



A BRAVE NEW WORLD

*The Impact of Covid-19 on the Events Sector and
Higher Education*

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In March 2020, after several precarious months of monitoring the global advancement of a new respiratory virus, COVID-19, the United Kingdom went into lockdown and life as we knew it stopped overnight. Hundreds of thousands of employees were furloughed from their roles, suddenly finding themselves out of work and with little to do. Those who managed to hold on to their jobs suddenly had to adjust to working from home full time and learn a whole host of new skills in the process. Parents of school-aged children were faced with school closures and the new, uncharted waters of home schooling. The elderly and those with health conditions were required to shield and cease any and all contact with people outside of their household. Supermarket shelves were bare in a matter of days, in what resembled scenes from a Hollywood depiction of the end of days.

As one of the industries hardest hit by the pandemic, the UK events sector has seen a reported loss of 126,000 jobs, with over a third of businesses in the sector reporting losses of £1m to £5m¹. Events businesses are anticipating that a further 38% of employees who are currently on furlough will also be made redundant at the end of the scheme. Almost half of the organisations in the sector have had to reduce their terms with suppliers and almost 10% are having to source new suppliers because their regular pre-Covid-19 suppliers are no longer in operation. Looking further forwards, there has been a decrease in Q4 enquiries of 75%.

However, the sector has also seen some prolific examples of resilience and business agility with companies pivoting almost completely from their original product offering to launching brand new products and accessing brand new markets in a matter of weeks – a timeline often unheard of in live event production.

¹ August 2020 [MIA Venue Report](#)

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, a similar situation unfolded. University campuses closed their doors and opened their online spaces, moving all teaching and learning delivery online almost overnight. Some universities struggled, whilst others trailblazed ahead, showing that effective student engagement online is possible to achieve. As an industry heavyweight in delivering active blended learning, the University of Northampton has championed increased student engagement in the online learning space for some time now, alongside its classroom-based teaching. However, the pandemic had major challenges in store for us too, especially in terms of delivering the practical aspects of our events degree programme.

Now, in October 2020, almost nine months since the start of lockdown, we present this white paper which highlights the changing nature of both the events sector and the implications of this for our events degree programme. The paper has been developed in consultation with industry representatives and it is our hope that it will provide an interesting snapshot of the key considerations events professionals and businesses need to keep on top of to ensure their own resilience in the face of an increasingly uncertain future.

Our thanks go to Stephen Morton-Prior from Clearwater Events, Jo Ferreday from Sheer Edge and to the members of the UON Events Industry Forum for their input, feedback and support.

SAFE EVENT DELIVERY

Part 1

There are now many more requirements placed on events post-Covid-19 and it is important to note that safety at events is as much the responsibility of the attendee as it is of the event manager. The specifics will be different between events so it is important to ensure that attendees understand the details and that they need to prepare for attending the event in a different way to pre-Covid-19. The guidance is continually updated online – check here for the latest information developed by the Association of Event Organisers and approved by the UK Government.

In advance, we need attendees to understand the agenda or schedule, the capacity, safety considerations, food and beverage and hygiene considerations. We need to ensure that we choose a suitable venue that has enough exclusive space and access routes, is (or can be) deep cleaned, has a dedicated team of cleaning staff, and that we build in contract clauses to protect ourselves financially.

Events will look and feel a bit different now. At the time of writing, the key requirements for Covid-safe events are:

- Health questionnaires or Covid-19 testing in advance

- Provisions for track & trace

- Extended registration times and staggered arrivals

- Check-in may include temperature checks

- Full PPE for staff and plexi screens at interaction points

- Sealed stationery and delegate bags

- Hand sanitiser stations

- Compulsory face masks for all attendees

- Lunch served in sealed boxes

It is very important that attendees know that they shouldn't attend if they have any symptoms and that the staff can require them to leave the event if their temperature is over 38°C. All attendees, staff and suppliers will need to consent to their data being used for Track & Trace and social distancing is currently at 1m+. There's a lot of guidance and help out there including support from agencies and service providers.

