

# Addressing the skills and labour needs of the events industry

A position paper for discussion at the Events Skills seminar, Confex, 22 February 2010

February 2010

## Introduction

This position paper has been produced to stimulate discussion around how the events industry can better address its skills and labour needs.

It tackles three themes that have arisen from People 1st's labour market review into the events industry and the 'Taking the Pulse' consultation undertaken by the University of Derby.

This paper has been jointly produced by People 1st and the University of Derby and provides a platform for discussion at the Events Skills Seminar at Confex, 22 February 2010.

## Understanding the context of skill needs across the industry

The events industry is extremely diverse and fragmented. Given the structure of the industry it is difficult to establish with any certainty its true size.<sup>1</sup> However, national statistics suggest that it has a workforce of approximately 530,000.

Regardless of its size it makes an important contribution to the UK economy. In 2007, business visits and event were said to be worth over £22 billion to Britain's economy<sup>2</sup> when taking into account the additional spending undertaken by the business visitor in the retail sector and on entertainment.

Events vary in size, type and impact, but generally involve the following key players:

- Clients<sup>3</sup>
- Event organisers (in-house corporate, association, public sector, plus intermediary agencies)
- Event industry suppliers

Given their central importance it is critical for the ongoing professionalism and growth of the industry that event organisers have the necessary skills and expertise to meet and exceed their clients' expectations.

## Skill requirements of the workforce

Typical event organiser occupations among intermediary agencies include: account director, account manager and event executive. The main skill needs associated with these roles, as with those for in-house organisers, are wide-ranging and include:

- **Account directors** include:
  - People management and leadership
  - Strategy and budget management
  - Solid understanding of suppliers
- **Account managers** include:
  - People management
  - Project management
  - Ability to liaise and build relationships with clients
  - Supplier management
- **Event executives** include:
  - Excellent verbal and written communication
  - Excellent organisation and administrative skills
  - Customer service
  - Degree in event management desirable

---

<sup>1</sup> This is owing to the industry being only partly covered by Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes. These are universally used to by government and labour market analysts to define and measure the economy

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.businesstourismpartnership.com/pubs/BVE\\_Leaflet\\_low\\_pages.pdf](http://www.businesstourismpartnership.com/pubs/BVE_Leaflet_low_pages.pdf) (March 2007)

<sup>3</sup> In many respects clients are often 'event organisers' themselves who therefore have the same training and CPD needs as event organisers

## Skills lacking

Employers who were interviewed as part of People 1st's recent research<sup>4</sup> found that employers believed that their current staff lacked the required skills in:

- understanding the client's industry/needs
- managing suppliers
- customer service
- crowd management
- understanding of legislation/standards such as health and safety and sustainability

## Recruitment, training and retention

Skills cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider labour market trends facing the industry – in particular understanding how employers are recruiting, training and retaining their staff.

### Recruitment

Vacancies across the industry are felt to be relatively easy to fill. This is influenced by the growing popularity of events management courses in higher education. There were 3,360 event management learners in higher education in 2007/08, 91 percent of whom were full-time<sup>5</sup>. A positive trend is that these events graduates are entering the industry, usually at an operational level and working their way up the business alongside non-graduates. So new entrants are starting at the bottom and progressing to senior roles and positions.

Consequently, senior roles tend to be filled from within the business. However, the leap between events executive and account manager is perceived to be long and it is critical that such staff are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.

### Skills development of the workforce

People 1st Employer Survey 2009 found that in the events industry:

- Induction and informal training are both used widely
- Workforce development tends to be undertaken on-the-job via coaching from the line manager, is very practical and is based around learning through experience
- 73% of businesses taking part in the survey gave staff the opportunity to take a nationally recognised qualification
- 60% offered paid or part-paid training.
- Nine per cent employ apprentices
- 19% had used the government's *Train to Gain* workforce development scheme.

