



**Authentic assessment in event management education:
Integrating technology and industry for authentic learning.**

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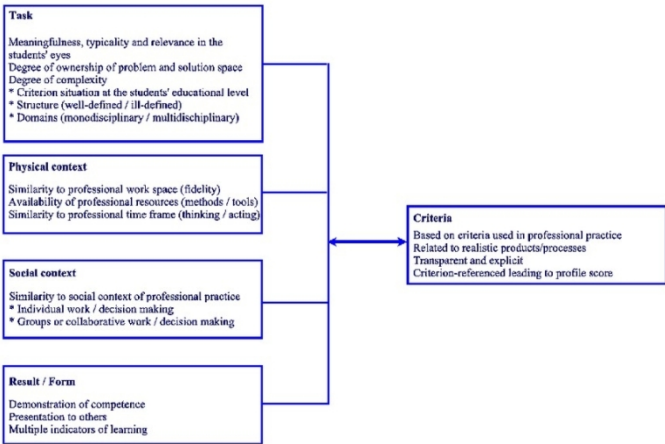


Figure 1: 5 dimensions of authentic assessment. Gulikers et al., 2004b, p.7.

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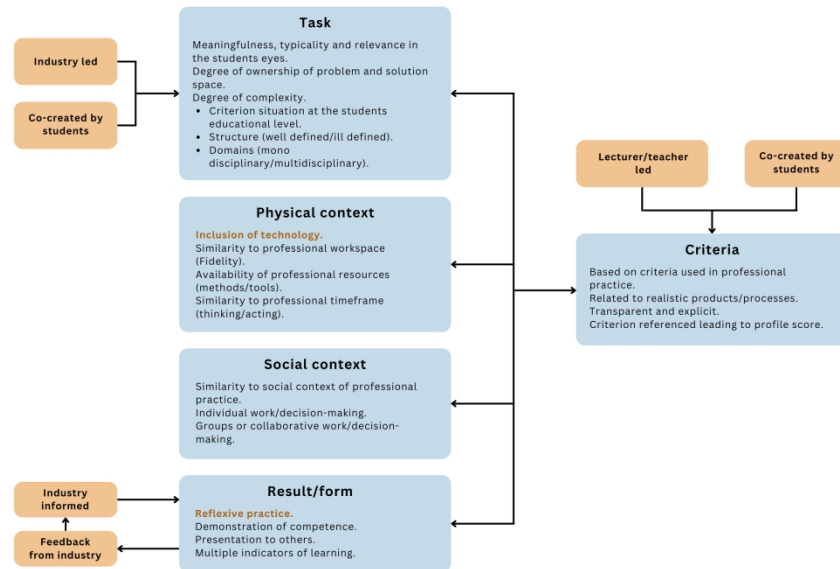


Figure 2. Proposed adaptation of Gulikers et al., (2004b) 5-Dimensional Framework (5DF)

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This paper explores authentic assessment in event management education, with emphasis on emerging technologies and industry collaboration. It addresses sector-wide concerns around course credibility and employability, examining how authentic assessment can bridge the gap between academic learning and professional practice.

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An interpretivist, qualitative approach was used, drawing on focus groups and interviews with UK-based event management academics. Thematic analysis identified key themes in assessment design, technology use, and industry engagement.

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Academics widely support authentic assessment for its role in developing industry-relevant, employability-focused skills. Technology was used to replicate professional contexts but was limited by institutional constraints, digital inequality, and staff capability. Industry partnerships improved assessment relevance but often relied on individual networks and goodwill. A revised version of Gulikers *et al.*'s (2004b) Five-Dimensional Framework is proposed, incorporating student co-creation, reflexive practice, and industry feedback as additional dimensions.

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The paper offers new insights by highlighting academic perspectives and advancing existing frameworks to better reflect current practice. The proposed model integrates technology, reflexivity, and industry feedback, offering a more adaptable tool for vocational disciplines.

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The study reflects only academic perspectives within UK event management educators.

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Further research should include student and industry views and test the revised framework in practice.

Practical implications

To support authentic assessment, institutions must provide clearer definitions, targeted staff development, and resources to embed industry collaboration in curriculum design.

Keywords: Authentic Assessment, Event Management Education, Authentic Learning, Industry Partnership, Employability, Technology

Introduction

Authentic assessment in event management education: Integrating technology and industry for authentic learning.

With increasing emphasis on aligning academia with industry, authentic assessment offers a valuable strategy to bridge this divide. In the context of declining offerings of event management degrees (UCAS, 2024) and ongoing recruitment challenges in the sector (Nadda *et al.*, 2022), tensions have emerged between academic rigour and experiential learning. To address skills gaps and support employability, educators have turned to authentic assessments that mirror real-world professional tasks (Steriopoulos *et al.*, 2022).

Authentic assessment remains underexplored in event management education (EME), especially in terms of industry relevance and technological integration. While emerging technologies and industry-standard software are increasingly embedded in curricula to enhance authenticity and digital skills (Nieminen *et al.*, 2023), implementing such assessments poses challenges often overlooked in literature, particularly in the context of EME.

This paper examines barriers faced by UK-based educators when implementing authentic assessments involving technology. It builds on existing pedagogic research to explore assessment design, technological integration, and alignment with industry needs. The study addresses the following research questions: 1) How do event management educators define authentic assessment in the context of their specific courses and curriculum design? 2) Within EME, what are the primary challenges and barriers faced in the implementation of authentic assessment methods, especially those forms of assessment which make use of technology? 3) What are the key factors and best practices identified in successful case studies of event management educators who have effectively implemented authentic assessment methods and new technologies? 4) What actionable insights and recommendations can be derived from the experiences of educators to overcome barriers and enhance assessment practices in EME?

