

Programme Specification: Masters in Acting: The British Tradition

NOTE: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the course and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if s/he takes advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detail on the specific learning outcomes, indicative content and the teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found (1) at <http://www.bcu.ac.uk/pme>, (2) in the Module Specifications and (3) in the Student Handbook.

The accuracy of the information contained in this document is reviewed by the University and may be checked within independent review processes undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency.

Awarding Institution / Body:	Birmingham City University
Teaching Institution:	Birmingham School of Acting
Interim Awards and Final Award:	Final Award – MA Acting: The British Tradition 180 credits/Interim Award –Postgraduate Diploma 120 credits
Programme Title:	MA Acting: The British Tradition
Main fields of Study:	Research in Acting
Modes of Study:	Research through Practice Practice-based learning (e.g. Productions and Workshops) Workshops, Lecture and Seminar Private Study
Language of Study:	English
UCAS Code:	N/A
JACS Code:	N/A

Relevant subject benchmark statements and other external reference points used to inform programme outcomes:

Currently, there are no existing benchmarks for programmes offered at MA level in the Performing Arts.

The course has been developed in response to the provision in performing arts and actor training at postgraduate and undergraduate level elsewhere in the UK. Many courses now provide a grounding in the principles and tools of the Stanislavski System and in the theatre form of Psychological Realism. Whilst they will almost certainly offer students an experience of playing Shakespeare they are less likely to offer an opportunity to explore other key theatre forms in the development of British drama and, where actor training at one time focused on aspects of style within the British tradition, courses are now more

likely to centre on European developments within the twentieth century and on contemporary drama and the media of film, television and broadcast.

Programme philosophy and aims

The **MA Acting: The British Tradition** programme is a course of taught postgraduate study intended for graduates who wish to undertake advanced studies in order to further their knowledge and widen their experience of the non-naturalistic forms of theatre that form the bedrock of the British tradition.

The programme focuses in particular on two key elements of this tradition: the narrative aspect of the drama and its implications for actors, and the actor's relationship with the audience. Both of these are seen as controlling as well as creative factors within the evolution of the theatre event. The course seeks to widen the student's understanding of the practice of acting and its traditions in this country, and provides practical workshop opportunities for the student to research, through study and practice, the particular skills and techniques associated with key stages in the development of British theatre performance, such as Renaissance theatre, Restoration theatre, Melodrama and Social Realism.

Whilst the course is fundamentally concerned with acting and offers practical opportunities to explore the particular challenges of theatre forms within the British tradition, this is not intended as a professional preparation for an acting career. This laboratory course gives actors or other performance or drama professionals the opportunity to enhance their experience in classical and popular forms of acting.

This new course, therefore, uniquely offers those with an interest in live performance opportunities to explore, through laboratory practice and critical study, the great British tradition of non-realistic acting methods. An exploration of what is meant by the word 'style' in relation to theatre performance is central to this course. 'Style' in acting is the result of a complex understanding of the world of the play, the actor's understanding of this world, the actor's relationship with the dramatic text and the audience. This programme provides opportunities for those interested in broadening and deepening their understanding of acting techniques and theatre performance to explore a range of forms from within the development of the British tradition.

The **MA Acting: The British Tradition** aims:

- To further the student's knowledge, through study and practice, of the non-naturalistic forms of theatre of the British tradition, providing the student with the practical experience of working in a range of styles and genres in order to inculcate a deeper understanding of the demands of non-naturalistic dramatic texts.
- To enable the student to understand the complex relationship that exists for the performer between the dramatic text, the performance space and the audience, and to see these elements as creative factors in theatre performance.
- To provide the student with the tools required in order to research the world of any play.
- To encourage the student to reflect on his/her own practice and to develop originality of thinking, methodology and self-direction in order to tackle and solve technical, interpretive, and scholarly problems.
- To enable the student to continue to advance his/her knowledge, understanding

and practice beyond the end of the course, and to develop personal learning skills in order to allow the independent acquisition of new skills or research to a high level.

- To provide the student with the conceptual understanding required in order to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship within the field of acting and performance beyond the student's own area of interest.
- To provide the student with the conceptual understanding required to evaluate theoretical, technical, and interpretive methodologies, to review them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses or develop innovative approaches in practice.
- To provide a progression route to further study at MPhil or PhD level.

