



Higher National Unit specification

General information

Unit title: Conferences: An Introduction (SCQF level 7)

Unit code: H942 34

Superclass: AF

Publication date: May 2015

Source: Scottish Qualifications Authority

Version: 01

Unit purpose

This introductory Unit is designed to develop the learner's knowledge of the conference industry in terms of its size, structure and importance to the UK economy. It will introduce the learner to the key stages and actions involved in planning, organising, managing, closing down and finally evaluating a large scale conference.

Outcomes

On successful completion of the Unit the learner will be able to:

- 1 Explain the size and structure of the UK conference industry and key decisions of buyers in the initial phase of planning a large scale conference.
- 2 Explain the role and key duties of a conference organiser for a large scale conference.

Credit points and level

1 Higher National Unit credit at SCQF level 7: (8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7)

Recommended entry to the Unit

Entry to this Unit will be at the discretion of the centre, no prior knowledge of the subject area is required.

Core Skills

Opportunities to develop aspects of Core Skills are highlighted in the Support Notes for this Unit specification.

There is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skill components in this Unit.

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Context for delivery

If this Unit is delivered as part of a Group Award, it is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within the subject area of the Group Award to which it contributes.

Equality and inclusion

This Unit specification has been designed to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment. The individual needs of learners should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Further advice can be found on our website www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements.

Higher National Unit specification: Statement of standards

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Acceptable performance in this Unit will be the satisfactory achievement of the standards set out in this part of the Unit specification. All sections of the statement of standards are mandatory and cannot be altered without reference to SQA.

Outcome 1

Explain the size and structure of the UK conference industry and key decisions of buyers in the initial phase of planning a large scale conference.

Knowledge and/or Skills

- ◆ The size and economic value of the UK conference sector
- ◆ The role of convention bureaux
- ◆ The types of conference buyers in the UK market
- ◆ Key decisions of a conference buyer in the initial stages of planning of a large scale conference

Outcome 2

Explain the role and key duties of a conference organiser for a large scale conference.

Knowledge and/or Skills

- ◆ Key planning responsibilities in advance of the conference
- ◆ Key operational responsibilities on the day and post conference

Evidence Requirements for this Unit

Learners will need to provide evidence to demonstrate their Knowledge and/or Skills across all Outcomes by showing that they can:

Outcome 1

- ◆ define the size and economic value of the UK conferences sector.
- ◆ explain the role and purpose of convention bureaux.
- ◆ identify the different types of conference buyers in the UK market.
- ◆ identify key decisions of conference buyers in the initial stages of planning a large scale conference.

Higher National Unit specification: Statement of standards (cont)

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Outcome 2

- ◆ identify the key planning responsibilities of a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) before a large scale conference:
 - Booking Venue
 - Recruiting keynote speakers/presenters
 - Sponsorship
 - Marketing the conference
 - Preparing an event schedule/time plan
 - Managing the advance registration system
 - Planning conference IT
 - Organising other in-house and external resources.

- ◆ identify the key operational tasks to be controlled and monitored by a PCO on the day of a large scale conference:
 - Pre start checks and controls
 - Live event checks and controls
 - Post event checks and controls.

- ◆ identify the key actions by the PCO to support the conference evaluation process.



Higher National Unit Support Notes

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Unit Support Notes are offered as guidance and are not mandatory.

While the exact time allocated to this Unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 40 hours.

Guidance on the content and context for this Unit

The meetings and conferences sector dominates the UK events industry. Within this classification there is a vast array of events ranging from small scale one day meetings to very large scale week long international conferences.

The context of this Unit is intended to provide learners with an appreciation of the economic value of this sector. It is also intended to ensure learners understand the complexities of organising large scale conferences in terms of; timelines, competition, technological demands and number of stakeholders involved. Importantly however it concludes by ensuring learners have a basic appreciation of the role and duties of a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) within the industry.

Outcome 1

Conferences are a key part of business tourism and this first Outcome is to set the context of the sector's importance to the UK economy. Learners should learn that conferences are a highly competitive global industry and the role of the Convention Bureau is important in attracting national and international business to the UK. Centres may choose to broaden the number of stakeholders they discuss but it is not intended this be an in depth analysis, more a general introduction.

Learners should also learn about the different types of conference buyers which exist in the UK market (corporations, associations, government/public sector organisations and entrepreneurial organisations) and understand the key decisions they control in the introductory planning process. Clearly this can vary, but typically learners should understand the buyer who is hosting the conference will likely define; the overall aims and objectives of the conference, the budget and set out the broad conference structure and venue requirements. Whether to undertake the planning and organisation of the conference in house or recruit support externally from a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) is another important decision made by the conference buyer.

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Outcome 2

Outcome 2 seeks to ensure learners understand the key tasks and duties required to organise and manage a large scale conference both in terms of the pre-conference planning stage and subsequent 'on the day' operational duties.

