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Grow the Show

Skills Needs of the Festivals & Events Sector in the West of Ireland

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Introduction

The events and festivals sector plays a vital role in the economic, cultural and social fabric of the West of Ireland. Across Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, the sector contributes significantly to tourism, employment, place-making, and community engagement, while also supporting a wider ecosystem of suppliers, creative practitioners and local enterprises.

As the sector continues to evolve in response to changing audience expectations, digital transformation, sustainability requirements and funding pressures, understanding its current and emerging skills needs is essential. Targeted workforce development and aligned supports are critical to ensuring that events and festivals in the region can scale sustainably, enhance competitiveness, and maximise their economic impact in the West.

This report presents findings from a focused literature review, a regional industry survey, and stakeholder insights gathered during the *Grow the Show* workshop. It aims to identify priority skills gaps, highlight growth opportunities, and inform future training provision and policy supports to strengthen the resilience and long-term development of the sector in the West.



Methodology

This report is informed by a combination of desk-based research, primary data collection, and structured stakeholder engagement. The objective of this mixed-method approach was to ensure that the findings reflect both the broader policy and labour market context and the lived experience of those operating within the events and festivals sector in the West of Ireland.

Literature Review

A focused review of relevant national, regional, and sectoral documentation was undertaken to contextualise the research. This included analysis of policy frameworks, labour market intelligence, creative economy reports, skills strategies, and regional development plans relevant to Galway, Mayo, and Roscommon. This process provided a strategic backdrop against which primary findings were assessed.

Industry Survey

An online survey was developed and distributed to businesses, freelancers, organisers, producers, suppliers, and other industry stakeholders active within the events and festivals sector across the region. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data from 40 respondents relating to company offerings, company maturity, current and emerging skills needs, training history, digital capabilities, and growth ambitions. Responses were analysed to identify recurring themes, priority skill gaps, and sector-wide development needs.

Participation was voluntary, and data was analysed in aggregate form to ensure confidentiality.

Stakeholder Workshop

The findings were further informed and validated through structured engagement at the *Grow the Show* workshop held on February 25th 2026 in the Galway Chamber of Commerce. Over 40 participants represented a cross-section of industry actors, including event organisers, festival directors and technical suppliers. Facilitated discussions explored operational challenges, future skills requirements, business sustainability, funding access, and opportunities for collaboration. Insights from these discussions were used to triangulate survey findings and to deepen understanding of sector-specific priorities.

Stakeholder Consultations

Engagement with industry bodies such as the Event Industry Association of Ireland (EIAI) corroborated skills needs and provided key insights to shape the response.

The integration of secondary research, survey evidence, and direct stakeholder consultation provides a robust evidence base for the analysis and recommendations contained within this report.

Context

Fáilte Ireland (2025) notes that festivals and participative events are an important driver of regional tourism and may attract visitors outside peak seasons, encouraging longer stays, and increasing local spending. They may also support local cultural expression and help build a strong sense of place and identity within communities.¹

Economic impact analysis by the Irish Event Organisers Association demonstrates the scale and importance of the wider events industry in Ireland with a median firm earning between €500k and €1m and engaging between 2 to 10 employees. The sector supports thousands of jobs across event production, hospitality, tourism, technical services, and the creative industries. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry generated significant economic value (€3.5 billion) through conferences, festivals, exhibitions, and live events, supporting a broad ecosystem of suppliers and service providers (The Irish Exhibition Organisers Association, 2020).²

Together, these bodies highlight the strategic importance of festivals and events to regional economic development and tourism, while also emphasising the need for continued investment in skills development, collaboration, and sustainable event management practices to support the long-term growth of the sector.



¹ Fáilte Ireland. (2025). STRATEGIC TOURISM FESTIVAL INVESTMENT SCHEME. In 2026 to 2028. <https://www.failteireland.ie/Failteireland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Festivals/Strategic-Tourism-Festivals-Investment-Scheme-Guidelines.pdf>

² The Irish Exhibition Organisers Association. (2020). Events Industry Report: Supporting the events industry in Ireland. In *The Irish Exhibition Organisers Association*. https://www.ieoa.ie/uploads/1/3/2/0/132037463/event-industry-ireland-independent-report-june-2020_final.pdf

Existing Skills Research

Academic research on festival management highlights “the strategic vision and approaches of the founders and directors are critical to the success of ... festivals”. While the research was specific to literary festivals it does highlight the increasing need for professionalisation within the sector, particularly in areas such as governance, audience development, sustainability, and digital engagement (McGuckin, 2022).³ As festivals grow in scale and complexity, organisers may require a wider range of skills in areas including project management, stakeholder engagement, financial planning, and experience design to remain competitive and resilient (McGuckin, 2022).⁴ The research also highlights that successful festivals require strong strategic planning, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainable funding models (McGuckin, 2022).⁵ Partnerships between local authorities, tourism bodies, businesses, and community organisations are critical to ensuring the long-term sustainability of events (McGuckin, 2022).⁶ Fáilte Ireland (2023) research emphasises the importance of programming, marketing, ticketing, cross-selling, audience engagement, and post event reporting to support the growth and competitiveness of the sector, most of which may require professional skills development for maximum efficacy.⁷

Insights from the Cultural and Creative Industries Skillnet (2025) roundtable on skills gaps in Ireland's creative industries highlight several challenges and opportunities that are also relevant to the festivals and events sector. The discussion emphasised the need to break down silos across creative sectors by creating interdisciplinary spaces where technologists, artists, and producers can collaborate and share knowledge. Participants noted the value of physical and virtual hubs that facilitate networking, collaborative projects, and cross-sector innovation, noting that creative professionals often operate in isolation and would benefit from stronger ecosystem connections.⁸

The roundtable also identified a persistent gap between education and industry needs, with calls for stronger engagement between training providers and employers, more hands-on industry experience for students, and improved awareness of creative career pathways at secondary school level. Flexible professional development was strongly preferred, particularly bite-size training delivered in evening or weekend formats,

hybrid learning models, and CPD-aligned micro-credentials that suit freelance and project-based work patterns common in creative industries. Mentoring programmes, “train-the-trainer” approaches, and the introduction of structured apprenticeship-style pathways were highlighted as potential solutions to support practical skills development and career progression (Cultural and Creative Industries Skillnet 2025).⁹

Additional themes included the growing importance of AI literacy and digital capability, with participants noting the need for training on ethical AI use, new AI-enabled workflows, and emerging roles within creative production. The roundtable also highlighted wider skills gaps in areas such as financial literacy, intellectual property management, leadership, communication, and sustainable production practices. Participants emphasised that supporting inclusive access to training, regional participation outside Dublin, and improved wellbeing and career sustainability will be critical for developing a resilient creative workforce in Ireland (Cultural and Creative Industries Skillnet 2025).¹⁰

Prior research noted that festivals often lack access to tailored training programs, leading to skills gaps among organizers (The Arts Council, 2020)¹¹. Many festivals are run by community volunteers who may lack technical skills or experience high turnover, resulting in lost knowledge (Leitrim Development Company, 2013)¹². There is a need for ongoing training to build capacity, especially for smaller festivals (The Arts Council, 2020)¹³.

Recent research across Ireland's creative, screen, design and immersive technology sectors highlights a growing convergence between creative industries, digital technologies, and experience-led cultural activity, which has direct relevance for festivals and events. Reports from Skillnet Ireland identify immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and interactive digital environments as rapidly expanding areas within Ireland's creative economy. These technologies are increasingly used to enhance audience engagement, storytelling, and live experiences, presenting opportunities for festivals and events to innovate in how audiences experience culture and place. However, the research also identifies skills gaps in areas such as digital production, immersive design, and technical development, highlighting the need for cross-disciplinary skills combining creative, technical, and business capabilities (Immersive Technologies Skillnet et al., 2022).¹⁴

Research on digital transformation in Ireland's screen and creative sectors further highlights the increasing importance of digital production, data-driven decision-making, and new content distribution models, which are reshaping how creative experiences are produced and consumed. Similarly, research on design practice in Ireland emphasises the growing demand for design thinking, user-centred experience design, and collaboration across disciplines. These findings suggest that future workforce development in the festivals and events sector will increasingly require digital skills, creative technology capabilities, and experience design expertise alongside traditional event management competencies (Immersive Technologies Skillnet, Animation Skillnet, & Screen Skillnet, 2022).¹⁵



^{3,4,5,6} McGuckin, M. (2022). Literary Festivals: Insights from Ireland. *Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality*, 17(2), 129–142. <https://www.emerald.com/cbth/article-abstract/17/2/129/258082/Literary-festivals-insights-from-Ireland?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

⁷ Fáilte Ireland. (2023). *Regional Festivals & Participative Events workshop* [Slide show]. Come Alive: Ireland's Festivals, Ireland. [https://www.failteireland.ie/Failteireland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Product_Development/Festivals_Events/Regional-Festivals-Participative-Events-Workshop-PPT-Slides-\(2\).pdf](https://www.failteireland.ie/Failteireland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Product_Development/Festivals_Events/Regional-Festivals-Participative-Events-Workshop-PPT-Slides-(2).pdf), https://www.failteireland.ie/Failteireland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/2_Develop_Your_Business/6_Funding/FI-120403-Festivals-0819-Infographic-AF-FINAL.pdf

^{8,9} Cultural and Creative Industries Skillnet. (2025). *Bridging the Skills Gap in Ireland's Creative Industries*. <https://www.creativeskillnet.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Creative-Skillnet-Round-Table-Results-June-2025-1.pdf>

¹⁰ Cultural and Creative Industries Skillnet. (2025). *Bridging the Skills Gap in Ireland's Creative Industries*. <https://www.creativeskillnet.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Creative-Skillnet-Round-Table-Results-June-2025-1.pdf>

^{11,13} The Arts Council. (2020). *Making Great Art Work: Festivals Policy & Strategy 2020-2025*. <https://www.artscouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Festivals-Policy-and-Strategy-2020-2025.pdf>

¹² Leitrim Development Company. (2013). *Leitrim Festivals and Events Project: Final Report*. https://www.ldco.ie/assets/uploads/Leitrim_Development_Company_Festivals_and_Events_Project_Report_.pdf

¹⁴ Immersive Technologies Skillnet, Animation Skillnet, Screen Skillnet, & Eirmersive. (2022). *The Irish Immersive Economy: Irish Immersive Technology Industry Landscape 2022*. <https://www.skillnetireland.ie/uploads/attachments/The-Irish-Immersive-Economy-report.pdf>

¹⁵ Immersive Technologies Skillnet, Animation Skillnet, & Screen Skillnet. (2022). *Digital Transformation in the Screen Industries*. <https://www.skillnetireland.ie/uploads/attachments/Digital-Transformation-in-the-Screen-Industries-Oct2022.pdf>

Networking and Knowledge Sharing

Establishing networks for festival organizers to share knowledge and resources has been identified as important (Leitrim Development Company, 2013)¹⁶. Initiatives like the Leitrim Events and Festivals (L.E.A.F) network aim to facilitate collaboration and learning between events (Leitrim Development Company, 2013)¹⁷ and would be a fantastic resource to replicate in the West region.