Intended learning outcomes and the means by which they are achieved and demonstrated:

Learning Outcomes¹

On successful completion of the **MA Acting: The British Tradition** course the student will be able to:

- Demonstrate, through study and practice, knowledge of a range of non-naturalistic forms of theatre of the British tradition.
- Express in practice knowledge and understanding of a range of styles and genres in relation to the demands of non-naturalistic dramatic texts.
- Utilise a range of strategies in researching the world of a play.
- Demonstrate through reflection and through his/her creative practice an understanding of the complex relationship between the performer, the performance space and the audience, simultaneously developing innovative strategies and methodologies, as a means of tackling and solving technical, interpretive, and scholarly problems.
- Utilise his/her ability to explore personal learning skills in such a way that he/she can acquire new skills, initiate research, and develop innovations in practice to a high level.
- Evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship within the field of acting and performance beyond the student's own area of interest.
- Exercise the conceptual understanding required to evaluate theoretical, technical, and interpretive methodologies, to review them and initiate new approaches to professional practice and/or research.
- To progress to a course of MPhil or doctoral study in a related field.
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Learning teaching, and assessment methods used

Learning and teaching on the course takes place in a variety of modes which are described

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below.

As this is a research based degree students must be prepared to carry out a considerable amount of self-directed learning and take a significant amount of initiative in their studies. Each module of the course requires a good deal of background reading and, in addition, students are required to undertake self-initiated research into their chosen field of study.

The course has been designed so that each of the modules supports and feeds in to the work of other modules, and all of the modules lead the student to the final Research Project module.

The modules on the course employ a variety of assessment methods.

All assessment is seen as part of an aligned and integrated course of study and the assessment tasks seek to comprise a genuine representation of the objectives of the course and its modules.

Assessment may be formative or summative.

- Formative assessment points are assigned at specific points during a module to provide students with an opportunity to test their learning and get verbal feedback as to their progress through the module.
- Summative assessment tends to be at an end point, and is mainly concerned with making a value judgement on a student's achievement. The notes a director gives you in a rehearsal, would be an example of formative assessment, whereas an end of module exam, would be summative assessment.

All assessed work is subject to moderation, and all marks are provisional until confirmed by the Examination Board, which meets after the completion of the year.

Unless otherwise notified, students must not present the same material for more than one assessment during the course. If this occurs the student will automatically be awarded a zero mark.

Attendance forms part of the marking procedure. There is a lateness and absence policy that directly impacts on the module marks, so continual lateness or absence could possibly determine pass or failure of a module.

Types of assessment

Assessment events may take various forms, i.e. a practical demonstration in class, a workbook, an essay, or a performance, either as an individual or with another student or as a collaborator in a larger group. In whatever form the assessments occur they are examinations and as such are compulsory. Absence from an assessment for whatever reason will result in a zero mark and the assessment would most probably have to be re-taken in the following year.

Performance module assessment

Performance is at the heart of the students' study on the course and provides the basis for research through practice. It takes place in the modules Acting Workshop and Workshop Productions.

Each workshop culminates in a rehearsal exercise with specified performance

requirements that is shared with the group and an invited audience. The workshop is assessed by its director and by a second marker who is a member of the full-time team. For the Acting Workshop the weighting is 60% for the process and 40% for the performance.

For the Workshop Productions module each student takes place in two workshop productions, and performances are given in the Patricia Yardley studio at the culmination of the rehearsal period. The student is assessed by the director and a second marker who is a member of the full-time team. In Workshop Productions the weighting is 50% for the rehearsal process and 50% for the performance.

In both Acting Workshop and Productions the marks of the Director and the internal second marker carry equal weighting.

Essays

A number of modules of this course require the student to produce essays that will provide opportunities to process research findings, reflect upon their experience and the relationship of theory to practice, and summarise their learning. These will require to be written observing the usual academic requirements, such as referencing.

Workbook

Students need to be able to develop a personal relationship with all of the material under study in order to be able to take a creative and individual approach to their research project, simultaneously developing their ability to reflect critically upon their experience, knowledge and understanding. In the creative arts the definition and exploration of a unique perspective is an essential skill; this is allied to the need to be able to explore the creative imagination in a positive and unfettered manner. It is also imperative that students can organise information and retain details of their experiences, which in the case of performance will often be of a transient or unusual nature, in such a way that the information can be easily retrieved. This process is supported by the creation of a Work Book in which students will annotate and reflect upon technical exercises performed and research undertaken in all of their class and project work across the course of study.

Presentations

These are used as a research tool and, in relation to the Research Project, provide an opportunity to present initial findings, ideas and arguments and to gain feedback. Presentations are used to:

- Clearly convey a coherent and rational argument.
- Communicate ideas or information to peers and engage in discussion.
- Analyse information and demonstrate its relevance.
- Give verbal expression to both concrete and abstract concepts related to the discipline or field of study.
- Argue rationally.
- Summarise your findings and offer an opportunity to obtain critical feedback.

In the case of **Contextual Studies** and **Research Methodology** Presentations are marked and the mark awarded forms part of the assessment for that module.

