

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

1. Key Information

Programme Title:	MA Special Effects for Film & TV
Awarding Institution:	Buckinghamshire New University
Teaching Institution(s):	Buckinghamshire New University
Subject Cluster:	Visual Arts
Award Title (including separate Pathway Award Titles where offered):	MA Special Effects for Film & TV
Pathways (if applicable)	
FHEQ level of final award:	7
Other award titles available (exit qualifications):	Postgraduate Certificate Postgraduate Diploma
Accreditation details:	
Length of programme:	1 year Level 7
Mode(s) of Study:	Full Time
Mode of Delivery:	In person (on-site) delivery
Language of study:	English
QAA Subject Benchmark(s):	Art and Design Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies
Other external reference points (e.g. Apprenticeship Standard):	
Course Code(s):	MASFTVFT
UCAS Code(s):	
Approval date:	01 December 2022
Date of last update:	February 2025

2. Programme Summary

The MA Special Effects for Film & TV at BNU is a state-of-the-art taught programme which provides an opportunity for you to specialise in specific areas within the Special Effects field of the creative industries. It focuses on the design, development and fabrication of physically based film and television special effects using a range of art and science technologies including engineering system design, props design & fabrication, set and theme design and the crafting of camera-ready animatronics devices.

The nature of the course is industry-focused, and will provide opportunities for you to engage with a broad range of skills as required by industry. Interpretation of scripted and envisioned concepts requires innovative thinking, originality and imagination and pre-visualisation coupled with practical skills to carry the projects through problem-solving to completion.

When graduating from this course, you will have relevant skills in developing theoretical and critical approaches to your specialism, and together with the craft skills acquired, will be able to support the design, prototyping and production of polished, realistic functional camera-ready artefacts and be appropriately prepared for future employment. Alternatively, you may wish to focus your studies towards the conceptual, theoretical and critical areas of your area of specialism for further study at MPhil/PhD level.

This course will be taught at High Wycombe BNU campus.

3. Programme Aims and Learning Outcomes

Programme Aims

This programme aims to:

1. Develop at an advanced level, knowledge, conceptual and technical skills, and experience of designing and producing complex Special Effects devices or artefacts for given applications
2. Prepare and equip postgraduate learners with advanced transferable knowledge, skills, and experience to enter the Props and Modelmaking and Animatronics industry sectors in film & TV production and/or related creative industries
3. Provide an opportunity for learners to envision, analyse, synthesise and resolve visual problems using SFX props or animatronics devices to provide original camera-ready solutions in the required medium and format
4. Provide an opportunity for learners to inquire, investigate, explore, experiment and articulate verbally and in writing, their chosen discipline applying academically sound research and evaluative methods, originality and critical thinking
5. Facilitate the development of a portfolio and/or showreel which would demonstrate the learners' knowledge, analytical and technical skills, entrepreneurship and personal direction in preparation for professional employment

Programme Learning Outcomes

Knowledge and Understanding (K)

On successful completion of the programme you will be able to:

ID	Learning Outcome
K1	Demonstrate an in-depth knowledge and understanding of your chosen specialism within the special effects discipline supported by functional artefacts, thorough research, analysis, synthesis, production management, production and product/audience evaluation.
K2	Engage critically with the key concepts, debates and issues pertinent to your discipline in order to develop and apply them within a major written investigation.
K3	Initiate, develop and produce original solutions to visual problems arising from film and television treatments, storyboards and scripts.

Analysis and Criticality (C)

On successful completion of the programme you will be able to:

ID	Learning Outcome
C1	Evaluate and critique artefacts pertinent to your discipline and offer constructive responses for improvement and quality enhancement.
C2	Deploy the skills of analysis, synthesis, pre-visualisation and management in the context of engaging with a special effects brief from script to screen.
C3	Analyse the various components contributing to the believability of special effects designed for film and television.

Application and Practice (P)

On successful completion of the programme you will be able to:

ID	Learning Outcome
P1	Demonstrate sound knowledge of contemporary issues relating to Special Effects.
P2	Conceptualise and realise through drawing, designing, constructing, problem solving and applying the necessary tools and skills through the production and post-production processes in order to produce a finished artefact.
P3	Show sound knowledge of the various Special Effects industry job roles and critically reflect upon the processes of animatronics/visual effects production.
P4	Apply, experiment and adapt the acquired skills in digital applications and the process and practice of designing animatronics models, props & models to fulfil a wide range of special effects design briefs.
P5	Facilitate opportunities to deepen your knowledge and experience of special effects props and modelmaking as well as animatronics production pipelines for the benefit of further study or professional development.

