

Birmingham City University
MA in Events and Exhibitions Management

What does it take to become an Event Manager?

A study by:

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1. Foreword by Kathryn James, Managing Director of the NEC

“A great event manager needs to be bursting with energy and enthusiasm, and be really passionate about what they are doing. As a customer facing role, those in it have to be able to deal with all sorts of people and all sorts of situations, and it’s important to put the customer at the centre of what they are doing and demonstrate genuine care for them.

Delivering an event means you have to work to tight deadlines and be really focused on the outcomes to ensure successful delivery. So, hard work and flexibility is needed in abundance – it’s not a nine-to-five job, particularly when the event approaches.

Having a degree is a fantastic grounding, but equally as important is work experience - be it at a venue, with an organiser or at a hotel etc. – and of course the core skills which include organisation, communication – on all levels, problem solving, ability to multi-task, prioritisation, relationship building, and teamwork; an event could be likened to a large and complex orchestra, where the event manager is the conductor, so they also need to be a great team player with the ability to lead and be part of high performing teams. And finally, not forgetting being patient and having a good sense of humour!

Kathryn James
Managing Director of the National Exhibition Centre (NEC)

2. Profile of Event Manager – questionnaire based

During April and May 2012 a survey was sent out to students in Birmingham, professionals both event industry related and other industries from both UK and overseas. The general means of promotion was through social media channels (Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook) and the University's intranet. Generally all respondents agreed that an Event Manager designs, organises, plans, and co-ordinates events. Some of the answers list:

“An event manager puts events together by utilising organisational, interpersonal and time keeping skills while being a little flexible and using their creativity to achieve the perfect balance to ensure that events are well structured and enjoyable while befitting the purpose of the event.”

“Help to create, organise and deliver an event effectively and memorably.”

“Satisfies the client within the scope of budget and venue requirements. Pays attention to detail and follow through.”

“An Event Manager steers the production of an event ensuring that stakeholders needs and expectations are met.”

“Like a House Contractor: Creates, Designs, Develops, Executes, Follow up ”

In a more broad definition, the Event Manager possesses a keen eye for detail, outstanding time and budget management, delivers excellent customer service, ensures a smooth outcome by liaising with various internal and external clients and conducts the evaluation and follow up of each event. To ensure future improvements and encourage repeat sales.

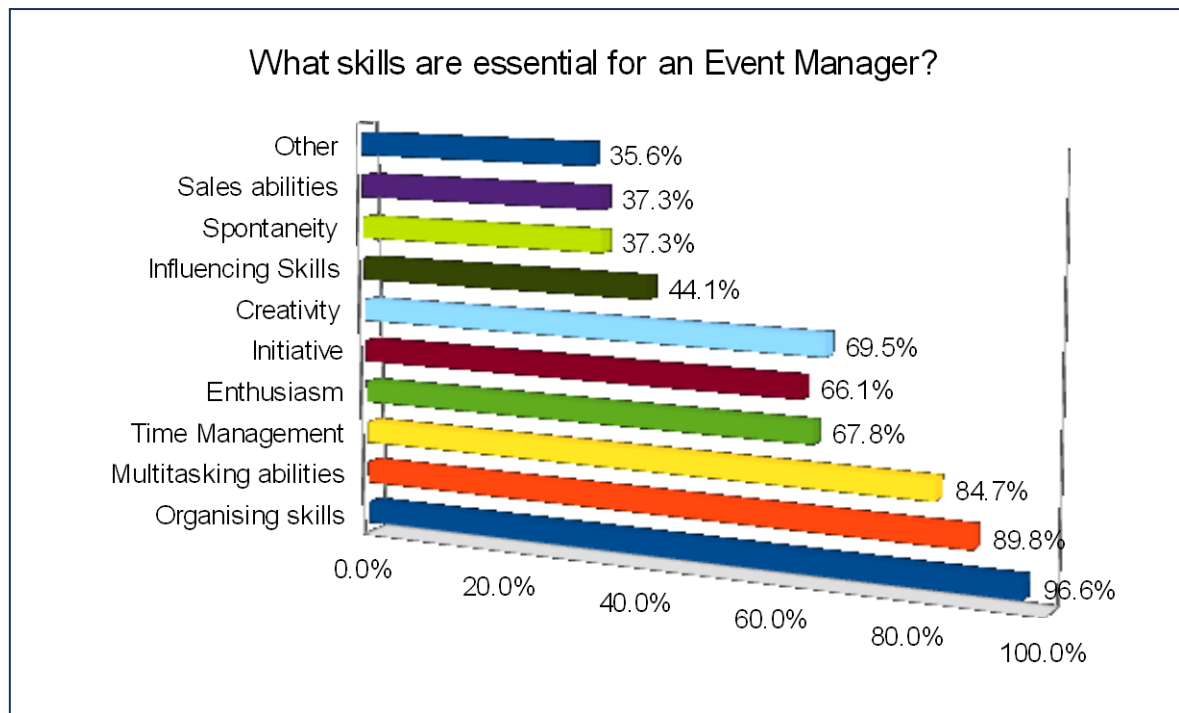
“It ultimately responsible for all deliverables so they must coordinate or do everything, they must be connected to and engaged with all levels of the team. they must create and communicate the final goal ”