Event spaces will need to be deep cleaned before and after; toilets especially will need to be cleaned before, during and after. The distancing and flow of people will have to be more strictly controlled, potentially with one-way systems, signage, barriers and there may be a mandatory seating plan. All physical resources e.g. furniture, AV, clipboards, badges, lecterns etc., will need to be for exclusive use and sanitized before and after use. Food service will usually be at table, rather than buffet.

Some of these requirements may ease over time but the UK government and Visit Britain '[We're Good To Go](#)' accreditation for the hospitality, tourism and events sectors is a useful starting point to ensure compliance. Event managers everywhere are monitoring the updates to government guidance daily in order to inform planning and to ensure that their events are maximising any opportunities e.g. increased capacities. Furthermore, there is also some encouraging evidence of how our industry is proactively dealing with this very challenging situation trying to develop an understanding of and model the ways in which the virus may spread at live events (see information on the [Restart-19 project](#) by the University Medical Center Halle (Saale) in Germany) in the hopes that the results of this research may inform a faster and safer return to 'business as usual'.



An example of a Covid-secure event venue layout. Image courtesy of [Clearwater Events](#)

The safety requirements in relation to Covid-19 are another layer on top of the already extensive health & safety considerations for events and, although restrictive in some ways, they have also led to innovative new ways of delivering events safely such as spaced outdoor 'pods' for music and comedy gigs and drive-in theatre performances. The challenge here is not just how to ensure compliance with the restrictions but how to make these adapted events financially viable. It is estimated by Stand Out Magazine that the additional cost for Covid-compliance is 10% of the event budget on top of pre-covid costs. Given the economic impacts of the pandemic, increasing prices will be challenging so there is a need for financial support for the sector to enable recovery and regain the £70bn annual economic impact of events in the UK. Similarly, these requirements have some significant consequences in terms of sustainability across the triple bottom line. The environmental impact of disposable PPE, disposable cups, and increased use of plastic is important in evaluating the viability of running an event in a Covid-safe way.

These safety requirements are applicable across a broad range of sectors as they affect and govern all aspects of our lives now. This guidance applies to events, hospitality, tourist attractions, suppliers, venues, work spaces, sports clubs, shops, town centres, and many more different spaces and places. The consistency of the requirement is helpful in that it pre-sets attendee expectations of the event and the experience. It is therefore important that we, as a whole sector, support and comply with the guidance to give confidence to attendees, suppliers, funders, clients, and all stakeholders. Consistent application of these rules will reduce the perceptions of risk about attending events, enabling the scale and scope of events to increase. It will also help attendees to self-regulate their behaviour if the expectation is one of compliance and this is presented as non-negotiable by event organisers across various sectors.

The seismic changes in the events sector due to the Covid-19 pandemic have to be central to our teaching moving forwards. Students will, of course, need to ensure that their event projects are Covid-secure and we will support them in considering this throughout their idea generation, planning and delivery. Within their studies of risk management, students will research and evaluate the impacts of the pandemic on the sector, the practical considerations that need to be made and potential mitigation of force majeure for future events.

Our graduates need to have highly developed planning and risk management skills to equip them for working in this new context. In building a robust set of skills and capabilities, students will develop high levels of resilience, enabling them to stand out from the crowd in recruitment, and add value to their projects and prospective future employers.



Students are encouraged throughout the course to understand their customers in terms of marketing, ticket purchasing, pricing, branding, communications, event design and evaluation. We are expanding this to consider influencing behaviour, the context of the locality, expectation management and impact evaluation. By building customer personas, students develop an intuitive and holistic view of event customers and thereby their understanding of how to create events that will achieve the project objectives, engage the attendees and ensure safety for all involved.

At every level of our course, students engage with industry professionals so they can keep their fingers on the pulse of the constantly changing requirements and guidance around Covid-19. This engagement also encourages students to consider a wide range of careers within the sector and beyond, and the skills they need to hone in order to achieve their ambitions.

CURATING VIRTUAL EVENTS

Part 2

We have to recognise that we are now working in new territory. The same rules don't apply as for our established practice of live event management. The virtual event is a completely different beast.