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The paper begins with a review of relevant literature, followed by presenting the qualitative methodology and research design, and a discussion of findings, and recommendations. The adapted five-dimensional framework for authentic assessment (Gulikers *et al.*, 2004b) informs the analysis from the perspective of UK-based event management educators.

Literature Review

The Growth and Decline of Event Management Education

Event management degrees are understood to be a relatively new academic discipline that emerged in the early 1990s as a separate field from tourism, hospitality, and leisure courses (Bowdin *et al.*, 2023). The popularity of event management degree courses mirrored the growth and professionalisation of the event industry, and at the time, the view towards event managers as skilled and trained professionals (Barron and Ali-Knight, 2017; Bladen and Kennell, 2014). As noted by Silvers *et al.* (2005) education would be seen to play an important role in the future development of the profession and for those who looked to certify and qualify their knowledge, skills and experience.

Ryan (2016), Dashper and Fletcher (2019) and Dashper *et al.* (2020) shed light on a period of significant growth in UK degree event management courses from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s. Fletcher *et al.* (2022) further observed a peak in course offerings during the 2021/2022 academic year, with UCAS listing 499 events management courses from 105 UK providers at undergraduate level. However, a review of listings at the time of writing for the 2024/25 academic year reveals a shift in the landscape. In 2024 there were 409 undergraduate courses offered by 112 providers, and 61 postgraduate courses from 38 providers (UCAS, 2024). This data suggests a recent decline in course provisions. The reduction in undergraduate course offerings is unsurprising in light of recent policy changes by the UK Government regarding post-16 education. The implementation of the new Advanced British Standard will further eliminate educational pathways leading to degrees in Tourism, Hospitality, and Event

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Management (Department for Education, 2023). Additional shifts in higher education policy can be interpreted as indicative of neoliberal imperatives, which prioritise metrics, measurable economic "value" of courses, league table rankings, and competitive course outcomes. The legitimacy and credibility of event management degree courses are also often questioned in relation to graduate employability outcomes (Fletcher *et al.*, 2017; Fletcher, 2022).

A recent white paper "*The Future of Tourism, Hospitality and Events (THE) Education*" (Wyld *et al.*, 2024) forecasts continued decline in the uptake of places on undergraduate event management courses, highlighting the reduction in European applicants due to Brexit. Moreover, concerns have been highlighted regarding realistic expectations for graduate salary brackets, as well as difficulties in achieving higher response rates to graduate outcome surveys. Concurrently, the UK event industry is also facing recruitment challenges and skill gaps exacerbated by the departure of non-nationals post-Brexit. This exodus, along with escalating vacancies, highlights the need for skilled employees (Nadda *et al.*, 2022). Despite these challenges, the event industry shows signs of resilience, with economic metrics nearing pre-pandemic levels, according to UKCAMS (2024). Such resurgence may serve to mitigate the apprehensions surrounding the viability of event management careers, albeit against a backdrop of evolving market dynamics. Arguably, while there may be a temporary decline in demand for event management courses the enduring need for competent and knowledgeable individuals to navigate the intricacies of the event industry suggests the potential for a future rise in demand.

This challenging landscape for event management degree providers places emphasis on educators to improve degree curriculum design with a focus on industry recognition, employability and graduate outcomes; further underscoring the need for symbiotic relationships between event management degree courses and requirements of the event industry and future event professionals.

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Event Management Degrees; Industry perceptions and requirements

Event Management degrees are widely recognised for their duality, as both academic degree courses and a vocationally oriented subject area (Sealy, 2017), and as such have a long history of integrating education with industry partnerships. However, there is limited research which seeks to understand the curricula of event management courses and assessment design in relation to industry perceptions and partnerships.

Lee *et al.* (2009), in a Korean study, identified a disconnect between industry professionals' understanding of the content and delivery of event management courses. While students viewed the courses positively, industry stakeholders emphasised the need for more practical training. The authors recommended stronger industry partnerships to enhance students' exposure to real-world practices and improve experiential learning. Bouchon *et al.* (2017) found similar results in Malaysia, observing that the event industry had not yet fully acknowledged the value of event management graduates' education. The event industry's lack of awareness and understanding of the benefits of event management courses for both graduates and the industry is also underscored by the work of Kashef (2015) and Ryan (2016). The findings of which revealed a general lack of awareness among these professionals regarding the scope and nature of event management courses.

Jiang and Schmader (2014) highlight the role of EME in supporting the professionalisation of the sector by recognising its contribution to foundational knowledge and core business skills. However, their study reveals persistent tensions between academic theory and experiential learning, reflecting broader debates in EME literature around the vocational and academic divide (Getz, 2002; Barron and Ali-Knight, 2017). In response, Bladen and Kennell (2014) critique traditional business school teaching methods as inadequate for the dynamic and relational demands of event work, advocating instead for a "reflexive practicum" (Schön, 1987), which prioritises experiential and reflective learning. They emphasise that reflexive

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practice is key to developing the creative and experiential competencies essential for event design. More recently, Cock (2024) reinforces the importance of pairing experiential learning with structured, evidence-based reflection to enhance its academic and professional value.

Research by Flinn (2023) found that industry misconceptions about event management degrees are diminishing, with most participants viewing EME positively and increasingly recognising its value in the professionalisation of the event industry. Event management educators therefore have a responsibility to deliver ‘work ready’ students. However, to date, there is little further research exploring the integration of industry partnerships and practices to support curriculum design and development.

