would like an application pack please email the Programme Administrator, Anne-Marie Taylor, at [a.taylor@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:a.taylor@bbk.ac.uk) or write her at the above address with your postal address.**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Directing is intended to provide its students with the opportunity to acquire a practical training and education that can enable them to become professional theatre directors. It offers an integrated programme of professional practice and theoretical, critical and contextual study, allowing its students to acquire a comprehensive practice-based awareness of the work and functions of the professional theatre director under current conditions. The Programme aims to further the creative and intellectual development of its students as independent creative artists by enabling them to

- develop their directing abilities to a professionally acceptable level
- understand and be able to communicate the nature of the professional practice of directing
- develop themselves as autonomous, reflective and self-aware artists.

The Programme has been developed through close co-operation between Birkbeck College and the National Council for Drama Training, which is the body charged by the theatre industry with overseeing and safeguarding professional theatre training provision and standards for actors, stage managers and technicians in the UK. The Programme has been developed in collaboration with a large number of professional theatre directors and other experienced professional practitioners. The Programme is intended to realise the industry's long-maintained aspirations for a professionally acceptable directing programme, as recommended by two major Gulbenkian Reports in 1989 and 1995. These reports believed that such a programme should

- be at postgraduate level
- derive from a collaboration between the university, drama school and professional theatre sectors; and
- incorporate a meaningful amount of work for the student with professional actors in a professional context.

The design of this Programme incorporates these specific points and very many others contained within the two reports.

Special features of the Programme include:

- **a six-month industrial secondment to a professional theatre company** or companies: recently participating theatres include West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Library Theatre and the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, Theatre by the Lake Keswick, Sheffield Theatres, Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, Paines Plough, and the Citizens Theatre, Glasgow.
- specific production opportunities under professional conditions within that secondment
- an extended mentoring relationship between the student and a professional director centering on that professional secondment
- an opportunity for the student to establish **a relationship with a professional drama school** offering a programme or programmes accredited by NCDT: current drama schools include Arts Educational, Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, Drama Centre London, Guildhall, LAMDA and RADA.

- regular observation of the Programme by a highly experienced group of professional directors under the umbrella of NCDT
- participation in the teaching of the Programme by **a substantial number of experienced theatre practitioners**: recent contributors include Mike Alfreds, Declan Donnellan, Mike Leigh, Vicki Mortimer, Simon Stephens, Colin Teevan and Samuel West.
- **relationships with the National Theatre Studio and with the RSC's voice and movement department.**
- **recent graduates include**: associate directors at the National Theatre of Wales, the Gate Theatre London, and several leading regional theatres and several London fringe theatres; assistant and staff directors at the RSC and the National Theatre; director of two new plays at the National Theatre; artistic directors of companies including Jermyn Street Theatre, commonpractice, Rough Fiction, Curious Directive, Counterpoint, and leading artists in Coney, badphysics and The Print Room; assistant directors on many West End productions, at the Old and Young Vic, for Headlong, Filter and other national touring companies; a winner of the Cohen Bursary; a winner of the Regional Theatres Young Director Scheme; the first English-speaking winner of the European Opera Prize and the Ring Award.
- from the above it can be seen that **the programme does not prescribe or advocate any particular form of theatre or theatre aesthetic**, but rather aims to impart to directors a range of knowledge and skills in relation to directing, and to enable directors to critically reflect on their work as independent artists in order to develop their own practical philosophy, aesthetic and work.

## YEAR ONE AND YEAR TWO

As a student on the Programme you would study and train on a full-time basis over two years (from September to September - see 'Notes on Programme Units', page 5). ***There is no option to take the Programme by part-time study.*** The work of each year consists of a series of Programme Units that build over the whole Programme to provide a rich and varied experience of the work and skills of the director. These Units are predominantly practice-centred and practice-based. Each year overall includes numerous opportunities to study and explore the work of the director in practical contexts.

