

Significance of Work Experience on a Graduate's Employability

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1. Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to evaluate how significant work experience is for a conference and events graduate's employability with particular reference to the conference and events department of hotels. It will also highlight what skills Conference and Banqueting managers' view as being most important, and whether the type of experience affects the skill graduates' learn.

Design

Four Conference and Banqueting managers' from hotel chains in the UK were interviewed at their hotel. The interview consisted of questions to gain background knowledge of the interviewee to gain an understanding of their experience and qualifications. There are also questions to cover different types and lengths of work experience compared with degrees, and the affect they have on employability skills. Basic and sector specific skills were rated to gain insight into what skills managers' view as being most important.

Findings

The interviews found that work experience through a placement year is viewed as more beneficial from a manager's point of view for a graduate's employability in conference and events. Work experience is also perceived as being more important than a qualification, as the skills learnt are viewed as being more valuable than those learnt on a degree. Work experience is very significant for a graduates' employability, relevance in hospitality is most desirable to employers.

The findings showed that the most important skill in both basic and specific sets is communication. The results suggest that the majority of important skills are learnt through work experience which therefore confirms work experience is very beneficial to a student however, some skills are learnt through a degree therefore it is still important in a graduate's employability.

Value

The value of this study is mainly to present up-to-date opinions and data of Conference and Banqueting managers' as to how significant they view work experience for a conference and events graduate's employability. This research adds value and more detail to previous studies within the hospitality industry, and also introduces specific research about the conference and events sector.

This research is also valuable to the author and others as it assists in how they can present themselves to employers. The research also underpins the relevance of work experience in relation to the type of skills it helps to develop.

Keywords: Work experience, employability, skills, conference and events graduates, hospitality.

2.0 Context and Objectives

2.1 Project Question

How significant do hotel Conference and Banqueting managers' think work experience is for a conference and events graduate's employability?

2.2 Aim

The aim of this research is to evaluate how significant work experience is for a conference and events graduate's employability with particular reference to the conference and events department of hotels.

2.3 Objectives

- To conduct a literature review to identify the nature of employability
- To locate previous research about employability and the relationship to work experience
- To obtain Conference and Banqueting managers' perspectives in an ethical and reliable manner
- To analyse the empirical evidence and evaluate the results into words
- To produce a conclusion and possible recommendations for both students and higher education

2.4 Context

The study of work experience on a graduate's employability within conference and events is worthy because it will help graduates' wanting to work in this area decide whether it is valuable to have work experience within the industry as well as, or instead of, a qualification. This will also result in helping students decide whether to study at university or work their way up the chain, and allow first year students to be informed how valuable relevant work experience is.

On a personal basis this study will help me understand the skills I have acquired and whether they are desirable for a supervisory job in conference and events. It will allow me to evaluate my employability which will illustrate areas that require improvement in order for me to gain the job I desire. The combination of the above points will help in the presentation of my skills on my curriculum vitae and during job interviews, it may also help me mentor students I supervise as a manager.

The study will also explore what type of work experience managers' think is more useful, such as part-time, a placement year, full-time vacation work or all three. This will link to whether the type of work experience has an effect on the type of skills learnt and which are perceived as more beneficial. The findings should enable more effective advice to be given to students, which could in turn result in better job prospects. A limitation of this research however is the small amount of interviews being carried out. The findings will be helpful but further research would need to be carried out to generalise the findings.

The ongoing question of whether to participate in a placement year or whether part-time work is enough will hopefully be answered. It will also discover if basic level experience on a placement year within a hotel is specific enough experience for a supervisory job within conference and events after graduating.

The findings will also generate suggestions for future conference and events courses in terms of what they should include to enhance graduates' employability skills specific to conference and events. University career advisors will be able to give more accurate advice about taking placement years and the most beneficial type of work experience.

Recommendations given from this research will also benefit conference and banqueting managers' because their particular opinions have been investigated which will lead to improved employability skill sets of conference and events graduates'.

3.0 Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to discuss and critique previous studies and current knowledge of work experience and the effect it has on a conference and events graduate's employability. This review has dealt with a limited amount of literature due to the majority of research being conducted within the hospitality industry. This particular review has a limited word count and time constraints so only the most relevant articles have been included. This review will also satisfy the first two objectives of this research through three sections.

