



mccrindle

Workplace skills

Skilling in the events
industry



Meetings and Events Australia

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Research objectives

Over the past three years Meetings & Events Australia (MEA) has collected data through an online survey deployed in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The survey explores the experience of professionals working in the events industry regarding skills shortages and recruitment challenges in the sector.

In December 2019, MEA engaged McCrindle to analyse this data and draw out key insights and trends over time. The objectives of this analysis are to:

- Test whether organisations have been impacted by a skills shortage in the events industry and where these shortages are felt most acutely within organisations
- Understand the recruitment process for organisations and identify key challenges in recruiting new staff
- Explore opportunities for attracting new talent to the events industry
- Highlight trends through analysis of longitudinal data to plan for the future of the industry.

Research methodology

The *Workplace skills* report is the collation of quantitative data collected through an online survey. Meetings & Events Australia (MEA) partnered with the Australian Association of Convention Bureaux (AACB), who participated in 2017, and the Exhibition & Events Association of Australasia (EEAA), who participated in all three years of data collection, to write and deploy the survey to professionals working in the events industry. The field time and total number of responses for each survey are outlined below.

Longitudinal analysis

A number of questions were altered or added in between each iteration of the survey. Throughout this report, notes have been added to highlight changes in the question or response options. In some cases, these changes restrict the ability to

analyse the data longitudinally. This is explained in the relevant sections of the report.

Graphs and rounding

Data labels on the graphs in this report have been rounded for simplicity. Some graphs may, therefore, sum to 99% or 101%. Any calculations where two data points have been added are based on raw data, not the rounded data labels, which are then rounded once combined.

Sample sizes for each question are specified on each graph throughout the report.

Terminology

Throughout this report, survey respondents are referred to as 'professionals working in the events industry' or, more simply, 'professionals'.

Category	Dates in field	Responses
2017	15 th of March – 10 th April	267
2018	3 rd – 26 th of May	181
2019	5 th of July – 1 st of August	180

Executive summary

The events industry is experiencing a skills shortage.

According to professionals, full time employees are staying in their organisation for up to five years (63%). Despite this, professionals are feeling the effects of an industry-wide skills shortage.

For almost three in five (58%) professionals the shortage is already affecting their organisation's ability to recruit. As a result, the proportion of organisations that do not have a problem finding experienced professionals is decreasing (37% 2017, 20% 2018, 18% 2019).

Mid-level event management is experiencing the greatest shortage.

The area in which organisations are most likely to experience a skills shortage is in mid-level event management (40%). There are also significant skills shortages in senior level event management (23%).

Professionals believe a lack of skilled workers (56%) is the main cause of the skills shortage in their organisation. This is followed by the remuneration packages offered (45%).

Half of organisations are anticipating growth in the coming year.

Almost two in three organisations (64%) are currently seeking to hire more staff.

Half of professionals (48%) believe their organisation is positioned for growth with the headcount likely to increase over the next 12 months. Another 46%, however, believe their headcount will remain the same.

Organisations are most likely to recruit online.

Organisations in the events industry are most likely to recruit new staff and contractors through online recruitment agencies such as Seek and Indeed (64%). Word of mouth (54%) and social media (34%) are also commonly used resources.

MEA accreditation is considered valuable.

Slightly less than half of professionals (45%) place importance (very important/important) on industry accreditation. A slightly higher proportion (51%), however, would find MEA accreditation valuable for their organisation.

Organisations are open to creative solutions to attract new staff.

Organisations in the events industry are looking to provide attractive working conditions for their staff members, with nine in ten organisations (89%) employing flexible workplace policies.

More than half of organisations (53%) would use short term skills staff on short term working visas, despite a decrease in willingness since 2018 (64%).

Almost two in five professionals working in the events industry (39%) believe an MEA Freelancer register would be of value in recruiting staff. A further two in five (42%) are less convinced, but still believe this may be of value.

Professionals believe the events sector is failing to attract new talent.

The number of professionals who believe business events such as meetings and conventions do not attract young talent to the sector, has increased over the last three years (51% 2019, 38% 2018, 40% 2017).

Many professionals believe that a lack of understanding of the industry, unrealistic expectations and poor pay, are barriers hindering the events sector from attracting new talent.

The availability of appropriately skilled staff (62%) and cost of labour (59%) are the factors most likely to impact (on a scale of 1-7, with 1 being the highest factor) an organisation's ability or desire to hire new staff (combined scores 1 and 2). Since 2018, the cost of labour is having a much greater impact, with the proportion of professionals rating the impact 1 or 2 increasing, by 12 percentage points (47% 2018 cf. 59% 2019).

When recruiting business events staff, organisations most commonly encounter the constraints of a lack of solid experience/track

record (55%), remuneration expectations too high (54%) and overall shortage of suitable candidates (42%).

The impacts of the skills shortage are not just experienced within the organisation but externally too. For more than four in five professionals (83%) the unfilled vacancies have begun to affect their organisation's stakeholders (i.e. customers).

Professionals believe that MEA can help close the skills gap by promoting the events industry as a professional career path (76%). In 2019 professionals are also more likely to believe that MEA can help by providing targeted training in areas of shortage (49% cf. 22% 2018) and more engagement at a secondary level (47% cf. 11% 2018).

Key recommendations

1. Improve working conditions in the events sector

The skills shortage is already beginning to affect organisations' desire to hire new staff, with most of the effects felt at the mid-management level. While professionals are likely to stay at an organisation for up to five years, organisations should be looking at ways to increase tenure.

Working conditions, such as rate of pay and flexible working hours are key areas for improvement.

2. Use alternative recruitment methods

While organisations are looking to increase in size, and professionals expect growth in their workplace, positions are taking longer to be filled.

Professionals should focus on promoting their organisation through a range of recruitment methods, such as recruitment websites, word of mouth and social media. Hiring short term skills staff on working visas could also be an avenue worth exploring.

Utilise and consider a range of alternative recruitment methods to recruit new workers.

3. Invest into promoting the events industry to young adults

Barriers to attracting young talent mainly include a lack of understanding of the events sector and unrealistic expectations. Promoting the events industry to emerging generations (Generation Z and Alpha) could help to alleviate false perceptions. Promoting the events industry to these generations could contribute to a greater understanding of the sector and encourage further interest from young talent.

Increase promotion and exposure of the events industry to secondary and university aged students in ways that resonate with them.

An industry-wide skills shortage

The events industry is experiencing a skills shortage.

According to professionals, full time employees are staying in their organisation for up to five years (63%). For almost two in five organisations (37%) their employees are staying for a longer period.

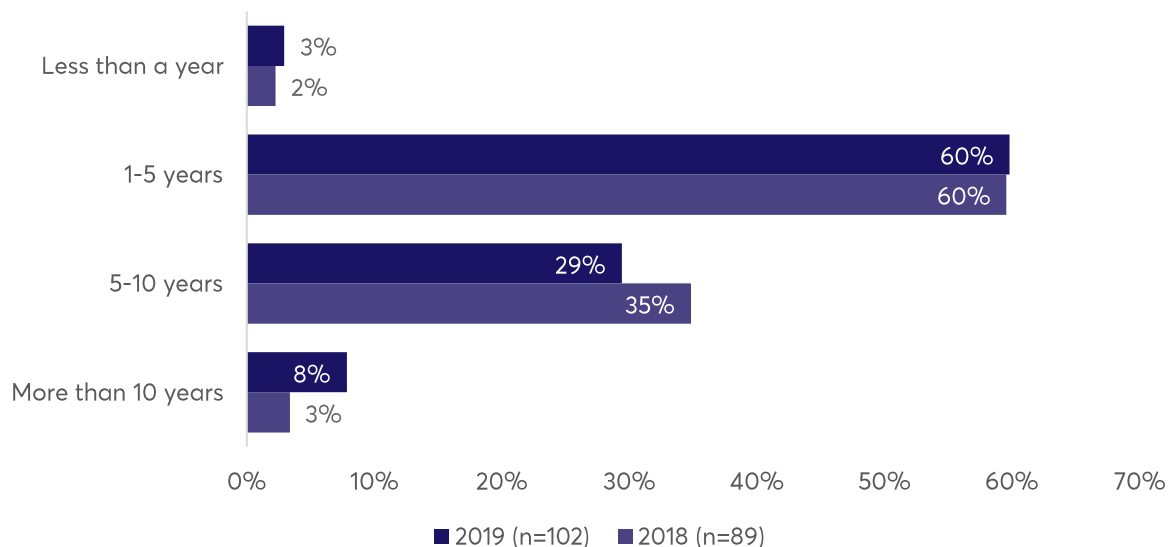
Although employees in the events industry are likely to stay with an organisation for up to five years, professionals are feeling the effects of an industry-wide skills shortage.

