



# THINK THEATRE

## THINK... WARDROBE

The Running Wardrobe department are responsible for the maintenance of all theatre costume once a production is in rep. They need to ensure that the costumes are washed and ironed after every performance, as well as mend any tears or other damage. This can prove challenging, particularly when a costume is damaged half way through a performance and needs to be fixed very quickly. So the ability to work under pressure is essential. The Running Wardrobe team are also responsible for making sure each actor's costumes are fully prepared and waiting for the actors in their dressing rooms before a performance. They will also help actors with quick changes during a performance, or with particularly difficult costumes to put on, such as Period dress or armour.

### Working Environment

The Running Wardrobe team work backstage at the theatre and are on hand before, during and after performances, preparing and looking after the costumes. To work in Wardrobe, you need to be prepared to work long and unsociable hours, as well as expect quieter periods, when there are no performances. The Wardrobe team work closely with actors, and it is important that Dressers are able to form and manage good relationships, sometimes with difficult personalities. The ability to respect confidentiality and work with discretion is key. A great deal of patience is required, and the ability to turn your hand to tasks such as laundry and ironing is as important as good sewing skills. Good communication and organisational skills are essential.

### Qualifications

It is not necessary to have a degree or formal qualification to become a Dresser, although this will certainly help you progress your career further down the line. Relevant qualifications for jobs in Wardrobe are focussed on costume construction for performance, although other qualifications, such as textiles, are also recognised within the industry.

Should you choose not to study to degree level, the minimum requirements to work with a wardrobe team are proven sewing skills, both by hand and on a machine therefore a Costume Construction qualification is essential.

### Work Experience

It is often possible to gain experience in Wardrobe departments through voluntary work or work placements. Many arts organisations need extra staff at certain times of the year, and it is also worth



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looking out for arts projects who are looking for an extra pair of hands. The RSC run a work placement in their Wardrobe department at certain times of the year. For more information, please visit [www.rsc.org.uk/about-us/work/wardrobe-placements.aspx](http://www.rsc.org.uk/about-us/work/wardrobe-placements.aspx).

### CASE STUDY

**Carolyn Daniels, Head Wardrobe Mistress, RSC**

***Q. What was your first job in theatre?***

A. Having left Drama College my first job in theatre was as a Stage Manager, which led to job as a Sound Engineer. I felt that these were not the areas that I wanted to pursue so I went back to college and studied a Costume Construction course. My first job after leaving the course was as Wardrobe Mistress at Greenwich Theatre.

***Q. Why Wardrobe?***

A. The variety of working on different styles of productions bring with it different periods of costume. Beautiful fabrics. The challenge that every day can be varied. Working as a team and being part of a creative process.

***Q. What is the best thing about your job?***

A. Working with a great team. Interacting with many diverse people and seeing a production come together through the technical period.

***Q. And the worst?***

A. When a production has a lot of fake blood in it and at the end of the evening you have to clean it off all the costumes.

***Q. What advice would you give to somebody hoping to embark on a career as in Wardrobe?***



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A. To develop good communication and organisational skills. A qualification in Costume Construction will really help. The realisation that the hours can be long and have a good sense of humour.