Transferable skills and other attributes (T)

On successful completion of the programme you will be able to:

ID	Learning Outcome
T1	Undertake research in a specific area of special effects production and post-production and related professional framework.
T2	Time manage, prioritise workload, manage pressure and adapt production pipelines as required to meet deadlines.
T3	Show development of a high level of interpersonal communication and conceptualising skills to manage a dynamic team work environment.

Graduate Attributes

The BNU Graduate Attributes of: Knowledge and its application; Creativity; Social and ethical awareness and responsibility; and Leadership and self-development focus on the development of innovative leaders in professional and creative capacities, who are equipped to operate in the 21st Century labour market and make a positive impact as global citizens.

On this programme, attributes are developed through the designing of theoretical and practice-based modules which develop the learners' advanced specialised skills, tailored to cater for

the needs of the Special Effects sector within the creative industry. Throughout the programme both analogue/traditional and digital skills are embedded within module design and provide an in-depth knowledge of the learners' specialism within the SFX discipline, covering the process and practice of special effects (K1- 3).

- When designing SFX for film and television, critical evaluation skills and an exploration of appropriate research methods are further developed to be able to design, analyse, synthesise, pre-visualise and manage a special effects brief covering script to screen (C1-3).
- Actively engages the learner with the industry requirements and needs, i.e. time management, prioritising workloads, manage pressure, adapt production pipelines as required to meet deadlines and develop a high level of interpersonal communication skills to manage a dynamic teamwork environment (T2-3, P1-5).
- Design, concept development and problem solving to be able to construct effective and a convincing finished artefact using appropriate analogue, digital technology and tools related to specific special effects disciplines. The programme will also facilitate opportunities to further study and research within the field of special effects, pursued at PhD level (P1-2, 5).

4. Entry Requirements

The University's [general entry requirements](#) will apply to admission to this programme with the following additions / exceptions:

A minimum of 2.2 at BA/BSc level in a relevant subject is required. Alternatively, a Higher National Diploma (HND) qualification in relevant subject, with a minimum of 2 years' industry experience will be required.

If you do not meet the entry requirements you may, if you have relevant professional experience, still be invited for interview, where you will be required to demonstrate the necessary knowledge and understanding for entry onto the course.

Previous study, professional and / or vocational experiences may be recognised as the equivalent learning experience and permit exemption from studying certain modules in accordance with our [accreditation of prior learning](#) (APL) process.

5. Programme Structure

Level	Modules (Code, Title and Credits)	Exit Awards
Level 7	<p>Core modules:</p> <p>CAD7006 Dissertation – 20 Credit CAD7009 Professional Practice – 20 Credit CAD7010 Final Major Project – 60 Credit CAD7011 Digital Previsualisation for Screen – 20 Credit CAD7043 Puppet Design and Production – 20 Credit CAD7014 Animatronics System Design & Production – 20 Credit CAD7015 SFX Props & Modelmaking – 20 Credit</p>	<p>PG Cert: Completion of 60 credits</p> <p>PG Dip: Completion of 120 credits</p>

Please note: Not all option modules will necessarily be offered in any one year. Other option modules may also be introduced at a later stage enabling the programme to respond to changes in the subject area.

6. Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Learning and teaching

The style of teaching and learning methods will vary according to whether the module is theoretically based, or skills based.

The method of delivery on this MA varies across modules will consist of a variety of methods and approaches from lectures, demonstrations in workshops, exercises applying technology and software, step-by-step worksheets, self-study, one-to-one tutorials, group work and criticism sessions, presentations in class and tutorial guidance via the internet and online resources. Teaching may also include engagement with professional practice through collections, exhibitions, performance, screenings, and other teaching methods as applicable to each pathway. The dissertation module is supported by a series of lectures and seminars on research skills and contextual studies, followed by individual supervision.

Learners will study how to use and safely apply the relevant technologies and techniques within workshops guided by the tutor. All learners will be expected to use open-access time to investigate, experiment and explore the available technology before they begin assignment work.

