

Course outline: Film Studies, Programming and Curation

The MFA in Film Studies, Programming and Curation is a specialisation within the broader **MFA in Film and Television**.

The course provides theoretical and practical support for students developing their professional practice in film curation and related fields. Students on this course gain a thorough understanding of the process by which a film moves from a creative idea to an audience experience. They will explore the history, theory and critical contexts of the production and reception of film and the moving image, and will apply this knowledge in project research and delivery. In addition, they will look at a wide variety of critical writing on film, to help them to develop their own critical awareness and forms of expression.

Their learning will be enhanced by regular screenings of a broad range of historical and contemporary cinema.

Alongside lectures, seminars and tutorials, the course offers in-depth workshops and a professional work experience opportunity to allow a more specialised focus on industry practices in programming, curating, archives and film criticism. Students also have the opportunity to curate or contribute to festivals, seasons, pop up screenings and other events. The final year Graduation Project is the culmination of the course, where students are able to draw on their learning to devise, realise, present and evaluate a real-life exhibition project.

Year One

Year one offers a combination of theoretical and practical work, organised into three key modules, outlined below:

Module 1: Conceptualising Film: Idea, Form and Style

The module provides an introduction to key ways of conceptualising film, exploring a range of historical and contemporary approaches that underpin critical, theoretical and creative practice. The purpose of the module is to develop your understanding of the history and development of film as an art form, an industry and as a subject of scholarship and criticism. The main topics include:

1. The evolution of the moving image: from scientific experiment to mass entertainment and beyond
2. Ways of seeing: approaches to studying film
3. The development of an industry and its audience
4. Film and Realism: Cinema as a Mirror of Society?

5. The Subconscious Art: dream cinema and the language of film
6. Historical movements in Cinema: influential developments, including the early avant-garde, Italian neo-realism, the Nouvelle Vague, Third Cinema
7. Contemporary British and World Cinema: approaches, developments and trends
8. Film Forum: the evolution of film criticism and comment
9. Film and Digital Media (technology and the impact on form and style)
10. Expanded cinema: film as a gallery experience, film as live event

The module draws on a wide range of illustrative film examples, and explores each concept with in-depth analysis of one or more key films. Each topic will be introduced by a film and media practitioner and/or an academic.

Students will write a 3000-word essay in order to explore one of the topics, to be submitted in April (assessed).

Students will also present two pieces of independent research, which will form part of their Year One portfolio. They will also keep a weekly learning journal in which they will reflect on their own learning.

Module 2: Identifying the Audience: The Practice of Cinema from Idea to Exhibition

This module looks at the changing sites and forms of film viewing, providing a detailed exploration of the cultural, economic and technological contexts that structure the processes and pathways by which films reach an audience. It includes a consideration of all parts of the film ecology, from the inception of an idea to the production, circulation and reception of films. Whilst primary examples will largely be drawn from Europe and the USA, these will be considered in a global context. The areas covered include:

1. Audiences: bringing people together to watch films: who, why and how, from fairground attraction to movie palace to pop-up and online.
2. The relationship between production and audiences: creativity, development journeys, film finance and funding.
3. Contemporary patterns of distribution: buying and selling films in a multi-platform world; from conglomeration and globalisation to independence and self-distribution
4. The business of contemporary exhibition: the 'majors' and the alternatives; the digital revolution and beyond.
5. Cultural cinema in the UK and Europe; the status of 'specialised cinema', including repertory and archive film
6. Film Festivals and markets: cultural and economic impact; models of programming
7. Programming for online platforms
8. Programming beyond the single screen: live cinema, event cinema and alternative content
9. Programming for diverse audiences
10. Marketing and promotion: identifying, reaching and developing audiences
11. Critics and criticism in the age of the internet and social media: continuity and change

In addition to regular lectures and seminars by NFTS tutors, the teaching programme includes a wide range of talks by professionals working across a range of platforms, including cinemas, festivals and online; industry executives working in exhibition, distribution, sales and marketing; venue and event managers; filmmakers and critics.

Students will write reviews of four films, to form part of their Year One portfolio. These will be directed to a range of audiences, and briefs will be provided.

Module 3: Archival Practice

This module covers the history, development and current experiences of film archiving. Specifically, it explores how curatorial work intersects with policy and practice in the UK and international archive landscape. Sessions will explore issues of curatorial practice with regard both to collecting and exhibiting work and will consider the presentation and reception of archive material across a range of exhibition platforms. Students will also have the opportunity to visit one or more archives or specialised film collections.

Module 4: Programming Film and Cultural Events

Beginning with a visit to the BFI London Film Festival, the module offers students the opportunity to learn the range of practical skills needed for delivery of film exhibition projects, including Graduation Projects. It is largely comprised of workshops and seminars, supported by film studies classes on aspects of contemporary cinema. Whilst these will mainly be taught at the beginning of Year Two, preparatory work on the practical aspects of contemporary film curation will take place during the final weeks of Year One.