Overall, the research emphasizes the importance of building skills and capacity across the festival sector in Ireland, particularly for smaller community-run events. Providing targeted training, networking opportunities, and strategic support could help develop a more robust and sustainable festival ecosystem.

Strategic and Sustainable Planning

Research indicates festivals need support in developing long-term strategic plans, building sustainable funding models, measuring and communicating their impact and audience development and community engagement. Local arts officers view festivals as vital for arts provision and community development, but recognize the need for more strategic approaches to festival support (Teevan & Wallace, 2018) . The Covid-19 pandemic had an outsized effect on the industry in Ireland.



^{16,17} Leitrim Development Company. (2013). Leitrim Festivals and Events Project: Final Report. https://www.ldco.ie/assets/uploads/Leitrim_Development_Company_Festivals_and_Events_Project_Report.pdf

¹⁸ Teevan, D., & Wallace, K. (2018). Festivals and Events Scheme Review 2017. The Arts Council. https://artscouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/FES_-_Scheme_Review2017.pdf

Trends & Challenges

Festival organizers in Ireland face several significant challenges.

Financial Pressures

- Increased operational costs, including higher expenses for producing digital content and investing in necessary infrastructure (The Arts Council, 2021)¹⁹.
- Difficulty in monetizing digital content, leading to an imbalance between production costs and revenue (The Arts Council, 2021)²⁰.
- Reduced sponsorship opportunities and limited box office income, especially during pandemic restrictions (The Arts Council, 2021)²¹.

Audience Engagement

- Concerns about audience stability and the challenge of re-engaging specific demographics, such as children and young people (The Arts Council, 2021)²⁵.
- Digital fatigue among audiences, with reduced engagement in online events over time (The Arts Council, 2021)²⁶.
- The need to rebuild audience confidence and attendance levels post-pandemic (The Arts Council, 2021)²⁷.

Staffing and Volunteer Issues

- Departure of skilled contractors who have retrained or left the industry (The Arts Council, 2021)²².
- Depletion of volunteer numbers, particularly among older demographics who may be more vulnerable to health risks (The Arts Council, 2021)²³.
- Staff shortages in the events sector, putting pressure on organizers (Brady, 2022)²⁴.

Programming and Production Challenges

- Maintaining artistic integrity and production values in a digital environment (The Arts Council, 2021)²⁸.
- Adapting to hybrid festival models (digital and in-person events) while striving to return to full in-person programming (The Arts Council, 2021)²⁹.
- Balancing the desire for international connectivity with the challenges of presenting visiting international work (The Arts Council, 2021)³⁰.

^{19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30} The Arts Council. (2021). Festival Makers Forum Report: Festival making in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. <https://artscouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Festival-Forum-Report-Final-DTDLKW1.pdf>

²⁴ Brady, J. (2022, September). Ireland's Event Industry Rebounds: A Summer of Festivals, Tourism, and Renewed Optimism. EventInsure. <https://www.eventinsure.ie/news/irelands-event-industry-rebounds-a-summer-of-festivals-tourism-and-renewed-optimism>

Planning and Sustainability

- Long-term viability concerns due to the need for multiple contingency plans to address changing public health guidelines (The Arts Council, 2021).³¹
- Increased workloads and demanding planning processes, leading to burnout and fatigue among organizers.³²
- Adapting to new marketing strategies for digital audiences while maintaining connections with local communities (The Arts Council, 2021).³³ When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, the festivals sector was largely unprepared for the sudden disruption, with many events cancelled or postponed. However, while some struggled due to limitations in size, resources, or organisational capacity, many festivals responded with agility and innovation. They reallocated resources, upskilled staff, and adapted programming to new formats, particularly by pivoting to digital delivery. Although this shift involved a significant learning curve, it created new opportunities and capabilities, positioning the digital arena as a lasting and important component of the sector's future development (Quinn, 2022).³⁴

Environmental and Logistical Issues

- Managing the environmental impact of festivals, including litter and waste management (Fáilte Ireland, 2023b).³⁵
- Navigating disruptions caused by city-wide events, such as street closures and temporary structures (*Organising City Wide Festivals Festivals in Ireland*, n.d.).³⁶

Funding and Support

- Reliance on various funding sources, including government, Fáilte Ireland, local councils, and leader programs (Dunne, 2013).³⁷
- The need for continued support to address shifting landscapes and stakeholder needs (The Arts Council, 2021).³⁸

Despite these challenges, the Irish festival sector has shown resilience and adaptability, with many organizers working to develop sustainable practices and innovative solutions to ensure the continued success of their events (The Arts Council, 2021).³⁹

Policy Landscape

The festivals and events sector in the West of Ireland operates within a broader national and regional policy environment that supports tourism development, cultural participation, enterprise growth, and workforce development. A number of government departments, state agencies, and regional initiatives play a role in shaping this ecosystem.

At a national level, Fáilte Ireland provides strategic funding and support for the development of festivals and participative events as key drivers of tourism and regional economic activity. Through its festival development programmes, the agency supports event organisers with funding, capability development, and strategic guidance aimed at improving visitor experience, extending the tourism season, and strengthening Ireland's reputation as a cultural destination (*Fáilte Ireland | National Tourism Development Authority*, n.d.).⁴⁰

Cultural policy and funding support for festivals are also provided by the Arts Council, the national agency responsible for the development of the arts. Through initiatives such as the Festivals Investment Scheme, the Arts Council supports a wide range of arts festivals that contribute to artistic development, cultural tourism, and community engagement across Ireland (Arts Council IE, 2025).⁴¹

Complementing this is the Creative Ireland Programme, an all-of-government initiative led by the Department of Tourism Culture Arts Gaeltacht Sport and Media. Creative Ireland promotes cultural participation and creativity within communities and provides funding to local authorities through Creative Ireland strategies and Creative Communities programmes, many of which support festivals, cultural events, and community-led creative activity (*Creative Ireland - Connecting People, Creativity and Wellbeing*, 2025).⁴²

Tourism policy oversight sits within the remit of the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment (DETE), which works alongside agencies such as Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to support the competitiveness of Ireland's tourism sector. Tourism and the visitor economy are recognised as important contributors to regional development, employment, and enterprise growth. Ireland's new tourism strategy, *A New Era for Irish Tourism: National Tourism Policy Statement* (2025), recognises festivals, events, and the night-time economy as important components of the national tourism offering. The policy highlights the role of festivals in showcasing Ireland's cultural heritage, generating economic benefits for local communities, and supporting regional and off-season tourism. It also commits to supporting a diverse portfolio of uniquely Irish festivals, strengthening regional business events, and developing the skills base required for a competitive and sustainable tourism sector through Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices. It also notes that "DETE and its agencies will work with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Solas, Skillnet and other relevant Departments, agencies and institutions to develop and implement world-class training for people looking to build careers in the sector. This will include non-traditional tourism sector skills to support the development of green skills in the tourism sector" (*Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment*, 2025)⁴³

^{31, 32, 33, 38} The Arts Council. (2021). *Festival Makers Forum Report: Festival making in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic*. <https://artscouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Festival-Forum-Report-Final-DTDLKW1.pdf>

³⁴ Quinn, B. (2022). Festivals and the COVID-19 pandemic: Creative responses, threats and opportunities. TU Dublin. <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=totalarcschase>

³⁵ Fáilte Ireland. (2023b). *Sustainable Festivals Guidelines 2023*. https://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Product_Development/Festivals_Events/failte-ireland-sustainable-festivals-guidelines-2023.pdf

³⁶ *Organising City Wide Festivals Festivals in Ireland*. (n.d.). Grooveyard. Retrieved March 3, 2025, from <https://grooveyard.ie/festivals-in-ireland-organising-festivals/>

³⁷ Dunne, F. (2013, March 15). Column: So you want to set up a festival? Here's what you should know. . . *TheJournal.ie*. <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/column-so-you-want-to-set-up-a-festival-heres-what-you-should-know-833161-Mar2013/>

³⁹ The Arts Council. (2021). *Festival Makers Forum Report: Festival making in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic*. <https://artscouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Festival-Forum-Report-Final-DTDLKW1.pdf>. https://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Product_Development/Festivals_Events/failte-ireland-sustainable-festivals-guidelines-2023.pdf

⁴⁰ *Fáilte Ireland | National Tourism Development Authority*. (n.d.). <https://www.failteireland.ie/Product-development/Festival-and-events.aspx>

⁴¹ Arts Council IE. (2025, November 27). Festivals Investment Scheme - Round 1 - The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon. The Arts Council / an Chomhairle Ealaíon. <https://artscouncil.ie/funding-opportunities/festivals-investment-scheme-round-1/>

⁴² Creative Ireland - Connecting people, creativity and wellbeing. (2025, November 11). Creative Ireland Programme. <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/>

⁴³ Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. (2025). *A New Era for Irish Tourism: National Tourism Policy Statement*. <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/publication-files/a-new-era-for-irish-tourism-national-tourism-policy-statement.pdf>