In the pre-Covid world of live events, when we designed the experience of a live event, we had control over the event environment, the overall look and feel and the sensory experience we wanted to create for our attendees. Transitioning over to virtual events, we need to recognise that we no longer have this level of control. We also don't have any influence over the things that may potentially detract from the event experience, such as distractions in the attendee's individual environment, connectivity issues, unsuitable level of temperature, or issues with levels of volume, comfort or food & drink.

What we can control and design is the **content of the event** and in doing this, we need to carefully consider our attendee experience from the moment they see the event listing, invite or promo piece, all the way through to their final feedback and evaluation of their experience. Of course, these considerations are exactly the same as for a 'traditional' live event so the same thinking applies – consistent use of brand(s), colours, language – across the various routes to market and the event experience itself. However, the virtual dimension of post-Covid live events also means that the design of the customer journey through this process needs to consider the tools we use to mediate the relationship between the event attendee and the event content in the virtual space.

The content is focused on the **impacts, outcomes and objectives** for the event and this is perhaps even more necessary for online events than live.

We need to create **clear and comprehensive narratives** for our events, that capture the attendee's attention and bring them 'with us', enabling sufficient 'buy in' for them to ignore the distractions and actively focus on the event activity.

There needs to be **a dynamic to the event** which plans for changes of pace and interactivity that will retain the attendee's interest. There has been a significant rise in the promotion and usage of interactive tools and social activities during lockdown, such as Zoom, Houseparty and Miro, and we can use these - and create our own - in the pursuit of attendee engagement.

Online engagement can take a variety of forms from social media posting and commenting to using structured learning tools such as MURAL or Padlet; from comprehensive feedback forms to simpler emoji-based response tools; from focused, formal discussion sessions to informal ordering drinks at the virtual pub, cocktail-making sessions or pub quizzes. The key here is to understand what the intended engagement is and which tools you want to use to achieve it, then make sure that you have experienced facilitators who can actively and seamlessly support attendees in using those tools to ensure their full participation in the planned event experience.

Hybrid events have been around for a while. Although not very prominent in the pre-Covid world, they will definitely be a key part of the future events environment. We should expect clients to want *online and live* seamlessly woven together as part of the overall event experience and to do this, we need to become proficient in crafting narratives and ensuring that the technology works well – every single time. Stage managers are the experts here and we can all learn more from them about creating the seamless integration we seek to support the increasing demand for hybrid events.