Informed by the study in Modules One and Two, there will be seminars and in-depth workshops on programming, including researching programme and event ideas, developing themes, selecting work to meet cultural and commercial imperatives, copywriting and devising marketing strategies. Practical issues regarding rights and availability, projection and technical presentation, producing publicity materials and on-stage introductions and Q&A hosting will all be covered. This work is supported by a range of film studies classes on contemporary cinema.

Other Activities

In each year of the course, students will have the opportunity to attend the BFI London Film Festival

In year one students are required to write a festival report based on their attendance, and this is an assessed piece of work.

Year Two

In Year Two, whilst students continue to receive tuition in film studies, contemporary curation and criticism, the emphasis is increasingly upon applying knowledge in the development and delivery of practical work, and the preparation for professional life. All students will complete a video essay as part of their learning around film criticism. Students are encouraged and supported to find professional work experience opportunities in relevant areas, such as cinemas, festivals, online platforms.

Module 4: Programming Film and Cultural Events (continued)

This module, which begins in Year One, offers students the opportunity to learn the range of practical skills needed for delivery of film exhibition projects, including Graduation Projects. It is largely comprised of workshops and seminars, supported by film studies classes on contemporary cinema. Subjects covered include researching programme and event ideas, developing themes, selecting work to meet cultural and commercial imperatives, copywriting and devising marketing strategies. Practical issues regarding rights and availability, projection and technical presentation, producing publicity materials and on-stage introductions and Q&A hosting will all be covered. Students will prepare several film introductions and devise questions for Q&A exercises.

Module 5: BFI Placement

The module is offered in partnership with the British Film Institute, and is intended to give students experience of working in a professional film environment relevant to the course syllabus. Each student will undertake an unpaid six-week professional work experience engagement at the BFI or an associated organisation, and this may inform the process of developing the Graduation Project. Students will keep a placement diary, to be submitted to the Head of Department.

During Year Two, students are also encouraged to find second work experience opportunities aligned with their own interests, with the support of the Head of Department.

Module 6: The Graduation Project

The Graduation Project will be both a theoretical and practical exploration of each student's chosen subject and specialist area. It is supported by the syllabus in Module 4: Programming Film and Cultural Events, and may also relate to the student's work placement. For example, if a student wishes to explore sites and forms of cinema they will devise, research, curate and deliver an original site-specific programme project and complete a reflective evaluation that considers the conceptual framework for the project, as well its aims, themes and intended audience and its practical delivery. Examples of possible projects could include an original film season, thematic programme or retrospective; a curatorial project designed to develop new audiences or to extend the range of work available to an existing audience; a project developing innovative forms of film criticism; or a project which focuses on presenting or re-presenting archive work in an innovative context.

In Term One of Year 2, a project treatment will be written and submitted. This will form the basis of a presentation to a Greenlight panel for approval. The panel will comprise NFTS tutors and external advisors, and projects will be assessed both for creative application of knowledge, robustness of the idea, understanding of technical and other practical requirements, and the student's likely ability to realise the project. Graduation Projects are supported by the Module 4 seminar, lecture and workshop programme and also by regular tutorials with internal and external tutors.

Part of the Graduation Project will be its successful documentation and dissemination, and on completion, an event will be held where projects will be presented to a peer and invited industry audience.

Dissertation

During the year the students also complete their Dissertation module.

As part of the work necessary to qualify for an MA, each student is required to produce an independent written dissertation or video essay. This runs from the start of the first year to October in Year Two. Following discussions with the Curating Department Dissertation Tutor, and Screen Arts tutors in the first half of the 1st year, students deliver a 500-word outline proposal by June of the first year.

For those producing a written dissertation, this is followed by a 2000-word chapter and detailed structure by November of 1st Year (students may not progress into 2nd year if they fail to deliver this and meet a satisfactory level). Full draft dissertation of 7,000-10,000 words (including sources and bibliography) must be delivered by September of Year Two, and following discussion with tutors, the final version of dissertation will be submitted in October.

An alternative option of a 15 – 20 minute video essay is also available to MA students. In this case the November submission of Year One will comprise five minutes of edited material with a detailed outline. Final submission dates are the same as for written work.

The aim should be to undertake research of an investigative nature that extends the boundaries of specialist knowledge of a particular area of Film Studies, Programming and Curation.

The Film Studies, Programming and Curation student's dissertation may encompass any aspect of film or any other subject which relates to their work or area of interest, subject to the approval of tutors.

For example, more specific areas might include:

- an examination of the work of a particular filmmaker
- the study of an aspect of audience behaviour
- an analysis of a specific historical development in the field of film exhibition
- an exploration of a particular theme in a body of work

Other Activities

All students will complete a video essay as part of their learning around film criticism. Students are encouraged and supported to find further professional work experience opportunities in relevant areas, such as cinemas, festivals, online platforms, in addition to the BFI placement.

Students will attend the BFI London Film Festival; all students also receive a small bursary to attend an additional festival or conference relevant to their own area of interest of specialism.