**Year One** begins in September and continues through until late June of the following year. It enables you to acquire an informed experience, knowledge and understanding of the work of the professional director in key areas. After an initial induction, in the first term you explore the training of the professional actor through your regular attendance at and observation of the work of a drama school that offers a programme or programmes accredited by NCDT. In the second term you explore the relationship of the director with the author and the text, and also take a Programme Unit in textual research, analysis and explication. In the third term you explore the relationship of the director with the designer through working one-to-one with a designer; and also learn about the structural and financial realities of the theatre industry. During the first year you also establish links with the professional theatre company or companies to which you will be seconded in the following year.

**Year Two** begins at whatever point from July onwards will allow you to embark on your six-month secondment to a professional theatre company (or companies). During this secondment you will be given a number of opportunities to work as a director at a professional level with actors and other appropriate collaborators in the creation of theatre, including directing workshops with professional actors. In addition you will acquire a practical understanding of how professional theatre companies work. In the final term (May-July), students reassemble as a group to draw together individual experiences and develop further your overall understanding of the director's work. You then make a final presentation (in September) that encapsulates your personal understanding of this work.

## PROGRAMME UNITS

### **Year One**

UNIT A Induction  
UNIT B The Director and the Actor  
UNIT C The Director and Research  
UNIT D The Director and the Author  
UNIT E The Director and the Designer  
UNIT F The Director and the Industry [I]

### **Year Two**

UNIT G The Director and Production  
UNIT H The Director and the Industry [II]  
UNIT I The Director and Directing

They are arranged chronologically as follows

## YEAR ONE

September	Term One	Term Two	Term Three
UNIT A Programme Induction	UNIT B The Director & the Actor	UNIT C The Director and Research	UNIT E The Director & the Designer
		UNIT D The Director & the Author	UNIT F The Director & the Industry [I]
	UNIT I The Director & Directing (assessed at the end of Year Two)		

## YEAR TWO

Summer "Vacation" / Terms Four and Five	Term Six
UNIT G The Director & Production  Professional Secondment  <i>[A secondment occupying six months during the period            covered by July of Year One to end of May of Year Two]</i>	UNIT H The Director & The Industry [II]  UNIT I The Director & Directing [final submission end September]

### Notes on Programme Units

1. The Programme extends beyond the formal divisions of academic terms, and is likely to involve substantial amounts of private work outside these divisions.
2. Because professional theatre companies have differing schedules the timing of Unit G will vary from student to student, occupying a total of six months sometime during the period from July of Year One to the end of May of Year Two. This means that the remainder of that period will be available to you for your own purposes once arrangements for your secondment are complete.

# **BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PROGRAMME UNITS**

## **UNIT A Programme Induction**

This Unit enables you to become prepared for the work of the Programme overall. It introduces you to the conventions, processes and structures of the Programme, and in particular to academic needs and demands at this level of postgraduate study. It also enables a diagnostic appraisal of your initial needs within the context of professional directing to be made at the start of the Programme.

## **UNIT B The Director and the Actor**

This Unit allows you to acquire an informed understanding of how professional actors are trained and how they develop and work in training. For the bulk of this Unit you will attend a drama school that offers programmes accredited by the NCDT, observing a wide variety of classes and training sessions. In addition there will be a series of intensive weekend sessions at Birkbeck College, which will include contextualizing workshops, classes and seminars, often with leading directors.

## **Unit C The Director and Research**

This unit enables you to acquire an understanding of textual and critical analysis, research and explication at postgraduate level. You will select, participate in and complete the work of one of the available Options from the current range of MA Options within the Department of English. The Unit provides you with a model of how to think, study and learn in depth, giving you the tools of analysis, and enabling you both to make your analysis available to others and to get those others committed to it - all key skills for the professional director.

## **Unit D The Director and the Author**

In this Unit you will acquire an understanding of the relationships between the director, the author and the text. This Unit is primarily aimed at helping you understand how a director prepares a play for production. It will include issues such as the relationship with the living author, negotiating an author's intentions (whether living or dead), the adaptation of texts for performance, and methods of devising. It may include workshops with writers and the RSC's movement and voice experts.