Planning responsibilities of PCO prior to a large scale conference:

Planning a large scale conference is a highly specialist job and for this reason most companies will seek the services of a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO). Complexities relate not only to the number of delegates involved, but also to the advance timescales (two plus years minimum). Conference planning has a large financial risk and breakeven depends on ensuring a target number of delegates register to attend the conference.

Learners should learn how marketing skills are important in conference planning. The conference market is very competitive and large conferences have to ensure they meet the needs and expectations of delegates not only in terms of meeting their business expectations but increasingly in terms of social needs as well. Typically a four day conference would include a range of optional activities including; dinners, field trips, entertainment and social events. Market research is used to assist in designing the overall conference event programme and to ensure it offers a good balance. A full marketing programme then needs to be developed to actively promote the conference. The organiser will be responsible for creating a campaign which typically includes; direct marketing, social media, print advertising, press releases and blogs.

The importance of monitoring delegate registrations should be understood. Targets are set and if insufficient advance registrations are received the conference may not be viable. Learners should also understand the link between delegate registrations and the organiser's ability to secure good sponsorship. High profile keynote speakers clearly make a conference more attractive to delegates and this is therefore an important priority for the organiser to arrange as early as possible.

Contractually, venues will impose a cut off date for finalising numbers which is typically a year before the conference date. It is noted that learners will likely already understand this from previous learning. It is not essential, but where time permits there is good opportunity in this section to look at venues such as the SECC who are forming strategic partnerships with organisers to not only support the marketing of conferences through their own medias but who are also lowering the financial risks involved by creating special conference booking contracts. Venues may also have negotiated accommodation rates with local hotels and may be able to organise this on behalf of the organiser if required. Other arrangements to be confirmed with a venue will include; food and beverage, room layouts, signage and basic in-house IT which can be supported by venue staff. This learning may have been covered in other Units so will likely need only a brief review.

Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

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In terms of specialist conference resources, learners should understand IT expectations of conference delegates. A large scale conference will require a full professional stage set with full rig to house; lighting, sound, projection and other state of the art AV equipment. Software specialists may also be contracted to create apps to enable delegates to download venue layout maps, digital agendas and timetables and speaker notes. For delegates who cannot attend in person the use of live streaming equipment to enable on line registration services is commonplace. Add-ons such as social media live feeds, discussion blogs, survey equipment, and translation services are also likely necessary. Hi speed broadband connection is now a priority throughout any conference venue.

Operational tasks to be controlled and monitored by PCO during and post event:

Pre-Event Tasks/Checks: Wide range of possible tasks could include; briefing venue staff on any minor amendments to conference schedule, checking directional signage, sorting out registration resources (delegate list, badges, information packs), inspecting room layout setups, testing all IT equipment is fully operational, briefing other support staff such as security staff, registration staff, cloakroom staff, etc.

Live Event Tasks/Checks: Wide range of possible tasks could include; monitoring queue handling at registration, meeting and greeting speakers/VIPs, marshalling timelines throughout to keep event schedule to time, overseeing food and beverage service. Learners should learn the importance of finer details not being overlooked over the course of a busy conference schedule such as evaluation/feedback processes being integrated into all key conference sessions.

Post Conference Tasks/Checks: As above a wide range of possible tasks could include: ensuring all equipment and resources are safely returned, letters of thanks, paying invoices and checking the bill/accounts with the venue, collating feedback surveys from delegates, preparing final budget reconciliation for buyer. Learners should understand the importance of analysing the evaluation/feedback from delegates for future learning and that the final responsibility of an organiser is to conduct a formal debrief of the conference with all key members of the buyer organisation's conference committee.

Guidance on approaches to delivery of this Unit

This Unit is an introductory Unit to Conferences and can be delivered by a series of lectures and tutorial discussions and presentations. The use of current conferences to identify buyers and services should be provided both locally and nationally. Exposure to actual conferences will enhance the learner experience both in work experience and in areas of citizenship — education, health, poverty, equality for example. Learners should be encouraged to work together to develop team skills where practical assessment is used. Learners could also volunteer to help at a conference in college or locally.

Guest speakers such as a conference buyer or supplier should, if possible, be invited to present to the learner group. Local venues may be able to provide a speaker who would be able to provide details of the venue and provide a tour of facilities. Visits such as this provide opportunities for learners to ask relevant questions and visualise the conference.

Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

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Attendance at a professionally organised conference such as Confex, HIT Emerging Talent, or a NUS Student Conference would greatly benefit the learners and provide an insight to the detail of running such an event. Using youtube clips from professionally organised conferences such as the European Tourism Association (ETOA) allow learners to experience conference delivery without attending.

The Unit can be taken as a stand-alone Unit for those learners interested in working in Conferences.