It is too soon to assess the likely impact of new competence-based qualifications for events managers. These qualifications assess the competencies of those in the workplace. They are designed to support workforce development and provide recognition to those who have achieved the qualification. However, similar qualifications designed for the events industry have not had a significant uptake in the past and the large number of graduates entering the sector may make these qualifications less attractive in comparison with higher education programmes, in particular the Foundation Degree.

Foundation Degrees are accredited by higher education institutions and are delivered by universities or further education colleges. They are specifically designed to develop the knowledge and cognitive ability of those in the workplace, offering routes onto further qualifications, such as Degrees. There are a variety of Foundation Degrees available in events management, but there is little consistency in their content or delivery.

There is pressure from a number of further education providers to develop competence-based events qualifications at more operational levels.<sup>6</sup> However, the likely demand from employers

---

<sup>4</sup> People 1st (2010) Labour market review into the events industry

<sup>5</sup> HESA, 2007/2008

<sup>6</sup> This would result in a level 2 qualification

has yet to be proved. Whilst there have been efforts from industry and education to work more closely together, in large part there is often a disconnect in the way employers are developing the skills of their staff with the delivery of qualifications and education provision. There are clear opportunities in ensuring that qualifications can better support the skills development and professionalism of the industry.

Research for the Labour Market Review found that employers perceive that there is a lack of professional qualifications for those working in the events industry, with some wanting to see some formalisation around continuing professional development (CPD).

Employers had mixed views regarding event management courses in higher education. Whilst pleased to see that they are popular, concerns were expressed over a perceived lack of practical/industry experience among students and the extent to which some lecturers may lack practical experience. Again, this highlights the importance of strong work-based training that can support progression, rather than relying solely on the skills of those entering the industry.

### **Staff retention**

Labour turnover is low, especially where employers offer training and progression routes. This is in stark contrast to the rest of the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector, which has the lowest staff retention rates of any sector.

#### **In summary**

The size and importance of the sector mean that it requires a high level of skills and professionalism to compete on an international stage. The skills required across the sector vary, but the changing nature of the industry means that these skills are expanding in scope and getting more specific in nature.

Employers continue to train their staff, but this is largely in-house and informal. Whilst qualifications are now available, it is likely that take-up will be low given their length and the fact that posts are increasingly being filled by undergraduates, who may not be as motivated to undertake a competence qualification, if it is not seen as part of a wider continuing professional development (CPD). This lack of a strong CPD culture results in disconnect between the ways employers are training and the various support available from the skills system.

Whilst the number of undergraduates entering the sector is beneficial, they still require ongoing skills development to ensure they have more practical skills. Employers are often confused where to find the right training and often the needs are so specific, that they might not necessarily be addressed in current qualifications and off-the-shelf training programmes.

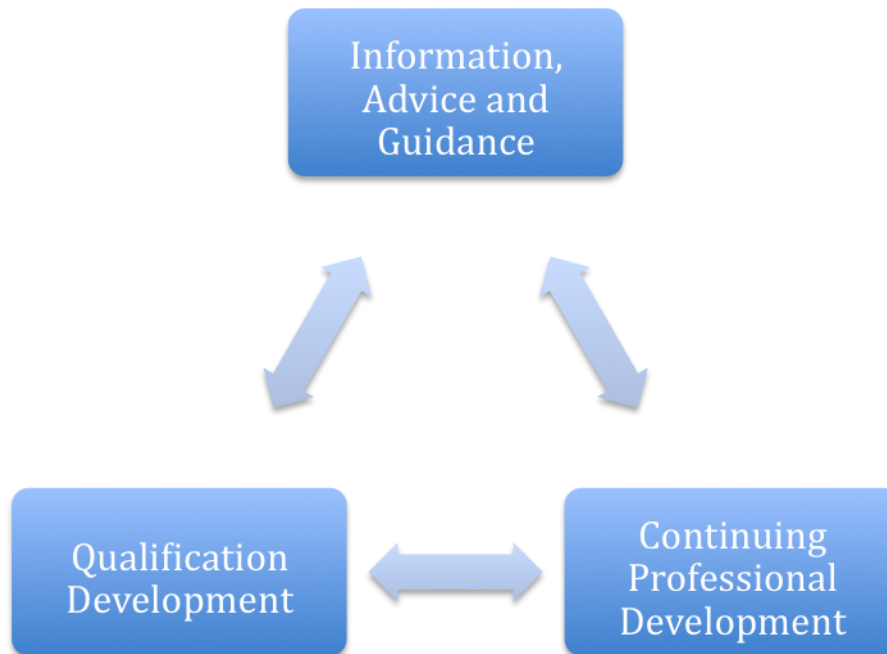
Currently, these skills and labour market issues are being addressed separately by individual businesses and not through any wider industry co-ordination.

