

## Course Outline

### Course Outline: Costume Design for Film and Television

**The MFA in Costume Design for Film and Television** is a specialisation within the broader **MFA in Film, Television and Games**.

The MFA Costume Design for Film and Television is a two-year, full-time, in-person MFA designed to develop advanced costume designers capable of leading costume departments within contemporary film and high-end television production. This is an intensive, practice-led Master's programme intended not only to refine craft expertise, but to cultivate designers with creative authority, strategic insight and the confidence to operate at graduate-entry industry level as leaders.

Rooted in professional screen practice, the course is embedded within the NFTS production community. You will work intensively on live film projects alongside directors, producers, cinematographers, production designers, hair and make-up artists and performers, operating within industry-standard structures, hierarchies and schedules. Across two years, you develop advanced costume craft skills alongside production literacy, budgeting awareness, research capability, leadership behaviours and critical professional judgement. The curriculum is deliberately progressive: expectations increase at each stage, culminating in autonomous departmental leadership.

Costume design is central to character, storytelling and world-building. Contemporary costume leaders must interpret complex scripts, construct coherent visual worlds across time and genre, manage continuity and resources, collaborate fluently across departments and sustain creative teams under production pressure. This MFA responds directly to those realities through structured escalation of responsibility, research-informed design thinking and sustained reflective practice. Across the programme, you move from intensive technical and collaborative foundations into increasingly senior roles, culminating in leading costume design on an NFTS Graduation Fiction Film. Alongside production work, you undertake an integrated Dissertation, ensuring that your creative leadership is underpinned by intellectual rigour and critical engagement with the historical, cultural, technological and ethical dimensions of costume design for screen.

## **Module 1: Fundamentals**

This intensive, practice-led module establishes the advanced technical, creative and professional foundations of costume design for screen. It brings the cohort to a shared professional standard appropriate to Master's-level study, ensuring you can operate confidently across contemporary, period and stylised productions.

You consolidate pattern cutting, draping, tailoring, alteration and finishing skills while developing material literacy, anatomical awareness and camera sensitivity. Script analysis, costume breakdown, continuity planning and professional workflow are introduced as integral design tools rather than administrative afterthoughts. Craft is explicitly connected to narrative, performance and production realities.

The emphasis is on disciplined professional process and accuracy. By the end of the module, you are prepared to enter collaborative production environments with organisation, clarity and professional confidence.

## **Module 2: Take-One Painting & Character of Place**

In this module, you apply core costume skills within collaborative production contexts. Working alongside directing, cinematography, production design and hair and make-up, you explore how costume operates within a shared visual system.

Through the Take-One Painting project, you translate historical artwork into screen-ready costume design, interpreting visual reference within cinematic conditions. In Character of Place, you begin with environment and atmosphere as the primary drivers of costume thinking, exploring how place shapes character and narrative identity.

The focus shifts from making alone to collaboration, sourcing, adaptation, negotiation and design communication. The module mirrors professional working conditions, emphasising clarity, responsiveness and collaborative authority.

## **Module 3: Without Words**

This module develops your ability to build coherent costume worlds through live production practice and specialist technical exploration.

You lead costume on at least one short fiction film within Without Words and assist on others, operating within a structured production environment. Alongside production, you engage in specialist workshops exploring diverse costume approaches including period practice, leatherwork, moulding and fabrication, futuristic materials, corsetry, millinery and breakdown techniques.

Through both strands, you strengthen research literacy, continuity management and professional judgement. You evaluate specialist techniques critically in relation to narrative intent, performer needs and production constraints. Ethical considerations, representation and sustainability are embedded throughout. By the end of the module, you demonstrate confident, research-informed design thinking and the ability to assess and articulate appropriate costume strategies within professional contexts.

## **Module 4: First Year Film**

Marking a significant progression in responsibility, this module places you in senior costume roles on an NFTS First Year Film. You are involved from pre-production through to shoot, undertaking script breakdown, character development, sourcing strategies, budgeting awareness, fittings and continuity planning. You lead on at least one production and assist on others, operating within a live interdisciplinary production team. The emphasis is on performer-centred practice, communication, decision-making and reliability under pressure. This module consolidates your ability to operate at pace, manage complexity and demonstrate emerging leadership behaviours within professional production structures.

