

A Guide to Hiring a Designer

So, you have an exciting project and some funding to make it happen. We've put this guide together to help answer a few questions you may have or help you ask some of the questions you might need to.

Timescale

A designer is engaged on a project roughly six to eight months (dependent on the scale) before the show opens and should begin work after a contract has been agreed and signed. The designer is responsible for working with the director and sometimes the producer to create the world for the show. The designer is expected to communicate ideas for the design at various stages along the way towards opening night with the director and production team.

Deadlines

Initial design ideas and development thoughts can take the form of sketch book ideas, library research or building a pinterest board each designer and director should find a mutually agreeable way of sharing their visual starting points. Equally there is no set limit to how many design meetings you should have but they are best done face to face.

The white card model (a model made in white usually from simple card) is created so that the designer and director can concentrate on shape, form and practicalities. If the designer and director are in agreement, the production manager will take the opportunity to roughly cost the design and help with the more practical aspects of the design.

The colour model is a finished design where most of the aspects of the stage design. have been decided, technical drawings for the build and ground plans have been drawn up ready to pass to the builder and stage management.

After the director and designer have agreed that the design is confirmed, the model is shown to the rest of the creative and production team. Images from the model are used along with the ground plan in rehearsals as reference, the model will be used by the builder and the scenic artist to realise the design.

The fit up happens before tech week and is dependent on the scale of the show as to how long it will take. An indication of this should be able to be worked out at the model box stage. The designer will be around to check on the final design and will be available during tech week up until either Opening Night or Press Night.

Responsibilities

In discussion with the Director, the designer is responsible for the overall look and finish of what is on stage.

The designer will work with the production manager to ensure that the design is safe for the performers to use.

The Designer works with the production team – the Production Manager, Stage Management and Wardrobe Supervisor- to realise the design from the model box, costume plates and other references provided for the team.

If you have contracted them to design the costume too, they are responsible for how this looks by the time it makes it on to the stage. A designer shouldn't be (unless previously agreed) expected to make and paint the set or construct costumes. A separate payment over and above the design fee specified on the ITC website should be made to the designer if the designer is agreeable.

Fees

For a small to mid-scale touring show ITC have a list of minimum fees they suggest for all members of the creative team and stage management.

The fee covers the company to use the design for the first 12 months of the show. The rights of the design belong to the designer. If the company or any other company wishes to use the design, they should pay an agreed amount, usually at least 25% of the original fee.

Some questions to consider and explain when you contact a Designer about a project -

What scale of show are you making?

Do you know what limitations you might have, size of van, fit up time, venue access?

Is it a touring show?

- What venues does it tour to? What is the largest and smallest?
- How long is the tour?

Is it possible that the show may have a life after the initial run and do you expect the set to evolve between runs?

Do you want the designer to design both set and costumes?

How many actors are involved?

Do you have a script or is it a devised piece?

Do you see the designer being involved in development dates?

Do you require the designer to carry out any additional duties, ie. Painting the set, making props and/or costumes?

Do you require the designer in the rehearsal room for the whole of the rehearsal period?

What is the budget and how do you see it broken down?

Useful Links

ITC [website](#)

UK Theatre Rates of pay [website](#)