Amid evolving industry expectations, event management courses must not only deliver relevant content but also adopt pedagogical approaches that enhance students' readiness for professional practice. Robertson *et al.* (2012) emphasise the need for curricula to reflect emerging competencies through experiential learning and authentic assessment methods that replicate professional contexts and support practice-based learning. Similarly, Steriopoulos *et al.* (2022) argue that authentic assessment helps bridge the academia-to-industry gap and stress the importance of integrating digital innovation into both event delivery and learning design. Despite these calls, existing research remains limited, often focusing on isolated practitioner perspectives (Robertson *et al.*, 2012; Steriopoulos *et al.*, 2022) or student reflections on live event experiences (Kitchen, 2024). There is a noteworthy gap in comprehensive studies examining the systematic implementation of authentic assessments and the integration of technology across event management programs. This paper aims to contribute in these areas.

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Authentic Assessment

Since the 1990s, the term "authentic assessment" has been extensively discussed and defined. In 1998 Joughin defined authentic assessment in higher education, as ‘assessment

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which replicates the context of professional practice or “real life” (Joughin, 1998, p.371). The most common definitions maintain that authentic assessments match real-world tasks and problems where students actively participate and apply knowledge and skills expected in the profession and workplace (Ashford-Rowe *et al.*, 2014; Bryan and Clegg, 2019; James and Casidy, 2018; Jopp, 2020; McArthur, 2023; Nyanjom *et al.*, 2023; Rust, 2007; Sambell *et al.*, 2013; Steriopoulos *et al.*, 2022; Villarroel *et al.*, 2018).

Authentic assessment bridges academic learning and professional practice by replicating real-world tasks and performance standards, thereby enhancing students’ employability (Steriopoulos *et al.*, 2022; Villarroel *et al.*, 2018). It develops critical skills such as adaptability, strategic thinking, and effective communication (Villarroel *et al.*, 2018), while also supporting the acquisition of event-specific knowledge, workplace awareness, and transferable competencies (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007). Given the applied nature of event management, these outcomes are best achieved through experiential approaches. As Gulikers *et al.* (2004a) argue, authenticity must be context-specific, tasks should mirror professional practices, such as team-based assessments reflecting real-world collaboration.

Authentic assessment has become increasingly popular in higher education, as institutions realise it provides students with opportunities to engage in activities that closely mirror real-world professional experiences (Sokhanvar *et al.*, 2021). Authenticity in teaching and assessment is defined by realism, contextualisation, and problem-solving. Realism connects knowledge to everyday life and work, contextualisation involves applying knowledge in a thoughtful and analytical manner, and problem-solving emphasises using what is learnt to address a challenge or fulfil a need (Villarroel *et al.*, 2018). Authentic assessment is considered a model that can boost employability by fostering workplace-relevant abilities such as problem-solving, autonomy, motivation, self-regulation, and metacognition (Gulikers *et al.*, 2008; Swaffield, 2011). Hence, it offers students the opportunity to practice skills and competencies that are highly valued by employers.

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These skills are recognised by Jopp (2020, p.946) whom identifies consistent aspects of authentic assessment that recur throughout the academic literature, including:

- Provide a real-world context (the assessment task is oriented towards the relevant industry).
- Utilise multiple methods of assessment and multiple solutions.
- Motivate and engage students.
- Challenge students (but set achievable parameters).
- Develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Provide clear links to the intended learning outcomes.
- Involve timely and constructive feedback.
- Integrate cross-disciplinary knowledge.

Authentic assessment promotes learner independence by engaging students in meaningful, future-facing tasks that shift them from passive recipients to active creators of knowledge (Swaffield, 2011). James and Casidy (2018) highlight authenticity as central to effective assessment design, noting that students typically value it highly. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) argue for a transition from teacher-led to learner-led regulation across undergraduate study, requiring active student engagement in assessment. Jopp (2020) further advocates involving students in assessment creation to foster critical employability skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking. When students perceive assessment as authentic, they are more likely to engage and demonstrate relevant professional competencies (Jopp, 2020). Villarroel *et al.* (2018) emphasise authenticity's role in aligning assessment, teaching, and learning to enhance employability. In response, universities have begun embedding real-world relevance into assessment practices (Nyanjom *et al.*, 2023), providing students with realistic

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yet supportive experiential learning opportunities (Murphy *et al.*, 2017). Event management is a vocational subject; hence, hands-on experience is a critical requirement for graduates entering the industry (Venske, 2018). Common assessment approaches include the planning and delivery of live events, working on client-based projects, maintaining reflective journals, and managing simulated crisis scenarios (Cock, 2024; Kitchen, 2024).

Authentic Assessment Framework

Gulikers *et al.* (2004b) devised a five-dimensional framework for authentic assessment (figure 1); the task, physical context, social context, assessment result or form and the criteria.

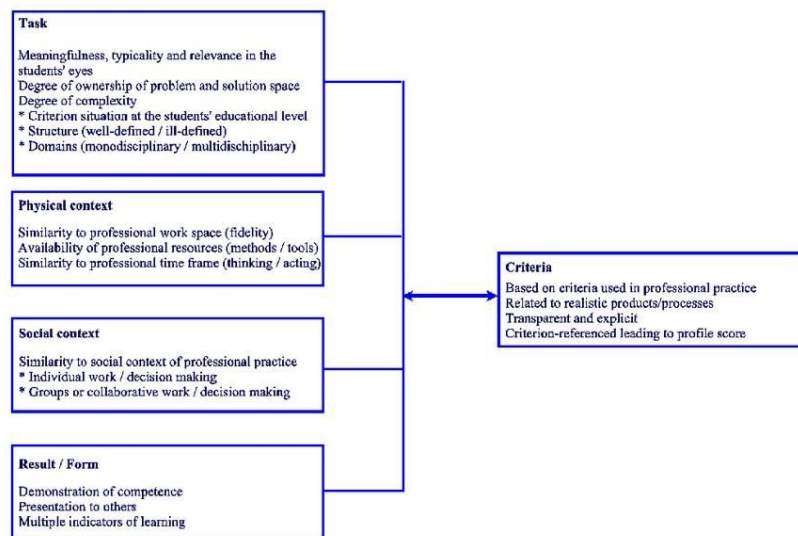


Figure 1: Five dimensions of authentic assessment. Gulikers *et al.*, 2004b, p.7.