Learners will have regular online/ telephone and email access to academic tutors and will increasingly use 'Blackboard', the University's virtual learning environment. Learners will be required to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in special effects via presentations, demonstrations and the artefacts they produce, e.g. animatronics models, 2/3D CGI models, props, and/or video sequences and short videos.

Learners will be encouraged to reflect on how they apply their knowledge and understanding of a wide range of special effects applied within film and television. Lectures and seminars will reinforce the need for 'personal reflection' to enable the learner to understand how the artefact/ prototype is being received by the client/audience and assess the 'believability', 'realism', or 'fantasy' of selected scenes or sequences. Working in groups within tutorials, learners will be encouraged to research a topic and present a solution to their peers in class.

Activities will include:

- Lectures, which inform and develop subject-specific knowledge and understanding.
- Demonstrations and workshops, which will develop proficiency in applying pre-production and production methods when fabricating props, physical models or animatronic devices used in special effects for film and TV.
- Work simulations that will develop learner skills for employability.
- Group seminars or tutorials during which key theories and contemporary issues will be discussed.
- Project briefs and assignments that will provide opportunities to further develop production skills and to experiment with new tools and technologies.
- One-to-one tutorials that will provide further support and guidance dependent upon each learner's needs and employment and career aspirations.
- Use of a range of technological system design tools for the acquisition of special effects production skills that will prepare learners for the technologically challenging work environment.
- Delivery of course content is complemented by contributions from industry representatives.

A wide variety of teaching and learning approaches will provide learners with confidence in applying up-to-date tools, technologies and processes, to enhance their learning in the classroom, studios, workshops and beyond. The teaching team will ensure that all module content is up-to-date and in line with current industry practice.

The teaching and learning strategies have been designed to support and expand the learning experience for self-directed study, requiring independent reading and research, planning and time management for productions and self-guided production activities in workshop/labs or on location.

Blackboard

The University VLE Blackboard system will be an important part of teaching, learning and assessment. All learners will be introduced to the University VLE Blackboard during the induction week.

Assessment

Assessment methods will be dependent on whether the module is a skills-based or addressing underpinning theory.

Skills based units will require learners to carry out time restricted exercises in the workshop incorporating logbooks/ design report to test and record their understanding of process together with the submission of an artefact. Assessment criteria will contain a technical element, application of industry-set standards and Health and Safety issues. Other forms of assessment may require a 'PowerPoint' presentation and/ or oral assessment. All practical and production work will require the submission of a Design Report or Production File which will offer all the paper documentation to support their understanding of process & practice of their discipline and demonstrate effective management of the production of the artefact.

The theoretical and conceptual based modules will require learners to write independently research a topic, write essays, give group presentations and attend in-class tests.

As per the teaching and learning activities, assessments are also comprised by a range of different methods. The following assessment activities are used on this programme:

- **Written work/Dissertation** – This will be mainly in the form of written documents, where learners are requested to present research material in specific subjects and analyse, edit and reference to fit the desired outcomes.
- **Blogs/Reports** – Learners are encouraged to document their entire learning progress throughout the programme, and some of that documentation will be asked to be delivered in the form of reflective blogs and critically evaluative reports and will be assessed (applies to formative and summative assessments) and marked (applies to summative assessments only).
- **Portfolio/Showreel** – As well as the written documentation on the different activities, visual portfolios are essential when presenting yourself to prospective employers. Learners are taught on the different processes involved in producing an industry-standard portfolio and will be assessed on the outcomes.

- **Presentation** – Presentation skills are a key element when working in teams and presenting ideas. Throughout the degree, learners are expected to produce coursework and may present it to a range of audiences.
- **Practical Skills via Timed assessments** - One of the most important elements of the programme, is the standard of practical skills learner are achieving, and the ability to accomplish practical tasks within a given duration, mirroring industry practice and expectations.
- **Group-based work** – This mode of assessment develops transferable skills in the areas of oral communication, negotiation and interpersonal skills. Working in a group can also promote the sharing of ideas and practical problem-solving skills. Learners will have the opportunity to undertake team-based projects; where they are assessed, the grade for the assignment will be a combination of a shared grade as a group (70%) based on specific assessment criteria, and peer assessment (30%).