Research Project

This module represents the culmination of the student's journey on the **MA Acting: The British Tradition** course and is the point on the course when he/she has the opportunity to review all they have learnt thus far in order to initiate original lines of enquiry and personal strategies through which to develop their own research ideas as a possible foundation for their future work in the field.

In the completion of this module the student has the option to produce a traditional **Dissertation** of 12,000-15,000 words, or to engage in research through practice and to produce a performance or demonstration (30-60 minutes) and to support this with a contextual essay of 4,000-5,000 words.

Reports and Feedback

Throughout the course students will receive written reports on their module assessments and oral formative feedback from tutors and the Course Director on their progress.

The structure of the course, the modules, levels and credit values, and the awards which can be gained are shown in the diagram below.

COURSE STRUCTURE

(Terms 1-4)

Acting Workshop

(30 credits)

Total Study Hours = 300

Taught Hours = 280

Acting Workshop 1 (10 weeks)

Narrative, the Actor and the Audience

Acting Workshop 2 (5 weeks)

Restoration Comedy/Comedy of Manners

Acting Workshop 3 (5 weeks)

The Well-Made Play

Productions

(30 Credits)

Total Study Hours = 300

Taught Hours = 300

Production 1

Production 2

2 Play Texts selected from the range below, including:

British Classical Play

Social Realism

Comedy of Manners

The Well-Made Play

Contemporary Writing

Contextual Studies

(30 credits)

Total Study Hours = 300

Taught Hours = 60

Workbook
(15 credits)

Total Study Hours = 150
Taught Hours = 6

Research Methodology
(15 credits)

Total Study Hours = 150
Taught Hours = 25

Research Project
(Term 4)(60 Credits)

Total Study Hours = 600
Taught Hours = 3

Field Trips

Offered in Terms 1 and 2 of the course, field trips inform and support the delivery of the course. These include: theatre visits, educational tours, museums and art galleries. Students need £300.00 in addition to the course fees in order to fund this part of the course.

The course model

The following indicates the minimum number of credits required for each award available through the course and a diagram illustrating the modules for each level and how you progress through the 3 years:

Master of Arts

180 credits at Level 7

Postgraduate Diploma

120 credits at Level 7

A student who fails or leaves before completing his or her programme of study will be entitled to receive an interim award, as specified above, provided the requirements for that award have already been met. Students proceeding through the programme will not be awarded interim certificates.

Support for Learning including Personal Development Planning (PDP)

Students are encouraged to identify and, with guidance, to reflect on their own learning needs and are offered the following support as appropriate to those needs:

An induction period of normally one week.

Student Handbook and Module guides.

On site library and computer facilities, plus further facilities through BCU and TID Libraries.

Staff support through the Course Director. All staff are open to personal access to advise on pastoral and course issues.

Professional counselling and Student Support through BCU Student Services.

Medical advice through connected services with experience of performers' needs.

Small Group Classes allow students to gain advice on problems relating to and arising from the training process.

Criteria for admission

Candidates must satisfy the general admission requirements of the programme.

The current admission requirements can be found under the 'Entry Requirements' tab of the web page for this course.

Methods for evaluation and enhancement of quality and standards including listening and responding to views of students

Evaluation and improvement of quality and standards

Committees:

1. Staff Meetings.
2. Ad-Hoc Project groups.
3. Departmental meetings.
4. Course Monitoring Meetings.
5. Academic Directorate meetings.
6. Planning Directorate meetings.
7. Student Year meetings.
8. Whole School Student Assemblies.
9. N.U.S. and Academic directorate meetings.
10. Course Board.
11. Academic Board.
12. Examination Board.
13. Faculty Board.

Mechanisms for review and evaluation:

Student/Staff Feedback

Student Feedback Questionnaires.

Student Feedback meetings with Course Director and Year Head.

Staff feedback questionnaires.

All feedback is discussed and evaluated at Course Boards and reported upon in the Annual Course Report written by the Course Director.

Items arising from meetings between the N.U.S. and Academic Directorate are reported to and evaluated by Course Boards.

Students are represented on both Course and Academic Boards.

Professional/Academic Monitoring

External Examiner Reports.

External assessors are used to give professional benchmarking.

The Examination Board meets to consider marks, progression and awards.

Internal Monitoring

Peer teaching observation.

Assessment Workshops.

A database of graduate destinations is kept and constantly updated. Graduates are

regularly contacted to update their CVs.

Yearly Course Monitoring Meetings allow staff to comprehensively examine the Course in detail across disciplines, and its relationship to training and the profession at large.

Staff Development

All staff are encouraged and supported to undertake professional and academic development