“Oversees the myriad details of an event from inception to completion, involving budgeting, contracting, training, ultimate responsibility for client satisfaction, and details, details, details.”

“Ensuring attention to detail is maintained, while developing positive working relationships to bring about the successful and timely completion of projects ”

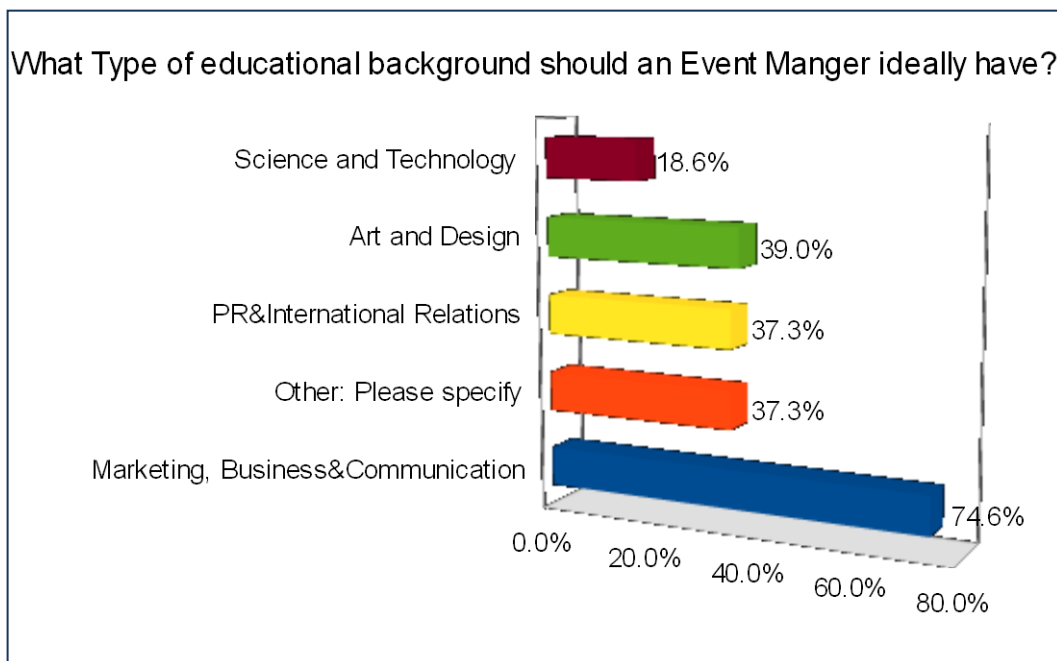
From the 64 questionnaires filled in 96.6% of respondents agreed that Organising skills are

essential for an Event Manager. The runner-ups were Multi-tasking abilities with 89.8% and Time Management with 84.7% (chart 1). The respondents agreed that Creativity, Initiative and Enthusiasm are almost equally important while Influencing skills Spontaneity and Sales Abilities came last. 35.6% of respondents believed that along with the 9 skills there are other skills that an Event Manager needs. Most mentioned financial management, communication, customer service skills and the ability to prioritise given that an Event Manager's job is so complex and can become overloaded by tasks at many times.