Assessment strategies support learner' understanding of their learning processes and are designed to foster a deep approach to learning. Strategies also promote autonomous learning and self-evaluation as vital elements within the overall learning process.

Formative feedback and feed-forward are considered a vital part of the assessment process. More formal oral and/or written formative feedback is given at key identified points, usually during student-led presentations of work in progress. At these points, a formative grade based upon performance up to that stage is applied, to help learners establish action planning and critical awareness. Grades given at this stage are only indicative and can go down as well as up at the summative assessment point.

Self and peer-evaluation constitute an important part of formative assessment and, on occasion, of the formal summative assessment process.

Summative assessment will take place at the end of the module. Submitted work will be assessed on the achievement of the module Learning Outcomes and awarded a grade based upon the Assessment Criteria. The assessments will take place with a full review of the briefs and all the supporting development work, which should clearly document the breadth and depth of research and the development of conceptual ideas for each project undertaken.

All assessments that contribute to final grades will be assessed against clear assessment criteria stated in assignment briefs; these assessment criteria are directly linked to grading descriptors, and they will be used to evaluate the submitted work and produce written feedback. Marks will be produced following rigorous quality mechanisms that ensure academic judgement remains fair and consistent and comparable with the wider educational sector.

Contact Hours

1 unit of credit is the equivalent of 10 notional learning hours. Full time undergraduate learners' study 120 credits (1200 hours) and full-time postgraduate learners' study 180 credits (1800 hours) as per year or 'stage' of the course.

Year 1

Scheduled teaching – 500 hours

Guided independent study – 1300 hours

7. Programme Regulations

This programme will be subject to the following assessment regulations:

- Regulations for Taught Degree Programmes (2023)

8. Support for learners

The following systems are in place to support you to be successful with your studies:

- The appointment of a personal tutor to support you through your programme
- A programme handbook and induction at the beginning of your studies
- Library resources, include access to books, journals and databases - many of which are available in electronic format – and support from trained library staff
- Access to Blackboard, our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which is accessible via PC, laptop, tablet or mobile device
- Access to the MyBNU portal where you can access all University systems, information and news, record your attendance at sessions, and access your personalised timetable
- Academic Registry staff providing general guidance on University regulations, exams, and other aspects of students and course administration
- Central student services, including teams supporting academic skills development, career success, student finance, accommodation, chaplaincy, disability and counselling
- Support from the Bucks Students' Union, including the Students' Union Advice Centre which offers free and confidential advice on University processes.

9. Programme monitoring and review

BNU has a number of ways for monitoring and reviewing the quality of learning and teaching on your programme. You will be able to comment on the content of their programme via the following feedback mechanisms:

- Formal feedback questionnaires and anonymous module 'check-ins'
- Participation in external surveys
- Programme Committees, via appointed student representatives
- Informal feedback to your programme leader

Quality and standards on each programme are assured via the following mechanisms:

- An initial event to approve the programme for delivery
- An annual report submitted by the External Examiner following a process of external moderation of work submitted for assessment
- The Annual Monitoring process, which is overseen by the University's Education Committee
- Review by the relevant PSRB(s)
- Periodic Subject Review events held every five years
- Other sector compliance and review mechanisms

10. Internal and external reference points

Design and development of this programme has been informed by the following internal and external reference points:

- The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
- The QAA Subject Benchmark Statement – see detailed mapping below

- The QAA Master's Degree Characteristics Statement
- The BNU Qualifications and Credit Framework
- The BNU Grading Descriptors
- The University Strategy

Mapping of Subject Benchmark Statement and any relevant Apprenticeship Standard to Programme Learning Outcomes

Subject Benchmark Statement / Apprenticeship Standard:	Knowledge and understanding (K)			Analysis and Criticality (C)			Application and Practice (P)					Transferable skills and other attributes (T)		
	K1	K2	K3	C1	C2	C3	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	T1	T2	T3
Art and Design 6.4.i present evidence that demonstrates some ability to generate ideas independently and/or as self-initiated activity and/or in response to set briefs	✗		✗	✗		✗	✗	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗	✗
6.4.iii demonstrate proficiency in observation, investigation, enquiry, visualisation and/or making	✗		✗		✗		✗	✗					✗	
6.4.iv make connections between intention, process, outcome, context and methods of dissemination.	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗				✗