They emphasise that authenticity is defined by how closely an assessment replicates professional practice. The authenticity of the task depends on its relevance, complexity, and alignment with real-world event management skills and knowledge. The physical context should reflect industry environments, providing the necessary resources and timeframes

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found in the professional setting. In event management, the social context is particularly important due to the collaborative nature of the field, although authenticity may also apply to tasks typically performed individually. Assessment results should resemble real-world outputs, allowing students to demonstrate competence in event management and problem solving. Presentations and defences of work further enhance accountability, and should reflect professional practice. Criteria must align with industry standards, guiding task design and ensuring consistency with real-world expectations. While the framework has informed authentic assessment design, Gulikers *et al.* (2004b) call for further research into how technology can support and enhance these assessments.

Event Technology

Integrating assessments within realistic contexts is essential for preparing students for the workforce, especially as emerging technologies increasingly shape teaching and learning. With employers seeking graduates equipped with 21st-century skills, including digital literacy, there is growing demand for innovative assessment practices. The student learning environment is becoming more technology-driven, multimodal, and flexible, supporting more authentic learning approaches (Valenti, 2015).

The event industry utilises a variety of technologies to facilitate the planning and implementation of events. These technologies encompass not only software solutions for event planning and execution but also include emerging and innovative technologies, such as artificial intelligence, chatbots, drones, facial recognition, mobile applications, augmented reality, and wearable technologies. Sjukriana *et al.* (2025) argue that virtual reality platforms, artificial intelligence, and mobile apps have transformed the landscape of the event industry. Hatch (2024) reports that 47% of event planners are adopting technologies to minimise environmental impacts, such as digital ticketing and virtual event platforms. The increasing complexity and scale of events necessitate the adoption of technologies to manage them

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effectively and with distinction (Mehrotra and Lobo, 2020). Event organisers are continually seeking novel approaches to enhance event experiences, meet attendee expectations, reduce costs, and alleviate staff workloads and stress (Cobanoglu *et al.*, 2021). These technologies enable organisers to efficiently plan events, manage budgets, design engaging programs, improve catering services, ensure high security levels, and lower overall costs (Cobanoglu *et al.*, 2021). Studies suggest that emerging technologies offer various learning and teaching opportunities that can positively impact the achievement of student learning outcomes (Kennedy *et al.*, 2009; Keppell *et al.*, 2015). The integration of technology-enhanced authentic assessment can positively influence pedagogical practice, especially in terms of student engagement, interactivity, creativity, and the achievement of intended learning outcomes (Jopp, 2020).

The literature highlights significant challenges and barriers associated with the implementation of authentic assessments using technologies. Successful implementation is hindered by entrenched teaching practices, weak industry connections, and resistance from some educators to embracing new technologies and innovative approaches (Jopp, 2020; Villarroel *et al.*, 2018). Industry collaboration is encouraged to improve students' digital literacies, with studies highlighting that digitally focused assessment tasks should mirror the anticipated future realities of their discipline (Nieminen *et al.*, 2023). Jopp (2020) found that challenges may emerge in motivating industry participation, especially due to the structural constraints of higher education, such as course delivery formats and the often-indirect benefits to participating businesses. Thus, it is essential to strengthen relationships with industry partners and engage in meaningful dialogue to establish a shared understanding of the purpose and outcomes associated with assessment.

Students require clear guidelines and adequate support for developing their digital literacy skills (Murphy *et al.*, 2017; Nieminen *et al.*, 2023). This highlights the importance of integrating support and scaffolding for digital literacies into assessment design. It is essential that the

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integration of technology does not overshadow the fundamental purpose of the assessment. The incorporation of technology-enhanced assessment into the curriculum should be aimed at enhancing student outcomes by fostering engagement and concentrating on the intended learning objectives (Jopp, 2020). Crucially, the goal is not to evaluate students' technical skills. Designing and implementing practical, real-world tasks can pose challenges when assessing large groups of students (Murphy *et al.*, 2017).

Nieminen *et al.* (2023) contend that authentic assessment designs must evolve to ensure that digital integration is a fundamental component of the curriculum. It is crucial for academic staff to remain current with emerging technologies, which poses significant challenges in terms of time and budget constraints. UK universities are currently facing unprecedented financial pressures due to rising operational costs, capped tuition fees, and a decline in international student enrolments, making investments in digital technologies particularly challenging for educators (Laker, 2024). Authentic assessment tasks may require, or be perceived to require, a greater investment of time and resources compared to traditional assessments (Hart *et al.*, 2011). Jopp (2020) suggests that resource limitations may lead academics to select assessment types that allow for more efficient grading processes.

The literature highlights the unquestionable benefits of authentic assessment in developing 'work-ready' graduates who possess the necessary employability skills demanded by industry. However, there are numerous challenges and barriers faced by higher education educators, most notably, incorporating current technologies and fostering and maintaining industry partnerships. This paper aims to fill this gap in the research by investigating the current challenges faced by event management educators in the UK.

Methodology

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The data consisted of qualitative data collection guided by an interpretivist philosophy to gain personal insights from event management educators surrounding the use of authentic assessments. Participants were engaged through the Association of Event Management Educators Forum (AEME) 2024 and through follow up emails utilising the AEME mailing list.

