



Risk control

Managing Graduations



In partnership with



Managing Graduations

Introduction

Graduations are large scale events for final year students and their guests, friends, and family to celebrate their achievements. Graduations are important days in university calendars. The events may run over days and involve large numbers of people coming onto university campuses. These events require a great deal of planning to ensure the ceremonies are successful and provide vivid memories to everyone who attends.

Universities have been holding graduation ceremonies successfully for decades in various formats and the staff involved will usually be very experienced. This guidance document provides information to support universities and details factors that may need consideration.

Event Planning

Graduations are large and complex, with planning for them taking a great amount of time.

It is essential that clear roles and responsibilities are identified for the coordination of graduations as several parts of the university will be involved in the delivery. Setting out these details and including them in the event plan provides understanding and clarity. Relevant contact information should be included and reviewed to ensure that the information is correct.

Regular meetings involving those identified should take place in the lead up to each ceremony. Discussions about provision of services, locations, health and safety, and accessibility should be discussed with plans addressing these aspects. Ongoing debriefing sessions may also be beneficial to identify any necessary opportunities for improvements.

Providing an event plan to all relevant staff will provide clarity and can form a basis for training events prior to ceremonies. It is likely that more than one plan will be required as there may be confidential elements where wider sharing will not be appropriate, for example, GDPR requirements.

Communications

Graduations will involve large numbers of people that require coordination so the requirement for identifying and implementing effective methods of communication is essential. Identifying these arrangements in the Graduation Plan will ensure that these are available. Communication procedures should be identified for various foreseeable adverse events such as emergencies.

Regular briefing sessions for all members involved in the event should be used to ensure that standard operating procedures remain current and that any updates or changes to protocols are clearly communicated. Such measures are critical to ensuring that communication remains dynamic and responsive in the event of an emergency or unforeseen circumstance.

Pre-Graduation Information

Pre-graduation information is an important part of ensuring non-staff are aware of any safety or event requirements for the ceremony they are attending.

This can be achieved by:

- Making the event pre-booking only. Consideration for clear processes regarding the handling of people without tickets or lost tickets should be given.
- Maps of the campus indicating relevant locations for the graduation ceremony should be provided which include parking locations and routes to the ceremony building.
- Videos / information on the graduation ceremony itself will ensure people know what to do and when. This will assist with the smooth running of the event. These can be hosted online, and links provided to those attending.
- An up-to-date Frequently Ask Questions section can be published to the institute's website.

Event Planning

Risk Assessment

An Event Risk Assessment must be in place. Where previous assessments have been used it is likely that only a review and update would be needed. Consider if any arrangements or aspects have changed and is the assessment still valid.

Consideration should be given to the event holistically to ensure that the risks associated are covered.

Increased footfall in and around universities for graduation should be accounted for within the risk assessment. For example, will additional welfare facilities be required and how will people be directed / marshalled?

Traffic management plans should reflect the inevitable increases in vehicle movements in or around the venue. Should the local authority or police be notified of the event to ensure the local communities are not adversely affected? With increased vehicles comes the increased need for parking. Identifying how this will be managed will help with the impression that those attending take away from graduation. Additional security staff may be required for

facilitating parking and ensuring any criminal activity is contained to a minimum.

With increased numbers of people on campus, there will be a risk of increased medical incidents. This needs to be reflected in the First Aid Needs Assessment that will identify required facilities, equipment, and trained staff. For example, would temporarily relocating defibrillators to be nearer the graduation be needed or beneficial?

Accessibility

Making graduations accessible to all must be considered. Deciding on locations can have significant impacts for the accessibility of the graduation, so choosing locations that facilitate easy access is essential. Additional training to those informed should also be considered.

Marquees

Many institutes use marquees to supplement their estate for graduations. The installation and dismantling processes require close management and coordination with others, such as audio-visual or carpet installers. Adequate power supplies need to be considered early in the planning stage so that they are in place at the right time to allow safe operation of equipment.

Management of contractors and the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 apply to such installations and adequate processes should be followed. For further information please see the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) webpages. Health and safety - Assigning CDM roles and duties in the live events sector ([hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk))¹. When erecting marquees there should be ground survey information to ensure that there are no buried services such as electrical cables that could be damaged when stakes are driven into the ground to support the structure.

Those who erect marquees should be competent to do so. MUTA are a trade body for marquee providers and institutions should ensure they use contractors who are registered with MUTA, or other suitable professional affiliation.

Insurances should be checked to ensure it is clear who is insuring the marquee(s). It may be the university or the hiring company's cover that applies. This information should be known to ensure adequate cover is in place and the sufficient sum insured, the length of the hire and if there is included a continuous hire charge clause. Are additional security measures required for overnight to ensure the structures are safe? Weather conditions (such as high winds) can affect these types of temporary structures. If bad weather is predicted, then the structure should be checked by a competent person prior to use.