Almost three in five professionals working in the events industry (58%) say this skills shortage is already impacting their organisation's ability to recruit. This skills shortage is not a recent

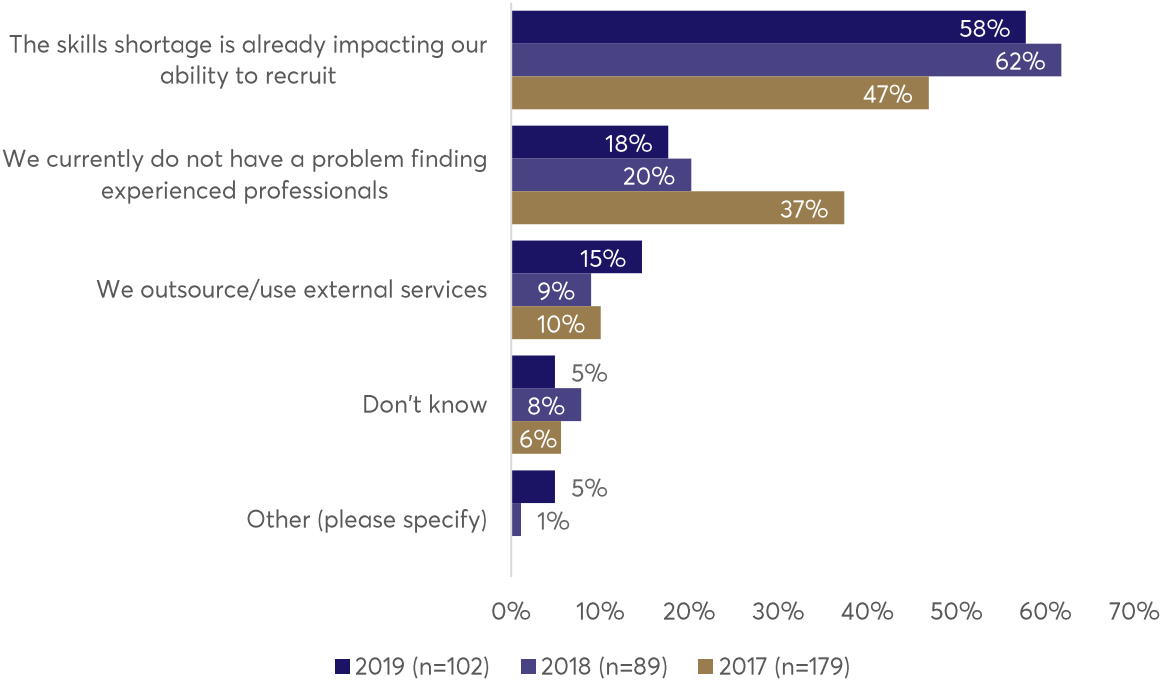
development either, with a high proportion of organisations being impacted in previous years (62% 2018, 47% 2017).

Meanwhile, the proportion of professionals who say their organisation does not have a problem finding experienced professionals has decreased over the last three years. In 2017, almost two in five professionals (37%) said their organisation had no issue finding experienced professionals. This dropped to 20% in 2018 and 18% in 2019, indicating a growing challenge for organisations in recruiting new employees.

On average how long do your full-time employees stay in the organisation?



Recent reports have highlighted a growing global skills shortage in meetings and events. Which of the following statements best fits your organisation's current situation?



*The option 'other (please specify)' was not provided in 2017.

Skills shortages are predominantly felt in middle management.

Professionals working in the events industry believe the skills shortage is most acute at the middle management (22%) and operations levels (18%).

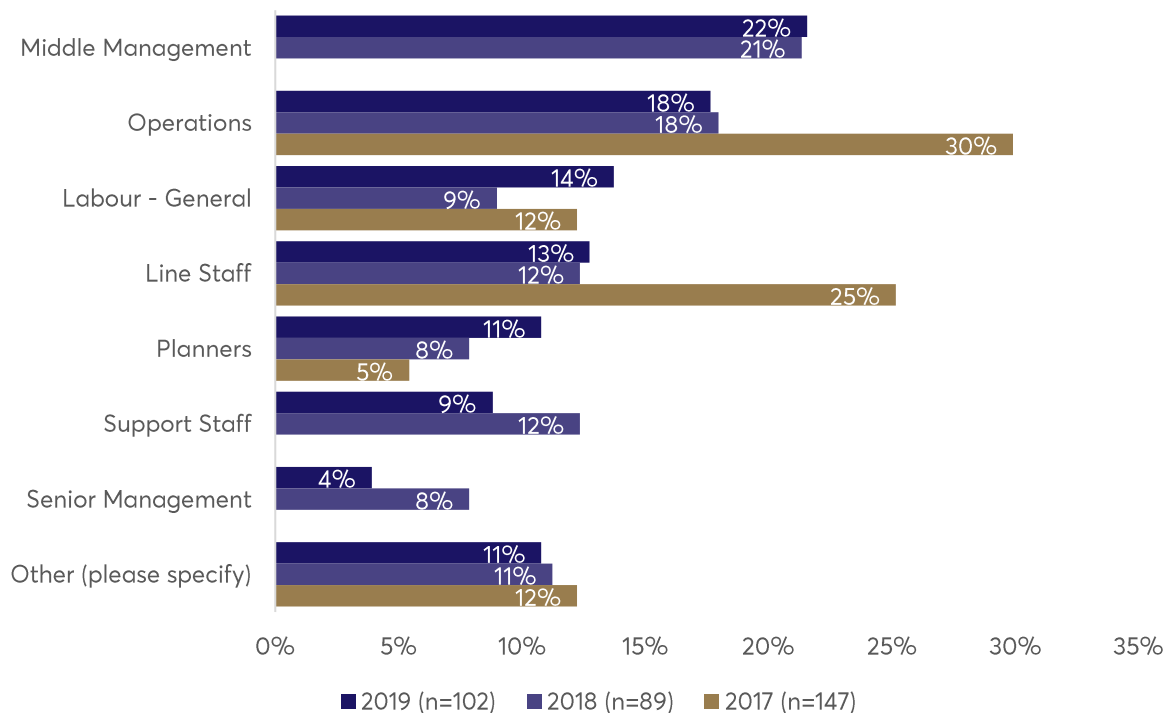
Consistent with this, the area in which organisations are most likely to experience a skills shortage is in mid-level event management (40%). There are also significant skills shortages in senior level event management (23%).

The one in ten professionals who responded 'other' (11%) in 2019, were most likely to be affected by skills shortages in sales and kitchen staff.