The remaining part of this discussion paper outlines some of the ways in which this coordinated action could be harnessed.

## Co-ordinated action to ensure the skills and the professionalism of the industry can be met

Three themes emerge from the various research that would help ensure the events industry possesses the skills it requires and develops a strong culture of continuing professionalism.

These are:



By their vary nature these themes are complementary and to have the desired impact on skills and professionalism require progress to be made in all three areas.

Addressing the issues raised in these themes is central to agreeing co-ordinated action and, consequently, these are at the heart of the discussion at the Skills Seminar.

Under each theme are explored the key issues, possible solutions and a number of questions that need to be addressed.

### 1. Qualifications

#### Issues

There is an array of qualifications available to employers to support work-based training. These can be generic (such as health and safety), sector-specific (such as food safety) or industry-specific (such as events management or temporary structures). In addition, higher education institutions accredit Foundation Degrees in events management that can support skills development.

Many employers are unaware of what's available and how they can gather the appropriate information. Consequently, most training is informal and does not result in a qualification. This does not mean it is of lesser quality, only that there are no consistent benchmarks across the sector and employers are not benefiting from public funding which could help them up-skill their workforce.

Research suggests that employers are usually looking for a specific qualification or training programme that could be delivered in a short period of time. Currently, competence-based qualifications are large, but the way in which they are structured means that they would be

offered in much smaller packages, which could help support continuing professional development. Alternatively, niche training packages could be developed to address very specific skill needs. These could be stand alone training programmes or be accredited by a higher education institution or awarding organisation.

There are also a number of qualifications available to develop the skills and knowledge of those entering the sector. Unlike most industries, these are concentrated in higher education rather than further education. There are benchmarks in place to encourage consistency in content as well as co-ordinated action across individual institutions through the Association for Events Management Education (AEME)<sup>7</sup>. Employers largely welcome this provision and benefit from the ease with which they can recruit.

### **Possible solutions**

- In order to ensure that there is clear progression into and across the sector, available qualifications could be matched against specific job roles and their individual needs. This could be fed into broader information and advice given to employers and jobseekers to help them find the right training and courses (see below). It would also identify gaps in provision where qualifications or bespoke training is required. This would involve a number of Sector Skills Councils who cover the broad range of skills required in events.
- There have been calls for competence-based qualifications to be developed at operational levels<sup>8</sup>. Given the nature of the labour market and the historical poor levels of take-up there needs to be a consultation with industry to better understand the need at this level and whether the development of competence-based qualifications is the answer.
- Foundation Degrees in Events Management are offered by a number of higher education institutions. They are an ideal qualification for managers or aspirant managers in employment. Currently, there is no consistency in the content of a Foundation Degree in Events Management. Employer awareness is low and consequently the industry is missing out on the opportunity afforded by these qualifications. Through the collaboration of Foundation Degree Forward<sup>9</sup>, AEME and individual higher education institutions and with the input of employers, there is an opportunity to agree a core content and badge those Foundation Degrees that meet these criteria. The purpose, expectations and benefits of Foundation Degrees can then be communicated much more easily to employers and learners (see below).
- The Diploma in Travel and Tourism will see its first learners start from September 2010. It has been developed in response to employer demands for better skilled and more employable young people. It is being created in a number of areas to appeal to students of all abilities and aspirations, who like to learn about subjects in ways that relate to real life. The qualifications are designed for students aged 14-19 and are set to become one of the three main education choices - alongside GCSEs/A levels and Apprenticeships. Given their likely impact it is important that there is suitable progression from the Diploma into work and higher education. Events is one of the industries covered by the Diploma and it is critical that it paints a realistic picture of the events industry and that there are realistic progression routes onto other programmes, especially in higher education.
- Not only are many employers confused about what qualifications are available and their purpose (see below) - they are also unsure of their benefit over and above their own in-house training. By producing case studies we can illustrate how employers have used qualifications, but also demonstrate their financial and wider impact on a business.