At a regional level, the West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 (extended to 2026) highlights the importance of sectors such as tourism, culture, and the creative industries in supporting economic growth across the region. The plan emphasises collaboration between enterprise agencies, education providers, and local authorities to strengthen regional innovation, skills development, and sector competitiveness (Department of Enterprise Tourism and Employment, 2022).⁴⁴

The Galway City Destination and Experience Development Plan (DEDP) developed by Fáilte Ireland provides a strategic framework for strengthening Galway's tourism offering and positioning the city as a key destination along the Wild Atlantic Way. The plan recognises festivals, events, and cultural experiences as central assets in Galway's tourism identity, highlighting their role in attracting visitors, extending length of stay, and enhancing the vibrancy of the city throughout the year. It emphasises the importance of building on Galway's strong reputation as a "City of Festivals" by developing high-quality cultural programming, improving collaboration between stakeholders, and supporting event organisers with strategic planning and capability development. The DEDP also stresses the value of coordinated destination management, stronger partnerships between tourism bodies, local authorities, and industry, and the development of compelling visitor experiences that showcase Galway's cultural and creative strengths. These priorities align closely with the focus of this report on skills development, collaboration, and sustainable growth within the festivals and events sector (Fáilte Ireland & Galway City Council, 2025).⁴⁵

Locally, Galway City Council plays a key role in supporting the festivals and events ecosystem through its economic development strategies and cultural policies. The city has introduced a Night-Time Economy Advisor as part of a national initiative to develop and diversify night-time cultural activity, alongside dedicated Festivals and Events Officers who work with organisers to facilitate the planning and delivery of events. Galway's economic development and city strategies recognise the role of festivals in enhancing the city's cultural identity, supporting tourism, and contributing to a vibrant city centre.

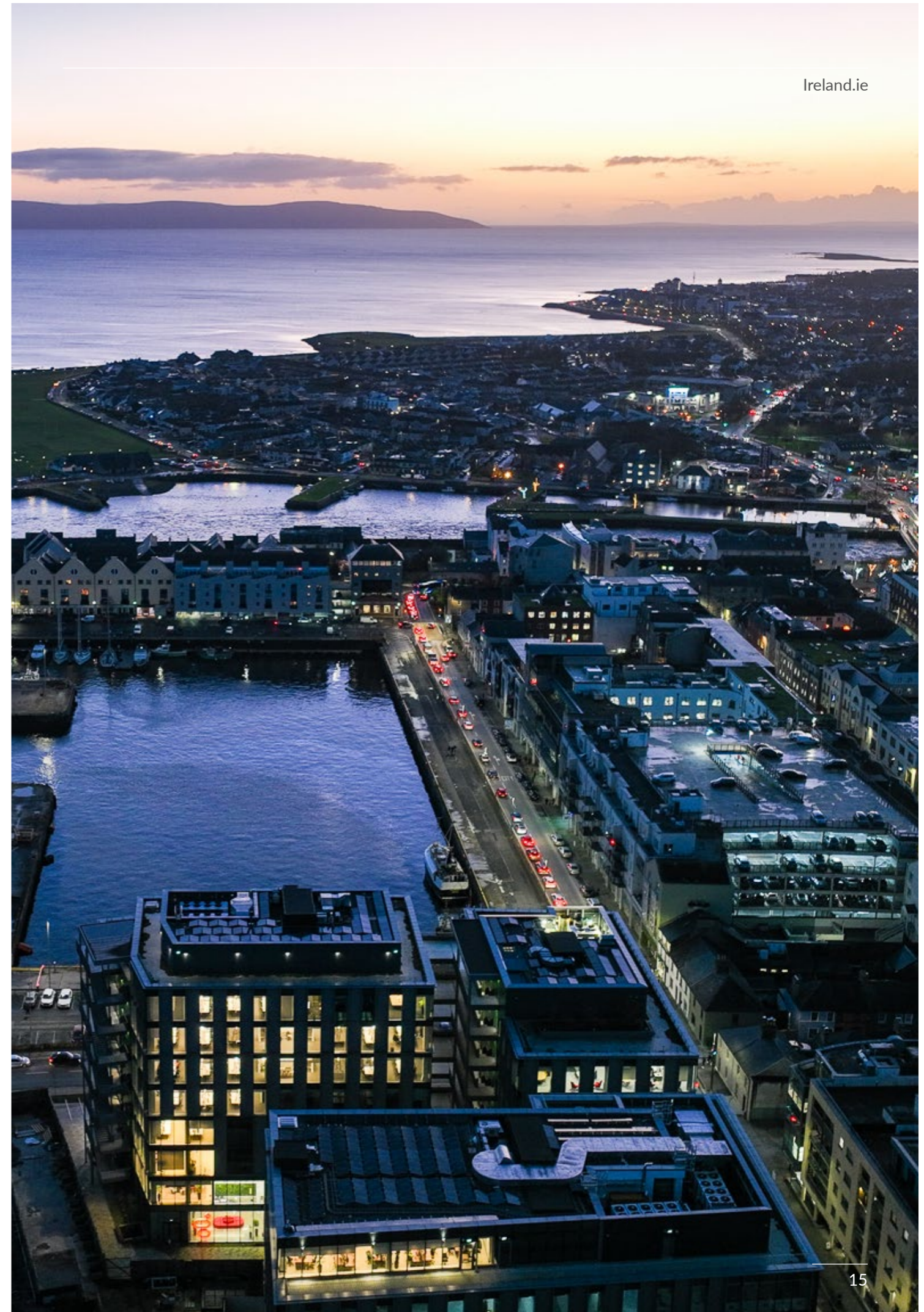
Finally, workforce development and skills alignment are supported by DFHERIS Regional Skills West, part of the national Regional Skills Forum network. Regional Skills West works to connect employers, education providers, and government agencies to identify skills needs and support the development of training and education responses aligned with regional economic priorities (Find Support to Train Your Staff With Regional Skills, n.d.).⁴⁶

Together, these policies and initiatives demonstrate a strong level of national, regional, and local commitment to supporting festivals and events as drivers of cultural vitality, tourism development, and regional economic growth. Strengthening alignment between these frameworks and the skills and operational needs of the sector will be key to supporting its long-term sustainability and continued contribution to the region.

⁴⁴ Department of Enterprise Tourism and Employment. (2022). *West Regional Enterprise Plan*. <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/publication-files/west-regional-enterprise-plan-to-2024.pdf>

⁴⁵ Fáilte Ireland & Galway City Council. (2025). *Destination and Experience Development Plan: Galway City*. <https://www.failteireland.ie/Failteireland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Wild%20Atlantic%20Way/Galway%20City%20DEDP/Galway-DEDP-English.pdf>

⁴⁶ Find support to train your staff with Regional Skills. (n.d.). gov.ie. <https://www.gov.ie/regionalskills>



Festival & Event Specific Courses

Several training programs are available for festival producers in Ireland, catering to various aspects of event management and production. These courses offer a range of options for those interested in festival production and creative arts management, from short professional diplomas to full bachelor's and master's degree programs. Highlights of such courses are provided below; not this list is not exhaustive.

Level 5

- *Full Time:* Louth Westmeath Education and Training Board offers a comprehensive one-year full-time programme in **Festival Management & Production** in Athlone. The course is accredited with an ILM Certificate in Festival Management and a QQI Level 5 award in Sound Engineering and Event Production. Key areas of study include Festival and Music Business, Communications, Sound Engineering, Event Management, Entrepreneurial Skills, and Music Production. The programme also includes valuable work placements at leading Irish festivals and events, and is available free of charge to eligible participants (*Finder - FET Course Hub, n.d.*).⁴⁷



Level 6

- *Full Time:* The **QQI Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Event Management** is offered by a number of Further Education and Training (FET) providers across Ireland, including Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The programme typically runs full-time over one year and covers modules such as Event Management, Festival and Cultural Event Planning, Marketing and Digital Promotion, Project Management, Business Management, and Work Experience. It is designed to prepare learners for roles in event coordination, festivals, venues, tourism, and cultural organisations, while also providing progression pathways to Level 7 degree programmes (*Finder - FET Course Hub, n.d.-b.*).⁴⁸
- *Full Time:* The **QQI Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Business with Event Management** is available through various Colleges of Further Education and combines core business skills with specialist event management training. Learners develop competencies in Event Operations, Entrepreneurship, Finance and Budgeting, Communications, and Work Placement. The programme supports both direct employment in the events sector and progression to higher education in business or event management (*Finder - FET Course Hub, n.d.-c.*).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Finder - FET Course Hub. (n.d.). <https://www.fetchcourses.ie/course/finder?sfcw-courseid=436991>

⁴⁸ Finder - FET Course Hub. (n.d.-b). <https://www.fetchcourses.ie/course/finder?sfcw-courseid=500178>

⁴⁹ Finder - FET Course Hub. (n.d.-c). <https://www.fetchcourses.ie/course/finder?sfcw-courseid=500863>

Level 7/8

- *Full Time, in person:* The **Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Event Management with Public Relations** at Atlantic Technological University is a four-year honours degree that blends core event management skills with public relations and communications expertise. The programme covers event planning, marketing, logistics and stakeholder engagement, preparing graduates for roles across a range of events, PR, tourism and cultural organisations. It emphasises practical skills and industry relevance, with graduates able to pursue careers in conference and convention centres, national and regional tourism bodies, event agencies, arts festivals and other sectors where event delivery and public engagement are key (Atlantic Technological University, 2026)⁵⁰. It includes a structured, accredited 30 week work placement in Ireland or overseas. Throughout the course students visit industry partners and attend guest lectures, often delivered by industry experts. In Year 4 students participate in Marketing Masterclasses working on real industry challenges.
- *Full Time, in-person:* The **ATU Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Tourism & Event Management** integrates event planning and delivery within a broader tourism and hospitality context. This four-year honours degree covers event operations, destination marketing, tourism strategy, sustainability, and business development. The programme equips graduates with the skills to manage festivals, conferences, and large-scale tourism events, while also understanding the wider economic and regional development impact of the sector. Industry engagement and applied learning are central features of the course (Atlantic Technological University, 2026).⁵¹
- *Full Time, in person:* The new **BA (Hons) in Music and the Live Events Industry (US813)** at Technological University of the Shannon (TUS - Athlone Campus) offered for 2026 is a four-year degree combining practical music performance with industry-focused skills in live event production, sound, touring, and music business. Developed in collaboration with industry professionals, the programme equips students with hands-on experience and entrepreneurial skills to pursue careers in performance, live events, production, and the wider music industry (Technological University of the Shannon, 2026).⁵²
- *Full Time, in-person:* The **Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Event Management** at Technological University Dublin is a four-year undergraduate programme designed to develop comprehensive expertise in the planning and delivery of events. The course covers key areas including event planning and design, marketing, sponsorship, budgeting, and health and safety management. A significant feature of the programme is its structured work placement component, providing students with valuable industry experience and professional networks (Technological University of the Shannon, 2026).⁵³
- *Full Time, in-person:* The **BA (Honours) in Event Management** at Munster Technological University is a three-year undergraduate programme focused on developing operational and strategic capabilities within the events industry. The curriculum includes specialised modules in Event Risk Management, Event Project Management, and Event Operations Management. Students also benefit from industry masterclasses and familiarisation visits to event venues, ensuring strong practical and professional exposure (Technological University of the Shannon, 2026).⁵⁴

