

Role

A Lighting Designer in theatre is responsible for creating a lighting design that integral to the look and feel of a production. This could be as simple as indicating the time of day (daylight/night-time etc) or creating a scene or mood. They will work closely with the director, designer and playwright to create the necessary atmosphere for each scene and help tell the story.

Lighting Designers are often self-employed and work on short-term contracts for each production they work on. Salaries and fees vary according to the size of the theatre and/or show. Some larger theatres employ a resident Lighting Designer which pays an annual salary, however this is rare.

These are the typical rates you can charge as a freelance Lighting Designer however it mainly depends on the project, what is expected of you and what experience you have.

Starting pay/salary: from £100 a day
Experienced pay/salary: up to £225 a day.

Responsibilities include

Reading a script carefully, being aware of references to lighting relevant to both time and place

Working with the Director and Designer to design a world of light that supports a production, adding to and enhancing the overall effect of the performance

Drafting a lighting plan and liaising with a Chief Electrician/Production Electrician/Lighting Technician to enable them to rig the lights and realise the design

Focusing the lights – pointing them in the correct direction, deciding how large and what shape the light from each instrument needs to be and in what colour

Plotting the lights – making the stage pictures for each moment/scene in the production by turning on lights, choosing a level, colour, focus for them to tell the story of that particular moment of the piece

Be aware of health and safety aspects

Attend technical rehearsals

Be aware of budgets and energy use

Key Skills

The ability to turn an idea, concept or mood into lighting

Working collaboratively and being open to the contribution of others

The ability to work under pressure, including time and budgetary constraints

Good communication skills

Technical skills

Excellent colour vision

Training

You could start as Crew or Assistant Stage Manager (ASM) to gain experience before moving on to become a Lighting Technician and then, once you have more experience, move into a Lighting Designer role. While you do not need a degree for this role, here are some useful subjects that you can study to gain knowledge and experience:

Drama and Theatre Studies

Art and Design

Electronics

Physics

Photography

Media Studies

Further education at colleges or universities:

- Lighting Design and Technology
- Technical Theatre
- Theatre Lighting Design
- Electrical Engineering

Courses include but are not limited to the following

www.cssd.ac.uk/courses/lighting-design-ba – Central School of Speech and Drama

www.bruford.ac.uk/study/undergraduate-courses/design-for-performance-ba-hons-2023/ - Rose Bruford College

www.rada.ac.uk/courses/foundation-degree-technical-theatre-stage-management/ - Royal Academy of Dramatic Art

www.southwales.ac.uk/courses/bsc-hons-sound-lighting-and-live-event-technology/ - University of South Wales

Other courses are available. Those above represent a sample from various drama schools and universities.

Useful Information

www.ald.org.uk – Association of Lighting Designers

www.iald.org – International Association of Lighting Designers

www.theatredesign.org.uk – Society of British Theatre Designers

www.abtt.org – Association of British Theatre Technicians

<https://www.onstagelighting.co.uk/>

<https://www.itdoes.co.uk/how-to-become-a-lighting-designer/>

<https://www.thealpd.org.uk/careers-in-stage-lighting/getting-started>

<https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/what-does-lighting-designer-do>