

YOUR CAREER IN THEATRE AND LIVE EVENT TECHNOLOGY



Find out more from those in the know!



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By Technical Stage Services

CULTIVATE YOUR OWN PATH

Choose a job that suits you!

- Are you interested in sound, lighting and video?
- When you go to a show or a gig are you more interested in how the show has been put together, rather than what's happening on stage?
- Do you enjoy getting involved back stage with school plays and shows?

If YES, then a career in Theatre and Live Event Technology may be for you!



YOUR FUTURE IN EVENTS

The past 12 months has been difficult for the live events industry, but don't let that put you off.

There is general agreement in the industry that the bounce back after Coronavirus will be epic!

We've put together some information to help you understand a bit more about the industry.

Then you can decide if you want to do some more research into it.



*This is not a comprehensive guide.
It is designed to give you a flavour of the industry
so that you can do further research.*

WHAT'S IN THE GUIDE

This guide is split into 3 sections:

1. Examples of the types of job roles, and the possible routes into them
2. The varying routes our team took to get where they are today
3. Advice from people in the industry



TYPES OF JOBS

There are many different types of jobs in this industry.

Some are very broad, and some are very specific. We've selected some of the most common roles in this guide:

- Lighting Technician
- Live Sound Engineer
- Stage Manager
- Stage Technician
- Audio-Visual Technician

With all of these jobs, there are opportunities to work for a specific company (employed), or to work as a freelancer (self-employed) - or sometimes a combination of these.

The job descriptions on the following pages are taken from the National Careers Service.

For more information visit

nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-careers

LIGHTING TECHNICIAN

Lighting technicians set up and operate lighting for concerts, conferences and theatre, or in film and TV productions.

Average Salary (a year)



£15,000 to £40,000

Starter

Experienced

Typical hours (a week)



42 to 44

variable

You could work



evenings/weekends/bank

holidays away from home

You can get into this job through:

University

You could do a foundation degree, higher national diploma or degree in:

- performing arts (production)
- lighting design
- lighting and performance technology
- technical theatre

College

You could complete a college course like:

- Level 3 Certificate or Diploma in Production Arts
- Level 3 Certificate in Technical Theatre: Sound, Light and Stage

Work

You could qualify as an electrician first and then get practical experience in production lighting.

Apprenticeship

You may be able to start in this job through the following advanced apprenticeships:

- Live event rigger
- Live venue technician
- Creative venue technician

Volunteering

You will need relevant practical experience. You may be able to find a traineeship with a specialist lighting company. You could also look for experience in the following settings:

- lighting equipment hire companies
- theatres or concert venues
- amateur theatre
- student or community film projects

What it takes

Skills and knowledge

You'll need:

- knowledge of building and construction
- the ability to use, repair and maintain machines and tools
- maths knowledge
- to be thorough and pay attention to detail
- analytical thinking skills
- the ability to use your initiative
- leadership skills
- patience and the ability to remain calm in stressful situations
- to be able to use a computer and the main software packages competently

What you'll do

Day-to-day tasks

You could:

- interpret a lighting designer's plan
- carry out risk assessments for health and safety purposes
- plan where to run cables and place lights at film locations
- help to rig and check the equipment
- take cues from the stage manager in theatre or the floor manager in TV
- programme and operate manual and computer-controlled lighting systems
- take down equipment after shows or filming

Working

Environment

You could work at a film studio, on a film set, at events, in a theatre or at a TV studio.

Your working environment may be hot, outdoors some of the time, at height and you may spend nights away from home.

You may need to wear protective clothing.

Career path and progression

You could work on more complex events, or specialise in areas like electrical safety, inspection and testing, pyrotechnics or rigging.

LIVE SOUND ENGINEER

Live sound engineers control the sound at events like theatre performances, music concerts and festivals.