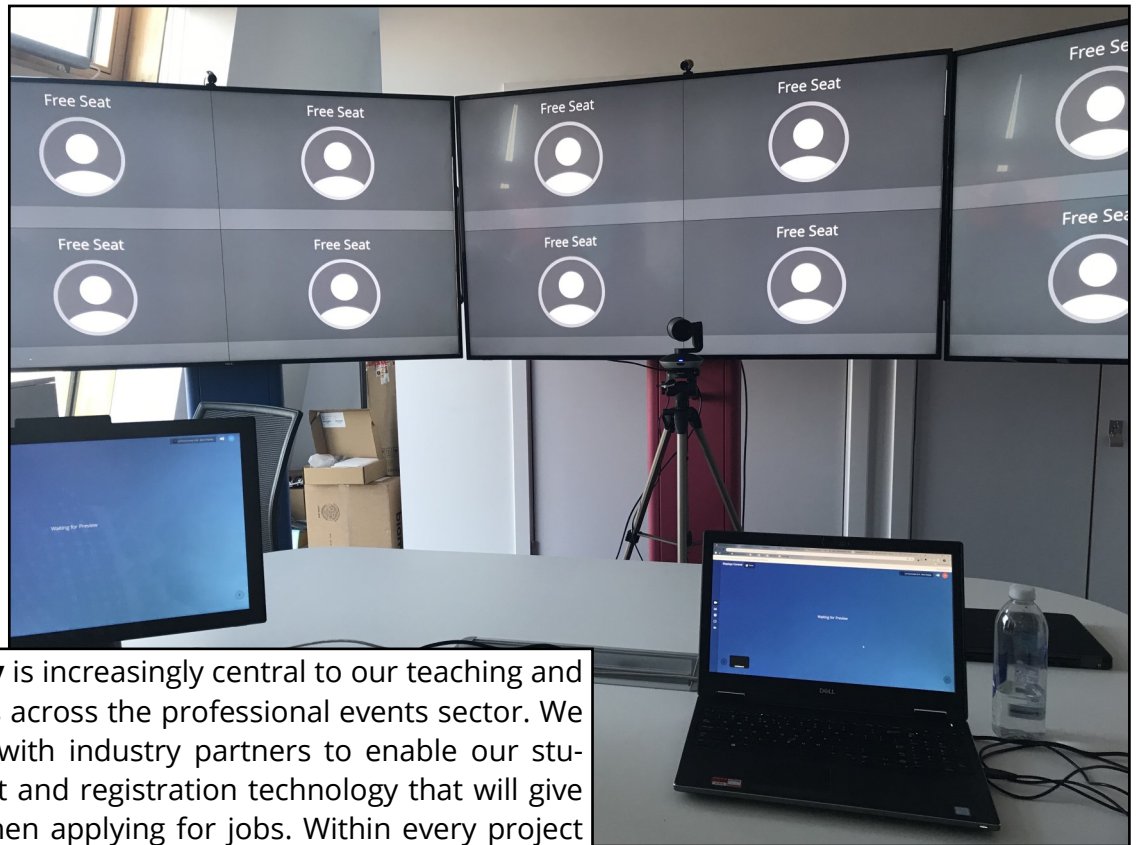
Virtual events have an entirely different set of **risks and challenges** for the event manager to consider. With virtual events we don't need to worry quite so much about the health & safety risks but we do need to make sure that the online spaces we are creating for our attendees are safe and secure. The technology and connectivity are a constant challenge for our industry yet they are vital to delivering the intended event experience and the subsequent positive impacts. We need to be confident, compliant and clear in our own management of data and our online presence, as well as that of our attendees. We also need to understand how the event experience translates through the screen whether it is on a laptop, tablet or phone, in order to pre-empt any functionality issues which would negatively impact on the attendee experience.

As with all events, the experience needs to **present value for time and money**. Lock-down has made us all reconsider how we use our time, including event attendance, so we need to present a compelling case through our marketing for why people should attend and engage with our events. Pricing decisions are incredibly difficult at the moment as there is little precedent set for valuing the online event experience. Ultimately, these decisions have to be governed by the costs of the event combined with the market response to pricing and event managers need to be prepared to flex according to their audiences' perceptions of price, quality, and value for time.

We are now working in a different medium and **event production is evolving for online**. It is important to note that not all events easily translate into an online equivalent, so this is a new discipline that we are developing. We can learn a lot from the broadcast industry here in terms of production and event design. The skill (and dark art) of production is fundamentally the same – we draw together the various elements, mix them together to craft the experience and then deliver it through live, hybrid or online media – but now we need to really think much more about the conceptual development of content and narrative, and much less about the implications of physical stage build or supplier schedules.

This shift in event production is tangible for our students as they **produce and deliver events** in each year of the course. Until now these events have been delivered 'live' but in the future they are more and more likely to be delivered online-only or as a hybrid. This means that our event production taught sessions and workshops need to focus the students' minds on offering more than YouTube; that students are enabled to explore and create their original narratives and that they seek out other disciplines, such as Theatre, Writing, Broadcast and Journalism, to keep abreast of best practice and be able to feed this into their event planning and delivery. Our module content discussing strategy, impacts, innovation and creativity throughout the course will correlate to these emerging practices so that students develop the skills to create events of all kinds focused on achieving objectives and creating value for all stakeholders.

Content ideation and the development of emotional connections with our audiences through virtual media is a growing area of practice within the events sector that we are exploring with our students through trying out ideas and approaches, through collaboration and through sharing of practice with industry professionals. We are drawing on partners and colleagues with experience and skill in this area to support us all in developing and sharing our technological skills in creating engaging, impactful virtual event content.