The first section to be discussed is employability skills, describing what they consist of and why they are significant for employability. Employability will be defined along with which skills are classed as making someone employable. Different sets of skills are required depending on the industry and company preference, specific to this study are those for the Conference and Events sector of Hospitality. These specific skills are articulated in the subject bench marks for hospitality courses at universities given by The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education.

Work experience and its relationship with employability skills form the second section which discusses research into which skills employers want from a graduate, and also whether the type of work experience affects the skills learnt.

The third section will discuss findings of previous research around work experience and qualifications. Other industries and countries have been studied which can be considered a holistic view of work experience and the effect on employability, some research is specific to the hospitality industry giving an insight into the relevant sector for this research.

3.1 Employability

Hind and Moss (2005, page 1) defines employability as 'a set of social behaviours and skills that you can learn to help you interact and work with other people in a variety of different situations.' The authors discuss what they identify as core skills which assist you in career development. These consist of: learning and study, communication, written communication, numeracy, career management, presentation selling and negotiation, group work, information gathering, thinking, project management consultancy and reflective skills (see app 8.1 for explanations).

Knight and Yorke (2004) write about employability within Higher Education (HE) although Knight and Yorke discuss what is being done to enhance it they do not state a definition or explanation of employability. This is in contrast to Hind and Moss (2005) who discuss the utilisation of employability skills developed through HE and work experience. Knight et.al suggest that employers often criticise the standard of new graduates' saying they lack business sense and understanding of the real world. They place partial blame on students not translating their achievements into a language that employers acknowledge. It is suggested that employability is more than just skills a graduate possess', it also includes qualities and achievements. Knight et.al split employability skills into three categories: Personal Qualities, Core Skills and Process Skills which contain a total of 39 skills (see app 8.2 for complete list) these three categories also contain all the skills Hind et.al state are important skills for a graduate to possess.

Compared with those by Hind and Moss (2005), Knight and Yorke (2004) include additional skills, in particular personal qualities such independence, emotional intelligence and initiative which are skills that cannot be taught in a classroom. All the sets include skills gained through life experience and degrees.

Skills for employability as mentioned by Hind and Moss (2005, preface vii) covers skills 'developed through Further and Higher Education learning; skills which are transferable to the work place and invaluable for lifelong learning.' Employability skills such as personal attributes mentioned by Knight and Yorke (2004) are acquired through 'life' experience which could be achieved through a placement year. Industries require specific skills to be taught within the relevant university degree, below are those which are taught on conference and events courses.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education (2009) checks how UK universities maintain their own academic standards and quality by reporting their practices and publishing guidelines. These include subject specific benchmark standards including skills and knowledge events graduates' should achieve from their degree (see app 8.3 for a full list). These skills are expected in addition to the basic skills discussed in the previous paragraphs and are very specific in relation to events design, planning, management control and event evaluation.

The combination of these pieces of literature gives a holistic view of employability skills. They have provided this research with substantial information about which basic employability skills all graduates should acquire and also those specific for an events graduate to achieve.

Hind and Moss (2005) and the QAAs skill sets (2009) have been adopted by this research for use in the interview. These two have been selected purposely because this is a small scale study which does not cover all aspects of employability. Hind and Moss' (2005) specify the basic skills in a compact set which this research requires, in comparison to the total of 39 skills by Knight and Yorke (2004). The QAA's (2009) skills are the most specific set in order for this research to discover the exact skills most important for a graduate in conference and events.

3.2 Work Experience and its Relationship with Employability Skills.

Archer and Davidson's (2008) report involved findings from an independent study by the International Graduate Insight Group which provides insight about the needs of graduate recruiters. In 2008 the study reported that the top three most important skills were communication, team work and integrity which are classed as 'soft' skills. Communication and team work are both mentioned in Hind and Moss' (2005) set of skills which will be investigated in the primary research.

Martin and McCabe (2007) explored the experiences of hospitality and tourism postgraduates undertaking paid part-time work and the skills they developed. Results showed that two of the top four reasons for working were to develop practical skills related to their course and to enhance their employability. Students rated which of Knight and Yorke's (2004) skills they thought had developed most (discussed in previous section.) The results showed that awareness of how to interact with people, adaptability and team work skills were most developed, these are mainly personal skills.