^{50,51} Atlantic Technological University. (2026, March 25). Event Management with Public Relations - Atlantic Technological University. <https://www.atu.ie/courses/bachelor-of-business-honours-event-management-with-public-relations/>

^{52, 53, 54} Technological University of the Shannon. (2026, February 20). Music and the Live Events Industry - BA (Hons) - TUS. TUS. <https://tus.ie/courses/us813/>

- **On Demand: The Postgraduate Certificate in Creative Arts Management at the University of Galway** is a professionally oriented programme designed to equip graduates and practitioners with the practical and strategic skills required to lead within the arts and cultural sector. Delivered in collaboration with flagship cultural institutions including Galway International Arts Festival and Druid Theatre, the programme offers direct industry engagement and insight into best practice in producing, arts management, curation, and marketing. A strong emphasis is placed on applied learning, with participants undertaking work-related projects or placements with arts organisations. This ensures graduates develop both the operational competence and sectoral networks necessary to support and scale creative initiatives within Ireland's dynamic cultural landscape (PgCert (Creative Arts Management), n.d.).⁵⁵ There was good take up from industry as this met an established need at the time, and could be explored to be offered as micro-credentials in the future as once off upskilling. A further course was identified as a skills need to meet new demand – see following.



⁵⁵ PgCert (Creative Arts Management). (n.d.). Going to University. Retrieved March 3, 2025, from <https://goingto.university/institutions/university-of-galway/courses/211715>

Level 9

- **Part Time, Blended: The Cultural Event Management Postgraduate Diploma** at IADT (Institute of Art, Design and Technology) is a Level 9 qualification designed specifically for professionals working in the cultural and creative industries. The 60-credit programme is delivered through evening and weekend classes, with some on-campus sessions, making it suitable for working professionals. Modules include Cultural Event Management, Strategic Management, Digital Marketing, Cultural Policy, and Business Management, with a strong focus on developing practical skills in cultural event management and entrepreneurship. At the moment it is 90-100% funded via Springboard Courses (*Cultural Event Management* - IADT, 2026).⁵⁶
- **Full or Part Time, in-person: The MA in Arts Management & Creative Producing** is a postgraduate programme designed to develop advanced skills in arts leadership, management, and event organisation. The programme includes collaboration with Cork Opera House to provide professional practice experience and industry engagement. Core modules include Creative Producing & Curating, Artistic Leadership, Arts Project Management, and Digital Marketing, alongside content covering festival and music business, event management, sound engineering, and entrepreneurial skills. The programme is delivered on campus, with in-person teaching and professional practice components rather than fully online delivery (*Arts Management and Creative Producing* | University College Cork, n.d.).⁵⁷
- **Part Time, online: Postgraduate Certificate in Creative Technologies** combines creative practice with technical skills in areas such as coding, digital media production, and emerging creative technologies. Delivered over three modules across two semesters, the course introduces students to key software platforms and methods used to design and develop immersive and interactive media, while also exploring areas such as computational creativity and generative AI. The programme aims to equip graduates with interdisciplinary skills relevant to the creative industries, digital media sector, and technology-driven creative practice. It is currently 90-100% funded via Springboard.



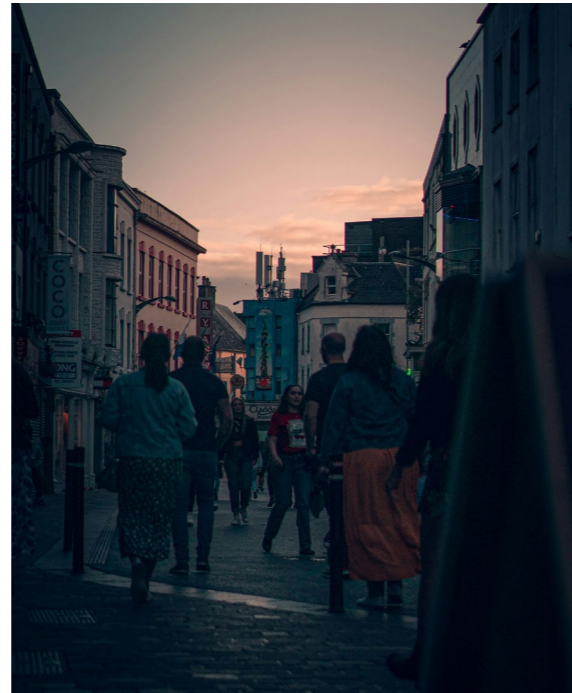
⁵⁶ *Cultural Event Management* - IADT. (2026, March 25). IADT. <https://iadt.ie/courses/business-in-cultural-event-management/>

⁵⁷ *Arts Management and Creative Producing* | University College Cork. (n.d.). University College Cork. <https://www.ucc.ie/en/ckd01/>

Private providers

There are a number of festivals and events courses available through private providers, though not all of these are funded/ accredited. For example DCM Learning offers an event management training course covering strategic planning, budgeting, event promotion, marketing, and operations (*Event Management Training Courses in Ireland*, n.d.).⁵⁸

Fitzwilliam Institute provides an Online Diploma in Festival Event Management with modules covering all aspects of festival management (*Diploma in Festival Event Management via Online Distance Learning*, n.d.).⁵⁹ Dublin Business School offers an online Diploma in Event Management & PR (*Diploma in Event Management & PR*, n.d.).⁶⁰ It is likely there is more private provision out there, these courses have not been fully mapped as this report focuses on state-funded provision.



⁵⁸ *Event management training courses in Ireland*. (n.d.). <https://dcmlearning.ie/event-management-training-courses-in-ireland/>

⁵⁹ *Diploma in Festival Event Management via Online Distance learning*. (n.d.). <https://www.fitzwilliaminstitute.ie/online-diploma-courses/event-management-courses/Diploma-in-Festival-Event-Management-Distance-Learning>

⁶⁰ *Diploma in Event Management & PR*. (n.d.). Dublin Business School. <https://www.dbs.ie/course/professional-diplomas/diploma-in-event-management-pr>

Short Flexible Industry Relevant Courses

- The **Cultural and Creative Industries Skillnet** offers a wide range of short flexible courses for those industries, some of which are relevant to the festivals and events sector (Cultural & Creative Industries Skillnet, 2024).⁶¹ They have expressed a strong desire to work with the sector to offer more tailored options should skills gaps be identified.
- The **Professional Diploma in Event Management** at University College Dublin is a 12-week part-time programme aimed at professionals seeking practical and strategic skills in the events sector. The course addresses core competencies such as event coordination, venue management, event production, and health and safety compliance. Designed to support career progression or sector entry, it offers a flexible learning structure suited to working professionals however it should be noted it is unaccredited (*Event Management Online Course (LIVE) in Ireland*, n.d.-b).⁶²
- **Fáilte Ireland** has provided occasional workshops for festivals and events organisers, offering key audience insights (Fáilte Ireland, 2023a)⁶³. Fáilte Ireland provides a range of practical training and business supports relevant to festival and event organisers through its learniFI online learning platform and wider business supports hub.

These offerings are designed to build capability across marketing, digital skills, commercial performance, sustainability, and customer experience within the tourism and events ecosystem. learniFI includes both self-paced modules and live workshops, with current relevant course titles such as *Digital Marketing for Tourism Businesses*, *Developing a Digital Sales Strategy*, *Social Media for Tourism*,

Understanding Your Customer and Market Segmentation, *Sustainable Tourism Business Programme*, *Business Planning Essentials*, and *Google Analytics for Beginners*.

In addition, Fáilte Ireland provides festival-focused resources including sponsorship management guidance, event sustainability supports, and strategic growth toolkits. While not formal accredited qualifications, these programmes offer accessible, industry-aligned upskilling opportunities that are directly applicable to festival and event organisers seeking to strengthen marketing reach, operational performance, and long-term sustainability.

Other Industry Relevant Training

To support the sector in identifying relevant training opportunities, a [course database](#) was compiled as part of this project. The database brings together programmes across further education, higher education, and professional training providers that are relevant to festivals, events, and the wider creative and tourism sectors. While some of the courses listed are specifically focused on event or festival management, others relate to areas such as marketing, production, business management, and digital skills that are transferable and applicable to the sector. By mapping these training options alongside the skills needs identified through the survey and stakeholder engagement, the database serves both as a practical resource for stakeholders and as a tool to help identify gaps in current provision and unmet training needs.