Skills shortages in mid-level event management increasing significantly

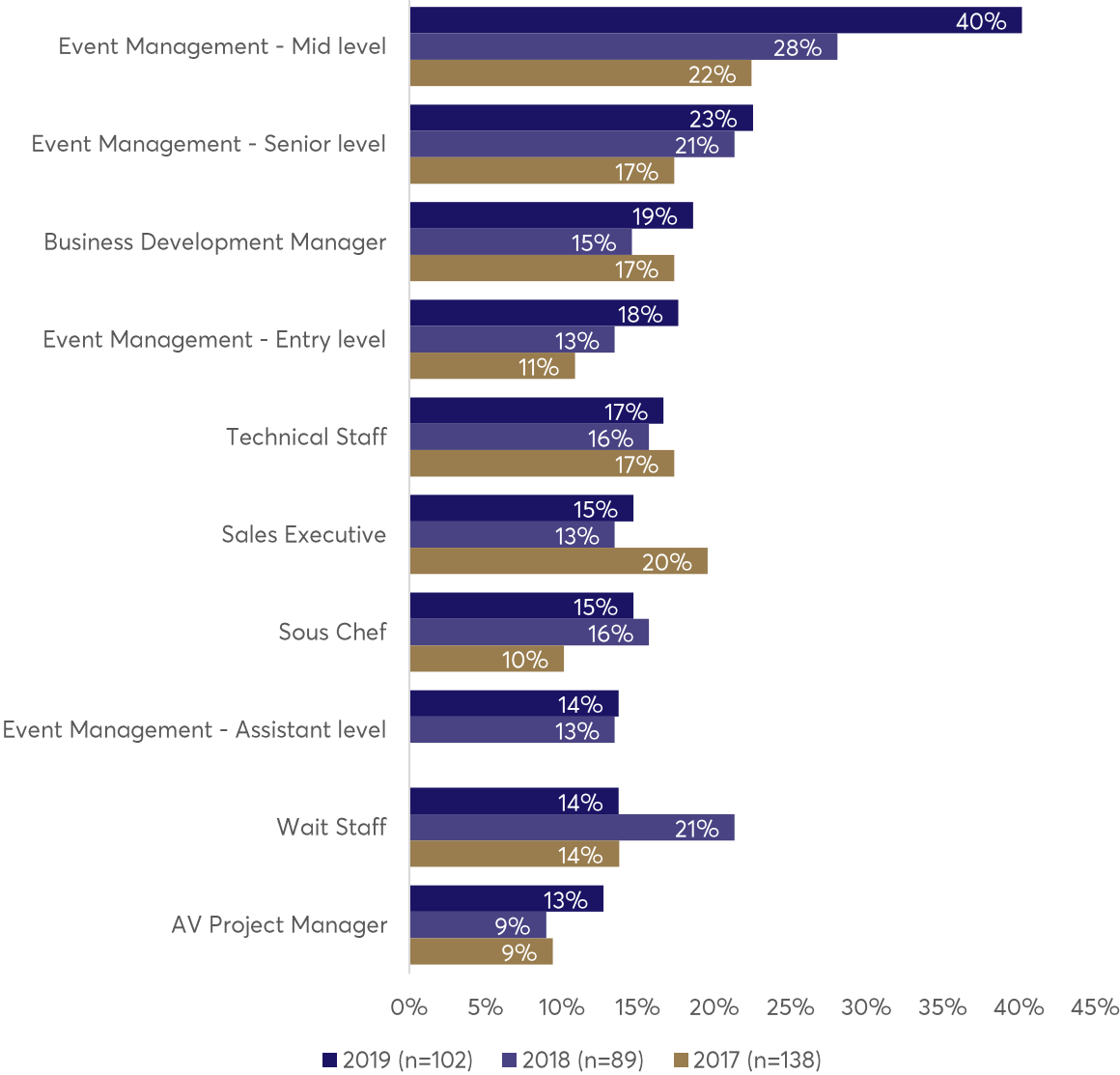
Within organisations in the events sector, mid-level event management has experienced the most significant change over time. The proportion of professionals who have noticed a shortage in this area within their organisation has increased by 18 percentage points since 2017 (22% 2017 cf. 40% 2019). Logistics is another area where skills shortages have increased (1% 2017 cf. 11% 2019).

At which level does your organisation find the skills shortage to be most acute?



* In 2017 Management was included as an option. In 2018 and 2019 management was divided into Middle and Senior Management. Support Staff was also added in 2018.

Please indicate the areas within your organisation that has skills shortages.
Please select all that apply.
Top 10 responses for 2019



Lack of skilled workers is the main cause of the shortage.

The largest cause of skills shortages in the event industry is a lack of skilled workers (56%). Remuneration packages (45%) and a lack of work/life balance (34%) in the events industry are also contributing factors.

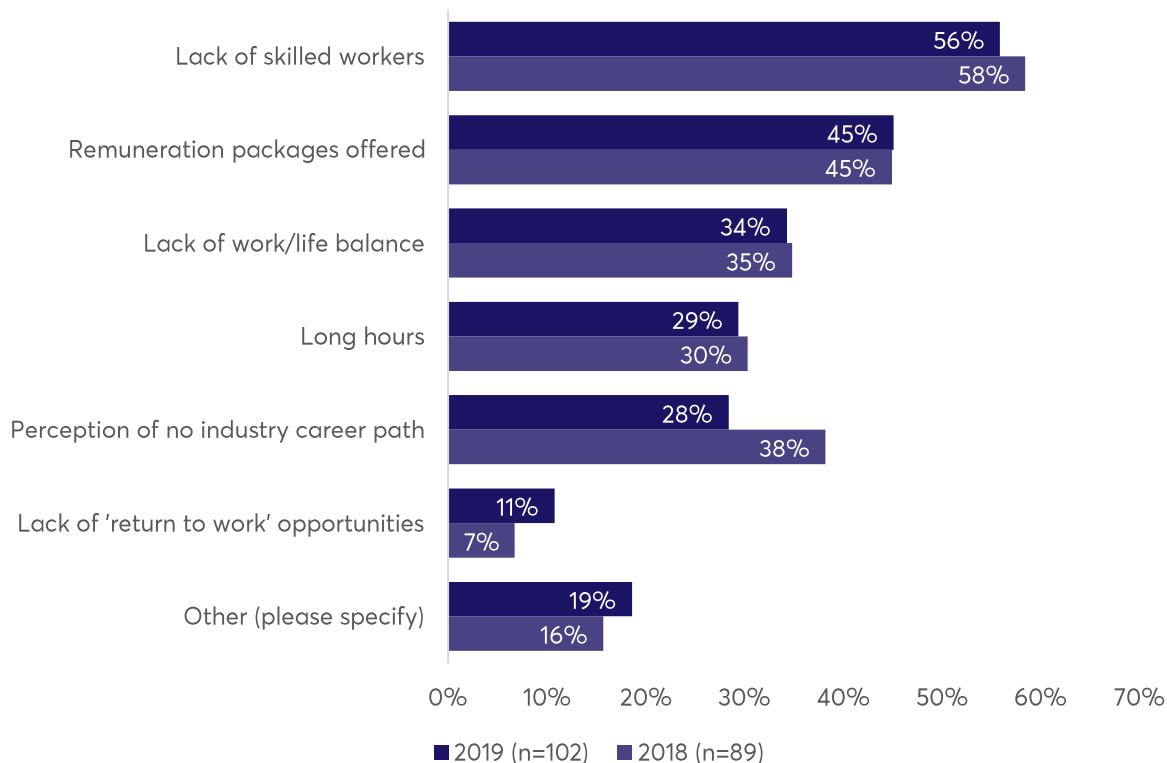
Professionals who selected 'other' (19%) suggested that growth in the industry, lack of people entering the industry and competition for similar skills in

other industries were a major cause of the skills shortage in their organisation.

Perception of no industry career path having less of an impact

Interestingly, since 2018, the proportion of professionals who believe the perception of no industry career path is causing the skills shortage has decreased (38% 2018 cf. 28% 2019).

What do you think is the major cause of skills shortages in your organisation?



*Question was not included in 2017 survey.