The data collected took two forms, with both focus groups and interviews being chosen as a combination to explore perceptions and attitudes as a representation (Jaimangal-Jones, 2014) of current EME. Facilitated by a workshop titled 'Challenges and Barriers to Innovative and Authentic Assessment Design' three focus groups were conducted to allow participants to be prompted by both facilitator questions and the comments of other participants (Kruger and Casey, 2000) to assess current implementation of authentic assessment alongside barriers faced by academics and strategies for moving forward. The focus groups (n=3) consisted of (8-10) participants from across the UK, lasting for one hour. Three researchers facilitated the in-person focus groups with semi-structured prompts enabling a free-flowing discussion which was recorded and transcribed. Groups were also asked to feed three key points from their discussions back.

Prompts for the focus groups included:

1. What Authentic Assessments do you use on your degree programmes?
2. What resources/tools/technology do you use to support Authentic Assessment? How?
3. What barriers/challenges do you face when creating and implementing Authentic Assessments on Event Management programmes

Whilst focus groups are common within hospitality and tourism research, their lack of anonymity may discourage participants from being fully open (Richard *et al.*, 2021). To combat such limitations, the researchers conducted a series of follow-up interviews with members of

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the event management academic community. Participants were reached via the AEME mailing list to assess initial interest in participation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via MS Teams by the three members of the research team. Each interview lasted between 50-60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed via MS Teams. In total 8 interviews were conducted with educators from 8 universities in the UK. The questions asked focused on three key areas: (1) the use of authentic assessment, (2) barriers faced in relation to authentic assessment and finally (3) strategies for moving forward.

The following criteria were used for both the focus group and the corresponding interviews (1) academics directly involved with EME (including tourism and hospitality management), (2) English speaking. The level within academia (i.e., lecturer, senior lecturer, teaching fellow was not deemed a significant requirement. However, criterion three stipulated, (3) must design assessments within a higher education event management course. As such a purposive sampling technique was deemed the most suitable.

Data analysis

All data collected was recorded and transcribed verbatim and checked by the researchers before analysis. Following the focus groups the researchers met to discuss inductive ‘key themes’ which each noted during the focus group. These themes directly fed into the deductive coding strategy employed within the thematic data analysis for the interview data. The thematic analysis undertaken takes the form of ‘artfully interpretive’ (Finlay, 2021), falling in line with the philosophy of interpretivism, whereby meanings are understood to be contingent upon the specific context with dialogs with participants used to uncover such meanings (Levitt, 2016). Following the steps of Braun and Clarke (2006) the researchers assessed themes in the data, common within both the focus groups and interviews to present to below findings.

Findings and Discussion

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Event Educators' Understanding of Authentic Assessment

There was consensus that authentic assessment should develop 'real-world' skills, aligned with current industry needs, expectations and practices and develop the employability of students. The findings concur with the literature (Ashford-Rowe *et al.*, 2014; Bryan and Clegg, 2019; James and Casidy, 2018; Jopp, 2020; Joughin, 1998; McArthur, 2023; Nyanjom *et al.*, 2023; Rust, 2007; Sambell *et al.*, 2013; Steriopoulos *et al.*, 2022; Villarroel *et al.*, 2018). Several participants expressed that students should be assessed in a way that mirrors the workplace and 'real' activities, be practical and enable students to put theory into practice, thus equipping them for employment (Steriopoulos *et al.*, 2022; Villarroel *et al.*, 2018). Authentic assessment should be realistic and practical and encourage the demonstration of industry-related skills. However, two participants noted that authentic assessment is a 'buzzword', with another suggesting it is a relatively new piece of terminology. This concurs with McArthur (2023), who argues that 'the real world' is an awful phrase and makes it sound external to students.

"I'm not a big fan of the word authentic personally... it's a bit of a buzzword... for me an authentic assessment, I would equate that to what I would probably term a real-world assessment and I think for me it's about something that has industry relevance." P3

Involving industry connections in designing and implementing authentic assessment is crucial, especially with regards to new technologies supported by Nieminen *et al.*, (2023) who stipulate that industry collaboration is encouraged and digitally focused assessment tasks should mirror the anticipated future realities of their discipline. All interview and focus group participants expressed strong support for the integration of industry involvement within their assessments and course content;

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“For me, the absolute key is involving industry. Industry collaboration to ensure authentic assessment is vital.” P6

While institutions often call for authentic assessment, they rarely provide a clear definition, leaving interpretation up to individual module leaders. Therefore, designing authentic assessments becomes an experimental perspective based on the educators' personal experience and knowledge.

A key advantage of implementing authentic assessment tasks is their potential to support more inclusive assessment design while also reducing reliance on traditional assessments, such as essays and reports that are susceptible to AI-generated content. The use of technology should facilitate more authentic approaches to learning (Valenti, 2015). In the context of the digital age, authentic assessments present an opportunity to design tasks that encourage genuine student engagement and original work, rather than relying on automated generated content.

Authentic assessment should be student-centric and provide opportunities for students to be involved in the development of assessments (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Findings show that students should be actively engaged in the assessment process, supported by Jopp (2020) who suggests this leads to greater student engagement and development of critical employability skills.

Design and Implementation of Authentic Assessment in Event Management Courses

When asked what authentic assessment looked like on their courses, the majority of participants initially noted that their courses ran ‘live’ event assessments;

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"Our second year is much more practical. Kind of a hands-on year. So that's where we have things like our live event, which is obviously very much an authentic assessment, and the students are out running and delivering their own events." P3

Although these assessments took place at different levels of undergraduate or postgraduate courses, many had a similar design, in that students were expected to work in small groups to produce fundraising events for selected charity clients. This kind of design helped the educators navigate institutional barriers (Jopp, 2020), which present themselves when developing these kinds of assessments, such as not having the resources or budgetary requirements to support students in developing their own 'in-house events'. Rather, students are required to fundraise or acquire sponsorship to float the project. However, participants also noted that although these kinds of live fundraising event assessments provided students with a good understanding of fundraising, sponsorship, and third- sector event experience, they did not prepare students for the complexities of larger-scale commercial event projects.