⁶¹ Cultural & Creative Industries Skillnet. (2024, April 17). *Training & Events - Cultural & creative Industries Skillnet*. Cultural & Creative Industries Skillnet - High-quality Subsidised Skills and Training. <https://www.creativeskillnet.ie/training-courses-events/>

⁶² *Event Management Online Course (LIVE) in Ireland*. (n.d.-b). UCED Professional Academy. <https://www.ucd.ie/professionallacadeemy/findyourcourse/professionaldiplomaineventmanagement/>

⁶³ Fáilte Ireland. (2023a). *Regional Festivals & Participative Events workshop* [Slide show]. Come Alive: Ireland's Festivals, Ireland. [https://www.failteireland.ie/Failteireland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Product_Development/Festivals_Events/Regional-Festivals-Participative-Events-Workshop-PPT-Slides-\(2\).pdf](https://www.failteireland.ie/Failteireland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Product_Development/Festivals_Events/Regional-Festivals-Participative-Events-Workshop-PPT-Slides-(2).pdf)

Industry Engagement Findings

A detailed survey on skills needs was distributed to stakeholders in the sector. While efforts were made to disseminate the survey across the region, the overwhelming majority of response came from Galway (city/county).

Survey

Survey Respondent Mix

Survey Respondent Type

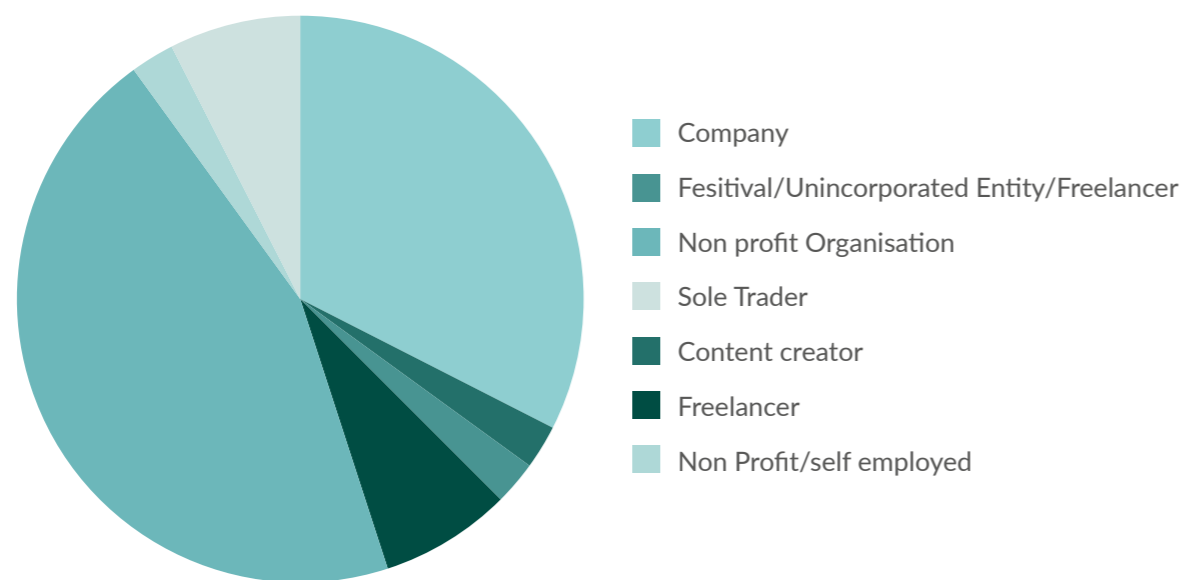


Figure 1 Survey Respondent by type

The majority (45%) of survey respondents represented non-profit organisations while approximately one third represented companies. The rest of the respondents were solo ventures such as freelancers or content creators. The respondents spanned 37 different entities, with some reporting involvement in multiple festivals. Three entities had approx. 20 team members, one had 100 team members while all the rest were micro entities with 1-10 team members.



Number of Years Entity in Festival/Event Management

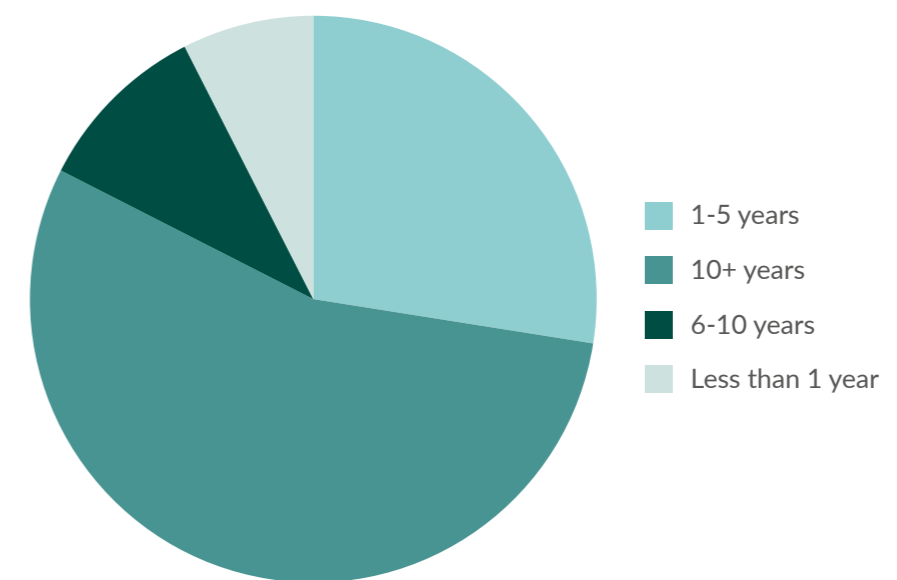


Figure 2 Number of Years Entity in Sector

A good mix of maturity was reflected in the survey with over half of respondents representing entities which have longevity of great than 10 years in the sector, followed by approx. a quarter at 1-5 years in the sector, with approx. 10% having less than one year of 6-10 years in the sector. Repondents were involved ina wide range of festival types including Community Events, Arts Festivals, Music Festivals, Cultural Festivals, Craft Fairs , Science & Technology Festivals etc.

Growth Plans

Respondents were questioned about their company's growth objectives for the next 1-3 years in the festival and event industry. All respondents noted a growth objective, with some having multiple growth objectives.

Growth Objectives

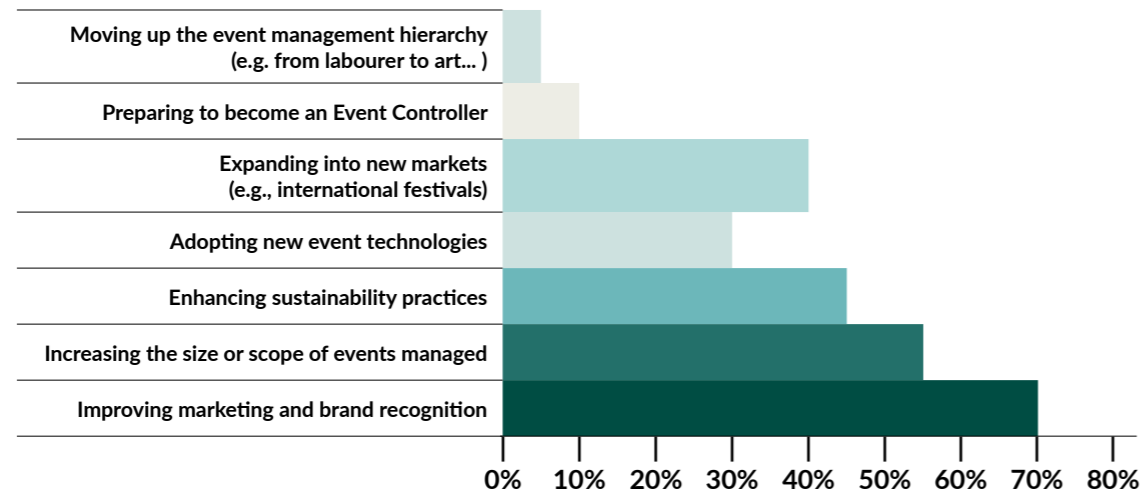


Figure 3 Growth Objectives of Festival and Event Entities

Improving marketing and brand recognition was the most commonly cited growth objective, noted by 70% of respondents, while 55% wish to increase the size of scope of events managed. 40% of respondents noted the desire to expand into new markets. Sustainability practice was also highly ranked with over 40% of respondents reporting this as an objective for their entity. Approximately one third of entities would like to adopt new event technologies. As succession planning in the industry was an issue noted by stakeholders, and given the survey was open to sole traders and freelancers, we also included an option for personal progression up the festival management ranks. A total of five out of 40 respondents noted this was a growth goal for them indicating some appetite for supports with career progression.

Previous Training

Just over half of respondents reported that the entity had a history of accessing training for the sector. Prior training mentioned is in the list below, frequency of mention is also included (e.g. "x 2" means mentioned by two respondents).

Programming & Production

- Audience development
- Diploma in Community Development Practice in University of Galway

Sustainability

- Carbon Literacy x 2
- Environmental sustainability training x 2

Diversity Equity and Inclusions

- Diversity training
- Digital accessibility training with University of Galway's Access Centre
- Staff anti bullying training
- Safe to Create x 5. A range of courses by Safe to Create were mentioned e.g. training in Conflict Management, Tackling unconscious bias, Being an active bystander
- Accessibility x 2
- Inclusive fashion and design
- Diversity in the workplace
- Safeguarding
- First point of Contact
- Consent facilitation

Commercialisation & Business Skills

- Financial management x 2
- Financial planning
- Business development mentoring from IBEC
- Innovation

Health & Safety

- Fire safety
- Health and safety x 3
- First aid responder x 4
- (Cryogenic) Gas safety awareness x 2
- Safe pass
- Manual handling x 2
- Security

Digital Skills

- Access 2000 intermediate
- First point of contact training
- It security awareness
- WordPress
- AI for Social Impact - DigiSet Brussels funded by EU x 2
- CREW digital mentorship
- Excel

Sales & Marketing

- Private online trainings in content creation
- Video production x 2
- Marketing x 2
- Certificate in sales and marketing level 7 bachelor of business.
- Certificate in strategic management level 7 bachelor of business
- Social media x 2
- Public Relations
- Higher Diploma in PR from PRII

People Management

- Leadership x 2

Governance

- Governance
- Strategic planning

One respondent noted that “Training is a constant for our organisation” while just under half of respondents noted “none’ for prior training history. As can be seen from the above, even those organisations which have engaged heavily in training seem to have focused efforts on DEI training, while health and safety and marketing also have been areas of focus. There appears to have been a dearth of uptake of training on people management (outside of leadership mentioned by two organisations), governance, strategic planning, security, programming & production etc. Signposting to affordable general people management training, or the development of people management training specific to the sector could be considered.