Future staffing needs

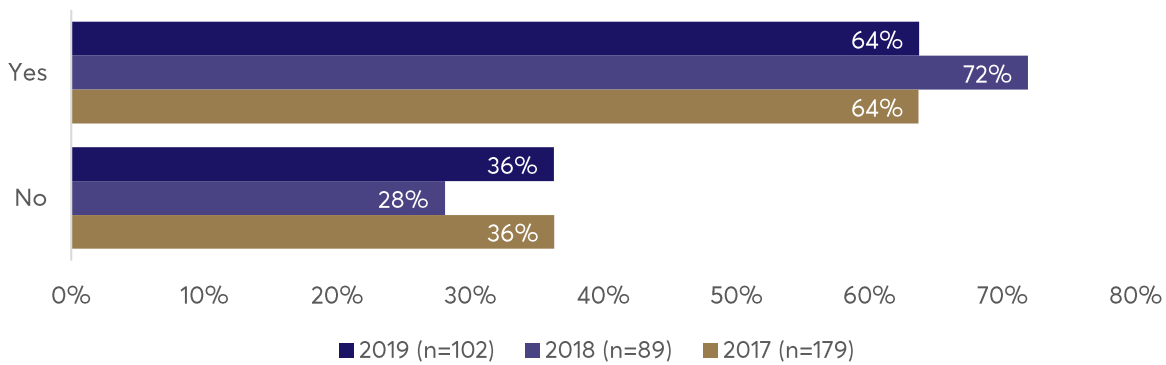
Organisations positioned for growth.

Almost two in three organisations (64%) are currently seeking to hire more staff.

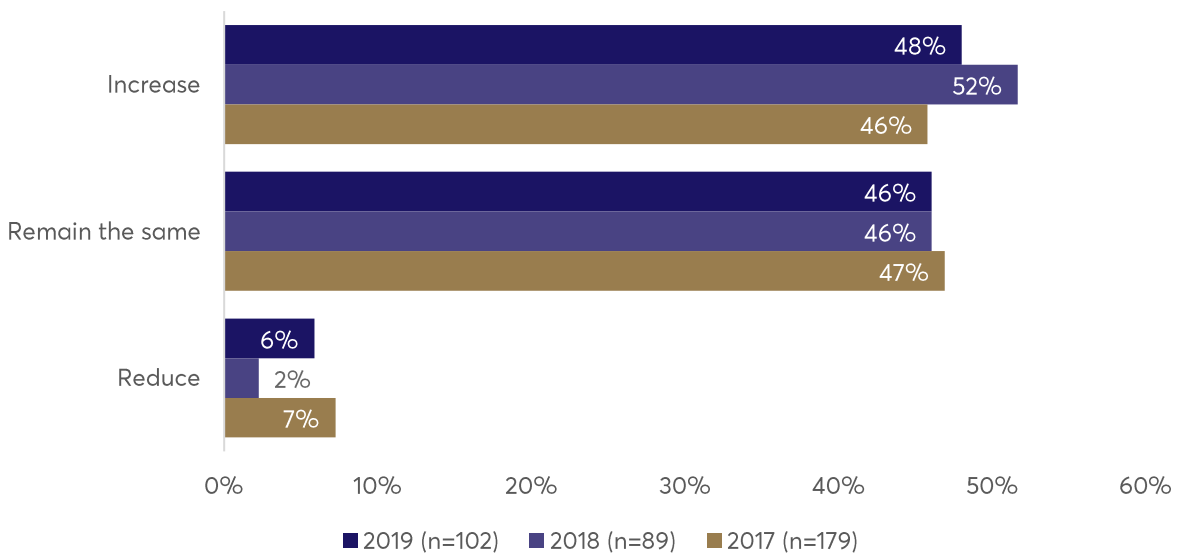
The skills shortage is likely to be of concern for organisations looking to increase their headcount in the coming year. Almost half of professionals

(48%) believe their organisation's headcount is likely to increase over the next 12 months, while another 46% believe their headcount will remain the same. Only 6% of organisations are expecting their headcount to reduce.

Are you currently seeking to hire more staff?



Over the next 12 months is your organisation's headcount (i.e. number of staff) most likely to?



Recruitment

Organisations are most likely to recruit online.

Organisations in the events industry are most likely to recruit new staff and contractors through online recruitment agencies such as Seek and Indeed (64%). Word of mouth (54%) and social media (34%) are also commonly used resources.

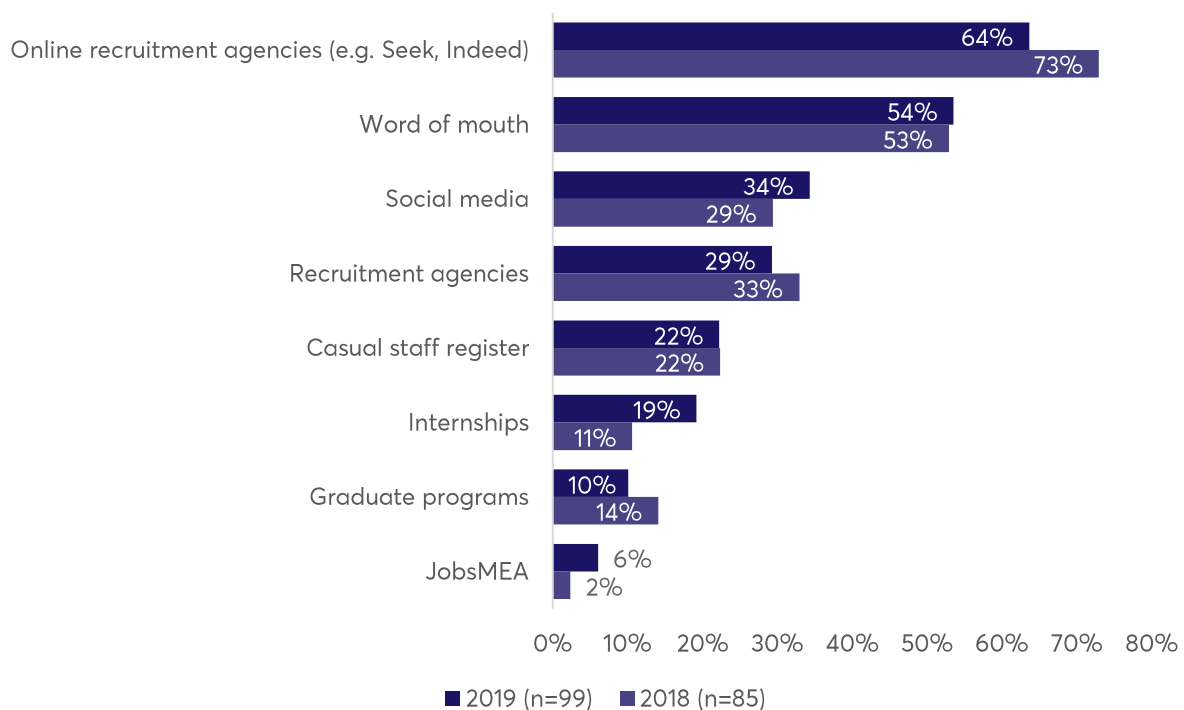
Roles are taking longer to fill

Organisations in the events industry are most likely to take 1 to 2 months to fill a role (52%). One in four organisations (24%) only take 1 to 4 weeks.

Organisations are taking longer to fill a role. More than half of organisations (52%) are taking 1 to 2 months to fill a role, a 12-percentage-point increase from 2017 (40%).

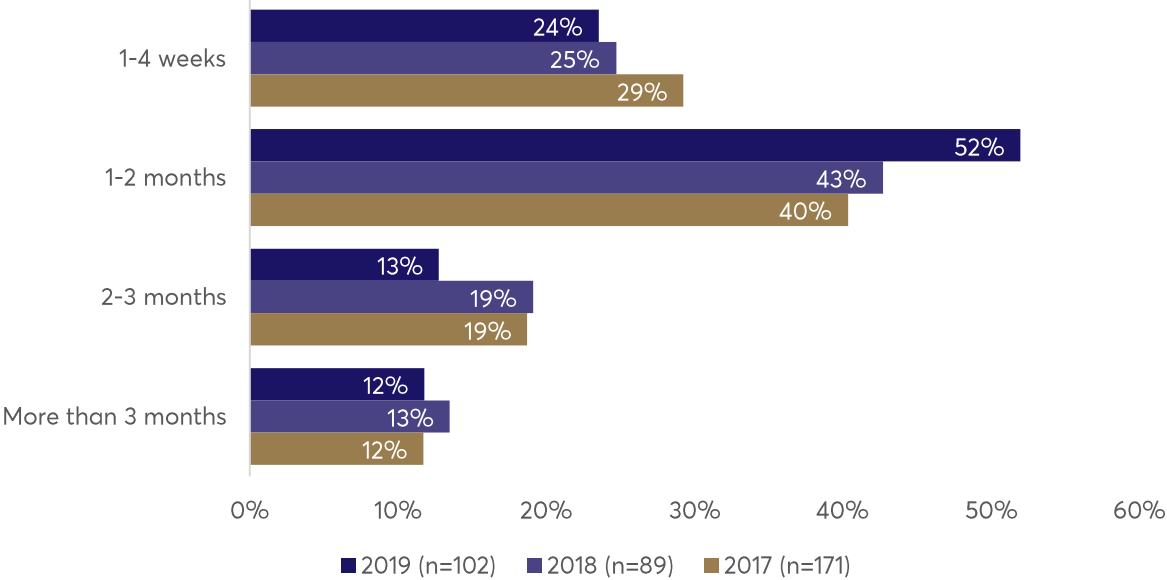
How do you mostly recruit new staff and/or contractors?