More than half of the respondents agreed a University degree helps open the market for large scale events and complex events operation. "University gives you access to research, and a whole knowledge base that you would not have ordinarily. It will give a more critical thinking set of skills. This together with practical should produce a more professional and credible event manager."

In terms of the ideal education background more than 3 thirds of the respondents agreed that a degree in Marketing, Business and Communications would be the best for the professional development of an Event Manager (chart 2) . An events department is usually located in the marketing or marketing and sales or sales department of a company, therefore it is not unusual for Event Managers to be asked to be business savvy with great marketing skills (especially promotional, PR and networking skills) and outstanding communication skills.

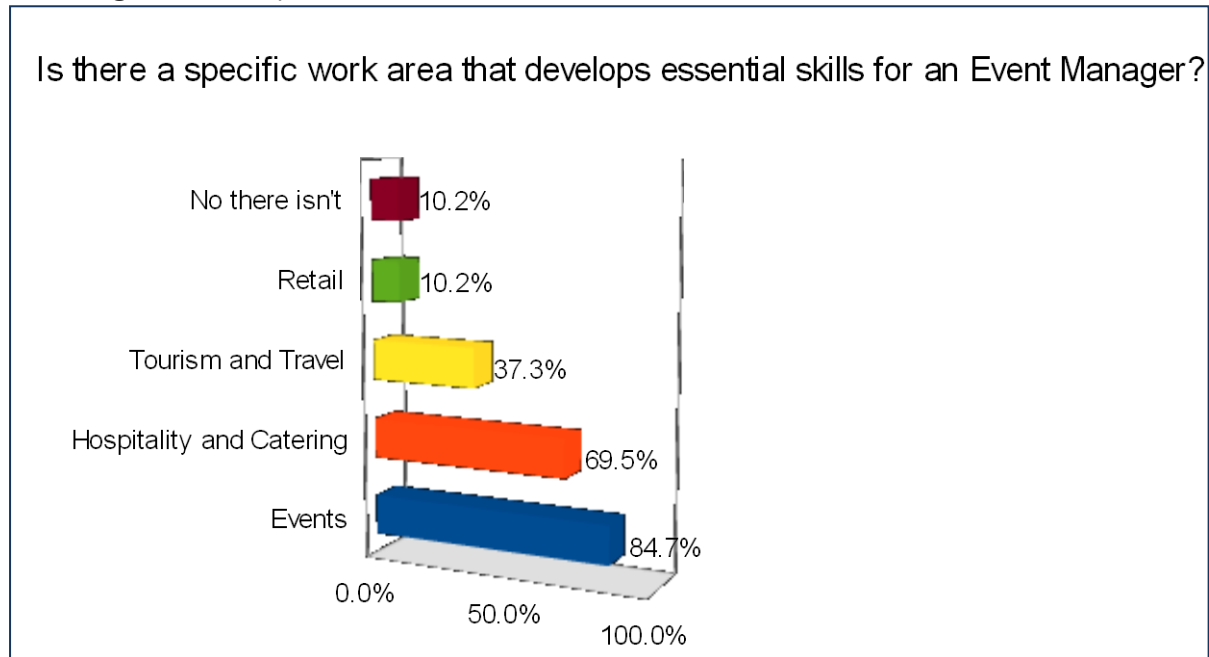


About a third of respondents 37.5% classified education, whether college, university or professional certificates and diplomas as useful but not particularly necessary “All would be useful. None necessary. Basically an event manager needs to be a jack-of-all-trades, and they need to build their skills & talents & interests through experience. Education helps, but if you spend too much time in classes, and no time actually getting hands-on experience, then you'll have a ton of knowledge, but no one will know who you are in the industry, so you'll essentially be starting from square one all over again when you're out of school finally”.