To navigate these challenges, educators had devised innovative solutions where authentic assessments took different forms. Such as students producing their own 'mini festival' delivered as a year-based cohort. Instead of being split into smaller groups, students were divided into staff teams, such as production, marketing, logistics, etc., providing them with a more realistic experience of working within a company structure as well as using project management software and processes collectively across the wider team, as interview participant 2 noted:

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"In some ways, you know the authenticity of it wasn't necessarily just delivering an event, it was the trying to replicate the planning process that professionals would use at that kind of level." P2.

Authentic assessments also took different formats across event courses, such as, consultancy projects with live briefs, crisis simulations, event proposals, site plans, and marketing content like podcasts and social media. These tasks mirrored real-world practice, often assessed through event delivery or planning documents such as risk assessments and marketing plans. Assessments were usually coupled with a reflective essay or report component, where students would critically analyse their learning using academic theory, with reflexive practice seen as essential for processing industry experience;

"They create websites, they do some coding, they do social media marketing and normally that engage with small local businesses and to offer support - 'we will be your social media manager for the next three months, and we'll create a profile for you and programming'. Then we'll reflect that in an assessment. So again, there's practical application that's then evaluated or reflected upon." P1

It is apparent that Bladen and Kennell's (2014) call for the implementation of Schön's (1987) "reflexive practicum" as part of the practices that should shape EME has become a notable part of experiential learning and authentic assessment in event management programs. Many participants also noted the relationship between the students' reflections and recommendations being underpinned by academic theory, to further support more rigorous and evidence-based learning outcomes (Cock, 2024);

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"It's obviously got the academic element too, but it's also got those practical recommendations as well." P3

Across both focus groups and interviews, participants were notably passionate about the process of designing and delivering authentic assessments, arguing that these kinds of assessments were more creative, stimulating and engaging for the students;

"If we're creating more authentic assessments, we get them excited about what they're doing because it's applied learning." FG1

It is argued that when students view an assessment as authentic, they tend to engage more actively with it and are better able to showcase the learning outcomes linked to professional skills and knowledge (Jopp, 2020). However, a counterargument was brought forward: that students showed reservations about authentic assessment. Participants observed that students sometimes considered authentic assessment as 'risky', as it was not as easy to understand as a report or essay brief in terms of getting a 'good' grade, and that students would rather be taught to 'pass the test'.

Working Hand in Hand with Industry Partners

Participants reported close collaborative relationships with industry partners when linking the industry to the design and delivery of authentic assessments. As per Flinn's (2023) research, participants further observed positive industry recognition and interaction on their current courses. It was notable that all participants reported working with industry partners in different formats to inform their curriculum design, assessments and practical experiences offered to students. Industry partners were reported as members of industry advisory boards which

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provided feedback on course design and validation. In addition, other partners served as external examiners and industry advisors, helping to ensure that the course content, modules, and assessment design address current skill gaps, industry needs, and emerging trends. This can be seen as a positive step in light of the skills shortage currently reported in the events industry (Nadda *et al.*, 2022).

Industry partners also contributed to the courses through guest lectures, site visits, and mentorship, with long-term collaborations proving especially valuable, generating sustained, impactful outcomes for both modules and overall course development. A compelling example was shared by interview Participant 6, who described a level 6 production module co-designed and co-delivered with an industry partner over a number of years, including the assessment component;

“We looked at the knowledge, skills and competencies that they would expect a recent graduate to have when entering their workplace as a direct hire from university. Together we designed a summative assessment associated with those skills. As well as implementing free industry-standard technology that’s used by that company in their workplace, the students had to project plan the construction of a temporary demountable structure.” P6

In this module the industry partner also directly attended classes over the course of the module, to set students the brief, lead a site visit, and provide feedback on the work produced as part of the authentic assessment. Further to this, midway through the module delivery, the partner would interject a ‘problem’, requiring students to adapt and problem-solve in real time, effectively simulating the unpredictability of real-world event production scenarios. The long-term outcomes of this partnership have been palpable, with students graduating from the course going on to be offered graduate employment with the partner leading from their initial

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interaction on the module. Such examples highlight the opportunity for authentic assessments to underline skills development and employability (Villarroel *et al.*, 2018), in addition to arguably demonstrating the value of event management degrees in relation to graduate outcomes (Fletcher *et al.*, 2017; Fletcher *et al.*, 2022).

However, industry partnerships also posed challenges, with participants noting that building these relationships required significant time beyond contracted hours. While partnerships could last for years, they often dissolved when key contacts left. Budget cuts also left educators unable to offer remuneration for industry partners' time and expertise.

Leveraging and collaborating with industry contacts is key (Jopp, 2020; Villarroel *et al.*, 2018) which was wholeheartedly endorsed by all participants.

Nonetheless, even with strong industry partnerships, academics felt that they were often over-asking in respect of the availability and resources of the partner or contact. The desire is there but not the spare capacity, as participant 3 highlighted that industry contacts have insufficient time available to support authentic assessments;

"I think people who work in event management are generally very good at giving up their time and going above and beyond. But there's only so much time they can give."

Poor student engagement or non-engagement can adversely impact relationships between academics and their industry contacts, often leading to embarrassing situations and staff being reluctant to damage these relationships. Staff departure adversely impacts collaborative assessments, as often key industry contacts are lost. The structural constraints of higher education, such as delivery formats and restricted assessment months (Jopp, 2020), can deter industry involvement.

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“A big barrier is us having to work in these semester time frames or examination windows that we get given. And I think that becomes a barrier to how you do things authentically. The timetable constraints, because you want two hours with them that week, three hours with them that week.” P5

Lack of time was further highlighted as a key barrier associated with engaging with industry. Participants discussed how heavily event management educators rely on industry support. However, making and maintaining connections and networking takes a lot of time which is not accounted for in staff hours and contracts.