Subject Benchmark Statement / Apprenticeship Standard:	Knowledge and understanding (K)			Analysis and Criticality (C)			Application and Practice (P)					Transferable skills and other attributes (T)		
	Benchmark / Standard requirement	K1	K2	K3	C1	C2	C3	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	T1	T2
6.5.i the broad critical and contextual dimensions of the student's discipline(s);	✗	✗		✗			✗	✗		✗	✗	✗	✗	
6.5.ii the issues which arise from the artist's or designer's relationship with audiences, clients, markets, users, consumers, and/or participants; major developments in current and emerging media and technologies in their discipline(s);	✗		✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗	✗		✗
6.5.iii major developments in current and emerging media and technologies in their discipline(s);	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗	✗		✗	✗		✗		✗
6.5.iv the significance of the work of other practitioners in their discipline(s).	✗		✗			✗			✗	✗				✗

Subject Benchmark Statement / Apprenticeship Standard:	Knowledge and understanding (K)			Analysis and Criticality (C)			Application and Practice (P)					Transferable skills and other attributes (T)		
	K1	K2	K3	C1	C2	C3	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	T1	T2	T3
Generic Level 7 Benchmarks QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education (October 2014)														
4.17 - A systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice.	✘	✘		✘				✘	✘		✘	✘		✘
4.17 - A comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship.	✘		✘	✘	✘		✘		✘	✘		✘		✘
4.17 - Originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how	X		✘		✘			✘	✘	✘				✘

Subject Benchmark Statement / Apprenticeship Standard:	Knowledge and understanding (K)			Analysis and Criticality (C)			Application and Practice (P)					Transferable skills and other attributes (T)		
	K1	K2	K3	C1	C2	C3	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	T1	T2	T3
established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.														
4.17 - Conceptual understanding that enables the student to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline and to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗			✗	✗			✗		✗
4.17 - Be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly	X		✗	✗	✗		✗		✗		✗	✗		✗

Subject Benchmark Statement / Apprenticeship Standard:	Knowledge and understanding (K)			Analysis and Criticality (C)			Application and Practice (P)					Transferable skills and other attributes (T)		
	K1	K2	K3	C1	C2	C3	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	T1	T2	T3
to specialist and non-specialist audiences														
4.17 - Demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level.	✘		✘	✘	✘		✘	✘		✘		✘	✘	
4.17 - Develop the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility. decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations. independent learning ability required for 	X	✘	✘			✘	✘	✘		✘	✘	✘		✘

Subject Benchmark Statement / Apprenticeship Standard:	Knowledge and understanding (K)			Analysis and Criticality (C)			Application and Practice (P)					Transferable skills and other attributes (T)			
	Benchmark / Standard requirement	K1	K2	K3	C1	C2	C3	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	T1	T2	T3
continuing professional development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop the necessary skills to continue to advance their knowledge and understanding and to develop new skills to a high level. 															

Mapping of Programme Learning Outcomes to Modules

Programme Learning Outcome	Knowledge and understanding (K)					Analysis and Criticality (C)					Application and Practice (P)					Transferable skills and other attributes (T)					
	Module Code (Core)	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5
Level 7																					
SFX Props & Modelmaking Manufacturing	✗		✗			✗	✗	✗				✗	✗	✗			✗	✗	✗		

Programme Learning Outcome	Knowledge and understanding (K)					Analysis and Criticality (C)					Application and Practice (P)					Transferable skills and other attributes (T)				
	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5
Animatronics System Design & Production	✗		✗			✗	✗	✗			✗	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗	✗		
Puppet Design & Production	✗		✗			✗	✗	✗			✗	✗	✗	✗						
Digital Previsualisation for Screen	✗	✗	✗				✗	✗			✗		✗		✗	✗	✗	✗		
Major Project	✗	✗	✗			✗	✗	✗			✗	✗	✗			✗	✗	✗		
Dissertation		✗				✗	✗	✗	✗	✗		✗						✗		
Professional Practice and Management	✗	✗		✗	✗		✗	✗	✗		✗	✗		✗		✗		✗		
SFX Props and Modelmaking	✗		✗			✗	✗	✗			✗	✗	✗	✗		✗		✗		