The glamour, dynamics and excitement of being involved in events can trick one into believing it's a breeze. A prospective student must be aware that working in events requires long hours, unsociable hours and weekend work. 49.2% of the respondents agreed an Event Manager's work week is between 40-50 h/week with 42.4% agreeing that an Event manager works more than 50 h/week. As such the burn out rate of the events industry is high. Ralston et al (2004:16) found that there were a number of stressors for event volunteers that could cause potential burnout. These factors included aspects such as: An intense time and energy commitment; over demanding workloads; insufficient number of volunteers; tensions between volunteers, staff, and others; open public scrutiny; lack of effective leadership; absence of tangible rewards; insecurity over one's appointment or volunteer role; and boring or unfulfilling labour (People and work in Events and Conventions: A research Perspective, Tom Baum et al, 2009)

The best work area to develop the essential skills needed by an Event Manager to handle successfully any projects is undoubtedly the events industry (84.7%) closely followed by hospitality and catering (69.5%) (chart 3). Tourism and travel is also considered important with 37.3% agreeing it can develop skills to work in events. Clearly the best way to get events organising skills is in the event industry, however it can be a tough sector to break through if you do not hold any or very little experience or have a qualification or a degree. The UK is one of the most active countries in terms of event organising and has many opportunities for work at events in minor roles but when it comes to co-ordinating and executive roles the picture changes dramatically. Out of the events jobs more than are casual or unpaid opportunities ranging from events stewards, cleaner, marshal

where many times one or more qualifications are needed (especially health and safety, security and catering certificates)



The National Careers Service website lists relevant information on the profession of Event Manager “Employers will look for relevant experience or strong transferable skills such as client management, organisation, budget management and negotiation.” and they develop further the set of the most important skills and knowledge needed to work in this industry:

- excellent organisation skills and the ability to carry out a number of tasks at the same time
- good communication and 'people' skills
- an ability to focus on the customer
- a creative approach to problem-solving
- a high level of attention to detail
- the ability to work under pressure and meet tight deadlines
- good negotiation, sales and marketing skills
- budget awareness
- administration and IT skills
- the ability to work as part of a team and also use your own initiative
- enthusiasm, motivation and a positive attitude.

There is one important element that Events Manager need to possess in order to be successful in the industry: Emotional Quotient (Goldblatt, online), the ability in a very complex world to get along with others is critical.

3. Short description of School of Media + Skillset

The School of Media is a recognised centre of excellence in providing media education in the UK . The student experience is at the heart of what we do, and at the School of Media we encourage you to explore your creativity and give you every opportunity to do so.

Our balanced approach to learning gives theory as much prominence as the production side of the business, giving you every advantage when it comes to finding a job.

We place a strong emphasis on collaborating with businesses and other universities, and part of your student experience here includes the opportunity to gain workplace experience within creative companies.

Creative Skillset Media Academies are recognised centres of excellence in television and media.

Birmingham City University is one of a few Creative Skillset Media Academies in the UK, and one of two in the Midlands.

Our relevant, practice-based courses across the full range of media subjects, alongside our strong links to business and industry-standard facilities have contributed to the University receiving national Skillset Media Academy status.

This accreditation acknowledges our media courses as effectively equipping students with the skills and knowledge that employers need.

Being part of the Skillset Academy Network allows the University to work in partnership with other Skillset Academy institutions to ensure that the next generation of media professionals remains at the forefront of productivity and innovation across the industry.

4. Birmingham City University - MA in Events and Exhibitions Management course

Despite the growing importance and need for increased professionalism, research on event management education and associated knowledge, skills and curriculum development is still limited (Lee et al., 2008)

On this course, you will acquire the professional skills needed to develop and manage successful events, conferences and exhibitions.

The course develops these skills to the highest level, enabling you to be ready to enter or progress within the industry, fully prepared and equipped with the skills to embark on event and exhibition management.

Our strong links with the industry mean you will learn from top industry professionals, gaining invaluable insider information and learning through real life case studies and venues.

The first of its kind in the UK, the course has been developed with The National Exhibition Centre (NEC) to ensure the qualification is tailored towards careers within the industry. The course is also relevant to those already working in all event management areas or roles. It also will appeal to graduates from disciplines such as media, tourism, music technology, public relations, business or marketing.

Birmingham is one of the best cities in the country when it comes to event venues. It boasts an enviable array of locations to visit and draw professional experience from.