Event technology is increasingly central to our teaching and learning as well as across the professional events sector. We are collaborating with industry partners to enable our students to use event and registration technology that will give them the edge when applying for jobs. Within every project assessment, students utilise online project management tools both internally and with their clients. For a range of assessments, students will learn how to create video and audio content, often working in groups to explore specific issues or plan event activity.

We encourage our students to attend events of all kinds as much as possible throughout the course. Students also undertake work placements and undertake volunteering with a range of organisations which moving forwards will include increasing online activity. As part of this, we support students in developing their **critical reflection** skills so they are able to learn from their experiences and apply their learning to their own professional practice. This is particularly important for the emerging practices around virtual events and will be vital fuel for their own skill development and capabilities.

It is important to note that whilst we may not be able to control the climate for the individual attendee, the shift to virtual events is of significant benefit in reducing the carbon emissions and environmental impact of the events sector as a whole. This is another reason why virtual events will continue to grow and be part of our sector's **sustainability** as we recover from this global pandemic.

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Part 3

At the end of March 2020, work moved into our homes, online, as the UK went into lockdown to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Some event managers, suppliers, venues and agencies suddenly found themselves working from home and having to work differently to usual operations. For others, work completely dried up as thousands of events were cancelled until further notice. Aside from this obvious lack of work and trying to find a path through the uncertainty, we also had to figure out **how to work remotely - effectively**. This presented us with all kinds of challenges including isolation, lack of effective team engagement, distractions, not being set up for working from home, productivity or lack thereof, as well as mental health, connectivity and technological issues.

The gauntlet was laid down and we all had to become more **technologically competent** instantly. Video conference calling increased exponentially with tools such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, Skype, Microsoft Teams and Cisco Webex all being used on a daily basis. Cloud file storage, access and management, such as Google Drive, Sharepoint, Dropbox and OneDrive, became invaluable as they provided accessibility to documents required for organisational survival. New lines of reporting were drawn as the demands on businesses evolved and new responsibilities, new teams, new projects began as we vied to navigate the situation. Project management technology and platforms, such as Teams, Podio, Trello, Asana and a plethora of other options, came into their own as teams spread across the nation figured out how to best work with each other online.

The gradient of the learning curve varied but nonetheless **everyone had to up-skill**. This now presents organisations with great value as our sector moves through lockdown and our people have more capability for working remotely to the point that – for some organisations – working from home is now the established norm which they will be taking into the future. One of the crucial skills, irrespective of the technology being used, is communication and how we can **build rapport and engagement** with our various audiences through the screen. This applies both to how we work as project teams and organisations, and how we develop and deliver the event narrative for online and hybrid events. We have had to learn how to present, discuss and resolve issues entirely virtually and for some, this has been a significant challenge that has exacerbated the feelings of isolation. With much practice, however, this virtual team working is slowly becoming second nature and our digital competencies have expanded.

Fundamentally, we have had to let our colleagues, clients, suppliers and collaborators into our homes and the delights and distractions within. Housemates, spouses, partners, children, animals, laundry, mess and tidiness have all been part of getting to know another side to the people we work with (even with template backgrounds). Whilst this can be stressful, it has enabled greater connection between team members, increased awareness of each other's lives, and **increased productivity**, particularly within meetings. In turn, this leads to **greater collaboration** and building of the team.

² See [Herzberg's Motivation and Hygiene Factors](#)

For some, working from home has enabled us to manage our own workloads and time more effectively, leading to increased satisfaction and personal fulfilment. For others, it has presented significant challenges both personally and professionally.

With these new ways of working comes opportunity and these expanded capacities are part of increasing our value to our employers, clients and projects. Working from home enables us to look after the wider elements of our lives as well as deliver on project objectives and fulfil our job roles which makes us more motivated. The challenge here is **how we manage ourselves** in this new context; how we address isolation and cabin fever; how we address our insecurities; how we keep developing our skills and capabilities; how we deal with uncertainty and risk and how we step outside of our own situation to consider those of other members of our team, in order to support both team cohesiveness and team effectiveness. This will undoubtedly bring with it additional challenges of transition to outcomes-based valuing of the various contributions of our team members, rather than pre-Covid presence-based work systems.