Please select all that apply.



* Question was not included in 2017 survey.

How long on average does it take your organisation to fill a role?



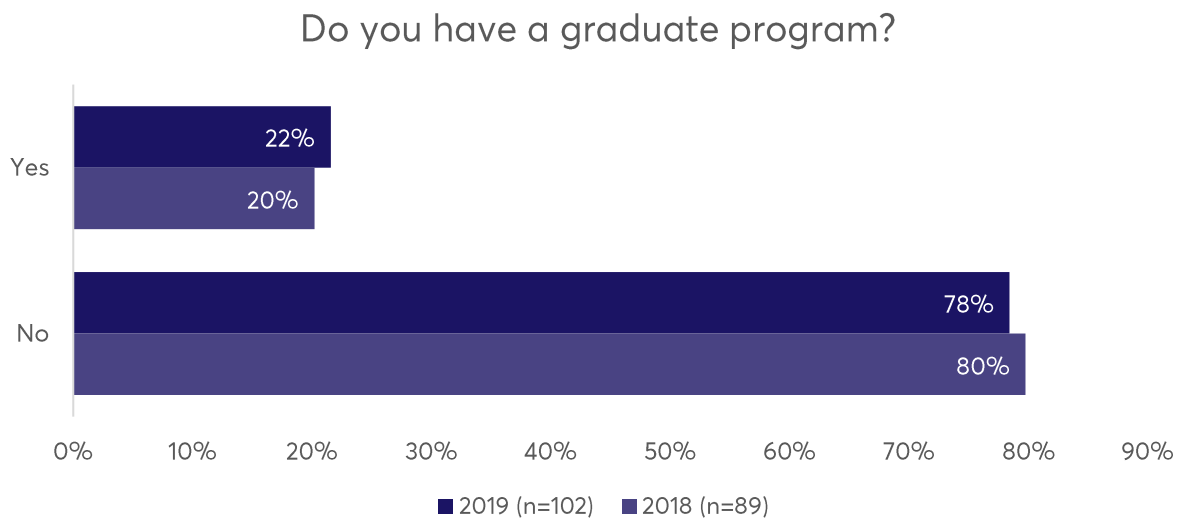
Recruiting through internship and graduate programs.

One in five organisations (19%) mostly recruit through internship programs (pg. 17). Almost two in five (36%) have employed an intern from their internship program.

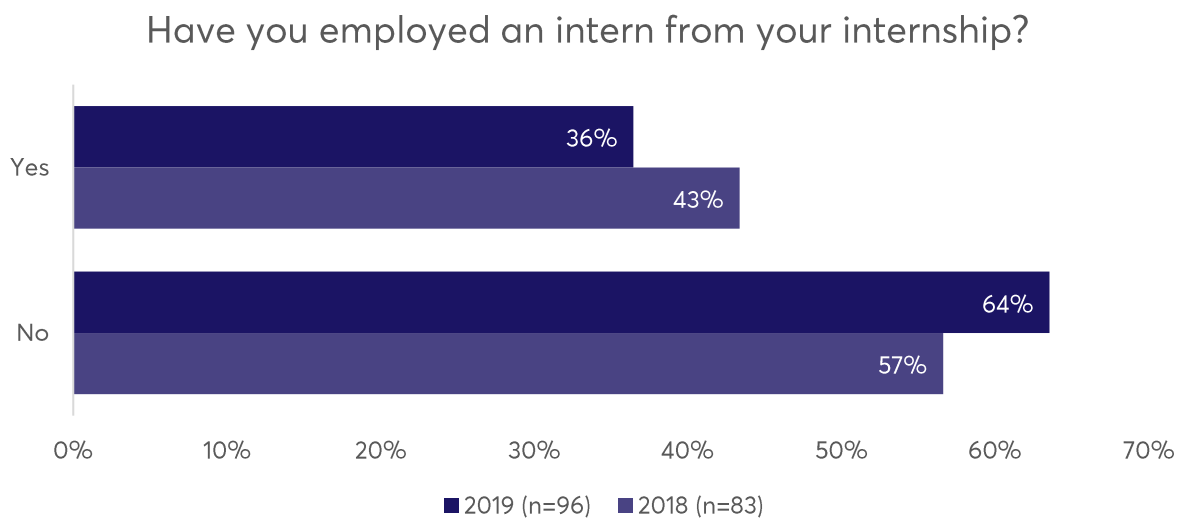
One in five organisations have a graduate program (22% 2019, 20% 2018).

Hiring contractors

Four in five professionals working in the events industry (78%) say their organisation hires contractors. This is consistent with previous years (79% 2018, 77% 2017).

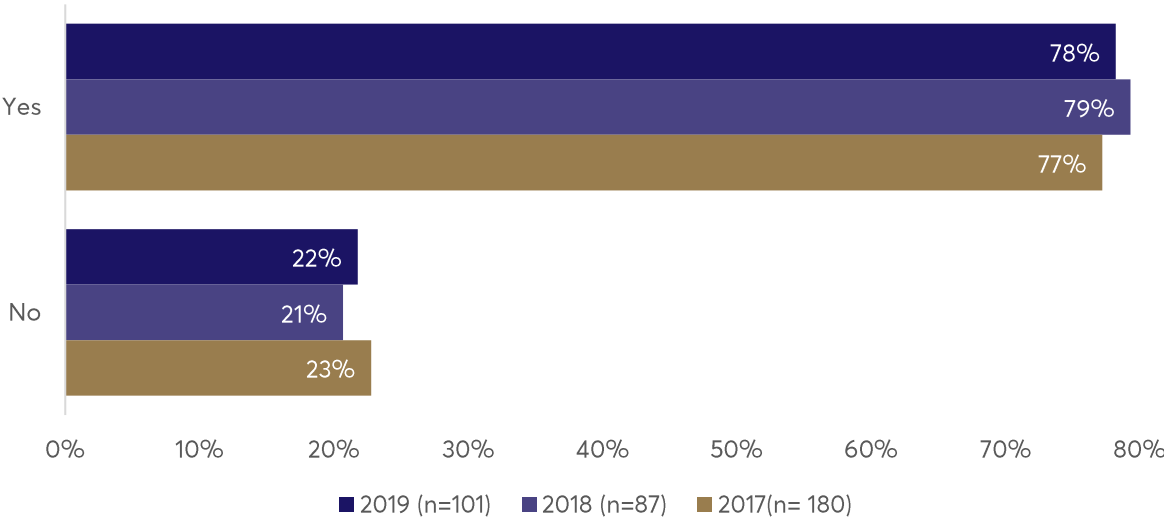


* Question was not included in 2017 survey.



* Question was not included in 2017 survey.

Do you hire contractors?