Average Salary (a year)

Typical hours (a week)

You could work



£25,000 to £40,000

Starter

Experienced



39 to 41

variable



evenings/weekends/bank

holidays away from home

You can get into this job through:

University

You can do a foundation degree, higher national diploma, or degree in a related subject like:

- sound and live event production
- live sound and lighting technology
- music technology
- technical theatre

College

You could complete a college course like:

- Level 2 Diploma in Sound and Music Technology
- Level 3 Certificate in Technical Theatre: Sound, Light and Stage

Apprenticeship

The following apprenticeships may be relevant:

- Live event rigger
- Live venue technician
- Creative venue technician
- Acoustics technician

Volunteering

You can get practical experience of using sound equipment to help your career prospects. This may be part of a course or you can try:

- helping backstage in a theatre
- being a roadie for a band
- rigging sound in amateur or student theatre, or for local bands
- working for a sound equipment manufacturer or hire company

What it takes

Skills and knowledge

You'll need:

- to be thorough and pay attention to detail
- knowledge of computer systems, hardware and software
- the ability to work well with others
- the ability to accept criticism and work well under pressure
- to be flexible and open to change
- persistence and determination
- customer service skills
- knowledge of media production and communication
- to be able to use a computer and the main software packages competently

What you'll do

Day-to-day tasks

You could:

- discuss the production's sound needs with the director or sound designer
- identify places in scripts where sound effects, music and changes in sound level are needed
- pre-record any sound effects and music
- position and rig up microphones
- complete sound checks before a performance
- operate the sound desk during shows
- follow a sound plan (known as a 'plot') and cues from the deputy stage manager
- look after and repair equipment
- unload, set up, dismantle and load equipment at each venue when on tour

Working Environment

You could work in a theatre, at events or at a recording studio.

Your working environment may be at height, hot, outdoors some of the time and you may spend nights away from home..

Career path and progression

With experience, you could progress to chief sound engineer in a theatre, become a sound designer, or set up your own sound services company.

STAGE MANAGER

Stage managers make sure the sets, equipment and props are ready for the opening of a performance.

Average Salary (a year)



£18,000 to £45,000

Starter

Experienced

Typical hours (a week)



39 to 41

variable

You could work



evenings/weekends/bank

holidays away from home

You can get into this job through:

University

You could do a foundation degree, higher national diploma or degree in:

- performing arts (production)
- lighting design
- lighting and performance technology
- technical theatre

College

You could complete a college course like:

- Level 3 Diploma in Production Arts
- Level 4 Professional Diploma in Technical and Production Practice

Work

You may be able to move into stage management after training as an actor. You could also work your way up if you have several years' experience as a backstage theatre technician..

Apprenticeship

You may be able to do a creative industries production management degree apprenticeship.

You'll usually need experience in production management or production accounting to do this.

Volunteering

You'll often need practical backstage experience to apply for a course.

You can get relevant experience from:

- student, amateur or community theatre
- working as a casual stagehand in local theatre venues

What it takes

Skills and knowledge

You'll need:

- business management skills
- leadership skills
- customer service skills
- the ability to use your initiative
- the ability to accept criticism and work well under pressure
- patience and the ability to remain calm in stressful situations
- to be thorough and pay attention to detail
- maths knowledge
- to be able to use a computer and the main software packages confidently

What you'll do

Day-to-day tasks

You could:

- make sure crew and performers are in the right place at the right time
- organise rehearsals
- work with staff to plan wardrobe, set design, scene changes, sound and lighting
- manage props and set dressing
- keep the 'prompt copy' of the script, which notes what's happening in each scene
- liaise with theatre managers and front-of-house staff
- supervise the 'get in' and 'get out' – the times when sets and equipment are set up and taken down
- give cues for the performers to go on stage
- cue sound and lighting effects

Working Environment

You could work at a TV studio, at a film studio or in a theatre.

Your working environment may be noisy, physically demanding and you'll travel often.

Career path and progression

With experience, you could manage a theatre company, become a theatre producer, or move into TV production.

STAGE TECHNICIAN

Stagehands help to get things ready on set for performances in the theatre, at concerts and in TV and film studios.

Average Salary (a year)



£15,000 to £20,000

Starter

Experienced

Typical hours (a week)



39 to 41

variable

You could work



freelance/self-employed

away from home

You can get into this job through:

University

You can do a foundation degree or degree in a subject like:

- stage and production management
- sound engineering and production
- theatre and production arts

College

You could complete a college course like:

- Level 2 Certificate in Technical Theatre Support
- Level 3 Diploma in Production Arts

Work

You may be able to start in a theatre or venue as a member of the casual backstage staff and work your way up.

You can contact a theatre's resident stage manager or master carpenter to find out about possible opportunities.

Apprenticeship

You can get into this job through a creative technician or technical theatre advanced apprenticeship.

Volunteering

- Any backstage experience you have from school, college, amateur or fringe productions will be helpful.