For our students, who will be graduating into this new context, there is a lot to consider about how they work and add value to their projects, businesses, employers and colleagues. We believe that the key to success in this are effective **communication skills** and every module our students take within their programme of study includes varying demands for communication such as group assignments, presentations, debates, reports, research, group event projects, industry liaison and volunteering placements.

The University of Northampton's **Changemaker** programme supports this through focusing on social innovation, communication and employability skills to enable our students to graduate with the personal social capital they need to navigate their path in this environment.

Our award winning **Active Blended Learning** approach which utilises a combination of face to face, online and blended activities within our teaching and learning. We use a wide range of online tools including Microsoft Teams, Blackboard Collaborate, MURAL, Padlet and NILE (Northampton Integrated Learning Environment) to facilitate workshops, taught sessions, synchronous and asynchronous activity, research, and group event projects and gain feedback from students, staff and industry.

As we move into the new academic year, we will be continuing this approach, albeit with more activity online and, in doing this, we are supporting our students to **develop their digital capabilities** further. We are also embedding more individual support for students, with our colleagues in Learner Support and Student Information Services, to enable them to learn how to manage themselves, which tools work for them, how they learn and work as a team, what their individual ambitions and challenges are, and how we as an academic team, and as the University as a whole, can enable them to thrive. This means teaching our students about online etiquette, safety, and being digitally resident, engaged in both 'the online' and 'the live'.

Across all of our modules, students are expected to utilise a **variety of technology tools** within their learning, assessments and group projects. Our day to day teaching & learning activity is supported via NILE (our Virtual Learning Environment) and we encourage students to use various tools in their work in the module sessions, to create their assignments, and to manage their live, virtual or hybrid event projects.



SCALING UP

Part 4

As lockdown restrictions are eased, the number of attendees to live events will increase and what has been viable for smaller groups will need to be flexed to accommodate more people whilst still retaining the necessary safety provision. Event managers need the ability to scale up their financial models and operational plans in order to achieve the project objectives.

Pre-Covid, **event budgets** have been predominantly fixed cost, e.g. venue hire, AV & production, content (performers/speakers), with some variable costs, e.g. day delegate rates, delegate packs. The client(s), partner organisations, suppliers and event management teams now need to be able to develop project budgets that reduce the fixed costs as much as possible so that cost is scaled more against numbers attending (variable costs). In order to do this, we need to change how we contract and manage our resources.

In **managing our resources**, we need to have the ability to scale (at short notice) our staffing, food & beverage, site, infrastructure, experiences and content to achieve the project objectives. To provide the capacity to scale up and down, the event plan needs to be simple and clearly articulated. Simplicity and focus on the project objectives enables decisions to be made quickly and resources moved around the project in response to need.

The events **supply chain** has been decimated by the Covid-19 pandemic and suppliers need to maintain their pricing in order to retain and rebuild their businesses.

Suppliers are essential in delivering events effectively and event managers need confidence in the provision of the necessary resources to create the experiences and achieve the objectives.

It is this dependency that affects the contracting relationship between event and supplier and where event managers who have robust and trusting relationships with suppliers will be able to negotiate more flexible contracts that support the need for more flexible budgeting. Where those relationships do not currently exist, event managers need to create **scaled contracts** that reflect the key points of growth as lockdown restrictions ease. Given these interdependencies, such contracts need to retain value for both parties and we need to avoid the rise of asking favours of suppliers, as this approach is unsustainable in the long run.

It is also important to note that most of the **income** generated in event projects is variable and can be at risk if attendees decide not to attend. Event managers, therefore, need to do all they can to ensure that this income is as 'fixed' as possible through non-refundable tickets, assurances of customer safety, maximising attendee engagement in advance, and articulating the value of the event. These are all aspects that were important pre-Covid, but are now absolutely vital to success and the future recovery of the industry.

The customer mindset has changed and every potential attendee has a unique, contextual relationship to the risk around the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically the health risks associated with attending a live event. The decision to attend is no longer made just considering value for money and value for time, but it now also includes **value for exposure**. Ultimately, our customers will be asking themselves 'Is this event worth it?'.