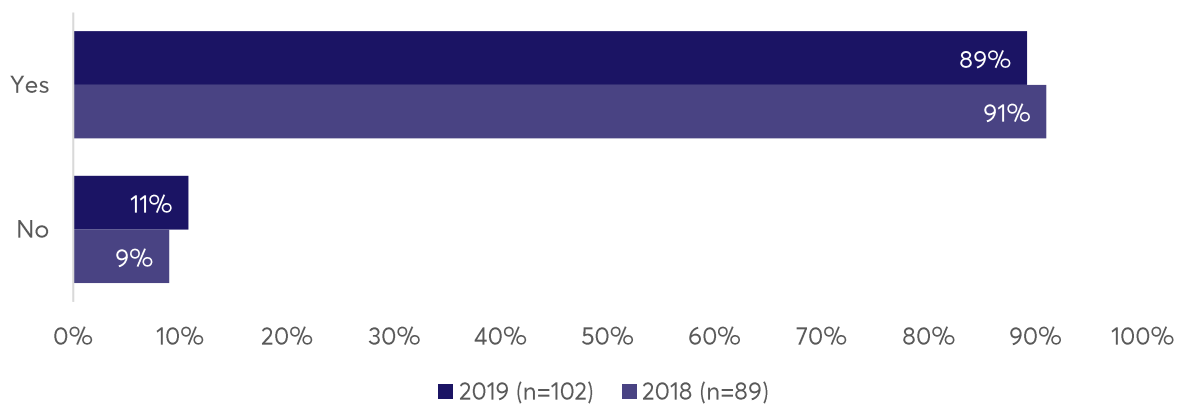
Organisations are open to creative solutions to attract new staff.

Organisations in the events industry are looking to provide attractive working conditions for their staff members, with nine in ten organisations (89%) employing flexible workplace policies.

Almost two in five professionals working in the events industry (39%) believe an MEA Freelancer register would be of value in recruiting staff. A further two in five (42%) are less convinced, believing this would maybe be of value.

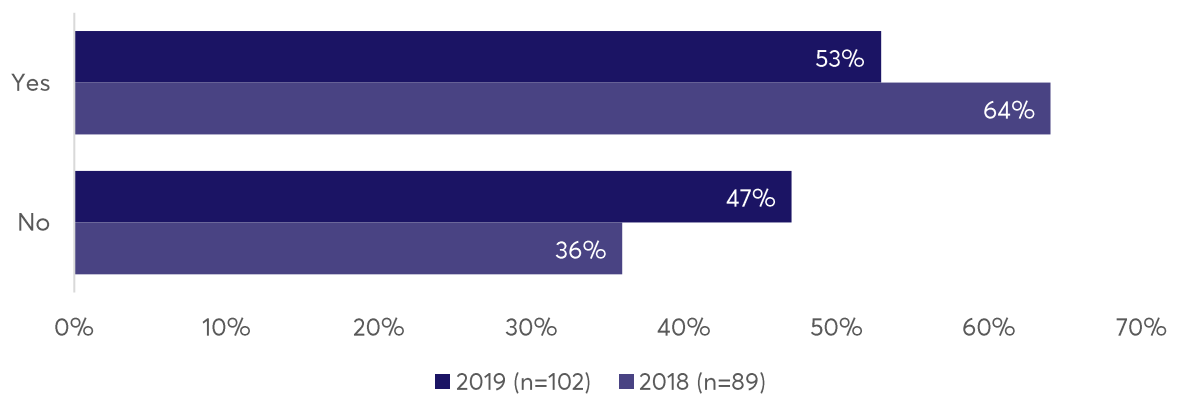
More than half of organisations (53%) would use short term skills staff on short term working visas, despite a slight decrease in willingness since 2018 (64%).

Do you have flexible workplace policies?



* Question was not included in 2017 survey.

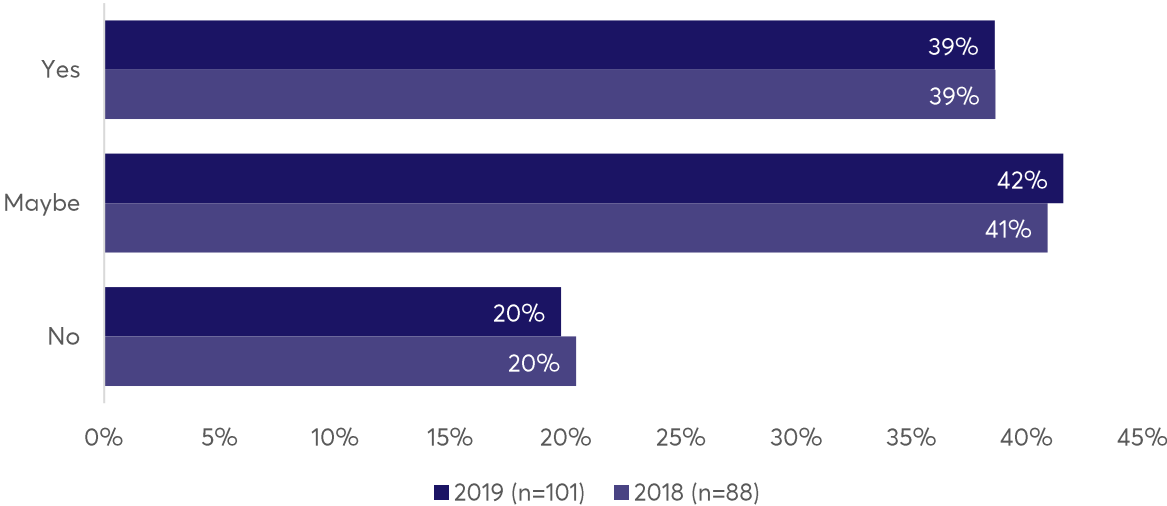
Would you use short term skills staff on short term working visas?



* Question was not included in 2017 survey.

Would a MEA 'Freelancer' register be of value to you to recruit staff?

(self-employed and hired to work for different companies on particular assignments)



* Question was not included in 2017 survey.

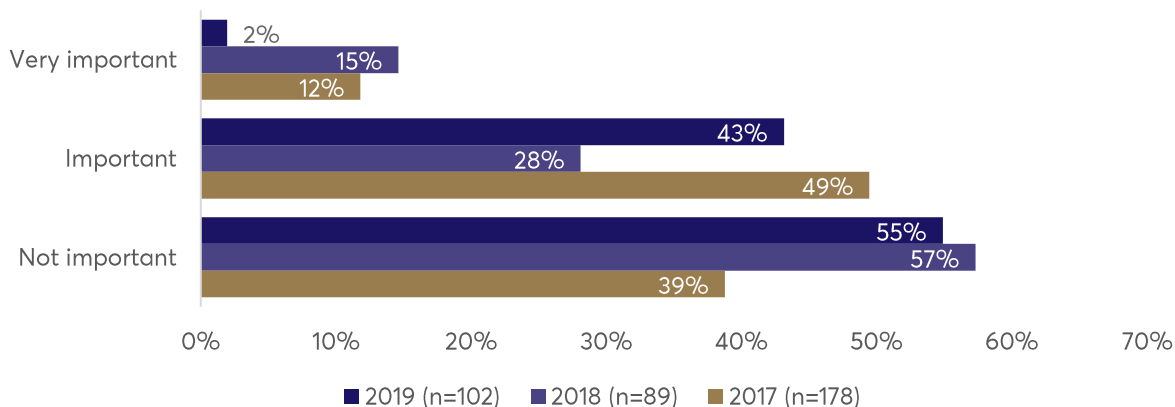
One in two organisations would find MEA accreditation valuable.

More than two in five professionals working in the events industry (45%) place importance (very important/important) on industry accreditation when recruiting. Only 2%, however, believe it is very important.

Despite this, more than half of professionals (51%) believe their organisation would see value in MEA's company accreditation for the industry.