There are impressive event spaces on every scale, from the massive exhibition halls of The NEC and ICC to sporting venues like The NIA, Villa Park, Alexandra Stadium and Edgbaston cricket club. There are also a number of music venues, such as the O2 Academy, as well as smaller, bespoke venues like the Custard Factory and numerous art spaces.

Our close partnerships with related organisations like The NEC allow students access to the real world of events and exhibition management while studying.

Combined with the placement opportunities on the MA, students on this course can develop their own professional network, ready for when they enter the workplace.

Prior to joining Birmingham City University Course Director Duncan Sedgwick spent over 20 years working in the events and exhibition industry.

Working for a variety of clients across many industry sectors he has produced and managed many events throughout the UK, Europe and in the USA.

Since 1999 Duncan has been a Director of a Midlands based events production company.

On this course you should expect to learn how to build an event pitch in a professional environment, the challenges that you will face in organising an event from scratch, the effort of working effectively in a team, your personal shortcomings and your reflection on how to overcome them, to innovate or add a personal touch to a concept or idea, be it original or otherwise commonly used already.

You will be provided with means of achieving your tasks and assignments and you will be supported throughout by your professors but it will be ultimately down to you to design and produce an event, be it on your own or by co-ordinating a team.

You will be given opportunities to hear, meet and work for established industry businesses and you

will be expected to perform at a professional standard representing the values of our University and putting to work the skills and theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom.

5. Overview of the Global Events Industry and Events Industry UK

The term event as defined by the International Dictionary of Event Management is “an event sponsored for the purpose of achieving specific goals and objectives such as entertaining customers, introducing and promoting new products or services, or providing incentives or training for employees, as well as other activities.” (Goldblatt, 2001).

Events have been organised for centuries, from life events such as weddings and funerals, or religious ones as communions or baptisms to social events like music festivals and celebrations, or cultural events like the Chinese New Year. Until recently, events have been seen as an integral part of the Tourism and Leisure, the Hospitality and Catering industries or as a support service to business. However, not all events are leisure events; team-buildings and staff development or trade shows and conferences are compulsory events for the corporate world and as the environment is changing in recent years the Event Industry has emerged in its own right supported by a growing body of knowledge. As the industry develops it also makes a significant contribution to business and adds more complexity to the environment of event management. The increased regulation and the involvement of corporate and government bodies in events means that event managers are now required to identify and service a wide range of stakeholders and to balance their needs and objectives. (Bowdin et al, 2006).

The global market for corporate market and events is currently worth US\$650 billion, according to a report published in 2010 by Carlson Wagonlit Travel. In Britain the sector was worth over £36 billion per annum to the national economy. The study did not include any cultural, sporting or music events which make the leisure part of the events industry, which means the figures are even bigger. In 2010 there were over 25,000 businesses in the sector including event organisers, venues, suppliers, destination management organisers, destination management companies and other events related businesses. (Britain For Events, online). The number of people employed in the industry, according to the same report amounts currently up to an equivalent of 530,000 full-time jobs.

According to Jeff Hunter the events industry is the fifth largest industry in the UK

<http://www.globalsportsjobs.com/content/3780/industry-insight/the-uk-events-industry-all-eyes-on-london-2012/>

The UK Event Industry market saw a drastic fall in the first recession years with companies reducing or cutting all together the budget for events, and other companies focusing on one day events reducing the number of over night stays or organizing smaller and more local events. From the 2010 reports we can see a rise in budgets and an overall increase of the market as we are emerging from the global financial crisis. (Britain for Events, online)

The predictions for the UK Event Industry market show a growth in numbers for the years to come (Opportunities for growth in the UK Events Industry, 2011) with 1.6 % growth for 2015 and an estimate of £42 billions and a 3.4% for 2020 and an estimate of £48.4 billions.

This year's London 2012 Olympics will leave a legacy behind since by organising this major sport event the entire local and national economy will profit and benefit from it. In fact 20% of the benefits will come from additional business visits expenditure £433m at 2006 prices.