## **Unit E The Director and the Designer**

This Unit is devoted to the work of the professional designer and the relationship between the director and the designer. You will examine the director's relationship with the designer and lighting designer through a series of practical case studies and practical workshops with professional designers and directors and through

theoretical sessions. It will include three weeks full-time working one-to-one with emerging designers to realise a production design and fully finished model.

### **Unit F The Director and the Industry [I]**

This is the first of two Units that will enable you to acquire an informed practical understanding of some of the realities that underpin all the work of the professional director. This Unit focuses on ‘nuts and bolts’ issues such as theatre and company organisation, programme and rehearsal planning, budgeting and budget monitoring. It provides a route map of theatre organization that prepares you for your theatre secondment in Unit G.

### **Unit G The Director and Production**

The Unit is a practice-based learning experience based on your secondment to a professional theatre company or companies for a total minimum period of six months. It will enable you to acquire a detailed practical understanding of how professional theatre companies work and to gain practical experience of professional directing through a series of projects involving professional actors and other professional collaborators, including workshops with professional actors. The exact content of the secondment will depend on the characteristics and work patterns of the company or companies involved, but it will include at least three opportunities to assist on major productions and two opportunities to direct actors.

### **Unit H The Director and the Industry [II]**

This is the second Unit concentrating on the realities that underpin the work of the professional director. It focuses on key issues currently affecting and influencing the director in the professional theatre. Its practice-based teaching and practical exercises will embrace cultural policy and its influences and implications, the work of funding bodies at national and local level, and an examination of funding requirements and criteria. In addition it looks at the role of directors as entrepreneurs, covering such topics as setting up a company and raising money: it provides practical advice and preparation to function as an autonomous director/producer/entrepreneur/business.

### **Unit I The Director and Directing**

This Unit enables you to gather and synthesise all the learning experiences of the Programme, and to acquire a developed overall understanding of the work of the director. In Year One it concentrates on themes and subjects related to some of the work being undertaken during each term, such as presentation and communication skills, the process of collaboration with actors, authors, designers, and choreographers and of ‘conceiving’ a production, plus textual analyses. In Year Two it examines equally relevant topics including more work on collaboration, a practical examination of the devising process, music and the director, and further work on ‘conceiving’ a production. It also allows you to draw together all the work of the Programme in a final presentation, to be prepared during July and August

and given in September, which expresses your personal understanding of the director's work and of your own present position as a professional director.

## **SOME ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAMME**

### **Teaching**

Several different methods of teaching are used on the Programme. There are many seminars, discussions and lectures on appropriate subjects. In addition there are numerous practical workshops in which you participate, taken by experienced professional practitioners; and interactive classes and sessions that concentrate on the practical realities of the professional theatre and allow you direct access to professional directors, actors and other working theatre personnel. On your six-month theatre company secondment (Unit G) you will learn by observing, participating and doing, under the guidance of your mentor, who will normally be the director of the company. There will be regular one-to-one tutorials with appropriate tutors and working professionals throughout the Programme

### **Fieldwork**

'Fieldwork' is the term used to cover all your work on the Programme outside formal group teaching, and covers many diverse activities. For example, in Unit One your fieldwork includes your attendance at a drama school and your observation of and involvement in the work being done there in the training of actors, plus further contact with teachers and classes at the schools. At other times 'fieldwork' will consist of various forms of practice-based research such as attendance at rehearsals or hands-on work with design students. Fieldwork provides raw material on which you base your developing experience and from which you can draw independent conclusions.

### **Assessment**

Each Unit contains at least one opportunity for you to demonstrate your understanding of the work done in the Unit, which is assessed at the end of the Unit. In most Units the primary assessment is by means of a Presentation that you will make to the whole group and appropriate tutors to express your understanding of the work. You will also be required to submit 'supporting material' to be assessed alongside the Presentation. This will back-up the Presentation, and as appropriate could be a mixture of written material, notes and other illustrative material (such as a portfolio of visual references, for example).