## **Module 5: First Year Garment Project**

Running longitudinally across the first academic year, this module provides sustained space for deep, research-driven garment design and construction.

Working from a curated deck of fictional but industry-realistic scenario cards, you select one brief and develop a fully realised garment from concept to completion over the course of the year. You treat the project as a professional commission, interpreting narrative context, production scale and character requirements before undertaking research, pattern development, toile testing, fitting, construction and finishing.

This module emphasises depth, rigour and technical authority. You manage materials, workflow, budget considerations and documentation across an extended project cycle. The garment must function as a screen-ready piece appropriate to performance and camera. The First Year Garment Project develops sustained technical mastery and disciplined project management—key attributes of costume department leadership.

## **Module 6: Collaborations**

This module extends your practice across film production contexts, typically combining a digitally shot live-action drama with a second project such as animation or another specialist screen format selected by the course team. You design and deliver costume across differing pipelines, adapting your approach to digital cinematography, stylisation, scale and movement. You are expected to demonstrate strategic thinking, workflow management and professional adaptability. The module strengthens your ability to translate core costume principles across mediums while maintaining conceptual integrity and professional standards, reinforcing readiness for senior practice.

## **Module 7: Grad Fiction Film**

A highlight of the MFA, this module positions you as Head of Costume on an NFTS Graduate Fiction Film. You lead the costume department across an extended production timeline, interpreting the script, defining the visual identity of characters, managing budget and workflow, and collaborating closely with the director and producers. Supervision is minimal, reflecting the programme's expectation of autonomous practice.

You are required to balance creative ambition with financial and logistical realities, exercising professional judgement under sustained production pressure. Assessment focuses on leadership, decision-making, budgeting literacy and departmental management as well as design quality. By the end of this module, you demonstrate readiness to lead costume departments within film and television production at scale.

## Module 8: Final Garment Project

Unlike the longitudinal garment project, this module is an intensive, high-pressure design-and-build project. Working from a new scenario card, you conceive, design, construct, fit and present a fully realised garment within a compressed timeframe. The emphasis is on speed with rigour, strategic decision-making and technical precision under constraint.

This module simulates professional production conditions, testing your ability to synthesise research, design clarity, workflow management and budgeting awareness rapidly and decisively. It marks your transition from supported postgraduate development to fully autonomous garment realisation.

## Module 9: Professional Practice, Portfolio and Industry Engagement

This final taught module supports your transition into professional leadership within the screen industries. You curate a final professional portfolio drawing on live productions, animation projects, historical work and both garment modules. You refine your public-facing profile, develop career materials and engage with industry practitioners through structured reviews and feedback sessions.

Through critical reflection, you articulate your creative identity, leadership approach and strategic career pathway. The emphasis is on professional positioning, sustainability of practice and readiness to enter industry as an emerging costume leader.

## Module 10: Dissertation

Running alongside the taught and production modules across both years, the Dissertation is an integral component of the MFA. It provides structured time and supervision for independent, practice-related research.

You undertake an original research project relevant to costume design for film and television, exploring conceptual, historical, cultural or aesthetic dimensions of the discipline. The dissertation may be realised as either a **written dissertation (7,000–10,000 words)** or a **video essay (15–20 minutes)**, with both formats assessed against the same academic standards and learning outcomes.

Supervised jointly by departmental and Screen Arts tutors, the Dissertation strengthens research, analytical and critical reflection skills, reinforcing the intellectual rigour expected of an MFA. Although completed in the second year, it is embedded across the programme, ensuring research thinking informs your creative and professional development throughout.

## **Work Experience and Industry Engagement**

A distinctive feature of the MFA Costume Design is the inclusion of a structured, non-assessed work experience element during the first year of study. Each student is expected to undertake approximately two weeks of professional work experience within a working costume department. While the School actively supports students through guidance, industry introductions and professional advice, responsibility for securing the work experience rests with the student, reflecting established industry practice. This experience offers first-hand insight into professional workflows, hierarchies, communication structures and on-set processes, strengthening confidence and professional literacy within real production environments. Alongside work experience activity, students participate in a curated programme of visits to galleries, exhibitions, costume houses, workshops and, where possible, active sets. Together, these activities broaden visual reference, deepen understanding of contemporary screen costume practice and expand professional networks, reinforcing the School's commitment to experiential learning, professional responsibility and graduate readiness.