Archer and Davidson's report (2008) involves all industries so they are not sector specific, however it gives a general understanding that employability skills are important within any industry. In comparison Martin and McCabe (2007) provides information from a students' perspective which states they feel work experience has a positive contribution to their future employability.

What Archer and Davidson (2008) and Martin and McCabe (2007) both hold in common is that certain skills are of high importance to employers. Martin and McCabe (2007) also link work experience with the type of skills learnt. An outcome of this primary research will discover the most important skills Conference and Banqueting managers' want from a graduate and whether they are learnt through work experience. The key skills to investigate are those supplied by Hind and Moss (2005) as they have been mentioned in both these papers.

3.3 Experience and Qualifications

A study by Connolly and McGing (2007) explored how Higher Education (HE) met hospitality management needs in Ireland, and the factors most important when recruiting hospitality managers. The results indicated that the industry prefers to hire those with practical skills. Therefore education should include opportunities of placements because they are of high value within the hospitality industry.

Chi and Gursoy (2009) conducted a study which supports Connolly and McGing (2007) as it investigates the factors for successful placement services. The results found that internship requirements were important for successful career services. Students in America are required to complete a certain amount of work experience as part of their award before they can graduate. This finding suggests that some skills cannot be taught or learnt properly without being practised, which is a vital step towards a career.

Connolly and McGing (2007) and Chi and Gursoy (2009) both suggest that a key part of education is a placement. Both authors' studies were in other countries which could suggest that practical skills and work experience are important world-wide when associated with the hospitality industry. The primary research should add findings from the UK to support this suggestion. Placements in the US are compulsory proving they are viewed as valuable therefore should UK universities also make placements compulsory?

Research conducted in 1991 by Huyton evaluated the effectiveness and usefulness of industrial placements as part of a Hotel and Catering sandwich course. They sent questionnaires to students, industry companies, college lecturers and management. All participants felt placements are a vital part of any Hotel and Catering course. In general it was recommended that the length should be 12 months, and monitored. The industry itself however was unsure of what they expected from a college. This study although conducted in 1991 shows that placements have been in place for many years, and are often a choice within degree courses today. The reason for including this older study is that there is no current research on placements within the UK explaining that placements are an opportunity within courses. This appears to show a historic view that placements are valuable, and have been optional for many years.

Previous research by Raybould and Wilkins (2005) is very similar to the primary research which is why it has been included in this literature. They investigated hospitality managers'

expectations of graduates' skills, in comparison to students' perceptions of what managers' value. The results state that the hospitality industry disregards students' formal qualifications because they lack experience, this is supported by Knight and Yorke (2004) (see page 4). The skills that managers' rank most important are interpersonal, problem solving and self-management.

Raybould and Wilkins (2005) results are specific to hospitality in Australia and conducted three years previous to Archer and Davidson (2008). This could have caused a contradiction between results as the hospitality industry is continuously changing and expanding. The primary research will be useful to resolve this conflict by questioning Conference and Banqueting managers' about skills they view as most significant when recruiting a graduate.

Harper, Brown and Irvine (2005) studied the performance and careers of hotel general managers with and without qualifications. Their findings suggest qualifications facilitate career moves and 'fast tracking' to senior positions, as qualifications develop functional managerial skills. The study mentions the hospitality industry is demanding more operationally skilled managers therefore work placement periods would benefit students. An observation of these results is that qualifications are perhaps more relevant once you are in a senior position, but work experience is considered more important to gain the first job once graduated. Since 2005 the industry has changed which could affect whether these results are relevant today.

The final piece of literature by Littlejohn and Watson (2004) shows academics' perspectives on the development of managers' in hospitality and tourism. The outcome of the event they attended was that work experience is often supplemented by continuing professional development and also that work experience should be of high quality. This perspective has been included because it shows that in 2004 they were recognising the need for work experience. The results of this research can also help universities enhance students' future employability.

3.4 Conclusion

The main findings of this literature review is that there are no studies specific to conference and banqueting however those conducted within the hospitality industry have some compatibility suggesting work experience plays a vital role in the employability skills a graduate gains (supported by Martin and McCabe (2007): Connolly and McGing (2007): Chi and Gursoy (2009): Huyton (1991)) however qualifications are also important (supported by Harper, Brown and Irvine (2005)).