In some Units (for example in Unit F and G - 'The Director and the Industry I & II') you will also participate in, or be set, practical projects or exercises. The assessment of Unit C - 'The Director and Research' - will usually be done by means of a formal essay. The assessment of Unit G - 'The Director and Production' - will include assessment of your final production. In almost every

case assessment of your work involves at least one experienced professional theatre practitioner.

## **Mentoring**

You will be supported during the whole Programme by your relationships with experienced professional mentors. Principal among these will be your mentor on the professional theatre secondment (Unit G), who will usually be the artistic director of the company to which you are seconded. In addition you will be mentored by a member of staff from the drama school to which you are assigned for Unit B. The Programme Director will be your principal contact and mentor at Birkbeck College.

## **Assignment to Drama Schools and Theatre Companies**

The Admission Process includes a careful assessment of your strengths and weaknesses as a director and of your needs during the Programme. You will be encouraged to express your own understanding of your needs and wants as part of this process. Your assignment to the accredited drama school will normally be arranged during the summer preceding Unit A. Your assignment to the professional theatre company or companies will normally take place during Unit D.

You should note that these are **assignments**, based on the premise that this Programme is a general training for professional theatre directors within the UK theatre system. While your preferences will always be carefully considered, we cannot guarantee that you will be offered a choice of theatre companies or drama schools.

You should also note that if you are offered a place on the Programme your acceptance of that offer cannot be conditional on your assignment to an individual drama school or a particular kind of drama school, or to an individual theatre company or a particular kind of theatre company.

## **Financial Considerations**

Fees for the 2012-13 academic year have not yet been confirmed but, as a guide, the fees are likely to be approximately £6,900 for each year for UK and EU students and approximately £13,000 for each year for Overseas students. In addition you will of programme need to have funds to maintain yourself while studying.

We expect that there will be possible support from bursaries and hardship funds but **applicants should be aware that the Programme will involve a considerable financial commitment.**

However potential applicants with limited means should not abandon their applications at this stage for this reason without further consultation with us.

# THE ADMISSION PROCESS

We want to secure the most talented, qualified and appropriate students for this Programme. There will be a maximum of ten places on the Programme each year, and competition is expected to be considerable.

During the admission process we are concerned above all to assess each candidate's potential both to cope with the considerable demands of the Programme and to achieve the necessarily high standard required on completion. It is also equally important that we assess the suitability of the Programme for each candidate's wants and needs, since the philosophy and content of the Programme may not be appropriate for every aspiring director.

The admission process is therefore designed to allow us to be satisfied that candidates

- have the necessary abilities to undertake and cope with the demands of this Programme
- show evidence of the skills and understanding needed for a Programme at this level of expectation and rigor
- demonstrate the personal qualities and commitment essential for the completion of this Programme
- that the Programme is appropriate for the experience and skills level of the director, and vice versa.

## Entrance Requirements

We take a broad view of entrance requirements and we acknowledge the value of professional and life experience as well as formal academic qualifications.

Candidates are expected to have sufficient prior experience of professional or professional-level theatre to allow them to appreciate the realities of life in the industry, in order to equip them for the demands of the Programme.

Candidates for admission to the Programme are therefore expected to possess *one of the following*

- a minimum second-class honours degree from a UK university (or a **directly comparable** qualification from a non-UK university), together with some significant experience of professional or professional-level theatre;
- an undergraduate-level or postgraduate-level diploma from a recognised UK drama school (or a **directly comparable** qualification from a non-UK drama school), together with some significant experience of professional or professional-level theatre;
- appreciable experience (normally three years' minimum) as a professional or professional-level theatre practitioner.

## Applications

If you decide to apply for the Programme you should note that in addition to completing the standard Birkbeck College application form you must answer some specific questions on page 15, designed to supply additional information about your experience of - and commitment to - theatre, and your aspirations. Your responses are considered to be significant and will be taken into account in assessing your suitability for the Programme. Please make your application online by following this link and scrolling down to Theatre Directing (MFA) Full-time: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/study/pgform.pdf>

You must also supply two references. At least one of these referees must be able to supply information about your experience of professional or professional-level theatre: ideally one reference would be an academic reference and the other a theatre reference.