Priority Skills Needs

Skill Needs

Respondents were invited to choose from a list of 30 priority skills needs, with some needs grouped or categorised together. The option to add other skills needs was also available.

Priority Skills Needs (% of Respondents)

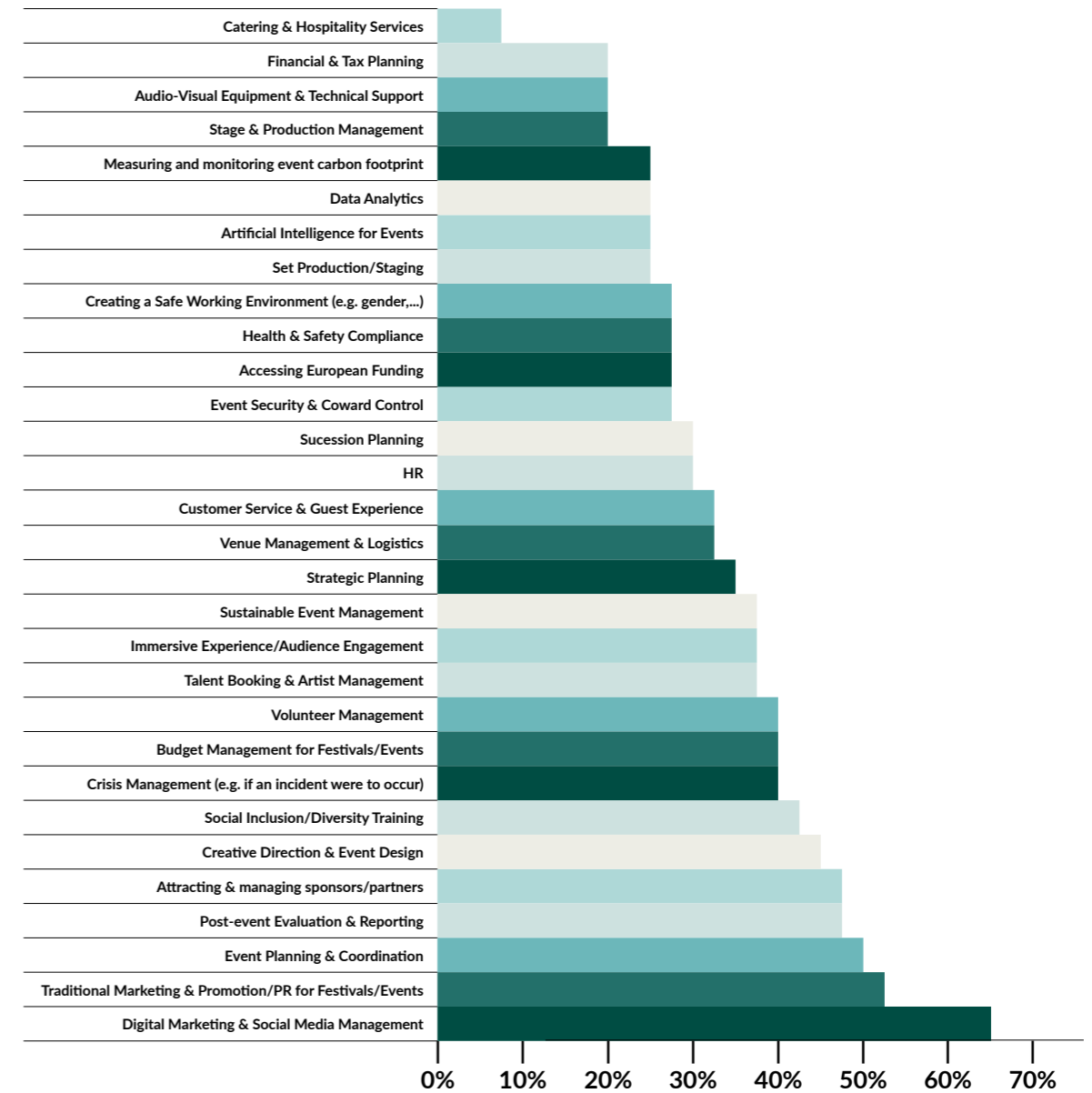


Figure 4 Priority Skills Needs

The spread of demand for priority skills needs was striking, with most skills being noted as priority for one quarter to half of all entities. The top skills need identified was Digital Marketing & Social Media Management – with 65% of respondents noting this as a priority skills need. When interpreting the figures it should be noted that one respondent chose not to answer the skills needs question.

The other top five priority skills needs identified by respondents were:

- Traditional marketing /public relations (53%)
- Event Planning & Coordination (50%)
- Post-Event Evaluation & Reporting (48%)
- Attracting & managing sponsors/partners (48%)

Approximately 40-45% of respondents noted these as priority skills needs:

- Creative Direction & Event Design
- Social Inclusion/Diversity Training
- Crisis Management (e.g. if an incident were to occur)
- Budget Management for Festivals/Events
- Volunteer Management

While 30-38% of respondents advised skills needs in:

- Talent Booking & Artist Management
- Immersive Experiences/Audience Engagement
- Sustainable Event Management
- Strategic Planning
- Venue Management & Logistics
- Customer Service & Guest Experience
- HR
- Succession Planning

20-28% of respondents noted these skills needs:

- Event Security & Crowd Control
- Accessing European Funding
- Health & Safety Compliance
- Creating a Safe Working Environment (e.g. gender, diverse needs)
- Set Production/Staging
- Artificial Intelligence for Events
- Data Analytics
- Measuring and monitoring event carbon footprint
- Stage & Production Management
- Audio-Visual Equipment & Technical Support
- Financial & Tax Planning

Only 8% of respondents noted a need for catering/hospitality training.

Preferred Training Modality

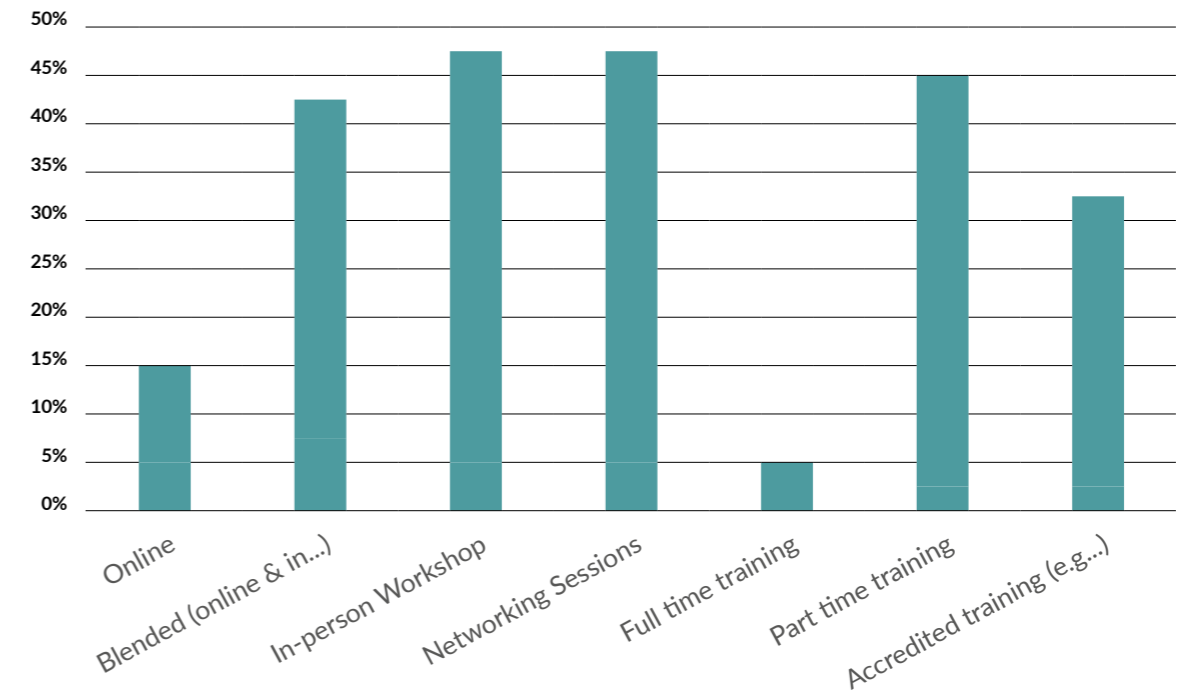


Figure 5 Preferred Training Modalities

Survey responses indicate a strong preference for **practical and flexible training formats** within the festivals and events sector. The most popular modalities were **in-person workshops and networking sessions (both 48%)**, highlighting the value participants place on peer learning, collaboration, and knowledge exchange. **Blended learning (43%)** and **part-time training (45%)** were also highly favoured, suggesting a need for accessible training that can fit around existing workloads. While **33% of respondents expressed interest in accredited training**, only a small proportion indicated demand for **full-time programmes (5%)**, reflecting the sector’s preference for shorter, flexible professional development opportunities rather than long-term full-time study. Interest in **fully online training (15%)** was comparatively lower, reinforcing the importance of in-person interaction and networking within the industry.

Workshop Insights

Building on the insights gathered through the industry survey, the Grow the Show workshop provided an opportunity to explore these themes in greater depth through direct engagement with sector stakeholders. The session brought together festival organisers, event producers, venues, and support organisations to discuss the practical challenges facing the sector and to identify opportunities for collaboration, skills development, and improved support structures. The discussions helped to validate and expand on the survey findings, providing qualitative insights into the operational realities of delivering events and festivals in the region, and highlighting priority areas for future training, networking, and strategic support.

Discussions during the *Grow the Show* workshop highlighted a number of interconnected challenges and opportunities for the festivals and events sector in the region, particularly in relation to **collaboration, skills development, infrastructure, and funding sustainability**. Participants emphasised the need for stronger and more structured collaboration across festivals, venues, suppliers, local authorities, and businesses. Stakeholders noted that collaboration itself is a skill that can be difficult to manage in practice and suggested practical supports such as shared templates, toolkits, and facilitated networking opportunities. There was also strong interest in creating shared industry resources, including a central database of contacts, a regional events calendar, and regular networking events similar to those already common in the tourism sector.