Guidance on approaches to assessment of this Unit

The Unit could be assessed using different methods of assessment for example, extended or short response questions, multiple choice questions, case study and report and/or practical with observation checklist and portfolio submission.

There could be an opportunity for partial integration of assessment with the HN Unit *Organising an Event* if a learner group wish to plan, run and evaluate a conference. Outcome 1 and elements of Outcome 2 would likely need to be supported with some additional extended response questions.

Assessment Guidelines

Outcome 1

Outcome 1 could be assessed through a series of extended response questions to cover all the Evidence Requirements of this Outcome. This could be done through extended response questions or multiple choice questions that could be on-line or paper format.

This should be supervised open-book conditions.

Outcome 2

Outcome 2 could be assessed through a case study or a practical activity with portfolio submission with support checklists.

For example learners could be asked to adopt the role of a PCO and be asked to create a website or folio to promote a large scale conference for a case study organisation. Learners could select and present information about the venue and location, draft a full conference schedule (with social events), write interesting profiles of their chosen keynote speakers, feature the logo and background of the event sponsor and provide details of on line registration procedures and costs. Potentially the website could have further links to a survey monkey, blogs and other on line forums/social media pages (which may also integrate with other assessments). Alternatively a survey card could be included within the folio. Evidence for on the day and post event duties and responsibilities of a PCO could be evidenced by asking learners to create their own mock checklists to detail what would be their pre, during and post event checks and controls.

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This should be an unsupervised open-book assessment.

Or

The practical activity of planning, running and evaluating a small conference on behalf of another group of learners such as a business enterprise meeting or employability event for tourism learners or for an actual client. There are many opportunities that would lend themselves to organising a small conference in an educational setting. The practical should be conducted with observation checklists and portfolio submission of any omitted evidence.

Opportunities for e-assessment

This Unit would be suitable for on-line and distance learning delivery. The delivery would be possible through a Virtual Learning Environment.

E-assessment may be appropriate for some assessments in this Unit. By e-assessment we mean assessment which is supported by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), such as e-testing or the use of e-portfolios or social software. Centres which wish to use e-assessment must ensure that the national standard is applied to all learner evidence and that conditions of assessment as specified in the Evidence Requirements are met, regardless of the mode of gathering evidence. The most up-to-date guidance on the use of e-assessment to support SQA's qualifications is available at www.sqa.org.uk/e-assessment.

Opportunities for developing Core and other essential skills

The learner will have opportunity to develop Core Skills at SCQF level 5 in Critical Thinking — *Problem Solving* and *Communication*. They could also have the opportunity to achieve *Working with Others* if practical assessment is used in Outcome 2.

Critical Thinking — Problem Solving

There is opportunity to develop Critical Thinking through *Problem Solving* where learners examine the planning, running and evaluation of conferences. The examination and selection of appropriate products, resources and services.

Communication

There is opportunity to develop the Written Communication component of the Core Skill of *Communication* at SCQF level 5 in this Unit. If a practical task is chosen, group work and oral discussions will develop skills in communications. Written communication skills will also be developed.

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Working with Others

There are further opportunities to develop the Core Skills of *Working with Others* SCQF level 5 in this Unit if the practical assessment model is used in Outcome 2.

Citizenship could also be developed in relation to the political party conferences that are an annual fixture in the UK calendar. The use of different conference examples could highlight topics such as political unrest in the world, human rights, climate change, tourism poverty, medical issues and developments, voluntary groups and sustainability.

History of changes to Unit

Version	Description of change	Date

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General information for learners

Unit title: Conferences: An Introduction (SCQF level 7)

This Unit is all about the conference industry which is rapidly growing and developing throughout the UK and globally. It is a key area in business tourism and has a positive impact on the economy of the country. It will introduce you to the organisations that attract conferences to regions and the UK. You will learn about the range of buyers that operate in the conference industry. You will learn how conferences are planned, run and evaluated.

Conferences may be a new area of study to you and you may not have thought about conferencing as a career option. The conference industry is a specialist area and provides a variety of career choices such as professional conference organiser (PCO), conference and banqueting managers (in venues) and marketing conference specialists. This is a global business that provides career opportunities around the world.

Outcome 1

You will be able to explain the size, structure of the conference industry. You will learn about the important role of convention bureaux. The range of buyers in the conference industry will be examined and you will understand the key decisions they make in the planning process.

Outcome 2

You will learn about the key duties and responsibilities of a conference organiser at all stages of planning a conference from start to finish.

You will learn about the advance planning tasks in terms of booking the venue, drafting the conference plan, market research and marketing, booking keynote speakers, sponsorship and resources, particularly IT.

Operationally you will understand the vast number of checks and controls required on the day to manage the event from initial pre checks through to final clear down and evaluation.

By undertaking this Unit it will provide you with the opportunity to develop broader skills such as problem solving, team work, research skills and communication.