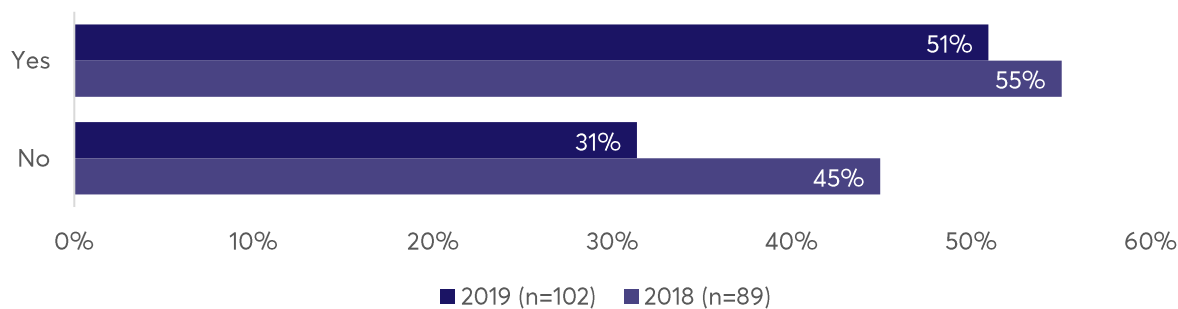
Accreditation was more likely to be considered very important/important in 2017 (61% cf. 43% 2018, 45% 2019). This difference may, however, be due to a slight wording change in the 2018 survey. In 2017 professionals were asked "what importance do you place on accreditation when recruiting?", while in 2018 and 2019 the question mentioned MEA's accreditation.

Meetings & Events Australia manages an individual accreditation for meeting planners. What importance do you place on individual industry accreditation when recruiting?



*Question wording changed to include MEA individual accreditation in 2018 and 2019 survey.

Would MEA's company accreditation be considered valuable by your organisation?



* Question was not included in 2017 survey.



***Half of professionals
(51%) believe business
events are not
sufficiently attracting
young talent into the
events sector.***

Attracting young talent to the sector

Business events are failing to attract young talent.

Half of professionals (51%) believe business events, including meetings, conventions, incentives and exhibitions, are not sufficiently attracting young talent into the events sector.

The remaining half of professionals (49%) believe business events are attracting young talent to the sector. This is, however, a much lower proportion than in previous years (62% 2018, 60%, 2017).

Young talent lack understanding of the events industry

Professionals were asked to explain why they believe business events is not sufficiently attracting young talent. A lack of understanding of the industry, poor pay and unrealistic expectations were the most popular responses.

Professionals believe that young talent do not have a proper understanding of the business events industry. Not only do professionals believe that young talent has the wrong mindset entering the events sector, but as a result, are unaware of the hard work and long hours required to become a professional.

"Most people do not have a proper understand of what a career in events involves - and business events are not really promoted as a career."

"Lack of understanding of work involved and the great expertise acquired in successfully filling this role."

Unrealistic expectations, regarding consistency of work and the nature of the events industry is also causing a barrier to attraction. Young talent is looking for consistent employment, festivals and public events. Seasonal opportunities and business events, however, constitute a large part of the industry.

"Most students are keen on doing festivals and community events."

"We are finding that young people entering the workforce in the business events industry lack enthusiasm and a basic level of administration skill. Most want to work on glamorous events and therefore find the style of events produced in the Business sector not attractive enough."

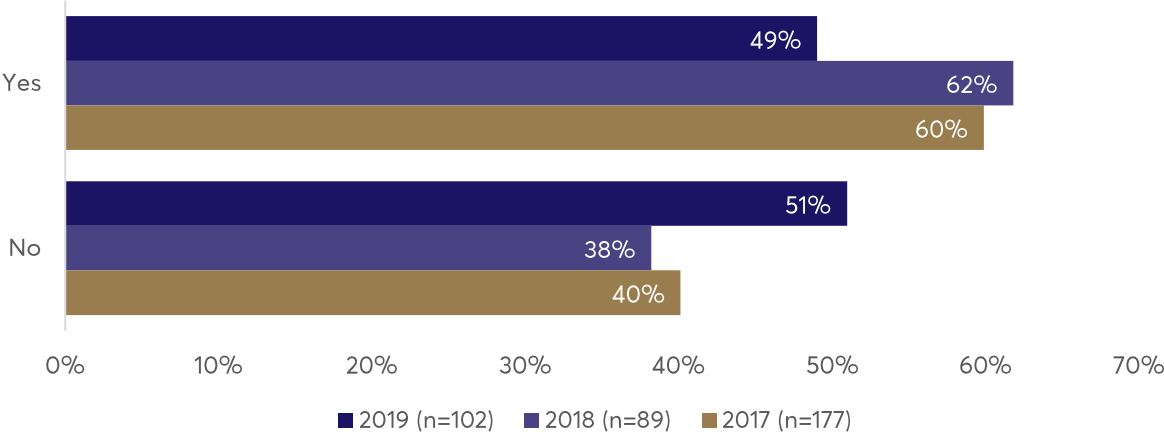
"Low pay - long hours - unstable seasonality."

Along with unrealistic expectations, poor pay was also highlighted. Professionals indicated that many entry positions were unpaid internships and that often large amounts of unpaid overtime were worked.

"Traditionally the sector doesn't pay very high wages. Large amount of unpaid overtime. Can be highly stressful for a low paid job."

"The conditions and pay do not make it an attractive career option and there needs to be more marketing to attract people to the industry."

Do you think that business events which includes meetings, conventions, incentives and exhibitions, is sufficiently attracting young talents into the sector?



Availability of skilled staff affects organisations' ability to hire.

Professionals were asked to rate (on a scale of 1-7, with 1 being the highest factor) the impact of several factors on their organisation's ability or desire to hire more staff.

The factors that most impact an organisation's ability or desire to hire more staff include the

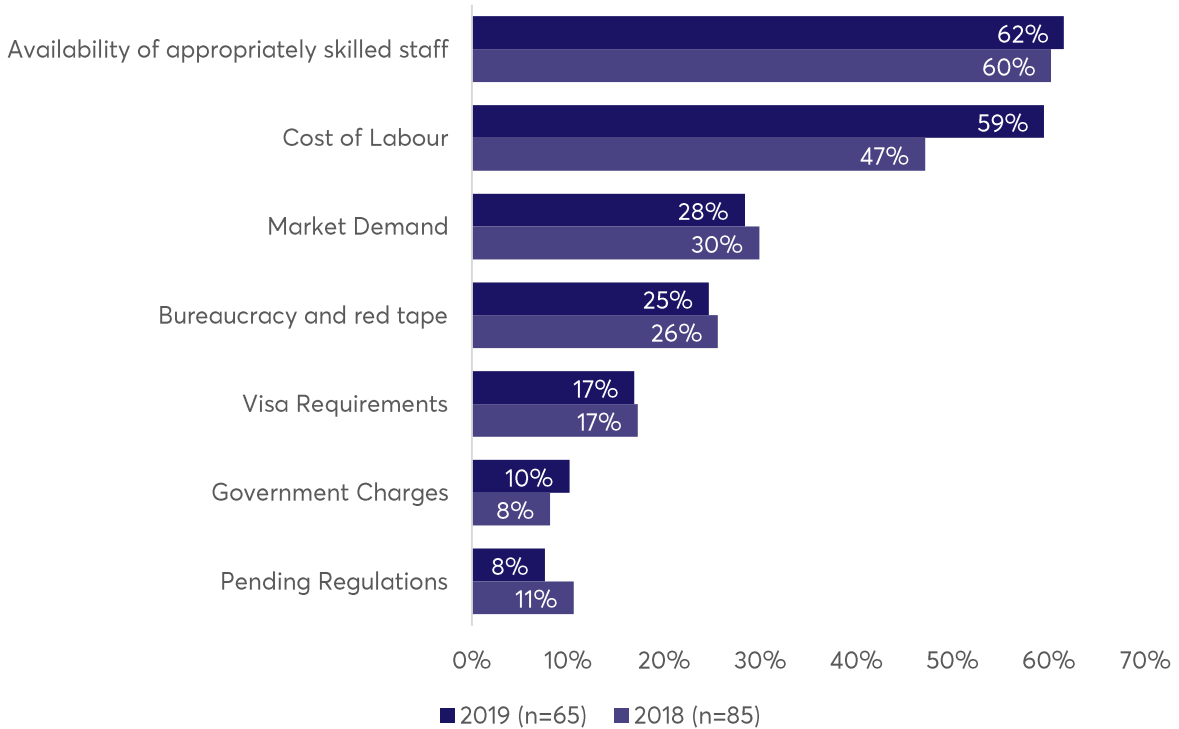
availability of appropriately skilled staff (62% scoring 1 or 2) and the cost of labour (59%).