Skills Needs

Skills development emerged as a key priority. While many organisations possess strong capabilities in planning, communication, marketing and funding applications, significant gaps were identified in areas such as digital marketing, audience development, sales, sustainability, IT and AI tools, and event production. Technical production skills were highlighted as a particular challenge, with lighting, AV, and sound often expensive to outsource and a shortage of suppliers locally. Participants suggested opportunities to develop training programmes or shared equipment resources, such as basic lighting or AV kits that festivals could access collectively. Additional training needs were identified in compliance, health and safety, risk assessments, contracting, governance, organisational development, and financial management, particularly for organisations seeking to move from start-up to scale-up stages.

Coordination

Participants also highlighted the need for better coordination with key stakeholders, particularly local authorities and production partners. Earlier engagement, clearer communication, and defined roles and responsibilities were seen as important for supporting the delivery of events of different sizes. Infrastructure and venue access were also raised as important considerations, with suggestions to audit and better utilise underused spaces in the city, including temporary or “meanwhile” venues, and to appoint a coordinating role to support access to suitable event spaces.

Funding & Resources

Funding and resource sustainability were also major themes. Many organisers expressed concern about increasing compliance costs and the challenge of sustaining core organisational capacity, as funding is often tied to specific projects rather than operational support. Participants highlighted the importance of developing stronger sponsorship models, including training on corporate social responsibility partnerships and sponsorship matchmaking between festivals and businesses. There was also recognition that success should not always be measured by growth in scale, but rather by the ability of festivals to deliver high-quality, sustainable programming that reflects their mission and community impact.

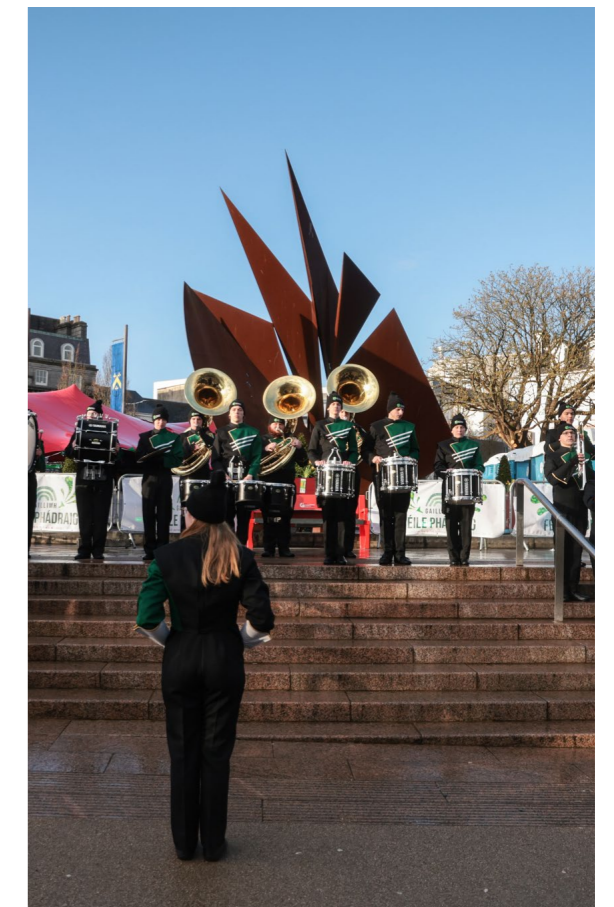
Infrastructure & Sector Supports

Finally, stakeholders emphasised the value of shared infrastructure and sector supports, including access to equipment, volunteer training, compliance guidance, mentorship, and clearer information on funding opportunities. The creation of a centralised “one-stop-shop” online resource for the sector (similar to models used by international festival networks) was suggested as a way to support organisers with practical guidance, training, and connections. Overall, participants stressed that stronger coordination, strategic infrastructure, targeted skills development, and improved networking opportunities would significantly strengthen the resilience and long-term sustainability of the festivals and events ecosystem in the region.

It was noted that there may be an opportunity to diversify revenue streams for experienced operators / producers. There is clearly an ecology wide need for capacity / growth and skills investment for sustainable careers which would benefit the broader cultural sector and local authority events and festival teams (while making links to the destination development / tourism agendas as well).

Networking

Participants highlighted that one of the most valuable outcomes of the Grow the Show workshop was the opportunity to connect with peers across the festivals and events sector. Many organisers noted that the session provided a rare space to share experiences, discuss common challenges, and build relationships with others working in similar roles across the region. There was strong support for continuing to provide forums like this in the future, with participants expressing interest in regular networking opportunities that would help strengthen collaboration, knowledge sharing, and peer support within the sector. As one participant reflected following the session, *“It was reassuring to realise we’re not alone in facing these challenges – there’s a real community here that can support each other going forward.”*



Skills Gap Analysis

Analysis of the sector course database alongside national industry supports indicates that a range of relevant training opportunities exist across higher education, further education, professional skillnet programmes, and tourism supports such as Fáilte Ireland’s learnFI platform and Live Learning workshops. Programmes from institutions such as Atlantic Technological University, University of Galway, Trinity College Dublin, and IADT provide accredited training in areas including digital marketing, creative media, hospitality management, event management, and technical production.



While the literature review noted that there were calls for greater integration between business and education providers, feedback received from education providers in the region is that it is difficult for students to find paid placement within the industry making it difficult to build relevant work experience.

However, while these programmes support general business, marketing, and digital capability development, many are not specifically tailored to the operational realities of festivals and events. Those that are more tailored to the sector tend to be longer, full-time courses. The survey results highlight a strong demand for practical, sector-specific skills related to event delivery, compliance, funding sustainability, and organisational management. These areas are only partially addressed through existing courses and often require participants to draw on broader business or tourism programmes rather than training designed specifically for event organisers. This suggests a clear opportunity to develop short, flexible, industry-led training programmes that address the specific operational needs of the festivals and events sector.

Mapping of Survey Skills Needs Against Current Training Provision

Skills Need Identified in Survey	Coverage Assessment
Digital Marketing & Social Media	Strong coverage, includes short courses, generally not specific to the sector
Artificial Intelligence / Emerging Technologies	Emerging provision, includes short courses, a limited number specific to the sector
Audio-Visual / Technical Production	Moderate coverage, includes short courses
Event Planning & Coordination	Longer courses available but generally require full time attendance. Limited short courses available.
Catering & Hospitality	Moderate coverage, includes short courses but limited demand from the sector during our consultations (only 8% desired training). However this may not reflect the true needs as catering providers were not well represented in the survey/workshop cohort.
Strategic Planning / Business Development	Partial coverage, includes short courses but not specific to the sector
Organisational Change	Partial coverage includes short courses but not specific to the sector
Set Production / Staging	Partial coverage, includes short courses
Stage & Production Management	Partial coverage, includes short courses
Venue Management & Logistics	Limited sector-specific provision
HR / Talent Management	Limited sector-specific provision
Audience Engagement / Experience Design	Limited sector-specific provision

Identified Training Gaps

A number of high-priority skills identified in the survey remain largely unaddressed by existing courses. These represent potential opportunities for new sector-focused training initiatives.

Key gaps include:

Event Operations and Compliance

- Event security and crowd management
- Event-specific health and safety training and risk assessment
- Regulatory compliance and contracting requirements
- Crisis management for festivals and events

Sector Development and Governance

- Festival governance and organisational scaling
- Succession planning within festival organisations

Festival Management and Sustainability

- Volunteer management
- Talent booking and artist management
- Budgeting and financial management for festivals
- Post-event evaluation and reporting
- Data analytics for measuring event performance and impact

Funding and Business Development

- Sponsorship development and corporate partnership management
- Accessing European and international funding programmes
- Financial sustainability and diversified funding models

Environmental Sustainability

- Carbon footprint measurement for events
- Sustainable event planning and production



Key Stakeholder Insights

The analysis indicates that while Ireland has strong training provision in digital media, tourism, and creative industries, there is limited structured training specifically focused on the operational and strategic management of festivals and events. Many of the skills gaps identified by survey respondents relate to practical event delivery, compliance, financial sustainability, and sector-specific management capabilities. These findings align closely with insights from the stakeholder workshop, where participants highlighted the need for short, flexible, industry-focused training opportunities combined with networking and peer learning platforms to strengthen the long-term sustainability of the sector.

Consultation with the Event Industry Association of Ireland indicates that the current skills challenge can be understood across four connected dimensions:

- Informal Skills Development
- Uneven Access to Training
- Rising Compliance Expectations
- Lack of a Shared Competency Framework

They noted that any future skills response should be:

- practical rather than overly theoretical;
- proportionate to event scale and risk;
- accessible to small and voluntary organisers;
- relevant to professional event teams and suppliers;
- aligned with real-world local authority and statutory processes;
- supportive of technical and operational career pathways;
- capable of recognising existing informal expertise while improving consistency.

It was also observed by the EIAI that skills areas are interdependent. A weakness in one area often creates pressure elsewhere. For example, poor risk assessment can weaken the Event Management Plan; weak documentation can create delays in local authority review; limited volunteer briefing can increase operational risk; and poor digital record keeping can undermine post-event learning.

The EIAI recommended that skills development be considered through a tiered model. This would allow training and support to be matched to event scale, complexity and risk profile. They identified three possible tiers such as (i) Small Community and Voluntary Events, (ii) Recurring Local Festivals and Public Events, (iii) Professional Event Organisers and Producers.

Ireland needs a structured but flexible approach to event skills development that supports safe, compliant and sustainable event delivery at every level.

Recommendations

Below is a set of overall recommendations for Regional Skills West Forum members and industry stakeholders to consider, combining insights from the survey results, course mapping, and the Grow the Show workshop discussions. They include both training development opportunities and structural / ecosystem recommendations identified by stakeholders. The recommendations outlined in this report are intended to inform and support ongoing collaboration between industry, education, training and public-sector stakeholders. Their implementation will depend on the priorities, resources and decisions of the organisations involved and should not be regarded as committed actions or programme deliverables of any single stakeholder.

