Courses

Why study theatre and performance at Bristol?

Bristol has a long history in the innovative study of theatre and performance; our department was the first in the UK to offer a degree in theatre studies. It is a history we are proud of and many have followed our path since. We continue to innovate and you will be taught by leading scholars and practitioners. Theatre and performance at Bristol offers you the chance to study in an environment that has produced some notable alumni, including actor Tim Pigott-Smith, playwrights Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, and RSC Director Gregory Doran.

Theatre and performance studies at Bristol is distinctive for blending study of historical contexts and theoretical perspectives with practice-based activities and investigations. You will be taught via a mixture of lectures, seminars and practical workshops using our two, in-house theatres for your presentations with access to our museum-accredited theatre archive – The Theatre Collection – and 24-hour rehearsal space.

The department has strong links with a wide range of theatres, arts organisations and theatre companies. In your final year you will undertake an independent practical, a written research project, or a work placement. Recent local placement partners have included the Bristol Old Vic, Mayfest, and Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory.

Besides the core focus on theatre and performance studies, you will also have the opportunity during your time here to contextualise your studies by taking options beyond your department. You may choose to take units in related or broader subject areas or in a foreign language. You will also take part in the Bristol Futures programme, which builds knowledge and experience in the fields of innovation and enterprise, global citizenship and sustainable development.

You may also choose to spend one semester living and studying abroad, an experience which broadens horizons and which employers highly value.

Become an arts student at Bristol and you will be joining a diverse group of staff, students and subjects united by a fascination in exploring how humans express their experiences. From 2018 we are offering you even greater opportunities to explore subjects beyond your core studies and an average of ten or more contact hours per week. Through our innovative curriculum we ensure you develop the key skills and attributes employers seek while receiving a first-class education.

This leaflet contains information for students planning to start university in autumn 2018. We have made every effort to ensure all details are correct at the time of going to press (June 2017). However, since this information is subject to change, you are advised to check the University’s website, bristol.ac.uk/ug-study, for the latest updates.
What will you study?

Our BA Theatre and Performance Studies is wide-ranging, allowing you to develop knowledge and skills across a range of areas as you proceed through your degree. The first year is introductory. You will learn how to analyse performance and work with play texts, as well as developing your practical skills in theatre production. In addition, you will participate in small-group tutorials where you will discuss performances that you have seen together and study issues in theatre and performance in dialogue with film and music. What you learn provides a foundation for your second and final years.

In the second and final years, you will take a series of units designed to deepen your analytical, critical, practical and historical expertise and skills. You will follow units in Performance Histories and the Politics of Performance. Alongside these, you can choose from a range of optional units which may include Devised Performance, Early Modern Theatre Practice, Performing the Archive, Applied Theatre, Choreography for Theatre, and Interpreting Plays.

As part of the final year you will work on realising independent projects. This can take the form of group or individual practical projects, and/or an extended essay or dissertation, and/or an industrial placement. Recent local placement partners have included the Bristol Old Vic, Tobacco Factory, In Between Time festival, Mayfest, Theatre Royal Bath, and Travelling Light Theatre. Students have also undertaken placements in San Francisco, New York and Berlin.

Joint Honours students spend half their time in the Department of Theatre and the other half in the partner department. If you study theatre and a modern language you will spend your third year abroad and return to Bristol for your fourth and final year of study.

Teaching and assessment

Teaching and learning in theatre and performance studies at Bristol are geared to an education at the forefront of the subject, closely integrated with the acquisition of the key skills and attributes sought by employers for a very wide range of careers. Our diverse range of assessments ensure that you gain a thorough training in advanced research, source analysis and sharing your findings in a number of ways.

We will ensure that you graduate with experience in formal writing, presentation skills and in using digital formats and other media to present knowledge, ideas and arguments. You will be experienced in working individually and in groups, and in making connections with and communicating to audiences beyond the University.

We use a variety of teaching methods including lectures, seminars and practical workshops. The Wickham Theatre and our smaller, adaptable studio space, the White Theatre, provide teaching, rehearsal and performance spaces for realising the union of theory and practice. Facilities include a design studio, model-making, carpentry and costume workshops. These are facilities that service productions and are themselves specialised teaching areas.

Assessment is by a combination of essays, seminar presentations, practical work, industrial placement and critical analyses.

‘My degree helped me to discover myself as someone who is creative and who likes to make things happen; who relishes in working responsively and is interested in leadership; who is conceptual but needs to get my hands dirty. The people I met on the course have remained my closest collaborators (I run a company with a University friend) and Bristol is the most extraordinary city in which to be supported, challenged and given permission to do things your own way.’

Kate (BA Drama 2001) Co-artistic director Mayfest/co-director MAYK

bristol.ac.uk/ug-study
The skills that arts students traditionally bring to the workplace are now, more than ever, valued in every part of the employment market. Our students go on to succeed in careers as diverse as the subjects they study while here – commerce, tech start-ups, law, accountancy, theatre, museums, publishing, the charity sector, journalism, politics, education and international relations, to name just a few. Arts graduates also go on to work in sectors perhaps not immediately associated with arts disciplines, such as engineering and IT.

To ensure arts graduates continue to be appealing to employers, the Bristol Skills Framework enables students to recognise their development in areas such as academic writing, problem solving, group work and individual and group presenting. We will equip you with the tools to market your skills, your achievement and your potential in whatever career path you choose to pursue after you graduate.

Our students develop transferable skills relevant to a wide range of sectors. Graduates have gone into theatre production, research, broadcasting, arts administration, education, and finance and related business sectors, as well as further study and research.

The department is proud of its many notable alumni, including playwrights Sarah Kane, David Grieg and Laura Wade, actors and comedians Simon Pegg and David Walliams, and directors Gregory Doran, Jonathan Munby and Matthew Warchus.

To make your application

The University of Bristol has one of the best employment records in the UK. We are rated sixth in the UK in the QS Graduate Employability Rankings 2016/17 and are the third most targeted university by top UK employers (High Fliers Research, 2017).
Contact us

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If you have any questions about courses, applications or any aspect of being a UK or international student at Bristol please contact the Enquiries Team.

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University guide to the city of Bristol
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