In order to make our income as fixed as possible, we need to ensure that the answer to our customers' fundamental question is as affirmative as possible; that the pricing and content reflects value for money, that the experience and outcomes represent value for time, and that the event safety operations ensure that exposure is minimised.

The challenges of scaling up are complex and significant and at the University of Northampton, we are focusing on developing our **students' professional practice** as event managers and building their experience in this rapidly changing industry. We are doing this by weaving practical event delivery projects through each year of the course that progressively scale up in both scope and risk. We are supporting our students to undertake work placements and take up volunteering opportunities alongside our curriculum, which provide them with professional experiences they can use within their academic work and their future employment.

Our **entrepreneurial** modules and the social innovation programme offered by the Changemaker Hub (the University's employability unit) enable our students to understand the role of business in our society as well as its commercial value. Throughout the courses, students learn about budgets and financial risk and how to flex to accommodate changing circumstances. By taking a holistic view of our sector, we encourage our students to see the bigger picture, their part in it and identify how they can use the skills and experiences gained at Northampton to build their future careers.

Risk management is at the centre of responding to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and as students progress through the course, they progressively develop their consideration of personal, operational and strategic risk and how to mitigate and manage it. We explore a range of potential responses using case studies and industry input, as well as developing core skills such as negotiation, communication, rapport building and decision making that play a key role in enabling event managers to navigate this brave new world that we are in.

BUILDING BUSINESS RESILIENCE

Part 5

The common business model for event agencies and suppliers pre-Covid was built on a hand-to-mouth basis with significant cashflow but limited capacity to build reserves and this meant that businesses had little or no resilience when Covid-19 broke out and events were stopped. In some cases, businesses were able to mothball their staff and resources (using the UK Government's [furlough scheme](#)) with their portfolios moving almost entirely to 2021. Some businesses pivoted their primary activity to provide different or evolved services, particularly in the virtual events environment, whilst others had to completely close.

Many events businesses have scaled back significantly or closed completely due to lockdown and the immediate loss of all revenue. Those who are still surviving, and in some cases, thriving, have reported 4 specific areas that have enabled them to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic.

Those organisations with **Agile business models**³, who were able to adapt quickly, have demonstrated the value of building in flexibility throughout the business. The Agile approach of *adapting to change over following a plan* inherently requires a business to build resilience into every aspect of operation. Similarly, *prioritising people over process* meant that the shift to home-working was easier and more acceptable to staff, suppliers and clients. The idea of *a working product over comprehensive documentation* meant that these agencies focused on creating minimum viable products, engaging with the virtual event concept and alternative ways to achieve the same objectives for their clients.

Customer collaboration over contract negotiation shifted the balance from servicing client requirements to working as a team with clients and suppliers, focusing on solving client problems rather than negotiating over finer details when there was no time to lose.

From a financial perspective, businesses have completely revised their pricing and cost base so that there is an element of every project that is contributing to their reserves and building financial resilience. **The old hand to mouth model is no longer viable.**

The second point these succeeding businesses noted was that they are ever increasing their ability to **manage client expectations**. The Covid-19 pandemic put the event agencies in a position where they needed to find solutions for clients but there was no way of offering exactly the same experience as they had previously. This re-set the client-agency relationship and enabled agencies to review, revise and establish new expectations with their clients.

For many, the pandemic required them to be creative in their strategy and accept that their businesses needed to **diversify their income streams** in order to survive. From the University of Northampton's **Events Industry Forum**, it was clear that companies had done this through learning new skills to broaden their offer to clients and generate new business that was not dependent on live events alone. More specifically, companies have developed capabilities in digital marketing, broadcast-level production, design, training, app development and curation of virtual events.

³ As articulated in the [Agile Manifesto](#)

As well as generating income, companies have also focused on ensuring **efficient use of resources** and in some cases, this has led to becoming an entirely virtual organisation with no office base. Others have invested in equipment to be able to offer more to their clients and yet more have focused on flexible employment options, making use of the government's furlough scheme and enabling and encouraging their employees to develop their skills through training.