Another point from this review is that no previous research details which skills managers' want in a graduate specific to conference and events. The primary research aims to resolve these issues. Producing this literature review has allowed the first two objectives of this study to be completed because employability has been explained and previous research has been analysed.

4.0 Method of Investigation

The purpose of this section is to discuss the research design and why it is the most suitable considering all relevant factors. A research design is the plan of how you are going to answer your research question, containing sources for collection of data and inevitable constraints (Saunders et. al, 2009). The technique of how the data is to be collected is also included. These will all contribute to satisfying the third objective of this research.

4.1 Type of Method

The chosen type of research for this study is qualitative research. This research is conceptual as managers' views about work experience and employability are required. Face-to-face interviews, in particular semi-structured interviews are the chosen method for this study because it gathers valid and reliable data that is relevant to the research question and objectives. The use of semi-structured interviews allows flexibility of both open and closed questions being included. This leads to quantitative data being collected at the same time which will be advantageous in relation to employability skills where it will provide comparable data and allows clear analysis (Saunders et. al, 2009).

While conducting this research many factors affecting the interviewee and researcher have to be considered, in particular time and availability:

- The research report has a deadline to meet
- Each interview is planned to take 30 minutes
- The interviewee is a manager therefore their schedule and availability must be taken into account
- Travel time to each location to ensure being on time for the interview

For the interviews to be effective and convenient, advance appointments are required to ensure the interviewee is available and the time is suitable for those involved.

4.2 Ethics and Safety

There are no major concerns of ethics within this study because the interviewees are over 18 with no disabilities and all published results will be anonymous. The only ethical issue that may be encountered is during the collection of data. Creswell (2003) suggests that a brief on the purpose of the study should be explained to interviewees and obtaining signatures approving the transcripts will resolve any potential issues. (See app 8.4.)

To ensure safety of the researcher a risk assessment was carried out. The researcher will have a mobile phone and colleagues will be notified of times and locations (see app 8.5).

4.3 The Sample

The participants of this research are Conference and Banqueting managers'. This ensures the data is specific about the desired skills relevant to the research question. The Conference and Banqueting managers' have been purposefully selected by the researcher because they are already known industry contacts which reduced the time frame for finding participants and enables the research to be conducted within the time limit.

4.4 The Interview Questions

The interview questions for this research have been shared with colleagues in order to refine questions to ensure participants understand the questions, also to guarantee the data collected answers the research question (Saunders et al 2009).

The initial questions for the interview create background knowledge of the interviewee to gain an understanding of their experience and qualifications, which can influence their opinion of work experience and employability skills. The next two sections of the interview cover types and length of work experience compared with degrees, and the affect they have on employability skills. Basic and sector specific skills are rated to gain insight into which skills managers' view as being most important and those gained through work experience. These will give a holistic view on how significant work experience is on graduates' employability skills. (Please see app 8.6 for a full set of interview questions.)

4.5 The Interview

The research will be carried out in a systematic, ethical and reliable manner. Interviewees will be contacted to make appointments for the interviews with a 30 minute guideline. The questions will be on paper and all responses will be scribed. Finally the interviewee will be thanked, asked to check the answers and sign to confirm that they are correct.

4.6 Analysis and Evaluation

The numerical data will be analysed via Microsoft Excel and presented in tables to show comparisons. Key points that have emerged through qualitative data will be summarised and evaluated contributing to the answer and completing the fourth objective of the research. A conclusion of the results will include analysis against previous research (section 3.0) along with implications of the research relating to students studying conference and events, the programme structure and the Conference and Banqueting sector. This section will complete the final objective of the research.

5.0 Findings and Analysis

This section includes the analysis and interpretation of the results gathered from four interviews conducted about how significant work experience is towards a graduates' employability from a Conference and Banqueting managers' perspective. This will fulfil the fourth objective of this research. The results are being analysed in three sections. The first will discuss the interviewee's personal experience and qualifications. The middle section will analyse the interviewees' view on work experience. The final section analyses two skill sets and discusses the interviewees' opinion on the link between work experience and the skills learnt through it. A full set of all four interview transcripts can be found in app 8.7.

5.1 Interviewee Background

The interviewees' were all Conference and Banqueting managers of chain hotels, 2 were from a Marriott, 1 from Hilton and 1 from the Menzies chain, which are all situated on the outskirts of a city centre. Below is a table which shows the qualifications and work experience of the interviewees.

	Hospitality Qualifications	Other Qualifications	Hospitality Work Experience	Other Work Experience
Interviewee 1	Personal License	GCSEs NVQ 1&2	15 years - Conference and Banqueting departments of hotels	N/A
Interviewee 2	N/A	GCSEs BTEC – in Art and Design Textiles HND – in Art and Design Textiles	1 year – Part-time in Conference and Banqueting department	1 year – Teaching Art and Design in Textiles 2 years – Retail Assistant 1 year – Mixologist in a Pot Pouri Factory
Interviewee 3	HND Hospitality Degree	GCSEs A-levels	18 months – RAF – Banquets and cooking 2 years – Pub work reaching trainee manager 2 years – Conference and Banqueting reaching manager	N/A
Interviewee 4	Hospitality Degree	GCSEs A-levels	1 year – Placement year from university within all departments 10 months –	N/A

			Sales Co-ordinator 2 years – Conference and Banqueting Administrator and Co-ordinator reaching manager	
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The key factors to note are that 3 have Higher Education (HE) qualifications (2 relevant) the same 3 have substantial relevant work experience and 1 had only 1 year of relevant work experience following experience in other industries.

When asked whether their work experience helped them gain their first supervisory/management job role they all responded 'yes', apart from interviewee 2 which could be because they have the least work experience within conference and events. Interviewee 1 and 3 both commented that without their experience it would have been a longer process to become a Conference and Banqueting manager. Interviewee 4 however commented that they felt work experience helped more to get their first job within the sector, rather than getting their first Conference and Banqueting managerial position. Interviewee 4's own experience supports the results by Harper, Brown and Irvine (2005) who suggests work experience is considered more important in gaining a graduate's first job (see page 7).

The interviewees' personal experience of 'life' could have an effect on how they perceive the importance of qualifications and work experience, and therefore influencing their answers. As the above table shows, the interviewees' have a range of backgrounds which led to their managerial jobs in Conference and Banqueting.

5.2 Work Experience

The first question discovered that 3 interviewees' said a placement year is the most beneficial type of work experience.

	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4
Q1 Which Type of Work Experience Do You Think Is More Beneficial To A Graduate Wanting To Work In Conference and Events?	Placement Year	Placement Year	Part-Time & Placement Year	It Doesn't Matter

Interviewee 1 viewed a placement year as a solid time of invaluable experience because there is more time to develop skills and enhance their employability. Interviewee 2 viewed a placement year as allowing the student to focus and concentrate solely on learning skills, through being more flexible due to no other commitments. Interviewee 3's opinion is that you need to learn the operations from a placement year however, inclusion of part-time

work during semesters allows the link between theory and practical to be made. This is supported by Martin and McCabe (2007) whose research found that students' worked part-time to develop their practical skills related to their course (see page 5). Interviewee 4 however thinks it doesn't matter because any experience is beneficial within hospitality, I think this may mainly be true for those applying for supervisory roles.

The results from the second question found that all the managers' would rather employ a graduate with a hospitality degree and relevant work experience apart from interviewee 4, who would employ a graduate depending on the individual. An observation could suggest that the combination of both is essential for a graduate, nonetheless, your own attributes and personality also affect your employability.

The need for a placement year is supported by Connolly and McGing (2007) who suggested placements need to be included in HE (see page 6). This also supports the result of managers' wanting a graduate with both relevant work experience and a degree.

	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4
Q3 Is Work Experience More Important Than A Degree?	Yes	Yes	Similar	Yes (a little bit)
Q4 Significance of Work Experience on a Graduates Employability 1-5 (1 being very significant)	1	1	1	2

As can be seen from the table above question three found that 3 managers' thought work experience is more important than a degree. Interviewee 3 however thought they are both important, this could be because they have a relevant degree and work experience. None of the secondary research directly compares a degree against work experience, so there is no other data to compare these results with.

As the above table also shows the final question within this section gathered information on how significant managers' think work experience is on a conference and events graduate's employability. As can be seen from the table 3 managers' rated 1, being very significant and one manager rated it as 2. Interviewee 4's reasoning was because they believe you need to look at the combination of work experience, qualifications and the individual themselves.

The other interviewees' commented that work experience is very significant because without it there is no real knowledge of the operations and business. Interviewee 1 thinks that work experience is needed to back-up the degree. Interviewee 3 suggests that the combination can act as a 'fast-track' to management, Harper Brown and Irvine (2005) also concluded that qualifications are a 'fast-track' to senior management (see page 7). Interviewee 3 also states however that they would not consider a graduate for a supervisory role if they had no hands-on experience.

The table below shows the list of basic skills given to each interviewee and their rating of them on a scale of 1-5 (1 being most important). The 3 columns at the end show the average of the interviewees' results.

**Interviewees Ratings of Basic Skills 1-5
(1 being most important)**

Basic Skills	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4	Mode	Mean	Median
Learning and Study Skills	1	3	2	3	3	2.4	2.5
Communication Skills	1	2	1	1	1	1.2	1
Written Communication Skills	2	4	1	1	1	1.8	1.5
Numeracy Skills	2	4	4	1	4	3	3
Career Management Skills	3	5	3	1	3	3	3
Presentation Skills	2	3	2	2	2	2.2	2
Selling and Negotiation Skills	2	2	4	1	2	2.2	2
Group Work Skills	1	1	1	1		1.1	1
Information Gathering Skills	2	3	3	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
Thinking Skills	2	1	1	1	1	1.2	1
Project Management	4	3	5	4	4	4	4
Consultancy Skills	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Reflective Skills and Personal Development Planning	3	4	1	2	2	2.4	2.5

Most Important

Of High Importance

Least Important

The table below shows the list of event specific skills given to each interviewee and their rating of them on a scale of 1-5 (1 being most important).

The 3 columns at the end show the average of the interviewees' results.

**Interviewees Ratings of Basic Skills 1-5
(1 being most important)**

Event Specific Skills	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4	mode	mean	Median
Knowledge of Theories and Concepts	3	3	2	3	3	2.75	3
Analysis and Knowledge of Factors on an Event	2	1	2	2	2	1.75	2
Business Analysis	2	2	1	2	2	1.75	2
Management of Resources	2	2	2	1	2	1.75	2
Event Planning	2	2	3	4	2	2.75	2.5
Communication	1	1	2	1	1	1.25	1
Clientele Understanding	2	1	2	2	2	1.75	2
Critique and Evaluation of Events Impacts	3	2	2	3	2.5	2.5	2.5
Strategy Skills	2	4	2	3	2	2.75	2.5

Most Important

Of High Importance

Least Important

5.3 Skills

The first two questions in this section examine the basic and event specific skills managers' view as most important in a graduates' employability skill set. The previous two pages display the results in tables.

The table displaying the results for question 1 is on page 13. Group work skills (highlighted pink) is unanimously the most important basic skill a graduate can have with all interviewees rating it 1 in importance. Archer and Davidson (2008) support this finding as they reported that team work skills were among the top skills required by graduate recruiters (see page 5). Martin and McCabe (2007) found that team work skills were developed through work experience (see page 5). Communication skills and thinking skills are also significantly important in relation to other basic skills such as numeracy and career management skills which were rated low, the least important basic skill (highlighted blue) according to the interviewees' is project management, with interviewee 3 rating it 5.

As can be seen from the results table (page 13) there appears to be a significant range of opinion on the importance of all other basic skills. This suggests that all basic skills are of some importance and that there is no collective opinion on the order, which also implies that it is the personal preference of the employer.

Question 2's results are displayed in the table on page 14. The event specific skill which managers' rated as most important (highlighted pink) was communication and the least important (highlighted blue) was knowledge of theories and concepts. As can be seen from the averages on the table there is a narrow margin separating all the ratings of importance within this set of specific skills as only one skill averages the lowest rating of 3. This observation of the results suggests that all of these skills have an important role in the employability of a conference and events graduate.

Raybould and Wilkins (2005) found that interpersonal, problem solving and self-management were ranked most important from a hospitality managers' perspective. These findings contradict those of the primary research, this could be because the study was conducted 5 years ago during which time the industry has changed. The participants were not Conference and Banqueting managers' therefore those skills may not be as important within the conference and events sector (see page 6). Another factor could be that the sample used for this research was small.

	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4
Q3 Do You Think The Type Of Work Experience Has An Effect On The Type Of Skills Gained?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

The third question's findings (table above) suggest that the type of work experience can affect the type of skills a graduate gains as 3 out of 4 interviewees' said yes. Their reasons are that placements give experience in a 'real life' environment, and due to it being a long period of time it allows the graduate to focus on the business without distractions. Interviewee 3 proposes the company employing the student can affect the skills learnt

through their willingness to help and guide the student. This links to the results of Littlejohn and Watson (2004) which suggests that the work experience should be of high quality (see page 7). Interviewee 4 emphasises their view (from question 1 under work experience section) that if it's the same job, the same skills should be learnt, the length of time may differ.

There seems to be a strong link between the type of experience and the skills a graduate gains. The quality of the experience also effects the type of skills a graduate gains. For the purpose of this research quality has been defined as a standard of excellence, superior value. For instance a placement year with a company who supports and teaches students' creates a higher standard of skill sets in comparison to part-time work for a company who regards students' solely as employees'.

	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4
Q4 Do You Think The Skills Learnt Through Work Experience Are More Valuable Than Those Learnt Through a Degree?	Yes	Yes	No (learn more on the degree)	Yes (slightly)

The final question found that 3 interviewees' think the skills learnt through work experience are more valuable to a graduate than those learnt through a degree. Interviewee 3 however, thinks the opposite. Group work was rated as the most important skill for a graduate during this research. Martin and McCabe (2007) found that teamwork was developed through work experience, therefore supporting the views of interviewee 1, 2 and 4

The table below displays the list of skills which the managers' view are learnt through work experience and those learnt through a degree. Those coloured blue correspond to skills within the skill sets rated earlier (see pages 13-14). As the table shows managers' believe the majority of important skills are learnt through work experience which supports the answers to questions 3 and 4 (within the work experience section) stating work experience is more important than the degree and is highly significant in a graduate's employability.

Skills Learnt Through Work Experience	Skills Learnt Through A Degree
Understanding and experience in operations in order to guide associates from a supervisory role	Knowledge of theory and understanding of why procedures are done
Handling Customers ~ Attitudes towards customers	Financial understanding
Property Awareness ~ Room set-ups and styles best for that room	Understanding of software and Information Technology
Experience of minor disasters and how to solve problems	Theories of best practise
Technical Skills	Commercial awareness
People Management ~ Attitudes and how to deal with complaints	Profit focus ~ finance

The experience of life ~ prepares students for 'the real world'	Working with deadlines
Learning how to do the job ~ operational roles	Written communication ~ Structuring and writing reports
Communication with customers ~ Face to Face and telephone	Practising of practical skills ~ learnt in a learning environment
Negotiating ~ Prices	

5.4 Summary of Analysis

In summary work experience through a placement year is viewed as more beneficial from a managers' perspective for a graduate's employability in conference and events. However part-time work is also useful for a graduate to create an immediate practical link with theory. Work experience within the hospitality sector is perceived as being more important and valuable than a degree due to the skills that are learnt through work experience being viewed as more important from a Conference and Banqueting manager's perspective. These results support several findings of previous research including: Harper, Brown and Irvine (2005); Martin and McCabe (2007); and Connolly and McGing (2007).

The skills of most importance in both Hind and Moss' (2005) basic skill set and The QAAs (2009) subject specific skill set are communication and teamwork. This has been supported by several pieces of literature, Archer and Davidson (2008) and Martin and McCabe (2007). The other skills by The QAA (2009) however, received a large range of opinion which suggests they are all important.

The results of this research suggest that the majority of important skills are learnt through work experience which therefore confirms work experience is very significant for a graduate's employability, however many others are learnt through a degree which proves qualifications are also important for a graduate's employability.

6.0 Conclusions

This final section aims to answer the research question 'How significant do hotel Conference and Banqueting managers' think work experience is for a conference and events graduate's employability?' Results will be reviewed and possible implications of results and recommendations will be made. This section also meets the final objective of this research, documented at the beginning of the study (see page 2). The negative aspects of the research will be discussed including why and what was done to prevent them, along with the positive aspects

6.1 Research Question Answered

The research question 'How significant do hotel Conference and Banqueting managers' think work experience is for a conference and events graduate's employability?' has been answered in the findings, in simple terms the answer is 'very significant'.

This conclusion has been determined by the data as it demonstrates that some of the most important skills required for a job in conference and events, are learnt through work experience. This study however is not suggesting that degrees' are surplus but that work experience further enhances a graduate's employability especially through a placement year during university. This is supported by the answer to question 2 (see page 12) where the majority of managers' agreed that they would rather employ a graduate with a hospitality degree and relevant work experience.

6.2 Positive Aspects

All four interviews were conducted successfully within the time frame allocated despite two interviews being last minute, leaving a substantial amount of time to analyse and evaluate the results. A positive aspect during the research was that all interviewees were very helpful and interested in both the research and researcher. The topic of the research seems to be an important area with the interviewees' all having strong opinions on the subject.

The secondary research mentioned in the literature review (see section 3) appears to support the primary results. This suggests that the correct questions were asked and that within the hospitality industry there is a consensus that work experience is an essential component for any student wanting a career in hospitality.

6.3 Reliability

These results are reliable because they were collected from Conference and Banqueting managers' in a systematic and ethical manner. The interviewee checked their answers and signed to confirm they corresponded to what they said and thought. These results however cannot be generalised because they are not representative to all Conference and Banqueting managers' due to the sample including only four managers from chain hotels.

6.4 Implications of the results

An implication of these results is that advice to students should definitely suggest participating in a placement year in order to enhance their employability, and that part-time work would increase it further if it was available.

These results prove that work placements from universities are definitely beneficial to students in order for them to gain the desired skills to work in conference and events departments in hotels. Students' should therefore participate in a placement year at university.

The implication on a personal basis is that the research has provided me with information on what skills I must have in order to obtain a job in conference and events. It has also proved that my placement year was an invaluable experience which has enhanced my employability greatly. This information would also be beneficial to all students looking to have a career in conference and events.

The results have an implication for conference and events departments in hotels as well because students will graduate with the skills conference and banqueting managers' view as being most important. The results suggest that all events specific skills are of great importance to conference and banqueting managers' therefore the skills graduates' obtain in relation to this particular area will be desirable to employers.

6.5 Recommendations

The previous section links into the recommendations being made from these results, further research would provide additional confirmation that these are suitable recommendations.

A recommendation towards Higher Education would be to explore the possibility of structuring hospitality courses to include compulsory year placements following the example of the US (see page 6). This would ensure that all students gain the desired skill sets from a managers' perspective therefore increasing their employability and possibility of a job after graduation.

Placements which take place should be of high quality, the companies who take part and employ the student must ensure they help and support the student in order for them to receive the best work experience possible, and gain beneficial skills. A recommendation is that universities need to develop partnerships with hospitality industry companies in order to support students.

6.6 Further Research

The results show that there is a difference between the skills learnt during work experience and those learnt through a degree and which are recognised as being most important. From a personal perspective this research has proved that the placement year I undertook will have enhanced my employability skills. I also have the knowledge of which skills managers' desire in a graduate, enabling me to incorporate them in my curriculum vitae to improve my chance of gaining a job. This supports the recommendation of further research into this area in order to improve students' possibility of gaining a high-quality job after graduation within conference and events.

Further research would provide additional results which should verify those found from this research. This would allow generalisation of the results, because it will include a larger sample of managers which is more representative of the target population.

6.7 Issues Encountered

On reflection of the skill sets used in this research, the selection of skills adapted from the specific benchmarks by the QAA (see app 8.3) were not appropriate.

During the time of this research there were two main issues. Two managers' cancelled their appointments for interviews due to becoming unemployed. This can be a problem when conducting research during a recession and also within a fast moving industry but was effectively resolved.

Another issue discovered was that one question was not clearly understood, this was the first question when asked about their work experience. Responses included their entire experience not just prior to their first managerial job. This has not affected the results however, but it proves that a pilot study should have been conducted which could have prevented the misunderstanding. All the other questions were successfully answered.

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