---

<sup>7</sup> AEME - the Association for Events Management Education aims to advance the education of the public in the subject of events and events management.. It is made up of events academic professionals in higher education

<sup>8</sup> This would be made available at level 2

<sup>9</sup> Foundation Degree Forward is a national body that supports the development and validation of high quality Foundation degrees

## Questions for discussion

- To what extent should we be focusing on qualifications, rather than just training?
- Why is the uptake of industry-specific qualifications so low?
- What would be needed to encourage employers to offer qualifications to their staff?
- Are there other solutions you feel we should be considering?
- What areas should be our priority?

## 2. Continuing Professional Development

### Issues

The results from the Labour Market Review were also strongly reflected in the 'Taking the Pulse' report in that there was unilateral agreement that a CPD system was needed to meet the demands of all sectors of the Events Industry and of all individuals working in it. To allow this to occur it was felt that there would need to be a Working Party which would establish a CPD programme that took account of the diversity of views and requirements of various Industry sectors and players. The intention is not to create another association but to provide an umbrella 'Institute' with a remit that could coordinate a CPD scheme.

The 'Taking the Pulse' report and the subsequent consultation period identified that many of the trade associations were providing an excellent service to their members in keeping them abreast with key issues. However, major areas of concern were:

- Many trade associations who offered training courses to their own members were seeing participation rates fall and in some cases courses being cancelled. There was also an issue over duplication of course topics and clashes of calendar dates
- If a member of one association attended a course there was no guarantee that the course would be recognised or accepted across the industry.
- In considering a CPD programme, discussions had included whether there should be different levels of membership, based upon the way individual members had updated their skills.
- Issues centred around the delivery of course and educational provision in an industry renowned as having to work flexibly.
- There was also the fact that many may not wish to commit to a full-time educational course, instead desired short courses that make a significant impact.
- This would mean that CPD for the events industry would need to be more demand-led, given the varied nature of the specialisms in events.
- The way in which each element of CPD is given credits remains a crucial issue along with whether each CPD course should be given CPD points for attendance or as a part qualification. This could be on the basis of a number of credits or as a qualification.

### Possible solutions

- There has been considerable research and time spent on exploring the feasibility of an Institute of Event Management that would be established as an autonomous body to accredit the education offerings of educational institutions, trade associations and private training providers.
- The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) has provided consultation and advice on how the Institute of Event Management could operate within the CMI educational and administrative framework. The assertions are that the Institute of Event Management could operate autonomously within the CMI in much the same vein as the Institute of Business Consultants or Women in Management.
- A recent bid for a National Skills Academy (NSA) for the Travel and Tourism Industry had support from a range of events organisations and associations on the basis that, if it were to progress further, the events industry would need to be more explicitly represented. The NSA bid for Travel and Tourism has stated *'It will establish centres of excellence in the increasingly important tourism sector, focusing on destination development, tour operations, events management and visitor attractions in each*



*English region. It will ensure our domestic workforce is skilled to meet the challenges of the 2012 Olympic Games, the 2015 Rugby World Cup and other leading events that follow'*

- Foundation Degrees with a common agreed framework and recognition through FDF could benefit employers; additionally the design of flexible modes of study with emphasis on work-based learning is essential. Furthermore, the ability for individuals to undertake Foundation Degrees in manageable sizes would be welcome.
- There is already evidence that trade associations are finding accredited solutions to the CPD question, which is obviously beneficial to the members of that association - however, it leads to the proliferation of awards. Therefore, there would need to be recognition of CPD schemes within any centralised structure.
- A short term and relatively quick solution would be to develop a central CPD portal offering online and offline courses designed to meet professional development needs. They could support the competencies required by Employers, Professional Bodies and Sector Skills Councils. Learners that enrol on the professional courses are able to gain access to a range of tools that help them to identify skills needs, log learning hours, build a portfolio for assessment purposes and claim for Accreditation for Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). APEL is a rigorous but not onerous mechanism of recognizing an individual's expertise and prior experience. The portal can act as a repository for case studies, study material and e-learning material.