Our students are graduating into this environment where the 'old' assumptions have all been challenged and new ways of working are constantly emerging. The Covid-19 pandemic is not the first, and will not be the last, significant challenge to face our sector and it is important that our graduates are equipped to navigate such challenges successfully.

The first element in this is enabling our students to **understand the business models** within and beyond the sector and the strategic priorities for events agencies, suppliers, venues, clients and in-house teams. Entrepreneurship is part of modules in every year of the course including assignments focused on writing business plans, identifying innovation opportunities, evaluating development areas for projects and organisations, and creating and managing their own event teams working with external clients and negotiating a range of circumstances for the successful delivery of their events. We bring in guest speakers from industry into every module, ensuring that our students are exposed to a range of practice and experience.

Reflecting on the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is clear that our students (and staff) need to develop a broad skill set that will enable graduates to become the most valuable resource to the organisations they work for and with.

At the University of Northampton, students on our events management programme share a number of core modules which give them the foundational knowledge and experience and from this, students can begin to specialise into their areas of interest. The Professional Practice modules focus on understanding and practicing the skills that are needed to work in their areas of interest and this provides students with valuable personal experiences which they can use to create their personal development plans, identifying the skills to be honed in preparation for working in the future events sector.

Similarly, our graduates need to be effective decision makers with the capability to consider the strategic as well as the operational. We support students in developing these skills through challenging practical assignments, extensive consideration of theoretical approaches, and by engaging with industry professionals both in the classroom and in practice through volunteering and placements. It is vital that our students build their capacity and capability for decision-making through practice as this gives them experience in managing the complexity of situations, understanding the resources available and then finding elegant solutions to achieve the project objectives.

Our institutional **Changemaker** ethos helps us engage students in understanding the social impact of their work and provides vital support in enabling students to build their skills for being employed and for running their own businesses. Within the BA (Hons) Events Management course, we have woven Changemaker into every year of study so that every student is supported to stand out from the crowd, gain employment and play their role in society.

CONCLUSION

Whilst the events sector has been devastated and decimated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. From our considerations in this paper, it is clear that there are **green shoots of recovery** for events of all shapes and sizes. Our events businesses will recover and thrive again, albeit part of a **leaner, fitter sector**.

There will be more integration between the live and virtual, between collaborators, and between sectors. Innovation and Agility will be the normal and we should expect change to be our constant companion. The timeframe for this is uncertain and volatile but we are now building resilience in to every project and every business, more than we have ever done before.

The role of the events professional will become even more multi-dimensional. Our graduates need to be **polymaths with multiple high-level capabilities** that will enable them to add value to their employers, enable them to start and lead successful organisations, and will challenge them to continue their learning and development throughout their careers.

The unfortunate reality for our sector is that we will lose a substantial number of brilliant businesses and projects. We need **support and funding** to cultivate those green shoots, enable them to take root and to grow. Those green shoots need to see more growth and development in our sector over the next 12 months and none of us can do it alone. The events sector has united in its devastation⁴ and will continue to be united in its recovery but we need help.

Our students will graduate into a sector that is reforming itself, finding new ways to navigate and manage the risks and their **creativity and capacity for capturing opportunities** will enable them to play their part in re-building our events, sports and cultural sectors.

In supporting our students to be a **positive and powerful influence for recovery**, we are developing our course content to support students in deepening their understanding of the industry, of accepted standards of practice and in finding their niche within it. We are engaging with industry partners more than ever before and seeking their input to and support for student projects and placements. The **UoN Events Industry Forum** is part of curating that two-way conversation, ensuring that our courses are industry focused, relevant and supportive.

An essential part of the revisions to our course content is the **integration of event technology**, woven into every event project and module, enabling students to be digitally resident and resilient, able to work in a variety of ways according to the needs of the project or organisation. Students will still need the core skills of communication, finance, analysis, marketing and event design and we are building on these to **cultivate positive polymath mindsets**, able to proactively engage with change.

Central to **enabling our students to succeed** in this ever-changed sector is the embedding of the Changemaker programme so that students understand their social impact and potential for creating and adding value to our society and economy, as well as for ourselves.

⁴ See the [LightItInRed](#) and [We Make Events](#) campaigns