What it takes

Skills and knowledge

You'll need:

- knowledge of building and construction
- the ability to use, repair and maintain machines and tools
- the ability to work well with others
- the ability to use your initiative
- knowledge of maths
- to be thorough and pay attention to detail
- persistence and determination
- the ability to come up with new ways of doing things
- to be able to carry out basic tasks on a computer or hand-held device

What you'll do

Day-to-day tasks

You could:

- loading and unloading equipment
- helping carpenters build and put up scenery
- attending rehearsals
- moving scenery, furniture and heavy equipment
- opening and closing theatre screens and curtains between acts
- operating manual and automated scenery-moving machinery
- clearing the stage or studio and backstage area at the end of a performance

Working Environment

You could work at a TV studio, at a film studio or in a theatre.

Your working environment may be physically demanding, you'll travel often, cramped, noisy and at height.

Career path and progression

With experience, you could lead a crew of stagehands and scene builders. You could also take further training to become a production carpenter, sound or lighting engineer, or move into stage management. You could also work freelance for theatre venues, TV or film studios, touring theatre companies and large-scale concert tours.

AUDIO-VISUAL TECHNICIAN

Audio-visual technicians install and operate visual, sound and lighting equipment at conference centres, schools, colleges and events.

Average Salary (a year)



£18,000 to £36,000

Starter

Experienced

Typical hours (a week)



39 to 41

variable

You could work



evenings/weekends/bank

holidays away from home

You can get into this job through:

College

There is no set entry route to become an audio-visual technician but it may be useful to do a college course like:

- Level 2 Technical Diploma in Digital Audio and Visual Production
- Level 3 Diploma in Creative Media Production
- Level 3 Certificate in Technical Theatre: Sound, Light and Stage

This would teach you some of the skills needed for the job. You could then try to find a trainee job with a theatre, college or events company. Some employers may prefer you to have experience of live events.

Apprenticeship

You could get into this job through a creative venue technician or live event technician advanced apprenticeship.

You could also do a smart home technician advanced apprenticeship if you install and set up digital technology in people's houses, for example home cinema, sound, lighting and security systems.

Work

You could start as an assistant technician and work your way up. Experience and qualifications in broadcast and sound technology, or electronics, would be useful.

Volunteering

You could volunteer with a charity, college or theatre group to get experience of setting up and running audio-visual technology and software.

What it takes

Skills and knowledge

You'll need:

- knowledge of media production and communication
- broadcasting and telecommunications knowledge
- to be thorough and pay attention to detail
- the ability to accept criticism and work well under pressure
- patience and the ability to remain calm in stressful situations
- to be flexible and open to change
- the ability to work on your own
- excellent verbal communication skills
- to be able to use a computer and the main software packages confidently

What you'll do

Day-to-day tasks

You could:

- setting up and testing equipment
- finding and dealing with faults
- operating equipment during rehearsals, performances and events
- checking and servicing equipment
- managing equipment bookings
- training other people in how to use equipment
- carrying out safety checks on AV equipment for organisations or venues

Working Environment

You could work at a college, at a university or at a conference centre.

Your working environment may be physically demanding.

Career path and progression

With experience, you could manage an audio-visual department, specialise in lighting or sound design, or become an events manager. You could also move into equipment and services sales.

You could work self-employed or freelance, for example installing audio-visual equipment in people's homes.

OUR ROUTES IN

There is no set route into this industry - to prove that point, here are the routes that some of our team (past and present) took to get to Technical Stage Services (TSS).

Dan

I got the bug for all things technical at school by helping out with their productions. I was also involved in an amateur dramatics company in York and loved helping out with the technical side of their productions.

I was never really academic, and after my GCSEs I did an Advanced GNVQ in Engineering. This led me to the University of Derby to study Live Performance Technology. I set up TSS straight from Uni, starting out freelancing and gradually building a business.

I fell into the industry by mistake

Dave

I fell into the industry, by mistake, I was just filling in between jobs working shows backstage at the Grand Opera House in York. I realised it wasn't like working, much more fun, so stayed.

Before that I'd been to catering college, then worked as a Hotel manager, Quality control engineer, and sales manager. I worked my way up to Technical Manager at the theatre, before joining TSS.

Matt

In high school I had a vision that I'd work in the live event industry, so I worked hard at it with an aspiration for all things technical. I passed my GCSEs, was studying A Levels and started freelancing.

I got a job as a motorcycle mechanic, carried on freelancing, and after a year got a permanent job at TSS.

