

6 Exploring industry standards for outdoor events

Andrew Lansley

Introduction

Harland (2024) highlights the challenges still facing the events sector and event professionals, in that *“whilst event organisers have made great progress over the last 10 years, especially in improving the accessibility and sustainability of events, it’s clear that there are still differences in approaches and that it can be difficult to focus on what will have the biggest impact”*.

The events industry in the United Kingdom is a dynamic and multifaceted realm, encompassing a wide array of activities. Unlike some sectors, the events industry operates within a regulatory framework that is often fragmented and incomplete. While certain aspects of event management are governed by legislation, such as health and safety regulations, it can be argued that progressive environmental and accessibility considerations remain unaddressed at the legislative level (Fenney Salkeld, 2016) and additional frameworks may be required to realise a higher standard of practice. Consequently, event organisers often resort to voluntary measures to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and inclusivity, where it can *“be observed that it is increasingly common for events to be proactive in this area”* (Allen et al., 2022: 303).

In response to the need for standardised approaches to sustainability and accessibility, various frameworks and certifications have emerged within the UK events industry, experiencing varying levels of adoption and success. The recently updated ISO 20121, for instance, is an international standard for sustainable event management that provides guidelines for minimising environmental impacts and maximising social benefits, however its suitability for wider application remains in question. Chris Johnson, Chair of Vision 2025 – a not-for-profit group representing over 1,000 event businesses through industry body stakeholders – believes barriers exist to these kinds of guidelines from being more widely adopted and commented that *“in fact there is little engagement or awareness of it in the festival sector beyond larger corporate and mass participation sports. This is largely due to the resources needed to understand, implement, and pay for the standard”* (Johnson, 2024). With numerous commercial initiatives and academic institutes providing a variety of