Hugh Robinson the Minister for Sport and The Olympics declared he wants to put forth a Major Sports Events Bill that will make it easier to win and host major events. This move, if put into action, will see an increase of the total events organised as part of the 2012 London Olympics (Olympic sport legacy plans, online) http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/news_stories/7153.aspx

The plan for a legacy is well under way as this year the city of London has won the right to host the 2017 World Athletics Championship. <http://www.citmagazine.com/news/login/1103718/>

The 2012 Olympics are going to be a catalyst for growth for the UK's event industry, with many companies in the tourism and catering industry benefiting from it after the games are over. <http://youthinkwhat.com/2012-olympic-games-and-the-event-industry.html>. The development of technology and media will make this event available in many unique forms which should inspire, rouse and thrill the next generation of producers, directors, event managers and logistic teams. Pullman (M&IT, 2012, p 47) believes that more young talent will be attracted to the industry which should rejuvenate and invigorate the broader industry gene pool.

6. Short definition of event professional roles

Because the event industry is so disparate, terminology is still developing and the titles of “industry players” often overlap. Mathews (2008, p1) identifies 4 terms to define the “producers” of an event :

Event Manager – a term for the delegated representative of an entity that holds overall ultimate responsibility for the event often used in larger events, such as festivals, or large event marketing events such as major sporting events. An event manager usually has the power to delegate or sub-contract other specialists in order to accomplish the event.

Event Planner – tends to refer to a person who plans smaller and more private events such as dinners, weddings, reunions, and similar gatherings. Frequently this is an individual operating independently, and not a company. However the term is sometimes used interchangeably with Event Manager.

Event Co-ordinator – a term for the person responsible for bringing together all the event participants to ensure they are working towards the same goal. All though this term too is used interchangeably with Event Manager, the event co-ordinator is usually not responsible for the creative side or suppliers sourcing, but for more simple coordination duties like in convention centres and arenas where they liaise with all parties engaged in creating an event.

Event Producer – a term interchangeably used both with event manager and event planner, but most often refers to the person responsible for coordinating and executing – and occasionally assisting with creating – the event, particularly the technical side that involve design, scheduling, staging, sounds, lights, AV, entertainment, and décor. In most event situations he is contracted by the Event Manager.

How ever we try to define an Event Professional it becomes obvious from the definitions above that the descriptions overlap. It is very difficult to impossible to assign a fixed definition to a role that must be by practice prone to flexibility, positively responsive to change. The work of an event manager involves handling many varied tasks, all according to the size and type of the event.

While it is very useful to identify the responsibilities of an Event Manager it is more productive to remain open about the different tasks that one must perform during the different stages of organising an event. Moreover, the definition can vary from sector to sector and from company to company according to the specific needs of the sector and the company.

In the words of Dr. Joe Goldblatt, CSEP, in an interview for HTMI Switzerland in 2010: You know you're an Event Manager when You stand watching in awe and gratitude as people come together for a mutual purpose to promote human understanding and, I might suggest, love.

7. Progression opportunities for an Event Manager

Events are connected to many other industry sectors: marketing, sponsorship, hospitality, catering, hotel management, tourism and travel all overlap with the world of events and create opportunities for career progression

The event industry is large and growing, offering employment and personal fulfilment in many different ways. The scale and diversity of the event marketplace mean that there are excellent career prospects for qualified professionals in a variety of settings: sport, music, fashion, arts, business, politics, education and charity sectors all use events to achieve desired objectives.

Given this variety, events provide opportunities for a wide range of people to apply their skills, talents and personalities. Typically, event jobs can be found in the following sectors:

- ⤴ Corporate: events are used to meet objectives such as connecting with business customers, engaging consumers and rewarding staff
- ⤴ National or local government: events are vehicles to drive the economy, showcase a nation or bring together local communities
- ⤴ Charity or voluntary: events are used to raise awareness of and generate valuable income for charitable causes
- ⤴ Agency or freelance: event planning and delivery is often carried out by agencies or freelancers working in collaboration with the client and other suppliers
- ⤴ Event venues: sports stadiums, entertainment venues, hotels, conference centres, university facilities, restaurants and bars can all play host to events and provide employment opportunities (<http://www.eventbusinessacademy.com/why-events>)

8. Levels of employability after completing BCU Events and Exhibitions Management MA

Student employability is defined as: 'a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy' (Yorke, 2006, p. 8). A study by Arcodia and Barker (2005) of the content of event management job advertisements noted the predominance of communication, problem-solving, leadership and computer skills as paramount for the event managers. A recent study by Beaven, St George and Wright (2009) focused on employability skills within a particular event setting, that of cultural events. The study found that from the employers' perspective, skills gained through student projects, (often in collaboration with cultural events organisations), while seen as valid work experiences, were not highly regarded by a large number of employers. In contrast, practical experience in industry was considered the most important employability skill.

