



Northern Cultural Skills Partnership

Research into Skills for Festivals and Events in the North East Region

Executive Summary

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Across the UK there has been a growing interest in and recognition of the benefits of a thriving Festival and Event scene. There is a widespread belief that a shortage of skills is constraining the development of the sector both nationally and regionally in the North East. The research undertaken in this study attempted to identify the regional skills issues through a combination of literature review and interviews with a wide range of festivals and events. Our findings show that whilst there are some skills shortages, as well as some areas where the North East excels, there are other issues which act as barriers to the development of festivals and events in the region. These need to be resolved alongside, if not before, any skills issues for the sector to progress.

This research was undertaken in 3 parts: a desk based survey; a 'broad brush' survey of 26 events; and, more detailed case studies building upon the findings of the first two phases. Each section is summarised individually through the report and the conclusions drawn from each phase of the research.

In general we did not find a strong emphasis on skills and formal skills development apart from in regulatory areas such as Health and Safety. The underlying causes for this are complex and include an emphasis on on-the-job learning and a lack of resources – personnel, time and finances – to undertake formal training courses. Furthermore the most pressing concerns facing many festivals and events are not necessarily skills or skills shortages. They may instead be sustainable funding sources or, particularly for festivals managed by volunteers, a shortage of people to put the festival on. With the exception of the types of festivals and events that comprise the culture¹⁰ programme and a few others, aspirations in terms of both size and quality of festivals and events do not appear to be high.

Despite this, many festivals and events recognised that they could, and should, improve in a number of areas, including marketing and PR, festival programming, business organisation and fundraising/sponsorship. In light of the increasing constraints the sector is facing it is our belief that skills will be increasingly vital. There is a strong case for developing a skills diagnostic tool and for helping festivals and events on a one-to-one basis to identify their immediate and future skills requirements.

Nationally there is a move for training providers to become more closely aligned with the needs of employers to ensure that the growing number of students studying event management or related courses are equipped with the skills they need to enter the market. This is being addressed in a number of ways, but in the North East the potential is for the HE and FE colleges to offer a greater number and/or range of work placement and volunteering opportunities to their students. This needs the strategic commitment of a number of organisations and a practical means of matching students with opportunities throughout the year.

Areas where skills shortages were reported include festival programming, outdoor event management, specialist supervisors and stewards and 'top end' equipment and skills. New provision could be developed through Train to Gain resources through UNIS4NE and with individual colleges.

A more outward-facing approach could be beneficial in many ways. This would require resources to allow personnel to develop links and relationships with festivals, events and organisations outside the region and outside the UK to bring in fresh ideas to the programming, management and promotion of regional festivals and events. It may be possible for example to consider a programme of internships or mentoring programmes to build such relationships if resources can be found.

In a similar vein, festivals and events in the region are not well 'joined-up' and could benefit from each other if a suitable forum was established and participants were prepared to share their knowledge and experience.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: NCSP should lead on the development of a Festivals and Events Skills Network to share experience and knowledge and to develop mutually beneficial partnerships e.g. for audience development.

Recommendation 2: The key stakeholders should underpin the work of this network through the development of the Toolkit, aiming to develop an interactive web based community.

Recommendation 3: A skills diagnostic tool should be developed to assist festivals and events on a one-to-one basis to identify their immediate and future skills requirements.

Recommendation 4: The region must enhance and strengthen its links with the National Skills Academy and CCSkills to the benefit of the North East.

Recommendation 5: Resources should be sought to allow the sector to learn and bring in fresh ideas from outside the region. This could include supporting internships, mentoring or partnerships working arrangements.

Recommendation 6: Festivals and Events in the region should be encouraged to apply to the Cultural Leadership Programme, led in the NE by culture¹⁰, which has recently been awarded an additional £10 million over 3 years, to further develop their skills and experience (see <http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk/default.aspx>).

Recommendation 7: At both a strategic and practical level there is a need to further align employers and training organisations to ensure that students are graduating with the required skills. Key aspects are course content, work placement and volunteering opportunities. UNIS4NE, the FE colleges and the volunteering networks need to develop working structures that are flexible enough to maximise the opportunities throughout the year.

Recommendation 8: A central database resource should be established within one of the existing support organisations to coordinate potential volunteers and volunteering opportunities.

Recommendation 9: Funding organisations should review their requirements for administration and timing (cash-flow) in order wherever possible to reduce the demands and constraints on festivals and events without diminishing their accountability.

Fundraising and Sponsorship

Recommendation 10: A strategic approach needs to be developed to address investment in festivals and events (culture¹⁰ are currently commissioning research to develop a private sector sponsorship strategy).

Recommendation 11: The Sponsors Club should build upon the momentum gained as a result of the discussions that took place to inform this report, bringing key stakeholders together to consider the options to maximise sponsorship to festivals and events in the North East.

Recommendation 12: The Toolkit website should include a regularly updated section of available fundraising courses, and that festivals and events organisers should be made aware of that information. Responsibility for creating and maintaining this information would need to be assigned to the appropriate organisation.

Toolkit

Recommendation 13: The Toolkit be given its own easily recognisable web address, and be linked to other websites that may be more frequently used by events organisers. Further that work be done to promote the website directly to event organisers, by email, flyer and direct mail.

Recommendation 14: An interactive element should be introduced to the website, allowing users to post news, and to share ideas etc.

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