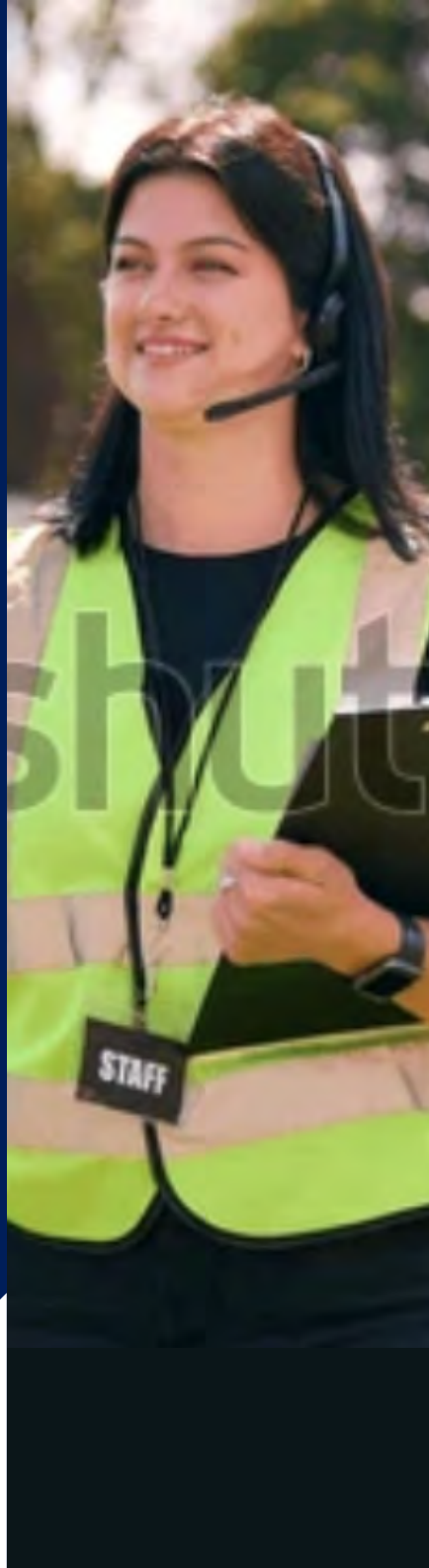




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CAREERS IN THE UK EVENTS SECTOR:

A GUIDE

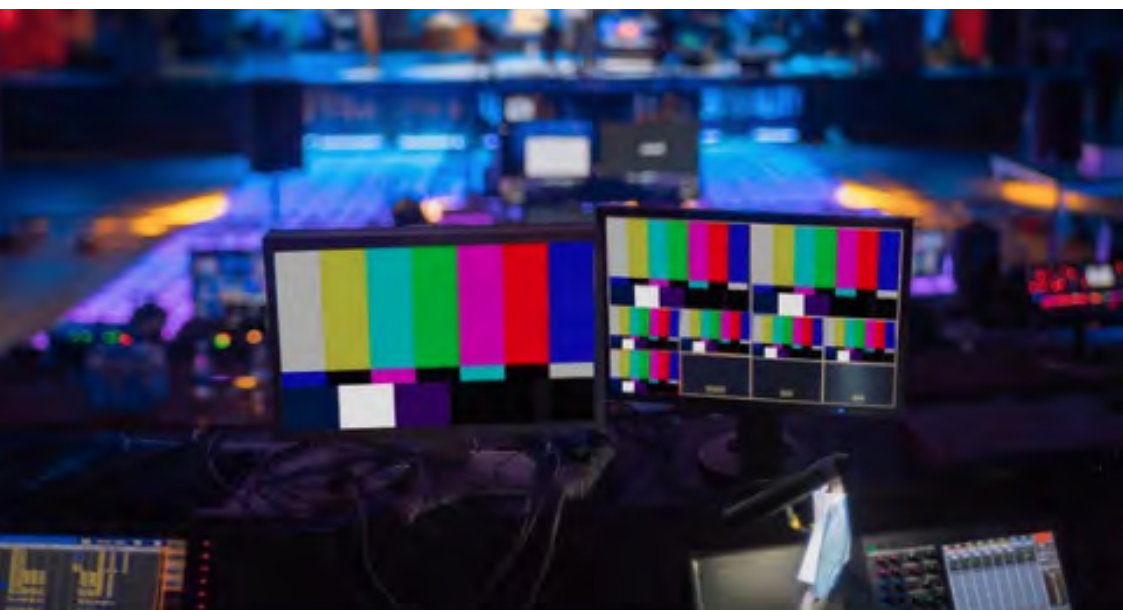


Professor Kate Dashper,
Leeds Beckett University
Supported with a Purple Guide Grant
from the Event Industry Forum (EIF)



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Introduction

The events sector offers a wide variety of different jobs, positions and opportunities, but it can be confusing to understand what different job titles mean, what skills and experiences you need for different roles, and how it all fits together into an exciting and rewarding career path. This guide has been designed to help you begin to make sense of some of the possibilities that a career in the events sector offers and to plan your journey.

The information provided in this guide is based on research led by Professor Kate Dashper at Leeds Beckett University and supported through a Purple Guide Grant from the Events Industry Forum (EIF).

To begin to try and map out career paths in events, job adverts on the UK's leading career sites were reviewed for a period of six months. All vacancies that were related to work in the events sector were collated and subsequently analysed to identify shared job titles, skills and experience required, levels of responsibility and management, and other relevant employment details. This enabled the identification of distinct career 'levels' in events – entry, intermediate, senior and executive – despite wide variance and inconsistency in job titles and descriptions. This provides a basis for identifying career pathways in the events sector and for planning opportunities for progression and promotion.

The second part of the research for this guide consisted of interviews with 20 senior events professionals who have had varied experiences and career journeys, ranging from freelancers to company directors to senior staff in large international organisations. These professionals shared their career journeys, offering advice and suggestions for people at different career stages, much of which is included in this guide.

The guide acts as a starting point for anyone considering a career in the events sector, or for those looking to progress in their events career. It can be difficult to plan a career path in such a varied industry and this guide provides a basis for planning to get the best out of your career in the events sector.



Part 1: Routes into the events sector

The first step in planning a career in the events sector is to explore ways into jobs in this area. There are many different routes, and no one best way to develop the skills, experiences, contacts and attributes needed to excel in the sector. The main routes in are:

Education

▶ What?

A recognised qualification, either in events management or a related subject.

▶ How?

Search the UCAS website for universities and colleges offering courses.

▶ Why?

Better job prospects, specialised knowledge, develop transferable skills, networking, personal growth.

Apprenticeships

▶ What?

A paid position that offers hands-on work experience alongside off-the-job training.

▶ How?

Search apprenticeship databases, contact companies you might like to work for.

▶ Why?

Learn as you earn, develop practical skills and networks.

Direct employment

▶ What?

Go directly into a paid or voluntary role in events and work your way up.

▶ How?

Look for opportunities on LinkedIn, job sites, contact companies directly.

▶ Why?

Gain practical experience and show enthusiasm.

Change of career

▶ What?

If you have worked in another sector you can change your career to events.

▶ How?

Think about the transferrable skills you have developed that could be useful in an events role.

▶ Why?

You can bring valuable skills and experience into the events sector and enjoy an exciting new career.

Education

One of the best ways to develop your skills and abilities is through education, whether that be specialist events management courses or more general courses that allow you to enhance your knowledge of core capabilities such as teamwork, communication and project management.

▶ Tertiary level education

Events management is not currently taught in schools, but it is possible to start learning about event and related job opportunities early on. Many colleges now offer event management qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3 to help you learn about the sector. Upon completion you might choose to progress onto higher education qualifications, such as a Higher National Certificate (HNC), Higher National Diploma (HND) or even a bachelor's degree.

▶ Higher education

A degree in events management is a great way to learn more about the sector, develop specific skills, build networks, and gain some experience. There are currently 375 undergraduate courses related to events, from 98 UK education providers, listed on the UCAS website (including events management, event production, event technology and events and festivals management), giving plenty of options to get you started. Many offer work experience, or even a full year in industry, to help you gain experience alongside learning. A degree in events management shows potential employers that you are passionate about the sector. Your degree does not have to be in events management to help you get a job in the sector. Many degrees help you develop and demonstrate higher level skills that will be useful for you in your events career.

A postgraduate qualification is another way to help you stand out from the crowd. There are currently 70 postgraduate events courses, from 41 different education providers, listed on the UCAS website. A postgraduate qualification will help you develop more advanced skills such as project management and is a great way to build your events-specific knowledge.

Whatever level you study at, and whether you choose events-specific courses or not, education helps develop your knowledge, understanding and skills that will be important in your future career. It shows potential employers that you can commit to a programme of learning, stay focused, meet deadlines, work with others and manage your own workload. Alongside some experience of working in events – maybe even as a volunteer – a relevant course can help showcase your enthusiasm, abilities and desire to work in the events sector.

Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship offers the opportunity to earn while you learn. You will be an employee at a company, working alongside experienced staff, whilst spending at least 20% of your working time on classroom-based learning with a college, university or other training provider.

Apprenticeships take 1-5 years to complete, depending on the level, and result in a nationally recognised qualification.

► Who can apply?

Apprenticeships are open to anyone over the age of 16 in England and who is not currently in full-time education. They suit people who are early in their career, those wanting to upskill in their current job, or people looking for a career change.

► What levels of events apprenticeships are available?

There is a wide range of events apprenticeships available, ranging from entry level (Level 2), through advanced (Level 3) to high (Level 4 and above). There are different entry requirements for different levels, and also different expectations and time spent. More information is available on the Events Apprenticeships website. Apprenticeships take 1-5 years to complete, depending on the level.

► Why do an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship suits many people who prefer a more practical approach to learning. You will have the opportunity to develop skills and begin to build networks and connections in the events sector. You will get paid whilst you do this. If you are over 19 and have completed the first year of the apprenticeship, you are entitled to the National Minimum Wage; if you are aged 16-18 or in the first year of the apprenticeship you are entitled to the apprentice rate.

An apprenticeship can offer a balance of work and study and can be a useful route into a career in the events sector, if you can find an opportunity that suits your needs and aspirations.

Direct employment or career change

Specialist events management degrees and apprenticeships were not always available, and many people have entered the events sector directly, whether as a first job or after working in another sector. This is still possible, and employers frequently advertise opportunities on employment websites and LinkedIn. Sometimes recruitment agencies manage the recruitment and selection process for the employer.

If you do not have relevant qualifications, and have not undertaken an events apprenticeship, how can you use your existing skillset to showcase your suitability for a position in the events sector? The details on the following pages list many of the skills requested by employers and valued by those currently working in events. Many of these are transferrable skills that can be gained and evidenced in other sectors to demonstrate that you have the necessary attributes and abilities to excel in events.

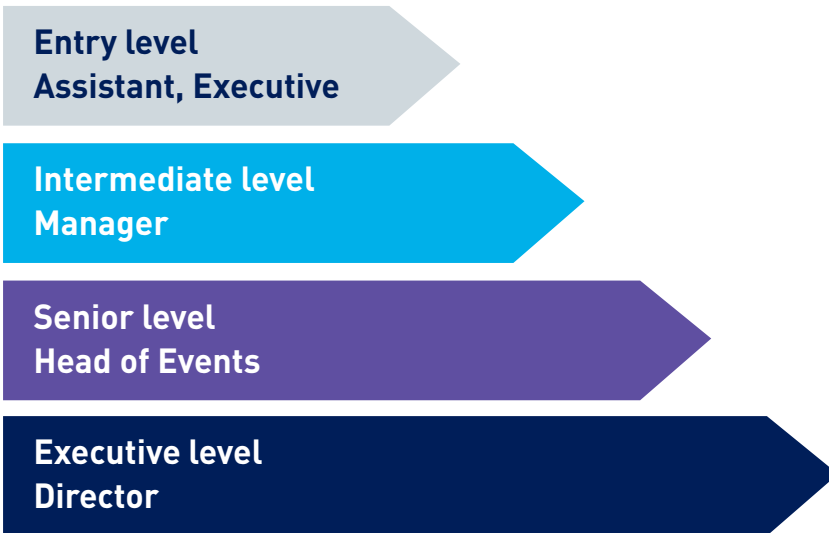
The top transferrable skills identified in this research are:

- ▶ **Attention to detail** – events professionals have to notice the smallest details for everything to run smoothly, safely and on budget, but many other jobs also enable you to develop this skill. What have you done – in work or your personal life – that illustrates your ability to focus on the details?
- ▶ **Team player** – events are all about teamwork. What examples can you provide of when you have successfully worked with, perhaps even sometimes led, a team of other people?
- ▶ **Project management** – each event could be conceived of as a project, and event managers need project management skills. How can you demonstrate your ability to plan, organise and manage a project to achieve a predefined outcome?
- ▶ **Skills training** – there are a range of short courses that provide practical training to help you kickstart your events career, covering topics ranging from planning and management, production and technical skills, safety and crowd control, to marketing, communications and technology.
- ▶ **Gain some experience** – nothing can beat having some experience of working at live events. This can be achieved around other commitments (such as another job or caring responsibilities) through volunteering, or casual work at festivals, sports events, and community events.
- ▶ **Networking** – the events sector is highly connected, and people often hear about work opportunities through their networks. Even if you do not currently work in events, you can start to develop your network through LinkedIn, and attending webinars and industry events.

Part 2: Career routes: Employed

For many people, their idea of a 'career' is linked to working for someone else. Being employed by a company offers many advantages, such as a guaranteed pay cheque, holiday entitlement, access to sick pay and maternity, paternity and parental leave, and often opportunities for training and development.

Progressing in your career as an employee may take place within one company, or you may move companies to gain promotion and advance up the career hierarchy. In the events sector, the career path for someone who is employed looks something like this:



“

I got the opportunity to work with an international organisation and it gave me solidity, the ability to buy my own house, get a mortgage. I got a car, possibility of travel, more support in learning and development. It gives you an anchoring.

Commercial Director

”

Entry level

Job titles:

- ▶ Assistant, Executive, General Staff, Planner

Required skills:

- ▶ Attention to detail; project management; budgeting; sales and marketing; content programming; health and safety; IT skills

Experience required:

- ▶ None needed, some experience is preferred

Required qualifications:

- ▶ None specified

Areas of responsibility:

- ▶ Assist with different aspects of events, communications, marketing and/or operations; supporting the event manager as required; some office and administrative functions.

Line management responsibilities:

- ▶ None

Reports to:

- ▶ Event Manager

“

You begin with just doing the basics, getting to know what an event looks like, and then you start to bring in some operations and logistics.

Conference Director

”

“

You have to be a really good problem solver, a quick thinker, and do it all. You have to be that classic swan, keeping everybody calm but paddling furiously underneath the surface.

Director

”

Intermediate level

Job titles:

- ▶ Manager, Coordinator

Required skills:

- ▶ Organisational skills; communication skills; team player; creative thinking; stakeholder management; budgeting; operations management

Experience required:

- ▶ Typically minimum of 5 years' events experience

Required qualifications:

- ▶ Degree level preferred

Areas of responsibility:

- ▶ Planning and organising events; liaising with clients; managing a team and delegating tasks as needed; ensuring compliance with safety regulations; overseeing budget

Line management responsibilities:

- ▶ Possibly, for entry level staff

Reports to:

- ▶ Head of Events

“

Now you start to understand how the operations and logistics fit together, you get to understand the whole event. How does it all look together? How does it all fit? As an event manager you get to bring together the operations delivery and the content and creative side, you bring that all together and make something amazing happen.

Conference Producer

”

Senior level

Job titles:

- ▶ Head of Events

Required skills:

- ▶ Leadership; communication skills; stakeholder management; budgeting; strategic planning

Experience required:

- ▶ Minimum 5 years' events management experience

Required qualifications:

- ▶ Degree level preferred

Areas of responsibility:

- ▶ Managing and leading a team; strategy; planning and managing budgets

Line management responsibilities:

- ▶ Definitely, for the rest of the events team

Reports to:

- ▶ Director



Head of Events has a more overarching strategic view. They understand the bigger picture, how each part fits into the company's strategic objectives, how it feeds into the company's KPIs, how that feeds into the overall revenue... You get to make the really big decisions, but you don't get to deliver so much, and I don't think that's always clear to people.

Event Producer

It's not about running events yourself; you have responsibility within the company for the performance of the events division. You're involved in setting budgets, in setting strategy, you're involved in dealing with business development, in tendering and winning contracts.

Head of Events



Executive level

Job titles:

- ▶ Director

Required skills:

- ▶ Strategy, leadership, people management

Experience required:

- ▶ Extensive experience of a range of roles

Required qualifications:

- ▶ Degree or postgraduate qualification beneficial

Areas of responsibility:

- ▶ Directing the strategy of the events and/or marketing team

Line management responsibilities:

- ▶ Head of Events

Reports to:

- ▶ Board or shareholders

“

Being a director and having a vested interest in the company changes your outlook on the business, your commitment to it, and your attitude to your whole work life ... it was like flipping a switch, the change in the way I approached things and the way I managed myself, the way I managed the staff, the way I interacted with customers. Everything was different.

Company Director

”

Part 3: Career routes: self-employed

Many people dream of being their own boss, either as a freelancer or setting up your own business, and the events sector offers many opportunities for this. Being self-employed gives you creative freedom, the ability to set your own hours and routines, higher earning potential, variety, flexibility about where, when and for whom you work, and job satisfaction.

Self-employment is not for everyone, as although you have the potential to reap larger rewards you also take on all the risks. You will not have employment benefits, like sick pay or holiday pay, and you will be fully responsible for your own pension, National Insurance and tax returns. You will likely work long hours, especially as you get established, and take on the stress of success or failure. The unpredictability of self-employment requires careful planning and strong support networks.

If you want to work for yourself, you will need to build your skills, experience and networks. Make sure to research thoroughly all aspects of setting up a business and that you understand local, national and international trends. A career path on the self-employed route is less linear and predictable than if you are employed by an organisation, but you could reap larger benefits.

Your options include:

Freelance/
solo-self employed

Setting up your
own business

“

I knew I was earning my money, rather than earning money for somebody else. You could see it going into the bank account, and you were making profit. If you worked harder, you got more money. If you didn't work in December, you knew you had to work harder in January or else you put in a really strong September, October, November. But you could do that. I think it's about being more in control, really.

Company Director

”

Freelance/self-employed

If you long to go it alone, then becoming a freelancer or going self-employed are options to consider. There are subtle differences between the two categories which are worth exploring further if you are interested in this career route, but here we will consider their shared characteristics.

Why do it?

As a freelancer, you become your own boss, giving you greater autonomy about when, where and for whom you work. You can set your own hours and choose your own clients and projects. There is no limit to how much you can earn, as you can take on as much work as you can do and also may collaborate with other freelancers if you need support on a job.

What are some potential downsides?

When you are self-employed, your income is never guaranteed. You have to find work, build relationships with clients, manage your diary and always be looking for the next job. When you are first starting out this might be difficult as you need to establish your reputation and build a network of clients. You are still responsible for paying any bills – including tax – even if you are not making a profit. As you would be working alone, you need to be driven, organised and resilient.

Desirable attributes

To be successful as a self-employed or freelance events professional you need to be hard working; knowledgeable about your area of expertise; organised and good at managing the administrative side of work; good at networking and building relationships with clients; honest and reliable, as your reputation is everything; and up to date with legal requirements, industry standards and related trends.

“

It became apparent that I don't make a very good employee, I'm used to running things my own way and just the idea of being restricted to someone else's concept of what right and wrong is, if I don't agree with that, or if it doesn't fit with my lifestyle, then there's going to be conflict. So it's much easier for me to just do it, and the opportunity is there.

Freelancer

For me, that's the thrill of events management. Just picking it up and doing it on the run. There's nothing I love more than getting a phone call saying, 'our event manager's sick, can you step in?' I love that, turning up, winging it, it's stress, but it's the right kind of stress and I love it.

Freelancer

”

Starting your own business

You might decide to start your own business at any point in your career journey, either on your own or with partners. The potential rewards are huge, but there are also considerable risks and you will need to work exceptionally hard to become successful. Many people have started businesses in the events sector, from small operations with just a couple of employees, to large international organisations. If you are ready to take a leap of faith, have a great idea, some financial backing and a strong work ethic, this could be a great option.

Why start your own business?

If you want to be your own boss and have more autonomy over your working life, starting a business is one way to achieve this. You will need to work hard, but you have the opportunity to achieve financial independence and follow your passions. Starting your own business is a risk, and it will take time to build your reputation, client base and income, but the rewards – financial and otherwise – can be significant.

Taking on employees

As your business grows, you will need to take on more staff. This is a sign of success and brings new opportunities, but also creates new responsibilities as their jobs depend on you and the company. You might need to develop your leadership skills and do some training or seek support for HR practices. It is unlikely that you will have all the skills needed for all aspects of your business – such as operations, strategy, HR, finance, legal, marketing etc. – so you will need to expand your team as the business grows.

“

We started by pushing our freelance work through the business, just to keep afloat, but the aim was to bid for bigger contracts, and the work did start to grow. It was a slow start, and we had to convince some of our clients to take the leap with us, and then to pay VAT and all those kinds of things, but we did grow.

Company Owner and Director

”

Conclusion: Why choose a career in the events sector?

This guide offers a brief introduction to careers in the events sector, and shows that there are varied options for creating an interesting, rewarding and successful career path. This guide offers some advice of things to think about at different stages of your trajectory.

Everyone's career journey is a little different, but some final words of advice come from some of the leaders interviewed for this research.



Is it all worth it?

“

What do I love about working in events? It's the shared experience, everybody sharing a moment. We say we do events but what we really do is create opportunity for shared emotions and that really is what is the power of events.
Company Director

”

“

I think it's an amazing career option. It's highly exciting. The rewards can be very good, you can be very successful.
Freelancer

”

“

The magic of events is that it's a mixture of creativity and seeing a project through to the end. Events are a powerful tool for changing the world. I really love it, and I get a real kick out of it.
Managing Director

”





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