In the UK, a study made by CIPD (Labour Market Outlook, online) employability skills (82%) and a strong work ethic (73%) are key attributes that employers are looking for when recruiting young people. Personal presentation (68%), literacy (64%) and numeracy (62%) also feature highly. Private sector employers are significantly more likely to focus on work ethic (78%), personal presentation (74%) and work readiness (58%) than employers in the public sector (63%, 59% and 48% respectively). When asked to rank which factors employers feel are the most important to them when recruiting young people, employability skills was ranked as the most important factor by 41% of LMO employers.

9. Conclusions

From small but important life events such as weddings or birthday parties to large and demanding projects such as conferences, conventions, trade shows, festivals and culture and sport events every events needs careful planning and sensible and dedicated people to get things going. The larger projects especially need a thorough and competent organiser. Thoroughness is a personal trait but competence is achieved through experience and study.

The work of an Event Manager is complex and requires a balanced mix of transferable skills and industry specific skills. The hours are often long, plans change as work progresses, the outcome needs to be constantly monitored and clients' expectations need to be intelligently handled. The Event Manager is more often than not the middle man between clients and suppliers and needs to think constantly on his feet to get things running smoothly.

The Events and Exhibitions Management Masters at Birmingham City University gives students a chance to acquire the competences needed to work in an ever expanding and very demanding industry. Through a mix of theoretical knowledge and work experience in local West Midlands companies, the students develop an invaluable insight into the world of event managements.

Moreover, the assignments challenge the students to investigate their personal approach to event organising, to innovate and improve on processes and to work on their own strengths and weaknesses. Coupled with industry specific training (IOSH) in collaboration with the NEC Group the students will have gained the confidence needed to start or progress their careers in event management.

10. Afterword Duncan Sedgwick, Course Director Events and Exhibitions Management MA

“Many people believe that managing an event is a relatively easy process. For some events that may be the case – but to produce and manage memorable events, ones that surpass the audience’s expectations, requires something more. The MA Events and Exhibitions Management course at Birmingham City University provides the skills and develops the students’ abilities to produce that something extra - and become a successful event manager.”

Bibliography and appendices

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Appendices

Appendix 1

What it takes to become an Event Manager
Questionnaire

What skills are essential for an Event Manager? Please choose one or more:

- Time Management
- Influencing skills
- Multitasking abilities
- Creativity
- Spontaneity
- Enthusiasm
- Initiative
- Organising skills
- Sales abilities
- Other: Please specify

Is there an ideal educational background for an Event Manager? ?

- Secondary School
- College
- University

What type of educational background should an Event Manager ideally have? Please comment on your choice:

- Arts and Design
- Science & Technology
- Marketing, Business& Communication
- PR & International Relations
- Other: Please specify

Is there a specific work area that develops essential skills for an Event Manager? (Please tick more than one if appropriate)

- Events
- Hospitality & Catering
- Retail
- Tourism and Travel
- No there isn't
- Other (please specify)

What, in your opinion, does an Event manager do? 15 words or more.

How many h/week do you think an Event Manager works on average?

- 40h/week
- 40 to 50h/week
- more than 50h/week

What age group are you?

- under 19
- 19 – 24
- 25 – 35
- 35 – 50
- over 50

What is your current educational/professional status:

- student (undergraduate events industry or related)
- student (undergraduate - other)
- student (postgraduate events industry or related)
- student (postgraduate - other)
- professional (events industry or related)
- professional (other)
- retired
- other: please specify

What is your educational background?

- Arts and Design
- Science & Technology
- Marketing, Business& Communication
- PR & International Relations
- Other: Please specify

Other comments that are essential in describing an Event Manager: