

Experiential learning in event management education: Do industry placements in degree courses complement jobs available in the events industry?

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**EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN EVENT MANAGEMENT EDUCATION:
DO INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS IN DEGREE COURSES COMPLEMENT JOBS
AVAILABLE IN THE EVENTS INDUSTRY?**

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ABSTRACT

Faced with the emergence of event management education in Australia, the increasing number of graduates applying for event industry jobs and their often high expectations of the industry (Grafton 2004), it is vitally important that students in these courses gain practical experience of the industry in the form of experiential learning. Drawing on the case of one university, Victoria University, which offers a range of event management degrees, this paper adopts an extended analysis to examine the trends in work integrated learning (WIL) opportunities over a two and a half year period. It identifies these opportunities by role, industry sector and length of employment (short or long term). The paper takes the further step of comparing this data to current job opportunities in the events industry in order to assess whether experiential learning opportunities made available to students are indicative of the type of industry work they may choose to undertake upon the completion of their degrees. Discrepancies between the two areas are discussed with implications for the design and content of event management degrees, specifically the experiential learning component.

Key words: Event management education, work-intergrated learning, events industry, experiential learning

INTRODUCTION

Events have enjoyed significant growth in Australia as well as globally. In Victoria and especially in Melbourne, major and special events have become a tourism drawcard. Approximately 324,000 international events visitors travelled to Victoria in the year ending December 2006, accounting for 12.4 million nights (Tourism Victoria, 2007). Thus, events visitors represent 22% of all international visitors to the State.

At the same time corporations and professional associations use business events increasingly as part of their marketing and business strategies, team building and membership drives. As events increase in frequency and number so do the requirements for well-qualified and trained personnel. An increase in and development of event management courses at tertiary level, both at universities and

TAFE colleges, provides a major part of that solution. Many of these courses provide an experiential learning component, whether that be a co-operative year or internship or the planning and running of real events.

This paper contains a brief literature review on event education and training and experiential learning as background to an analysis of the type of jobs available to students undertaking the WIL component of their degrees. A comparison is then drawn between graduate entry jobs and the WIL jobs to ascertain whether any major discrepancies exist between them. This analysis should enable educators to better understand the industry that is employing event management students and thus enable them to design courses which ensure these students are job ready for their chosen careers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Growth of the events industry, event education and training

As the events industry has grown both in size and profile over the last decade (McDonnell, Allen, O'Toole & Harris, 2005; Harris, 2004; Mules, 2004; Shone & Parry 2004), so too has event management education and training (Lee, Lee and Kim 2007; McDonnell et al., 2005; Jago & Harris, 1999). As the number of events has grown, whether major, sports, community or business, the demand for training courses and professional staff has also increased. This has resulted in an increasing number of new Event Management courses, both in combination with other related courses such as hospitality and tourism, as well as those dedicated solely to the study of event management.

Faced with an increasing number of graduates applying for jobs, there has been some critical comment expressed by the industry. In particular, criticism has been aimed at the high expectations of graduates and the lack of knowledge and skills in some areas such as exhibitions and risk management (Grafton, 2004). At the same time there have been some doubts expressed about the reality of the industry being able to employ the ever growing number of event management graduates (Sims, 2005).

Despite the growing importance and need for increased professionalism and the growth of event management courses, research on event management education is still relatively scarce (Junek Lockstone & Osti, 2007). In particular, this research has been lacking in the area of graduates entering the events workforce, especially when compared to the related disciplines of tourism and hospitality. However, it also needs to be said that the last few years have seen an increasing number of studies focussing on event management education, thus contributing to a growing body of literature in this area.

Previous studies have included research on the development of event management specialisation courses (DeFranco, Abbott & Ali, 2006; Hassanian & Dewhurst, 2005; Sims, 2005) and the skills set and knowledge compatible with working in the industry (Harris & Griffin, 1997; Harris & Jago 1999; Perry, Foley & Rumpf 1996; Royal & Jago 1998). Getz (2002), in his discourse on event studies as an academic discipline, presented a critical analysis of events study programs at university level, discussed the development of this field of study and synthesised the literature relating to it. Getz also acknowledged and raised concerns about being able to develop courses which include all of the various components of event management and event studies. What has emerged as vital to event management courses and is supported both by educators and the industry, is the importance of experiential learning. This may be in the form of a co-operative year in industry

(internship) or the planning and operating of real events in conjunction with industry as part of the course framework. Experiential learning is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Experiential and work integrated learning

It is important to acknowledge that there is extensive research on experiential learning as theory (see for example Feinstein, Mann & Corsun, 2002; Kolb, 1984) as well as in other areas of education and training (see Karns, 2005). Industry placements, also referred to as co-operative education, is only one area of experiential learning but as such, has become more important both from the graduates' viewpoint (Moscardo, 2006; Ruhanen, 2006) as well from the employers perspective (Leslie & Richardson, 2000) as tourism, hospitality and event jobs have increased in number, recognition and profile over the last two decades. For graduates undertaking an internship within the structure of their course this represents a highly valued and regarded addition to their academic knowledge and skills and enhances their employability in a very competitive jobs market. A valuable link between the employer and the educational institution is forged (Williamson, 2005) and this relationship offers advantages for all parties – students, industry and the educational institution (Moscardo & Norris, 2004; Leslie & Richardson, 2000).

WIL has been an established part of tourism degrees since the increased growth of these types of qualifications in the 1980's. The advantages for the students and employers as well as for the learning institution have been discussed by a number of authors (Busby 2005; Tribe, 2002; Leslie & Richardson, 2000; Leslie, 1991). Students gain practical experience and exposure to the 'real world' of their discipline which in turn complements their theoretical studies and makes them more employable as graduates. In addition, course programmes can be improved through the relationship between students, industry and the institution.

Similarly, literature points to the importance of student work experience in event management courses (Beaven & Wright, 2006; Ruhanen, 2006; Williamson, 2005; Moscardo & Norris, 2004;). A two year longitudinal study into student perceptions of practical work in an Events Management course revealed positive feedback regarding the benefits of this applied learning experience (Daruwalla & Fallon, 2005). Sport management and experiential learning have also been researched, highlighting experiential learning and its importance to students and their course of study (Burley 2005; Bennett, Henson & Drane 2003; Lamb 2006).

A number of authors have researched the practical skills required by event management graduates (Royal & Jago, 1999; Perry et al., 1996; Getz & Wicks, 1994; Stafford, 1994) and have found that these cover a broad range of business, management, and marketing skills as well as providing students with the opportunity to gain a good understanding of event specific knowledge.

WIL at Victoria University

To examine comparative trends and patterns in the types of event management employment available to students during and after their degrees, the paper draws on the example of one university that offers an extensive WIL program. Victoria University has been offering degree courses in tourism and hospitality education since 1992 and has been acknowledged to be a leading education provider in these fields. Since 2003, a straight Bachelor of Business in Event Management been offered, which now can also be combined with one of several disciplinary areas including tourism, hospitality, marketing, sports administration and music industry management. Students undertaking any one of these courses, must in addition to their university subjects also complete a compulsory component of WIL. This can take the form of co-operative education (co-

op), which is an industry placement in full-time paid employment for one year, or Business Integrated Learning (BIL), which comprises 350 hours spent working in industry on either a paid or voluntary basis. The co-op year is undertaken in the 3rd year of the students' course, thus allowing a reflective and focussed contribution to the students' last year of study. A WIL Unit, working on an university wide basis, coordinates all student placements. For the purposes of this paper, the terms co-op and BIL will be collectively referred to as WIL unless otherwise specified.

Jobs in the events industry

The investigation of jobs ultimately available to event management students is perhaps the area most lacking in research attention. Arcodia and Barker (2002; 2003a; 2003b) saw a need for an assessment of requisite skills and attributes required by event management graduates. Their study has established a starting point for web-based event management jobs and the skills and attributes associated with these. Arcodia and Barker's study, whilst not specifically focussed on this, provides a good overview of the type of jobs available to event management students over a specific time period in 2002. As they note, there is a need for ongoing research into the event management job market so that course development and training requirements can be further improved to meet the current and future needs of this market. Similarly, McCabe (2001) discusses the lack of research on career opportunities and career path development within the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) sector of the industry. Taking this dearth of literature into account, an aim of this paper is to further contribute to this area of research.

RESEARCH AIM

This paper adopts an extended analysis to examine the trends in work integrated learning (WIL) opportunities in the case of one university offering a range of event management degrees. It identifies these opportunities by role, organisation and length of employment (short or long term). The paper then offers comparative insights into current job opportunities in the events industry in order to assess whether the experiential learning opportunities made available to students are indicative of the type of industry work available that they may choose to undertake upon the completion of their degrees.

METHODOLOGY

This paper provides a secondary analysis of content from two sources:

- Firstly, an Excel spreadsheet, compiled by VU's WIL Unit, of Co-op/BIL jobs made available to students studying straight and combined event management degrees. The data covered the period January 2005 through to September 2007 and comprised 250 jobs in total. The data was organised under the headings organisation name, position type, event date (ongoing or episodic position), organisation type and paid or volunteer work. In the interests of anonymity, specific organisations have not been identified in the analysis.
- Secondly, a search of various Internet job sites was undertaken during the month of September 2007 (this timeframe is commonly set as the maximum that most websites will allow you to search) using the key word 'events'. The sites in question included Careerone (<http://www.careerone.com.au/>), Mycareer (<http://mycareer.com.au/>) and Seek (<http://seek.com.au>). In terms of identifying pure event industry jobs, various problems were highlighted in using the Internet search engines for this purpose. For example, not all jobs with events in the title were suitable as several were more heavily based around administrative and secretarial duties with only a small component of them devoted to

events. Some listings provided only minimal information as to the exact specifications of the event role, a number of jobs were listed simultaneously on two or three separate websites and several jobs with events in the title appeared dubious, e.g. offering promotional work with no experience required and lots of \$\$\$\$ signs accompanying them. Taking into account these factors, the end result of the searches yielded 60 graduate entry event jobs in the Melbourne region considered suitable for analysis.

For the sake of comparison, to ensure consistency the same category titles were used (where possible) to apply to the subsequent analysis of WIL and Internet jobs. The resultant categories are as follows:

- Position type
- Organisation type
- Work status
 - WIL jobs – ongoing or episodic
 - WIL jobs – voluntary or paid
 - Internet jobs – full time or part time
 - Internet jobs – permanent or contract
- Position type versus organisation type

Categorisation of material, particularly that from the Internet, was undertaken on a discretionary and judgemental basis. Whilst dealing with numerical data some level of interpretation was inevitable within this process. This potential limitation is compounded by the fact that in the case of the Internet data, potential employers using these sites can largely choose how they wish to label and define position titles and their organisation in order to attract employees meaning that there is bound to be some distinctions across generic labels such as Event Co-ordinator and Marketing. This is consistent with findings indicating a lack of standard terminology within the events area (Jago & Shaw, 1998; Arcodia & Robb, 2000).

Data from both information sources is compared in the following results section and similarities and discrepancies between the two areas (WIL and Internet jobs) are discussed with implications for the design and content of event management degrees, specifically focusing on the experiential learning component.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Job comparison based on position type

As Table 1 indicates, Events jobs are by far the majority of the jobs undertaken by WIL students enrolled in the event management course. However, the percentage of events jobs has declined since 2005. Overall they represent 70% of all WIL jobs. The other types of jobs that are growing at the expense of these jobs including roles in administration, events marketing and food and beverage. Administration jobs have risen from zero in 2005 to nine in 2006 and five in 2007. They represent 5% of the total jobs, the second highest job type after events. Also worth noting, ten students in the past three years have been placed in managerial positions in floor/stage management or as consultants/managers. Customer service type jobs are decreasing, from three in 2005 to two in 2006 and only one so far in 2007.

Table 1

Total WIL jobs per year by position type

	2005 number	2005 %	2006 number	2006 %	2007 number	2007 %	Total number	Total %
Events	63	85.1	64	60.4	48	68.6	175	70
Admin	0	0	9	8.5	5	7.1	14	5.6
Food & Beverage	1	1.4	7	6.6	3	4.3	11	4.4
Showbag / Ushers	3	4.1	4	3.8	2	2.9	9	3.6
Events / Marketing	0	0	6	5.7	3	4.3	9	3.6
Customer Service	3	4.1	2	1.9	1	1.4	6	2.4
Consultant / Manager	0	0	3	2.8	3	4.3	6	2.4
Marketing	0	0	3	2.8	2	2.9	5	2
Floor / Stage Manager	1	1.4	3	2.8	0	0	4	1.6
Research	3	2.2	1	0.9	0	0	4	1.6
Tourism	0	0	2	1.9	1	1.4	3	1.2
Various	0	0	2	1.9	1	1.4	3	1.2
Retail	0	0	0	0	1	1.4	1	0.4
Total	74	100%	106	100%	70	100%	250	100%

Event Assistant is by far the most common position title. It represents 53% of all WIL job titles (see Table 2). Many WIL jobs were offered without any specific job title, but it can reasonably be assumed that many of them will correspond to the Event Assistant job function.

**Table 2
Common WIL Position Titles**

Position title	Number of positions	%
Event Assistant	134	53.6
Event Co-Ordinator	10	4
Event / Marketing Assistant	8	3.2
Admin support / assistant	7	2.8
Satchel Fillers / Showbag stuffers	7	2.8
Food and Beverage Attendants	6	2.4
Customer Service assistant	3	1.2
Floor Manager	3	1.2
Marketing Assistant	3	1.2
Professional Development Assistant	3	1.2
Various / Unnamed	66	26.4
Total	250	100%

Clearly, as Table 3 depicts, Co-ordinator Events is the most prominent job title appearing in event industry jobs advertised on the Internet, with Events Administration following a close second. Almost half of all jobs seem to be at the level of Co-ordinator, whether in events, marketing or customer service (28 jobs).

Table 3
Total Internet jobs – September 2007

Position title	Number of positions	%
Co-ordinator - Events	18	30.0
Events Admin	12	20.0
Co-Ordinator - Marketing	8	13.3
Manager - Events	6	10.0
Events Officer	5	8.3
Event Supervisor	4	6.7
Various	2	3.3
Co-ordinator - Customer Service	2	3.3
Manager - Marketing	1	1.7
Exhibition Staff	1	1.7
Event Sales	1	1.7
Total	60	100%

Comparing the two top positions available to WIL students and the general public by way of the Internet, there appears to be a similar focus on events co-ordination and administration. In the case of WIL positions, Event Assistant and Event Co-ordinator account for 58% of available jobs, whilst in the case of Internet positions, Co-ordinator Events and Events Admin account for 50% of available jobs. This parity of positions reflects well upon the ability of the WIL program to adequately prepare students for the workforce upon completion of their degrees. Where the two data sources differ is that the WIL positions indicate greater diversity in the remaining positions identified (e.g. food and beverage attendants, satchel fillers) as opposed to the Internet data which is more events focused (e.g. events officer, event supervisor, event sales).

Job comparison based on organisation type

Table 4
Total WIL jobs per year by organisation type

Organisation type	2005 number	2005 %	2006 number	2006 %	2007 number	2007 %	Total number	Total %
Conference, Meeting, Incentive	15	20.3	32	30.2	11	15.7	58	23.2
Festivals & Special Events	28	37.8	12	11.3	10	14.3	50	20
Corporate	11	14.9	10	9.4	5	7.1	26	10.4
Government	4	5.4	18	17	4	5.7	26	10.4
Venue	6	8.1	13	12.5	6	8.6	25	10
Not-for-Profit	1	1.4	12	11.3	10	14.3	23	9.2
Association	3	4.1	9	8.5	6	8.6	18	7.2
Exhibitions	4	5.4	0	0	7	10	11	4.4
Meetings & Events	1	1.35	0	0	8	11.4	9	3.6
Event Marketing	0	0	0	0	1	1.4	1	0.4
Retail	0	0	0	0	1	1.4	1	0.4
Tour Operator	0	0	0	0	1	1.4	1	0.4
Convention Visitor Tourist Organisation	1	1.4	0	0	0	0	1	0.4
Total	74	100%	106	100%	70	100%	250	100%

Table 4 indicates that the largest employer of WIL students is the Conference, Meeting and Incentive Sector. It employs 23% of all WIL students (it should be noted that the Excel data upon which this finding is based provides no clear indication as to the difference between this sector and 'Meetings and Events' also mentioned). Festivals and special events employ 20% of students. In total these two sectors account for 43% of all WIL student jobs. However, the festivals and special events sector dropped noticeably from 2005 (28 students, 38% of all jobs) to 2006 (12 students and 11% of all jobs). There is no apparent reason for this drop, especially considering Melbourne was host to special events such as the 2006 Commonwealth Games during this period. The corporate, government, venue and not-for-profit sectors all employ around 10% of students each.

Table 5
Total Internet jobs per year by organisation type

Organisation type	Number of jobs	%
Venue	12	20
Association	11	18.3
Corporate	11	18.3
Events	9	15
Council	6	10
Not for profit	4	6.7
Not Stated	4	6.7
Catering	2	3.3
Marketing	1	1.7
Total	60	100

The majority of jobs available to the general public on the Internet are in venues, associations and corporate companies (in the finance, legal and IT industries). As Table 5 depicts, jobs within events companies are also well represented and councils are a good source of employment vacancies for events-type jobs.

Comparing job opportunities available to WIL students and the general public on the basis of generic organisation types such as venue, association, corporate, council/government and not-for-profit, it appears WIL positions are underrepresented in certain areas. For example, venue based positions comprised 20% of all events jobs advertised on the Internet in September 2007, compared to only 8.6% made available to WIL students in 2007 (to date) and 10% in total over the entire study period (January 2005-September 2007). Similar discrepancies arise in relation to associations (Internet – 18%, WIL – 7% in total) and the corporate sector (Internet – 18%, WIL – 10%). Parity is only achieved in relation to council and not-for-profit sector positions. There is a greater focus of WIL jobs on festivals and special events. This is perhaps a concern as this type of employment/voluntary work may only be exposing WIL students to the more temporal and infrequent nature of events employment.

Job comparison based on work status

Table 6
Total WIL jobs per year by work duration

	2005	2006	2007	Total
Ongoing (co-operative) position	26	49	18	93
Episodic position	48	57	52	157
Total	74	106	70	250

Table 6 indicates that the clear majority of event jobs available to WIL students are episodic, lasting for anything from one day to a range of dates in a six-month period. The ongoing positions were usually available for between 6 and 12 months. This can partially be explained by the nature of the WIL program (the choice of students to complete either one year of paid employment with a single employer or 350 hours of paid/voluntary work across a number of separate assignments) and employment in the events industry in general.

Table 7
Total WIL jobs per year by work status

Year	Voluntary	Paid	Total
2005	44	30	74
2006	54	52	106
2007	43	27	70
Total	141	109	250

Table 7 suggests there was a relatively even split between voluntary and paid positions, however, the majority (56%) were voluntary in nature.

Table 8
WIL voluntary v. paid jobs by position type

Position type	Voluntary	%	Paid	%	Total
Events	121	69.1	54	30.9	175
Admin	1	7.1	13	92.9	14
Food & Beverage	0	0	11	100	11
Showbag / Ushers	7	77.8	2	22.2	9
Events / Marketing	7	77.8	2	22.2	9
Customer Service	0	0	6	100	6
Consultant / Manager	1	16.7	5	83.3	6
Marketing	3	60	2	40	5
Floor / Stage Manager	0	0	4	100	4
Research	0	0	4	100	4
Tourism	0	0	3	100	3
Various	1	33.3	2	66.7	3
Retail	0	0	1	100	1
Total	141	100%	109	100%	250

Examining the work status of WIL jobs further, 69% of them were voluntary, with just over 30% being paid (see Table 8). In contrast, 93% of administration jobs were paid and only 7% were voluntary. All food and beverage jobs were paid, but the majority of show bag stuffers and those working in events marketing (78% each) were voluntary. All the floor/stage managers and all the consultant/managers (except one) were paid. This suggests that those jobs most highly related to the subject of the course (events) are most likely to be voluntary jobs, whilst those in other areas (e.g. admin, customer service, research and tourism) are almost certain to offer paid employment.

Table 9
WIL voluntary v. paid jobs by organisation type

Organisation Type	Voluntary	%	Paid	%	Total
Conference, Meeting, Incentive	23	39.7	35	60.3	58
Festivals & Special Events	41	82	9	18	50
Corporate	13	50	13	50	26
Government	16	61.5	10	38.5	26
Venue	4	16	21	84	25
Not-for-Profit	23	100	0	0	23
Association	10	55.6	8	44.4	18
Exhibitions	6	54.6	5	45.5	11
Meetings & Events	4	44.4	5	55.6	9
Event Marketing	0	0	1	100	1
Retail	0	0	1	100	1
Tour Operator	0	0	1	100	1
Convention Visitor Tourist Organisation	1	100	0	0	1
Total	141	56.40	109	43.60	250

Table 9 indicates that 82% of all jobs in the festivals and special events organisation type were voluntary. This harks back to the earlier comment about exposing WIL events to the temporal nature of the industry and further supports the finding that many WIL jobs relating to the events area are likely to be voluntary. However, those working in the Conference, Meeting and Incentive sector are more likely to get paid employment – 60% of those working in this sector were paid, whilst 40% were volunteers. The not-for-profit organisations (not surprisingly) did not offer any paid jobs – all were voluntary, whilst the event marketing, retail and tour operator sectors offered paying jobs throughout. The corporate sector was evenly balanced, paying 50% of students and providing voluntary opportunities for the remaining 50%.

Table 10
Internet full time v. part time jobs by position type

Position Type	Full time	Part time	Not Stated	Total
Co-Ordinator - Events	15	2	1	18
Events Admin	9	1	2	12
Co-Ordinator - Marketing	8	0	0	8
Manager - Events	4	2	0	6
Events Officer	2	3	0	5
Event Supervisor	3	0	1	4
Various	2	0	0	2
Co-ordinator - Customer Service	2	0	0	2
Manager - Marketing	1	0	0	1
Exhibition Staff	1	0	0	1
Event Sales	1	0	0	1
Total	48	8	4	60

As Table 10 suggests, the vast majority of event jobs currently advertised on the Internet offer full-time employment (80%). This is a good sign for graduates wanting a career in the events industry and is worth stressing, as the events / tourism industry arguably has a reputation for providing casual, short term and part time employment opportunities.

Table 11
Internet permanent v. contract jobs by position type

Position type	Permanent	Contract	Not Stated	Total
Co-Ordinator - Events	15	1	2	18
Events Admin	7	3	2	12
Co-Ordinator - Marketing	7	0	1	8
Manager - Events	3	3	0	6
Events Officer	2	3	0	5
Event Supervisor	2	1	1	4
Various	2	0	0	2
Co-ordinator - Customer Service	2	0	0	2
Manager - Marketing	0	0	1	1
Exhibition Staff	0	1	0	1
Event Sales	0	0	1	1
Total	40	12	8	60

In addition, Table 11 indicates that the majority of jobs advertised on the Internet are permanent (67%) in nature rather than contract based (20%). A further 13% of jobs don't state whether the work is permanent or contract. It may be that advertisements for permanent jobs will state this, while those for contract workers may be less likely to state this information in the advertisement, and therefore it is possible that all eight jobs where the duration of the appointment is not stated are contract based. If this were the case, then 20 jobs (a third) would be contract based. This has implications for students looking for permanent positions.

Table 12
Internet full time v. part time jobs by organisation type

Organisation type	Full Time	Part Time	Not Stated	Total
Venue	10	1	1	12
Association	10	0	1	11
Corporate	10	1	0	11
Events	8	1	0	9
Council	4	2	0	6
Not for profit	2	2	0	4
Not Stated	1	1	2	4
Catering	2	0	0	2
Marketing	1	0	0	1
Total	48	8	4	60

Table 12 suggests that jobs available within venues were predominantly full time, as were association and corporate jobs. These organisations therefore seem to offer the best opportunities for full time work. That said, however, as was earlier noted WIL students currently appear to be underexposed to positions in these sectors and therefore may not be as cognisant of the career opportunities that these sectors offer. In addition, events industry jobs were almost entirely advertised on a full time basis. However, for councils and the not-for-profit areas, the jobs were more likely to be available part-time.

Table 13
Internet permanent v. contract jobs by organisation type

Organisation type	Permanent	Contract	Not Stated	Total
Venue	9	2	1	12
Association	6	3	2	11
Corporate	8	1	2	11
Events	8	1	0	9
Council	3	3	0	6
Not for profit	2	2	0	4
Not Stated	1	0	3	4
Catering	2	0	0	2
Marketing	1	0	0	1
Total	40	12	8	60

Confirming the results of Table 13, organisations advertising positions in the venues, corporate and the events sectors are most likely to have permanent jobs available. Associations had a sizeable percentage of jobs available on a contract basis, and for councils and the not-for-profit industry, half the jobs were permanent and half were contract. This suggests that venues, the events industry and corporate companies offered the best chance of full time permanent jobs, whilst not-for profit companies and councils are currently offering more part-time, contract-based work.

Comparing job opportunities available to WIL students and the general public on the basis of work status, whether due to the nature of the WIL program (as outlined earlier) or general employment conditions in the events industry, WIL students are generally exposed to more episodic work assignments (59% of the 250 jobs were classified as episodic) as opposed to Internet advertisements which were overwhelmingly advertised on a full-time, permanent basis (80% and 67% of the 60 jobs advertised respectively). Of the Internet jobs, it was noted that the venue, association and corporate sector appear to provide the best opportunities for full-time, permanent work. It was also noted that the WIL students currently appear to be underexposed to positions in these sectors, perhaps at the expense of roles in festivals and special events (20% of all jobs) which are largely voluntary in nature (82%).

Regarding the WIL organisations and position types, Table 14 underlines the relationships between the Conference, Meeting and Incentive Sector and the Festivals and Special Events Sector, and jobs related to events. Of the 108 jobs available in these two sectors, 92 were events jobs. The corporate, government, not-for-profit and association sectors were also sources of event jobs, with 15, 18, 16 and 14 jobs respectively. However, for those students interested in other job types, such as floor/stage manager, admin, food and beverage or research, the organisation types to look for were venues and the corporate sector. Table 15, similarly depicts the reliance of the venue sector on events personnel.

Based on the preceding results and discussion a number of implications for the design and content of event management degrees, specifically the experiential learning component, will now be examined.

Job comparison based on position type and organisation type

Table 14 - WIL jobs by position and organisation type

Organisation type	Admin	Consultant / Manager	Customer Service	Events	Events Marketing	Floor / Stage Manager	Marketing	Research	Retail	Showbag / Usher	Tourism	Various	F & B	Total
Conference, Meeting, Incentive	3	3	2	46	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	58
Festivals & Special Events	1	0	0	46	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	50
Corporate	3	0	0	15	1	0	1	2	0	3	0	0	1	26
Government	1	0	0	18	2	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	26
Venue	1	0	2	6	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	25
Not-for-Profit	0	1	0	16	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
Association	3	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	18
Exhibitions	0	1	2	7	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	11
Meetings & Events	2	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	9
Event Marketing	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Retail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Tour Operator	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Convention Visitor Tourist Organisation		0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	14	6	6	175	9	4	5	4	1	9	3	3	11	250

