

THE STRUCTURE OF A WIGS, HAIR AND MAKE-UP DEPARTMENT WITHIN A THEATRE



Starting out after college and pursuing a career in theatre may seem daunting. For the newly qualified it can be difficult to understand where you fit in and what the roles within a working make-up department are. The most important thing to remember when starting out is that you are not alone; you will be surrounded by a team of people with a vast range of experience that you can learn from. Being a team player is vital; “There is no I in team” It is important to be supportive and contribute positively to your team and in doing so, you too will be positively supported in your role.

THEATRE PRODUCTION (IN HOUSE) ROLES

Wigs, Hair & Make-up Designer / Supervisor.

The designer will be involved from the start of the production, liaising with the director and costume supervisor to design the looks for the actors, taking into account lighting, quick changes, sweaty dancers and hot lights. During technical and dress rehearsals, quick change locations will be worked out with the team. They will also be responsible for the preliminary creation of a continuity bible that will be finished by the HOD once looks have been established. Once the show has opened, the day to day running of the show will be handed over to the Wigs HOD. Often the designer remains on board, supervising from a distance, ensuring the original designs are adhered to throughout and during cast changes.

Wigs HOD.

The HOD will take on the day to day running of the show, including wig dressing, staffing, ordering, budgeting, timesheets and liaising with the company manager. They also learn all of the show plots in case they need to cover a sick member of staff.

Deputy Wigs.

The deputy's role is to support the HOD, carrying out the same duties and stepping into the role in the absence of the HOD. They also tend to do a lot of the maintenance barbering and haircutting for the run of the production.

Wigs Assistant.

The wig assistants will carry out wig dressing and haircutting duties and run a 'show plot' of quick changes during the show. The quick changes can consist of full wig changes, changing mics, hat changes, hair up/down and mopping sweaty brows!

Setting Day Person.

This person's role is to ensure all the wigs are reset from the previous show and are ready to be dressed out in time for the show. They are required to uphold the continuity of the show so that it looks the same throughout the run. Sometimes this job is done by the deputy and wig assistant.

Show Swing Person.

Employed just to come in for the show and run a 'show plot'. This is often the route assistants take to get their foot in the door and work up through the positions. They put on wigs, dress hair, help apply make-up, and often learn multiple show plots.

THEATRE PRODUCTION (IN HOUSE) ROLES CONTINUED

Qualifications:

NVQ level 3 hairdressing & barbering that includes afro and textured-hair training

Level 3 media make-up that includes make-up for multi-ethnic skin tones

HND / HNC / degree in make-up & hair

Hair, barbering, wigs, and textured-hair skills are vital. Production companies are now making it mandatory for wig assistants, deputies, and technicians to have this experience when hiring.

Tips:

Contact the stage door of the production to get the name of the HOD and drop your CV in person to stage door or send it by post. Follow up with a cold call or further letter. Also check out the West End Wiggies Facebook page where jobs are posted by production companies, theatres, and individual artists looking for show cover.

TOURING PRODUCTION ROLES

Touring Productions: These are productions or shows that did well in London or other established theatres and move around the country (and sometimes multiple countries) working out of empty theatres for anywhere from 4 weeks to a year.

Touring Wigs HOD.

The job description is the same as a HOD running a show in London with the primary difference that a touring HOD is responsible for liaising with the wardrobe department in order to set up a “wardrobe village” at each new venue the show is performing in. This is important because each theatre venue is different and you will be rebuilding a wigs, hair and make-up department in very different sized venues.

Touring Deputy.

Is responsible for all of the same things as in a normal theatre production but will be supporting their HOD with helping to transfer the show successfully to its new venue. They may have to take on more of the dressing and hair cutting so that the HOD can set up their department.

Touring Wigs Assistant.

The job is the same as in a regular theater so you will be doing wig dressing, haircutting duties, and running a ‘show plot’ of quick changes during the show. The quick changes can consist of full wig changes, hat changes, hair up/down. On tour they may also be asked to do small wig or postiche repairs. You will also support your deputy and HOD by packing wigs and supplies down when a show is due to transfer to another venue.

Qualifications:

NVQ level 3 hairdressing & barbering that includes afro and textured-hair training

Level 3 media make-up that includes make-up for multi-ethnic skin tones

HND / HNC / degree in make-up & hair

Tip: Join West End Wiggies on Facebook as they advertise positions for show covers and also production companies hiring for tours. Working on a tour is a great way to cut your teeth and get experience before working in the West End. Often productions that are established won’t hire you unless you have touring experience because they know how fast on their feet touring departments are.

WIG MAKING ROLES

Wig Makers.

Artists who work from home or at a wig-making workshop, they are responsible for knotting individual hair into a lace foundation, which has been made to fit a specific actors head. They also dye the hair which is to be knotted into the wig, dye the lace to match the performer's skin tone and blend the hair colours as required.

Hair colouring and blending.

This is normally done by the wig maker or someone on their team. They dye batches of hair, or dye the roots, pre curl and blend it, so that it can then be allocated to the knotter for knotting into the wig.

Foundation Makers.

This job normally also falls under the wig maker umbrella of jobs. They are trained to take measurements of the performer's head and then pad out a headblock to fit the measurements. From there they use a lace fabric and tailor it to the head measurements so that is bespoke to the actor's head shape and hair line.

Knotters / Out-Knotters.

Knotters are technicians that may work from home (which is referred to as out-knotting), or a wig making studio. Their sole job is to weave (knot) the hair into the lace foundation to the specifications of the wig maker or production they are working for. They not only make wigs but knot facial hair, hairpieces, and body-hair pieces.

Wig Dresser.

These are technicians that may come into a theatre, a wig workshop, or a film set and are responsible for setting and dressing the wigs to the specification of the designer, continuity images (normally kept in a show bible if it's theatre), or a piece of visual reference. They are also sometimes asked to take pictures and make notes of the process so that it can be replicated by others on the production.

Qualifications:

Wig Making can be taught with on the job training, or 1 week to 2 week intensive course by qualified knotters. In order to be hired you need to send out small samples of your knotting work to different wig studios. The more delicate your work is (and the faster you are), the more likely it is that you will be hired.

Tips: Wig making is an important skill to have and will help elevate your job application as lots of established reparatory theatres (theatres that have multiple shows happening at the same time) tend to hire applicants who can not only run a show, but can make wigs for them during the day. This craft is not hard to learn but one which needs a lot of practice in order to build enough speed and proficiency to make it financially viable.