

Course outline: Directing Animation

The MFA in Directing Animation is a specialisation within the broader **MFA in Film, Television and Games**.

Year One

The first year consists of specialist animation modules that collaborate with other NFTS courses, all introducing students to the ingredients required for an animated film. The students will add the outcome of each project to their school's Google Drive. This will include finished films, storyboards, animatics, and animation fragments to record the range of their film-making practice during their first year. The emphasis is on excitement, discovery, risk, curiosity, and, above all, exploration through practical work.

The first year contains the following six assessed modules:

- Module 1 - Animation Screen Language with Sand
- Module 2 - From Ideas to Animatics
- Module 3 - Character of Place
- Module 4 - The Character Film
- Module 5 - Animation Technique and Sound
- Module 6 - Animation Graduation Film

In addition to the above major modules, there are many shorter workshops across the first year, including Drawn and Stop-motion Animation. Also, we run an introductory **Foundation** course before the first term. In a relaxed atmosphere, students are introduced to the diverse world of animation through screenings and group discussions. They will carry out short exercises to help explore storytelling through sound, framing and lighting, characters and documentary interviewing.

Module 1 - Animation Screen Language with Sand

Cross Specialisation with Composing for Film and Television

Students explore non-traditional film language by creating a short animation in the fluid medium of sand - a technique not typically used by students. This aims to allow students to discover storytelling through the morphing and transitions in this medium, to free up the process of animating with this liberating technique, and to learn how a musical soundtrack created by the Composing students can increase the emotions and understanding of their work.

Module 2 - From Ideas to Animatics

Cross Specialisation with Screenwriting and Editing

Working closely with a writer, students will develop an idea for animation that reflects their personal interests or views on life. They will articulate the idea through a mission statement and develop it into dramatic and emotional storyboards. The editor will then cut the storyboards to create a well-paced and engaging animatic.

Module 3 - Character of Place

Cross Specialisation with Production Design, Cinematography and Composing

Working in teams, students design and light a still image that evokes the character of a place. Inspired

by this image, they will plan and shoot a 20-60 second pixilated animation. There is limited post-production, but Composing students will be free to work on the project.

Module 4 - Character Film

Cross Specialisation with Screenwriting, Editing and Sound Design

Using personality traits as the starting point, animators and writers design a 'rounded' character that can work in many stories. The characters will be randomly paired up, and their meeting will form the structure of a short animation. The dialogue will be written for the interchange, and students will direct and record professional actors.

The editors will work on both the animatic and the final film. In the last week, the animators will direct the sound designers to create the film's soundtrack.

Students should use this project to develop their skills in character body language, gesturing and lip-syncing. The final film should illustrate well-rounded characters who clearly think and can express believable emotions.

Module 5 - Animation Technique and Sound

Cross Specialisation with Editing and Sound Design

Students will generate an idea from a given soundtrack produced by the Sound Designers. The project encourages students to be more experimental with the design and technique. It also allows them to explore the relationship between sound and pictures more in-depth.

Module 6 - Animation Graduation Film: Ideas

Cross Specialisation with Producing and Screenwriting

Through a series of short workshops, students develop two ideas, one of which will become their Graduation Film.

Workshops will cover ideas for traditional narratives and more experimental films where metaphors, techniques, and materials are used to express an idea. This development period will also allow the three departments to get to know each other better through presentations and social events.

The students will pair up, forming the core of the Graduation Film production team.

Year Two

Animation Graduation Film

Cross Specialisation with Producing, Screenwriting, Production Design, Cinematography, Sound Design, Editing and Composing

The second year of the MFA is almost entirely spent developing and producing a short animated film, which will be an important part of the graduation process and a calling card for students' further employment in the animation industry. This should be approximately six minutes long but may vary according to the technique selected.

Masterclasses and seminars are also included during the year, supporting the development and production of the Graduation Film and focusing on the business skills needed for a freelance career. Students will attend the Annecy Festival in France, provided it is running, to gain further understanding of work across various genres and expand their networking within the industry.

The second year contains the following assessed module:

- Module 7 - Animation Graduation Film

Following the development stage at the end of the first year, this module contains three key stages in the second year

- Pre-Production
- Production
- Post Production

Animation Graduation Film: Pre-Production Stage

The first four months are spent developing the project and assembling a crew. Students will work closely with Screenwriters and Producers to produce a treatment and script for the film. They will team-up with Cinematography and Production Design and work on storyboards, character and production design.

The last stage of development will be the making of the final animatic with Editing, Composing and Sound Design students.

Other members of the team who contribute to the production are Visual Effects students, who will help prepare and test the production pipeline, and Production Management students, who will work with Producers to coordinate the smooth running of each production. Model Making students help with the stop-motion films with puppets and props.

The production will be supervised by Producing students who will coordinate with the Directing Animation students to schedule the production within the time framework, budget and the School's limited space and resources.

There will be regular presentations of the work as it develops to groups of tutors, professionals and students for review and critical advice. At the end of this development period, the films will be greenlit on the strength of the animatic, designs, tests where necessary, and budget and schedule.

Animation Graduation Film: Production Stage

Once the development period has concluded and the films have been greenlit, production will commence.

The films will be animated between May and November under the supervision of directing and producing tutors. Each film will be planned to suit the director's technique and style, and specialist help will be brought in where required. Directing Animation students will be expected to lead the animation and usually work with a few assistants and volunteers.

The Producers, working with the Director and Production Managers, will create and monitor the budget and schedule of the film. Fortnightly reports will be produced to inform the school of the production progress.

As well as day-to-day Production, there will be a week workshop to develop the soundtrack at the animatic stage, pipeline test and progress screenings.

Animation Graduation Film: Post Production Stage

Editing, sound design, and music composing occur in the autumn and the beginning of the following year.

Each film will have seven days allocated for sound mixing in a Dolby dubbing theatre. Sound and music are supervised by professional editing, film composers, sound designers, and animation-directing tutors.

The films are presented at the end of the School year in Central London to an invited audience of film

professionals. The School enters the films in the major festivals to give the work as much exposure as possible.

Dissertation

Students complete a dissertation during their course. There are two dissertation options: a written dissertation of between 7,000 and 10,000 words, or a video essay of between 15 and 20 minutes in duration.

The purpose of the dissertation is to allow students to undertake independent research, explore the nature of their discipline through working on a subject of their choice and increase their knowledge of the creative aspects of animation. It gives them the time and opportunity to think about and develop their ideas on the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of their work at the NFTS and to reflect critically on their own and others' practice.