Table 15 - Internet jobs by position and organisation type

Organisation type	Co-ordinator - Events	Events Admin	Co-ordinator - Marketing	Manager - Events	Events Officer	Event Supervisor	Various	Co-ordinator - Customer Service	Manager - Marketing	Exhibition Staff	Event Sales	Total
Venue	5	0	0	2	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	12
Association	4	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	11
Corporate	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	11
Events	2	3	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	9
Council	0	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	6
Not for Profit	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Catering	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Marketing	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Not Stated	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Total	18	12	8	6	5	4	2	2	1	1	1	60

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

In reviewing the findings of the current research, it appears that experiential learning opportunities, in the form of the WIL program at one university, are adequately preparing current event management students for employment in their future industry of choice. In the instance of Victoria University, comparing common positions made available to their WIL students against those offered to the general public by way of the Internet, there appears to be a similar focus across both on events co-ordination and administration. This parity reflects well upon the ability of the WIL program to ensure job ready outcomes for their graduates.

Further analysis, however, did highlight some discrepancies which may be of concern for the future focus of the WIL program. Namely, investigation of job advertisements on the Internet indicated that opportunities for full-time and permanent work in the events industry were more likely to appear in the venue, association and corporate sectors. Whilst this is not problematic in itself, in fact the opposite is true, what is worrying is that it appears that WIL positions are currently underrepresented in these areas and therefore students may not be as cognisant of the career opportunities that these sectors offer. A study into the co-operative education experiences of tourism and hospitality students noted similar findings. Leslie and Richardson (2000) found that co-op often failed to provide students with the range of experiences that they were anticipating or hoping for. This suggests that there are opportunities to refine and improve the experiential learning component of event management degrees. However, it has been demonstrated that industry placements give students the opportunity to understand the industry more realistically and to reassess their career aspirations (Solnet, Robinson & Barron, 2006; Junek, Lockstone & Osti, 2007) and for these reasons are a valuable part of any degree course.

For WIL students, underexposure to positions in the sectors mentioned above appears to come at the expense of a greater focus on work relating to festivals and special events. This is perhaps a concern as this sector is more likely to be exposing WIL students to the temporal and infrequent nature of events employment. Furthermore, analysis showed that the vast majority of positions relating to festivals and events were voluntary in nature. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the current paper to assess to what extent this is characteristic of employment in this sector in general (as opposed to the specific characteristics of the WIL program which enables students to undertake work on either a paid or voluntary basis). Irrespective of this limitation, WIL positions in the festivals and special events sector have decreased significantly since 2005, possibly suggesting that the job opportunities made available to WIL students in the future will be more closely aligned to employment patterns in the wider events industry (e.g. shifts towards the venue, corporate and association sectors).

As a final insight into the nature of WIL job opportunities, it is of interest to note that analysis suggests that those jobs most closely related to the specialisation of the course, in this case event management, were most likely to be voluntary, whilst those in less associated areas (e.g. administration, customer service, research and tourism) were almost certain to offer paid employment. Solnet, Robinson and Barron (2006) similarly found that recruitment was often from outside the event sector in industries such as marketing and public relations. Whilst not suggesting that voluntary roles offer any less of an invaluable experience for students undertaking industry placements, what the findings highlight are the potential difficulties for those charged, whether they be the students themselves, academics or a separate administering department, with the task of finding commensurate paid placements in the events industry.

The comparative analysis applied in the current paper provides a worthwhile contribution to the dearth of research on employment outcomes in the events industry, specifically those focusing on the preparation of graduates, through experiential learning, for their entry into the events workforce. Given the scope of the current research, potential exists to expand it across a number of universities and investigate communalities in the WIL programs offered. This research agenda would also benefit from a more longitudinal perspective of job opportunities open to the general public, in order to track trends, and in the case of the current study, provide a more balanced comparison of work opportunities available to our current students and as graduates, future industry leaders.

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