Implementation and Challenges, Technology in Authentic Assessment Design

Valenti (2015) posits, the student learning environment is undoubtedly moving toward being more technology-focused which is evidenced by all participants employing technology in their teaching and assessment. As the event industry continues to integrate new technologies, assessments must adapt to reflect these changes (Steriopoulos *et al.*, 2022). Technologies utilised by the institutions represented by the focus groups and interview participants are MS Teams, OnePlan, Google Sheets, social media, Eventbrite, Adobe, WIX and similar tools for creating websites, Google SketchUp, Canva, AI, AutoCad, Google Glass, drones, live streaming and broadcasting suites. The majority of these technologies are freely available to students via their institutions or by utilising the free versions of software, which corroborates the fact that current unprecedented financial pressures universities face are a key factor in funding other technologies to support the development of authentic assessment (Laker, 2024). All participants cited cost as a fundamental barrier to implementing event industry technologies.

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"You wouldn't be surprised to hear that finance is a barrier. Free versions of software get you so far." P6

Event management educators could leverage technologies acquired and used by other university departments, such as media, film and the arts. However, this occurred on an adhoc basis and relied on 'favours' from contacts in other departments. Additionally, some utilised staff in other departments with technological expertise to train their event management staff and students.

"I was really fortunate that at that time there was a colleague....in our digital technology department who had a background in events in this kind of use of immersive technology. He was able to come and join me on that unit and team teach." P6

Several participants further highlighted that due to the economic climate, some students do not own a laptop. Consequently, care must be taken when designing digital authentic assessments to ensure they are inclusive and accessible.

"Even just being able to get students access to like general computers. I can't always guarantee that because we do have a lot of students who come from a kind of wider participation background." P3

There are numerous barriers associated with academic staff in terms of their technical competence, experience, confidence, and knowledge. The implementation of new technologies is hindered by entrenched teaching practices and resistance from some educators (Jopp, 2020; Villarroel *et al.*, 2018).

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"If I want students to, you know, use technology, I need to be able to use it myself. Well, I need to have access to it. I need to be able to use it myself, and I need to know how to use it." P3

Student competence must also be considered, not just that of academic staff.

"Making an assumption that they can just use technology because they're young is a big mistake." P2

The departure of staff with technological expertise presents challenges. There is significant time and cost associated with training staff how to use technology. Moreover, time has to be allocated to training students on how to use the technology (Murphy *et al.*, 2017). Several participants reported that their institution did not allocate staff time for this additional training. This poses the question, 'are staff trainers or educators?'. Jiang and Schmader's (2014) study highlights the tension between high-level academic theory and applied experiential learning, illustrating the divide between vocational and practical views of the academic rigour expected in degree-level courses. However, it is vital for staff to "practice what they preach" (Nieminen *et al.*, 2023).

It is imperative that assessment criteria focus on the grading criteria rather than on how well students master the technology. The incorporation of technology-enhanced assessments into the curriculum should concentrate on the intended learning objectives (Jopp, 2020).

"It's about them using it and learning from that. That sort of practical application. Just creating an environment that will allow you to expose the students to that kind of authentic life. And I guess you have to have a safety net. They have to learn if there is something that goes wrong, they have to learn from it." P2

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Some software requires the sharing of student data which poses challenges associated with university data protection policy, as participant 2 highlighted;

“Some universities are very, very wary of software from a perspective of how much student data was being pulled in.”

It is undeniable that the motivation is there from academic staff to integrate technology and create authentic assessments. Findings highlight that incorporating authenticity into assessments demands significant time, resources, and effort. Furthermore, anticipating future professional practices, particularly within the rapidly evolving digital landscape, remains a significant challenge (Ajjawi *et al.*, 2024). The literature demonstrates that emerging technologies offer learning and teaching opportunities that can positively impact student engagement, creativity and the achievement of learning outcomes (Kennedy *et al.*, 2009; Keppell *et al.*, 2015). However, these findings reveal an array of barriers that pose significant challenges to event management educators.

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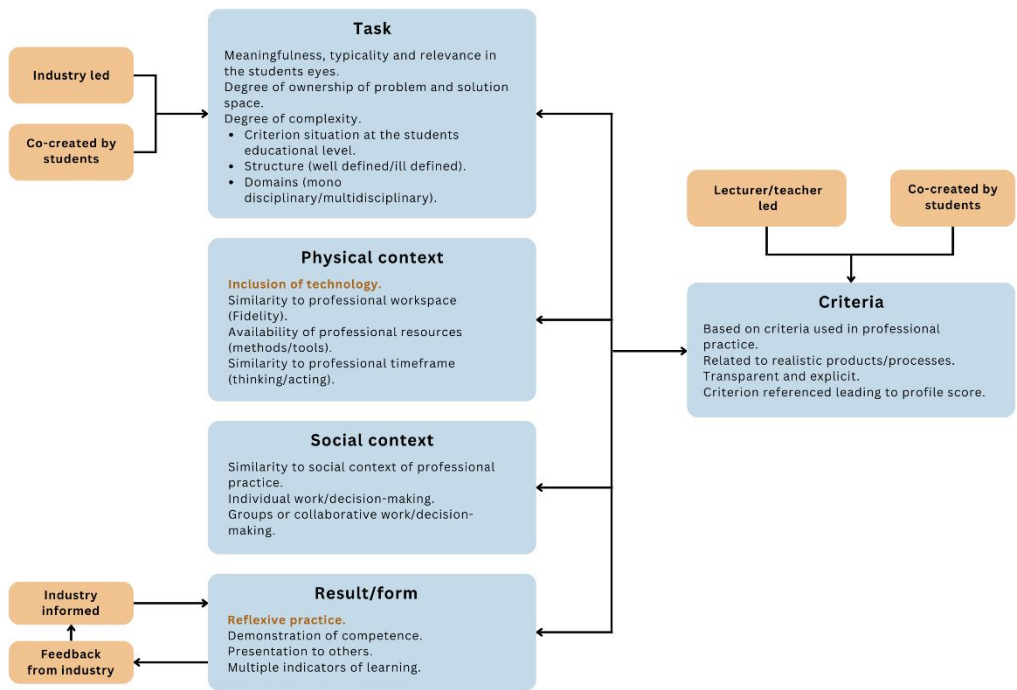