Sharon

I've always been on stage either acting or singing, but never had any interest in the technical side before meeting Dan. I started going with him to jobs, learnt how to coil cables and put truss together to make myself useful, and it's grown from there really.

I'm actually a qualified accountant, and spent 12 years working in local government finance before making the move to TSS.

I spent 11 years as an electrician

Andy

From playing guitar in bands at school, I found I was more interested in the technical side, working with sound and lighting at theatres and local gigs.

I did a degree in Sound, Light and Live Event Technology, but then worked for 5 years designing packaging and hand making high end hi-fi speakers. I then spent 11 years as an electrician, before finally coming back to the industry.

ADVICE FOR YOU

We asked our followers:

What advice would you give a young person wanting to get into the industry?

Here's what they said...

Start off by helping setting up shows that your school puts on and then volunteer at a theatre when you are old enough

Never be late for a call and listen more than you speak. Everyone who you work with can be your teacher, if you let them.

Start off by volunteering at small events, school shows, even to get experience in the warehouses.

But volunteer until the point where you're getting asked to help on shows on a regular basis- at that point it's worth having a conversation about possible paid opportunities or even possibly apprenticeships to get you going.

start on the small events as a volunteer



“

Volunteer everywhere,
be kind, be helpful,
be friendly.

Take every opportunity
to learn, get the coffee
in, don't rush home,
listen and practice,
practice and practice



”

Experience is more important than qualifications, so start at the bottom, and work for free, for local bands, amateur dramatics etc. Watch, read, learn from shows, concerts, TV. (You'll find that far more beneficial, and cost effective, than a college course). The rewards are wonderful! Maybe not always be the highest paid job ever - but it's a great way to live a life!

Volunteering is a useful way to gain contacts and information, but don't be afraid to speak up if you think something is wrong or dangerous. If they don't listen to your concerns leave as fast as you can. If you don't feel safe, don't be there.

Get lots of volunteering experience, but also, get a trade. Become an electrician, do an electrical engineering apprenticeship. Become a coded welder. Study electronics. Structural engineering. Do something that makes you a valuable specialist. Get a few years under your belt in industry. Keep up theatre and live events part time or as a hobby. If you still feel it's a route you want to take then you're ready for the switch, with some cash and years behind you. You'll also be snapped up as you have valuable specialist skills.

Always carry a can of deodorant, and if the event calls for smart dress, don't turn up for the get in wearing it, it most certainly won't be smart at the start of the event.

do what makes you happy



Don't be afraid to
go outside your
comfort zone.
Show initiative, get to
know the local venues
and see where trying
new things takes you.



make sure you know how to make good cups of tea and coffee, no matter what your position is being able to offer someone a good cuppa will get you friends and acquaintances the world over. Make sure you can clean up after yourself, be it washing the dirty mugs from that oh so good cuppa or when you've done a job have a sweep down and tidy up, respect your workplace!

Being in the entertainment industry is definitely fun, but you will end up working long hours, including lots of evenings and weekends. You could probably get a different job earning twice as much working half the hours. So only do it if you really love it.

Start at the bottom and work your way up, join crewing agency's and get on the local theatre's casuals list. Every day is a school day, not just for you but for others around you. There is no such thing as a stupid question, and if you have an idea those around you should be willing to listen (if not get out of there fast), your idea may save time, money or, in a worst case scenario, lives. It may also be a pile of rubbish, but you won't know that till you've put it forward, and you'll laugh about it in the pub at the end of the week..

Start off volunteering, get your foot in the door and ask questions!

FIND OUT MORE

If you want to find out more, here are some websites that might be useful.

Find out more about Careers:

[Discover Creative Careers](#) - find out more about different careers in the Creative industries

[National Careers Service](#) - general careers advice, more information about a broad range of careers, and to find potential courses.

Find out more about the Theatre and Live Event Technology Industry:

[Professional Lighting and Sound Association \(PLASA\)](#)

[Production Services Association \(PSA\)](#)

[Association of British Theatre Technicians \(ABTT\)](#)

[Stage Management Association \(SMA\)](#)

[Institute of Sound, Communications & Visual Engineers \(ISCVE\)](#)

[Bectu \(Union for workers in the entertainment industry\)](#)

THE CHOICE IS YOURS!

We hope you've learnt a bit more about career opportunities in the industry we love!

If you want to keep in touch with us you can follow us on Social Media



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Keep an eye on our [Careers](#) page for future apprenticeships and job opportunities.

Good Luck!



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