Hiring Equipment

Graduations often require specialist equipment, and this is often hired in. Consideration should be given to what is required, where will it be stored and if any additional security measures are required. It should be established who is insuring the equipment and if the hirer or insurer has stipulated any conditions that must be met. The institution may need to inform their insurer of these arrangements to ensure adequate cover is in place.

Volunteers

Graduation ceremonies can often rely on volunteers to ensure smooth running of the event. Volunteers should be made aware of their responsibilities and how they fit into the event plan. Arrangements ensuring volunteers are trained and that any personal protective equipment is provided and used appropriately.

Contractors and Third Parties

Institutions using contractors and third parties to run events at graduations should ensure that arrangements are in place for the checking and approving of the suitability of health and safety processes. This would include risk assessments, safe systems of work and that these companies have appropriate Public Liability insurances in place.

Contractors and third parties will need to be monitored by the institution to ensure they are following their approved processes.

External catering provision may be brought in. Methods of food preparation, handling, and storage will need to be suitable. These requirements should be checked, approved, and monitored to ensure food safety.

Facilities and Processes

Processes should be established for the handling of any lost personal effects which facilitate the quick return of items.

If cloakroom facilities are being offered, ensure that an adequate location is chosen and that staffing of the area ensures security of any items that are stored for people attending.

Security and Martyn's Law

Security planning should follow the principles of Martyn's Law (Protect Duty). Comprehensive terrorism risk assessments should be conducted and proportionate security measures implemented. These measures may include deploying visible security personnel, using CCTV surveillance, and, where needed, implementing bag checks. It is important that these steps do not detract from the overall welcoming atmosphere of the event.

Regular training in counter-terrorism awareness and emergency response protocols should be provided for all personnel involved. Coordination with local law enforcement and counter-terrorism advisors should be maintained to ensure that security protocols are reviewed regularly and adapted to the prevailing threat environment, thereby maintaining public confidence.

Increase in Money on Campus

Graduations present an opportunity for Institutes to showcase their facilities and services. Visitors attending are likely to make use of these. There is a likelihood of increases of cash stored on site, so arrangements should be reviewed to ensure large quantities of cash are stored securely or it may be necessary to increase bank / cash runs. Putting clear plans in place and providing adequate security measures will ensure levels of crime are reduced to minimum levels.

Graduation Traditions

Graduations often have well established traditions that increase their pomp and ceremony. These may include civic regalia being used, institutional robes and ceremonial items such as maces. Arrangements should be in place ensuring that they are cleaned, made available, used correctly, and stored safely after each ceremony.

Institutions want graduations to be memorable and may invite guest speakers who may be famous, controversial, or political. Security arrangements should reflect the risks that these speakers may bring. Consideration of arrangements required for pre-graduation, during the ceremony and after must ensure the safety of all involved.

Celebrations

After the graduation ceremony has taken place, graduates, staff, and visitors will want to celebrate in many different ways. Some celebrations can be formal in nature such as dances, balls, or less formal activities such as parties. Whatever the celebration they will also require robust planning.

It is likely that consumption of alcohol will form part of some celebrations. Well managed events will ensure safety and reduce the levels of incidents. Additional door security will be likely as well as a need to have first aiders available. When selecting venues for these activities, suitability of the building will need to be considered, providing adequate numbers of staff for the event and suitable welfare facilities. It may be beneficial advertising personal safety messages prior to these events to ensure the safety of all involved, and consider communicating with local police to reflect and encompass any local issues.

Outdoor locations could also be used for post-graduation events. These locations usually offer space for different types of activities. Inflatables, fairs, and fireworks may form parts of these events, and each will pose significant risks that require managing.

Inflatables have been responsible for significant injuries and occasional fatalities. It is essential to have safety plans in place for this type of equipment, taking into account prevailing weather conditions which may increase risks. Ensuring the operator is from a recognised trade body and that all risk assessments, insurances, and supervision is in place will go some way to reducing the associated risks.

Fairs and similar attractions are sometimes used to enhance the day and should be properly managed. See Contractors and Third Parties.

The use of fireworks should be closely overseen by the institute. Fire and explosion are significant risks. Suitable storage must be provided ensuring and that an adequate distance from buildings is maintained. These activities tend to be run by specialist companies who have extensive experience. Institutes should ensure all contractor management arrangements are in place. For further guidance please see the Health and Safety Executive website, HSE Explosives - Organising firework displays².

Post Event

Once the ceremonies and celebrations have finished and everyone has had a great time and, on their way, home, it is time for the clearing up to start and return the institute back to normal operation.

Plans will need to be in place to ensure clean ups occur quickly and safely. This may involve the use of contractors who will require the same level of management as identified in Contractors and Third Parties (above).

References

1. Health and Safety Executive website - <https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/cdm-2015/cdm-role-allocation/live-events.htm>
2. Health and Safety Executive website - <https://www.hse.gov.uk/explosives/fireworks/using.htm>

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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