Figure 2. Five-dimensional Framework adapted from Gulikers et al., (2004b)

To truly make an assessment authentic, assessments should be led by industry, not educators, to align with professional practices and technological advancements. Gulikers *et al.* (2004,a) found that assessments created by educators were not always perceived as authentic by students, supporting the need for industry involvement. The literature highlights the benefits of students co-creating assessments, including increased engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes, along with improved student–staff relationships and development of graduate skills (Deeley and Bovill, 2017; Doyle *et al.*, 2019). Steriopoulos *et*

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al. (2022) argue that student involvement enhances clarity, understanding, and motivation, while the educator should retain responsibility for assessment criteria.

If industry is leading on the development of the assessment task, it logically follows for them to provide guidance on the result/form. This further ensures that the outcome of the assessment is authentic. However, there is recognition that this approach is in tension with the integration of theoretical frameworks and academic conventions, which are typically absent from industry-based documentation and practices.

The findings of this study, in conjunction with the existing literature, have informed the development of a further dimension, 'feedback from industry'. In the event management industry feedback naturally follows an event and therefore is part of standard professional practice. Hence, to ensure the assessment is authentic, this feedback is critical. Further, given the industry-led nature of the assessment, it is both logical and appropriate for feedback to be provided to the students by these industry professionals.

Within the physical dimension, the inclusion of technology should be made explicit as it is intrinsically linked with event management practice. Supported by Steriopoulos *et al.* (2022) who state that the inclusion of technologies is crucial for skill development. Finally, reflexive practice should be incorporated within the assessment outcome, as it closely aligns with real-world contexts (Bladen and Kennell, 2014; Cock, 2024).

A conscious decision was made to not solely apply this adaptation to the 5DF to EME as it can be applied to a wide range of industries, especially those of a vocational nature.

Actionable insights and recommendations

When asked what actionable insights and advice they would give to other academics and educators, participants advised that authentic assessment requires creativity, encouraging

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educators to experiment with design. They also stressed the importance of developing industry partnerships and reaching out to new contacts via platforms like LinkedIn to engage industry experts in course delivery.

However, as raised throughout the interviews and focus groups, it appears that to produce a successful authentic assessment relies on several unpredictable factors, such as reliance on favours from industry partners to contribute pro-bono, academics having personal expertise on certain software and technologies in order to deliver it on modules, or good interdepartmental relations to borrow other on-campus resources and materials. Further to this, successful authentic assessment seems to rely on the passion and dedication of the individual academic to go above and beyond the remit of their contracted role, to ensure these factors are aligned.

To advance authentic assessment, universities should establish clear institutional definitions and frameworks; support staff with shared understanding, targeted training, budgets and resources; and consider flexible delivery models and assessment timelines. These steps will ensure alignment with industry practices and provide more responsive learning experiences.

Conclusions

This paper builds on previous pedagogical research into event management, specifically considering the role of technology in the design and implementation of authentic assessment and the barriers faced by higher education professionals. The paper suggests that from discussions with academics, previous rhetoric around the disconnect between event management courses and the industry's understanding of them is outdated. The majority of academics within this study frequently used authentic assessments and industry partnerships to ensure that their event management courses were relevant to the needs of the sector. This

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adds weight to the debate around the balance between vocational and academia within higher education degree courses. Participants within this research suggest that current event management courses are striking a balance between training and educating, strengthening courses to have employability driven outcomes and integrate reflective practice needed to create industry ready graduates.

Key findings suggest that academics design authentic assessments that are aligned to industry needs, develop student employability and encompass 'real-world' skills. Furthermore, authentic assessments were co-designed with industry and assessed in a way which mirrored workplace tasks. Reflexive practice was also recognised as an important component of authentic assessment in EME. This is significant given that reflexive practice is less recognised within authentic assessment literature, and therefore more research should be conducted to explore this further. When discussing the use of technology to enhance authentic assessment, participants suggested a number of key barriers which require addressing, including manpower and time required to design and implement, key contacts within industry, digital student poverty, budget requirements and restraints, and upskilling staff members.

Whilst the data presented within this paper gives insight into the barriers faced in relation to authentic assessment and technology, discussion within the focus groups centered on module content rather than the assessment design itself. This broader discussion highlights that whilst authentic assessment design is important, assessments cannot happen without the modules that facilitate them. Therefore, academics should consider authentic assessment within the design of the 'authentic curriculum' as a whole in order to allow space for authenticity within assessment design.

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It should further be noted that the data presented here reflects the voice of academia in the UK and further research should be undertaken to collect the voices of students and industry in relation to authentic assessment, technology and the barriers faced within EME. Furthermore, we suggest future research should include the testing of the proposed adapted framework through the lens of students and industry. Further research needs to explore the value of authentic assessment from the student perspective, given that academic participant responses varied with regards to the value perceived by students on authentic assessments. By addressing the challenges highlighted in this paper and gaining further diverse perspectives around authentic assessments, EME can continue to evolve in line with the industry. This will ensure graduates are industry ready to thrive in a professional landscape and enhance attraction to event management degrees.

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