1. Develop a Competency Framework and Targeted Short Courses for the Festivals and Events Sector

Ireland requires a coherent events industry skills and competency framework that reflects the real-world complexity of event delivery, including safety, risk, compliance, technical production, statutory engagement, volunteer coordination, business sustainability, digital documentation and leadership. A competency framework is a structured description of the skills, knowledge and behaviours required for specific roles and responsibilities, providing a consistent basis for training, assessment and progression.

The analysis indicates a clear demand for short, practical, part-time training programmes tailored specifically to the operational realities of the festivals and events sector. Future training development should prioritise modular, flexible programmes that can be delivered through workshops or blended learning formats. Given the preference for short, flexible learning formats, there is an opportunity to develop stackable micro-credentials and CPD programmes specifically for festival organisers and event professionals. These could be delivered through partnerships between Higher Education Institutions, ETBs, Skillnet Ireland, and industry organisations, and could build on existing programmes in creative industries, tourism, and digital media.

Priority areas include:

- Event compliance, health and safety, and risk management
- Sponsorship development and corporate partnerships
- Budgeting and financial sustainability for festivals
- Volunteer management and workforce coordination
- Audience development and engagement strategies
- Sustainable event planning and carbon footprint measurement
- Event data analytics and impact evaluation
- Artist booking and talent management
- Festival governance and organisational scaling
- Strategic planning for cultural events
- Collaborative event programming and partnership building
- Leadership and management in the creative events sector
- Improving understanding of permits, licences and statutory processes

These programmes could be delivered through regional education providers, Skillnet networks, or industry-led training initiatives, ensuring strong alignment with sector needs. Funding these courses to the maximum extent possible will be key given the limited resources of the sector.

2. Developing Career Pathways and Progression Routes in the Festivals and Events Sector

A key challenge highlighted through both the survey and stakeholder engagement is the need to develop clearer career pathways and progression routes within the festivals and events sector. Many organisations operate with small teams, rely heavily on freelance workers or volunteers, and face what has been described as a potential “succession cliff,” where experienced organisers and producers may leave the sector without a clear pipeline of trained professionals to replace them. Strengthening structured pathways into and through the sector will therefore be critical to supporting its long-term sustainability and professionalisation.

One potential response is the development of work based learning such as a sector-specific traineeship delivered through the Education and Training Board (ETB) network. ETB traineeships combine structured classroom learning with paid work-based training and can be short duration (e.g. 6 months – 1 year), making them well suited to sectors such as events and festivals where practical experience is essential. A festivals and events traineeship could equip participants with core competencies in areas such as event planning and coordination, production and logistics, marketing and communications, sponsorship and partnership development, health and safety, and event compliance. Industry placements with festivals, venues, production companies, and tourism organisations would provide hands-on experience while helping organisations access a pipeline of trained entry-level staff.

Determination of employer appetite for an apprenticeship could also be considered to leverage the wealth of experience of higher education providers. The advantage would be the potential for national reach and a progression from FE.

Such work based learning programmes would support the development of entry-level roles and early-career pathways, enabling new entrants to gain practical experience while building professional skills. It could also support the wider ecosystem of suppliers, venues, and event production services that underpin the delivery of festivals and events.

In addition to traineeships, there is potential to explore innovative tertiary education models that connect further education, higher education, and industry experience. Ireland’s emerging tertiary education framework encourages collaboration between ETBs and higher education institutions to create flexible and accessible learning pathways.

Work based learning approaches would enable learners to earn while they learn, build qualifications over time, and gain valuable industry experience throughout their education. They would also strengthen collaboration between education providers and industry, helping ensure that programme content remains aligned with evolving sector needs.

By establishing clearer pathways for entry, progression, and leadership within the sector, these initiatives would support the professionalisation of festivals and events, help address emerging skills gaps, and ensure that the next generation of organisers, producers, and creative leaders is equipped to sustain and grow Ireland’s vibrant events ecosystem.

However there is a need to determine industry buy-in for any such programmes developed to ensure that sufficient numbers of work-based training places can be offered. The cyclical nature of the festivals and events sector and unstable funding models must be considered in the design.

3. Strengthen Industry Networking and Knowledge-Sharing Platforms

Workshop participants strongly valued the opportunity to connect with peers and share experiences. Many stakeholders expressed interest in regular networking events or forums where organisers, venues, suppliers, and support agencies could exchange knowledge and build partnerships.

Establishing a regional festival and events sector network or forum, scaffolded by Galway City Council and other councils in the region, could support:

- Peer learning and mentorship
- Collaboration between festivals
- Shared problem solving
- Access to suppliers, venues, and partners

Regular sector gatherings, roundtables, or industry events could help strengthen the sense of community and collaboration within the sector.



4. Expand Centralised Information and Resource Hub

Stakeholders highlighted the need for a centralised platform providing practical guidance and resources for festival organisers. At a national level there is already a hub within Fáilte Ireland which could be reviewed/added to, and promoted more widely amongst those in the festivals and events sector (Fáilte Ireland | National Tourism Development Authority, n.d.-b).⁶⁴ Workshop participants largely did not seem to be aware of the existing Fáilte Ireland resources for the sector. This could be further expanded to function as a “one-stop shop” similar to models used in international festival networks.

For local resources/information that needs to be shared in the sector, this could be hosted by the Galway City Council.

National – Fáilte Ireland – Exists but Could be Expanded Further

- A directory of training programmes and funding opportunities
- Additional templates for sponsorship proposals, risk assessments, and project planning etc. It was also noted that such templates should be built into training provision to the greatest extent possible, given that festival and events entities are time poor and rely on volunteers

Local – Galway City Council

- Guidance on compliance, licensing, and event regulations
- A shared calendar of regional events
- Information on venues, suppliers, and technical services

Leveraging the existing Fáilte Ireland platform could help reduce administrative burden and improve access to resources across the sector.

5. Improve Coordination Between Festivals, Local Authorities and Stakeholders

Workshop discussions highlighted the importance of clearer communication and earlier engagement between event organisers, local authorities, and other key stakeholders. Participants noted that clearer processes, defined responsibilities, and improved communication could significantly support event planning and delivery.

Local authorities are often asked to assess complex event documentation, coordinate internal and external stakeholders, and respond to a wide range of event types. However, there is no consistent national training pathway for local authority staff involved in event review, event safety advisory processes or public event permissions. This could be examined as part of the next stage.

Opportunities include:

- Developing clearer event planning frameworks for different scales of events
- Creating regular engagement opportunities between organisers and local authorities
- Improving communication channels between festivals, tourism agencies, and cultural organisations

Improved coordination would help support more efficient event delivery and reduce administrative challenges.

⁶⁴ Fáilte Ireland | National Tourism Development Authority. (n.d.-b). <https://www.failteireland.ie/Product-development/Festival-and-events.aspx>

6. Support Shared Resources and Infrastructure

Participants highlighted opportunities to maximise the use of shared infrastructure and resources across the sector. This could include:

- Shared access to basic technical equipment (lighting, AV, staging)
- Shared procurement or collective buying power for services
- Improved access to temporary or underutilised event spaces
- Coordinated venue and event space mapping

Developing mechanisms for resource sharing and collaboration between festivals could help reduce costs and increase efficiency.



7. Develop a Regional Festivals and Events Strategy

Several participants emphasised the need for a more coordinated strategic approach to the development of the festivals and events sector in the region. A regional strategy could help align stakeholders, identify shared priorities, and support long-term sector sustainability. While we note that Galway City Council intends to develop such a strategy for the city, given the structure of the wider hinterland and the vision for a shared economic development plan, it would be worth considering at a minimum collaboration with the Galway County Council on the strategy and outreach to the bordering Mayo/Roscommon/Clare councils on this. Leitrim council might also be considered due to their prior work in collaborating with, and organising, the sector.

Such a strategy could address:

- Sector growth and sustainability
- Funding and investment models
- Skills and workforce development
- Infrastructure and venue capacity
- International collaboration and cultural exchange

A strategic framework would support the sector in moving from short-term project delivery toward longer-term sustainable development. The West could launch a regional pilot to test practical, proportionate training supports.

8. Strengthen Access to Funding and Sponsorship Opportunities

Access to sustainable funding was identified as a significant challenge. Stakeholders highlighted the need for greater support in developing sponsorship relationships, understanding funding opportunities, and building financial resilience.

Potential supports include:

- Sponsorship training and corporate partnership programmes
- Funding guidance workshops
- Sponsorship matchmaking or “pitch events” connecting festivals with businesses
- Improved visibility of available public funding programmes
- Supporting festivals to diversify their funding streams would help strengthen the sector’s long-term viability.

The findings highlight that while the region has strong creative talent and a vibrant events ecosystem, the sector would benefit from more structured training opportunities, stronger collaboration mechanisms, and improved access to shared resources and information. Addressing these areas would help strengthen organisational capacity, enhance sector resilience, and support the sustainable growth of festivals and events across the region.



Conclusion

The findings highlight both the strengths and the challenges within the festivals and events sector in the West of Ireland.

The sector benefits from strong creativity, community engagement, and a willingness among organisers to collaborate and share knowledge. However, the research also points to a need for more targeted supports to address skills gaps, strengthen organisational capacity, and improve coordination across stakeholders. While a range of training opportunities exist in related areas such as digital marketing, hospitality, and creative production, there is limited provision specifically tailored to the operational realities of festival and event management. Funding for such courses and offering at times when the festival calendar is less busy will be key to uptake of places.

Addressing these gaps will require a combination of sector-specific training initiatives, stronger networking and knowledge-sharing platforms, improved access to shared resources, and clearer engagement between organisers, local authorities, and industry partners. By developing flexible professional development opportunities, enhancing collaboration across the sector, and providing more structured support mechanisms, there is significant potential to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of festivals and events in the region. Continued engagement between industry stakeholders, education providers, and public bodies will be key to ensuring that the sector can grow, innovate, and continue to contribute to the cultural and economic vitality of the West.



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