### Questions for discussion

- To what extent is an Institute of Event Management feasible?
- Where would the industry find the monies to launch the Institute of Event Management?
- Does the CMI educational framework fit with industries training needs?
- Are we comfortable appearing under the umbrella of Travel and Tourism?

## 3. Information, Advice and Guidance

### Issues

Ensuring that employers and employees have an accurate understanding of what qualifications and training are available is critical if we are to better align ongoing training and development undertaken by employers with available support. Research by People 1st has found that the single reason why employers do not provide qualifications to their staff is the fact that they are confused about what is available.

Similarly, learners and jobseekers need an accurate understanding of the industry – to dispel myths, highlight opportunities and be clearer about what employers are actually looking for. This will not only ensure that new entrants have a realistic expectation of what they will encounter when they enter the industry, but also they are entering with the skills and knowledge that employers are seeking.

Employers, employees, learners and jobseekers access information through different media and it is important that the information being conveyed is consistent and open to all these routes. Any activities undertaken in this area therefore need to involve a wide range of possible partners and information needs to be disseminated as far as possible in order to maximise its use.

One area of focus in recent years has been the development of **uksp.co.uk** which aims to help employers overcome the confusion about available support. **uksp.co.uk** has a qualifications guide that enables browsers to find relevant qualifications and provides a 'plain-English' overview, an understanding of the content of each qualification, as well as where they are delivered and what funding is available.

It also highlights for jobseekers the range of development routes available across the sector, including the events industry. For each job role it provides information on typical role and



salary, as well as the type of qualifications and support required to gain the skills and knowledge employers seek. There are also job profiles that explain how people already in the industry have developed their careers.

### Possible solutions

- Given the lack of focused information on career opportunities in the events industry, there is an opportunity to produce a dedicated guide that outlines the range of careers opportunities, including entry and development routes and snapshots of those already working in the sector. The guide could be produced in a format that partners can embed in existing information and advice or as a stand-alone guide. This could be disseminated to different education institutions, careers companies and trade associations.
- Stand-alone case studies could be produced to provide a set of profiles of people working in the sector. These would be chosen from a range of job roles, organisations and different parts of the industry. They would provide a snapshot of a 'day-in-the-life', what motivates people in their roles and an understanding of their educational and career journey and how they ended up doing their role.
- Following the review of wider qualification needs highlighted above, there will be a need to update **uksp.co.uk** to ensure it reflects the needs of the industry and can provide accurate information on the relevant qualifications and training opportunities available.

### Questions for discussion

- Are there other solutions you feel we should be considering?
- What areas should be our priority?
- Who needs to be involved?

### Further information

The Events Skills Seminar will be held prior to 'International Confex', Earls Court on 22 February 2010. The seminar is an opportunity for industry associations and partners to hear the findings and issues coming out from various pieces of research, but also to discuss how the events industry can tackle its skill needs and raise the professionalism of its workforce.

For more information on this position paper please contact:

#### People 1st

Martin-Christian Kent

Martin-  
[christian.kent@people1st.co.uk](mailto:christian.kent@people1st.co.uk)  
01895 817008

#### University of Derby

Conor Moss  
& Nick Jordan

[C.moss@derby.ac.uk](mailto:C.moss@derby.ac.uk)

07827 842944

#### Business Visits and Events Partnership (BVEP)

Tony Rogers

[tony@tony-rogers.com](mailto:tony@tony-rogers.com)