## Overseas Candidates

Candidates from overseas must attend the selection process in person. If your first language is not English you should note that **certified evidence** of your proficiency in spoken and written English is **required** prior to admission to the Programme. **The minimum level of proficiency required to undertake this Programme is 7.5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).** Please note that the admission of successful candidates whose first language is not English will be made on their achievement of **certified attainment** of this IELTS level or its equivalent. As we receive a large number of applications for a limited number of places, and a limited number of interview places, we require evidence of certified attainment before offering an interview.

## Selection Process

After the consideration of all written applications, those applicants who are considered to be suitably qualified will be invited to participate as candidates in the Programme's selection process. During that process each candidate's potential to become a professional director will be scrutinised and assessed. Details of the selection process will be supplied to candidates in good time before the interview dates.

## Applying For Entry in September 2012

Completed applications will be welcomed by Birkbeck College until 13<sup>th</sup> January 2012 for interviews in mid-February or until 20<sup>th</sup> April 2012 for interviews in early June.

If you have questions about the programme you should contact the Programme Director, Rob Swain, by email at [r.swain@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:r.swain@bbk.ac.uk) or by writing to him at Birkbeck College, University of London, School of English and Humanities, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX. Please include a contact telephone number in your email or letter. He will then respond to you within a few days.

## NOTES ON MAKING AN APPLICATION

You should supply the College Registry with the following three items, which should be attached electronically to your online application.

- A completed copy of the standard Birkbeck College postgraduate application form.
- A copy of your up-to-date-*curriculum vitae*.
- A 'supporting statement' consisting of some reasonably short written answers (each of 500 words or less) to the questions supplied below.

**You are strongly recommended to keep a copy of all three parts of your application for future reference.**

### 1 The Online Application Form

This is the general application form for all postgraduate programmes at Birkbeck College and should be completed as fully as possible.

With regard to the section on Professional Experience, please remember that your CV will supplement the brief summary details you give here.

With regard to your referees, please note that at least one of these referees must be able to supply information about your experience of professional or professional-level theatre. This referee must be able to give an informed view of your professional or professional-level theatre experience in general, which may or may not include directing. Selection panels will be well aware that some appropriate candidates will only have quite minor, if any, experience of directing, and the Programme does not prescribe a minimum level of directing experience before admission. The status or job-title of this referee is very much less important than her/his ability to describe and testify to your professional or professional-level experience of theatre. You should supply telephone numbers for both your referees.

### 2 The Curriculum Vitae

Your CV should include details of your professional or professional-level experience of theatre (not just of theatre directing) and in addition should include details of any theatre directing experience you have had, **whether at professional level or not.**

### 3 The Supporting Statement

This should consist of your answers to each one of the following questions, which we have designed to provide us with additional information, both about your experience of (and commitment to) theatre and about your aims, interests and concerns as a director.

Your responses to these questions are considered to be significant and will be taken into account by selection panels in assessing your potential suitability for the Programme.

- What do you believe to be the role of a theatre director in relation to actors and other creative collaborators?
- Describe how you might approach directing a particular play or theatre piece (of your choice).
- What kind of theatre or theatre company do you want to direct and why, and what kind of work would you programme and why? (Please note that you can name and/or describe the work as you wish.)

Please note that each question should be answered in **not more than 500 words**. Of programme your answers can be shorter than this if you wish. Please also note that, contrary to the statement on the application form, you are not expected to confine this 'supporting statement' to one sheet!

**It is very important to remember that there are no 'correct' answers to these questions!** We have designed them to allow you to reveal as frankly as possible your present views of theatre and of what your potential or possible work as a director might be.

We will expect our applicants to reveal a wide range of experience, opinions, interests and ambitions. Feel free to be candid; we will be interested to read your honest opinions and beliefs.

*Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information given in this document. However, Birkbeck College reserves the right to vary without notice the contents of programmes or parts of programmes and to modify facilities and arrangements for students. Applicants and students should confirm the up-to-date position when they need to know it.*