Since 2018, the cost of labour is having a much greater impact, with the proportion of professionals rating the impact 1 or 2 increasing by 12 percentage points (47% 2018 cf. 59% 2019).

To what extent do the following factors most likely reduce your ability (or desire) to hire more staff?

Please indicate 1 to 7 (1 being the highest factor).

Scores 1 and 2 combined.

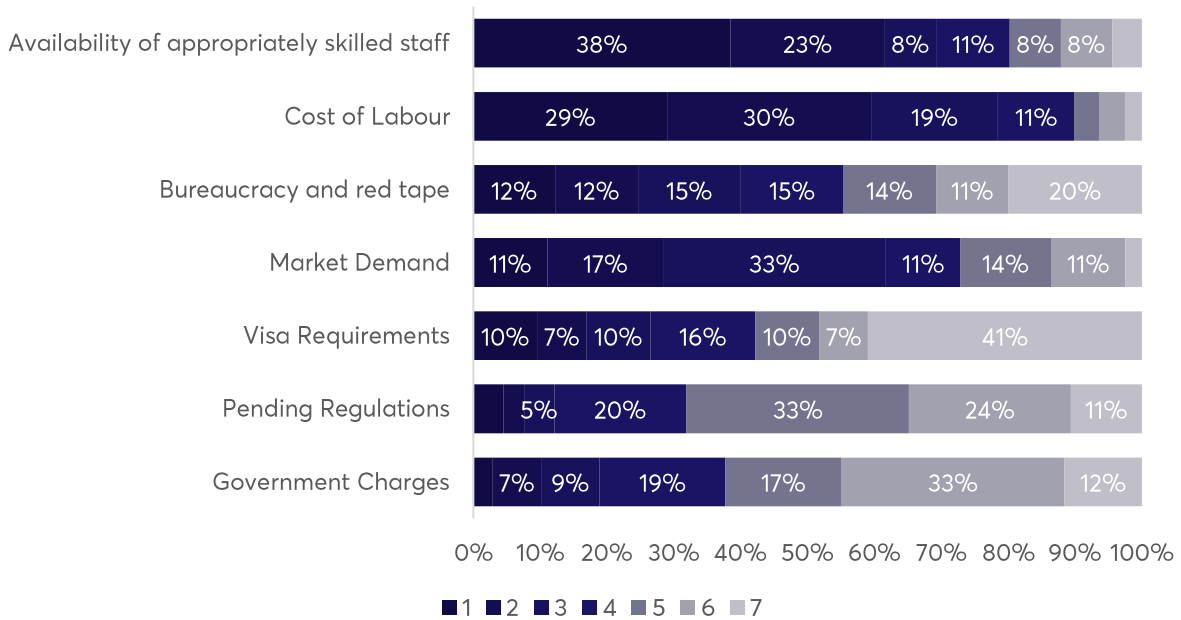


* Question was not included in 2017 survey.

To what extent do the following factors most likely reduce your ability (or desire) to hire more staff?

Please indicate 1 to 7 (1 being the highest factor).

2019 (n=65)

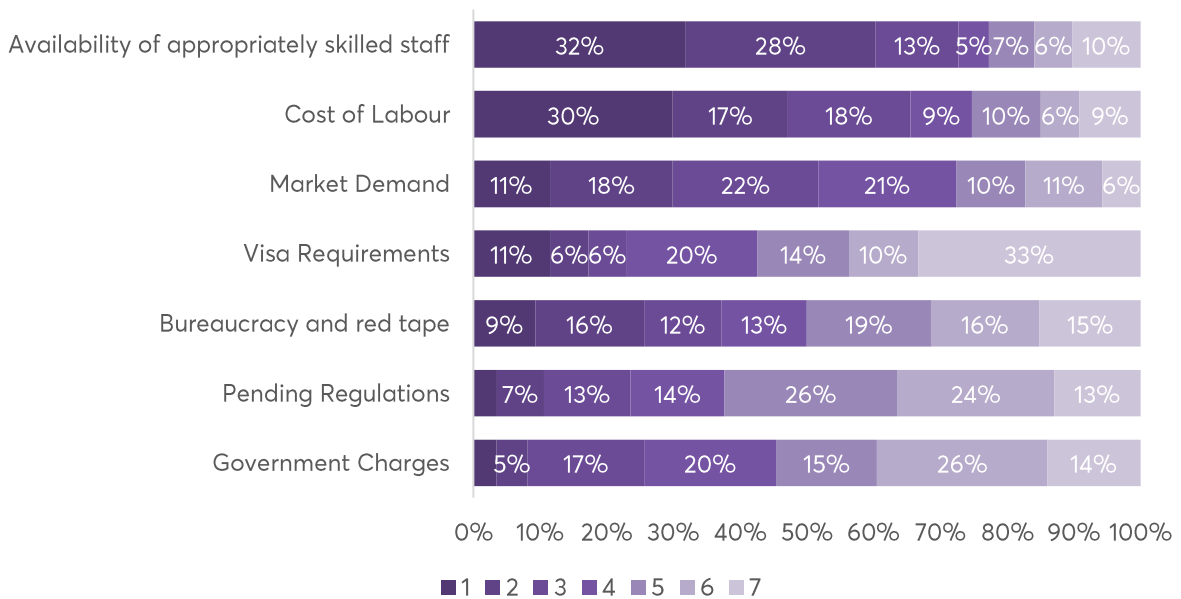


To what extent do the following factors most likely reduce your ability (or desire) to hire more staff?

(Please indicate 1 to 7. 1 being the highest factor)

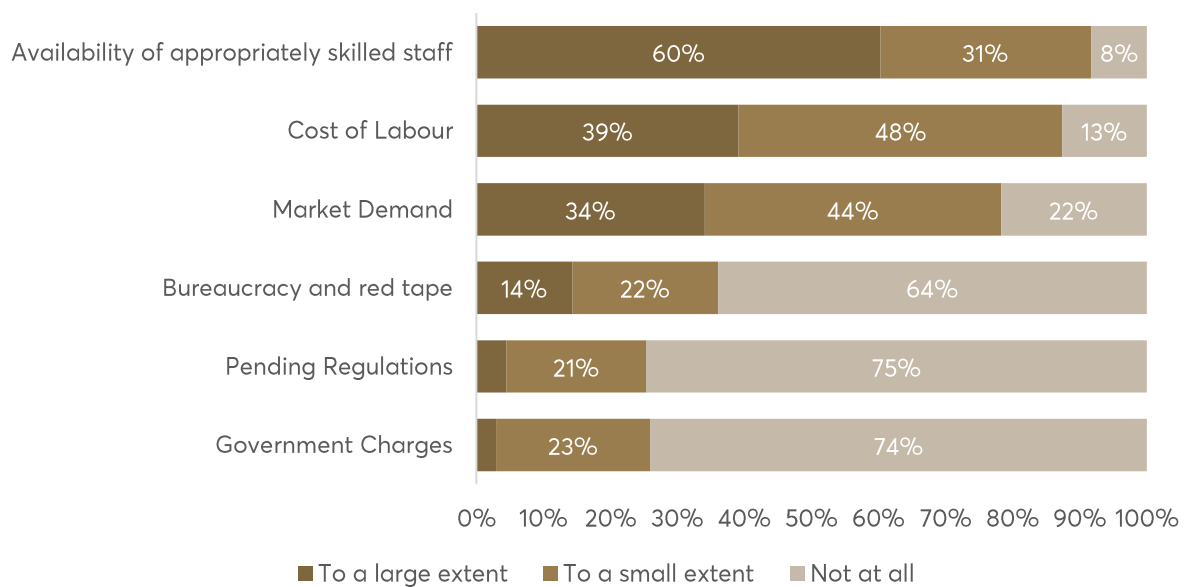
Please select all that apply.

2018 (n=85)



To what extent do the following factors most likely reduce your ability (or desire) to hire more staff?

2017 (n= 133)



Lack of experience is the main obstacle for recruiting business events staff.

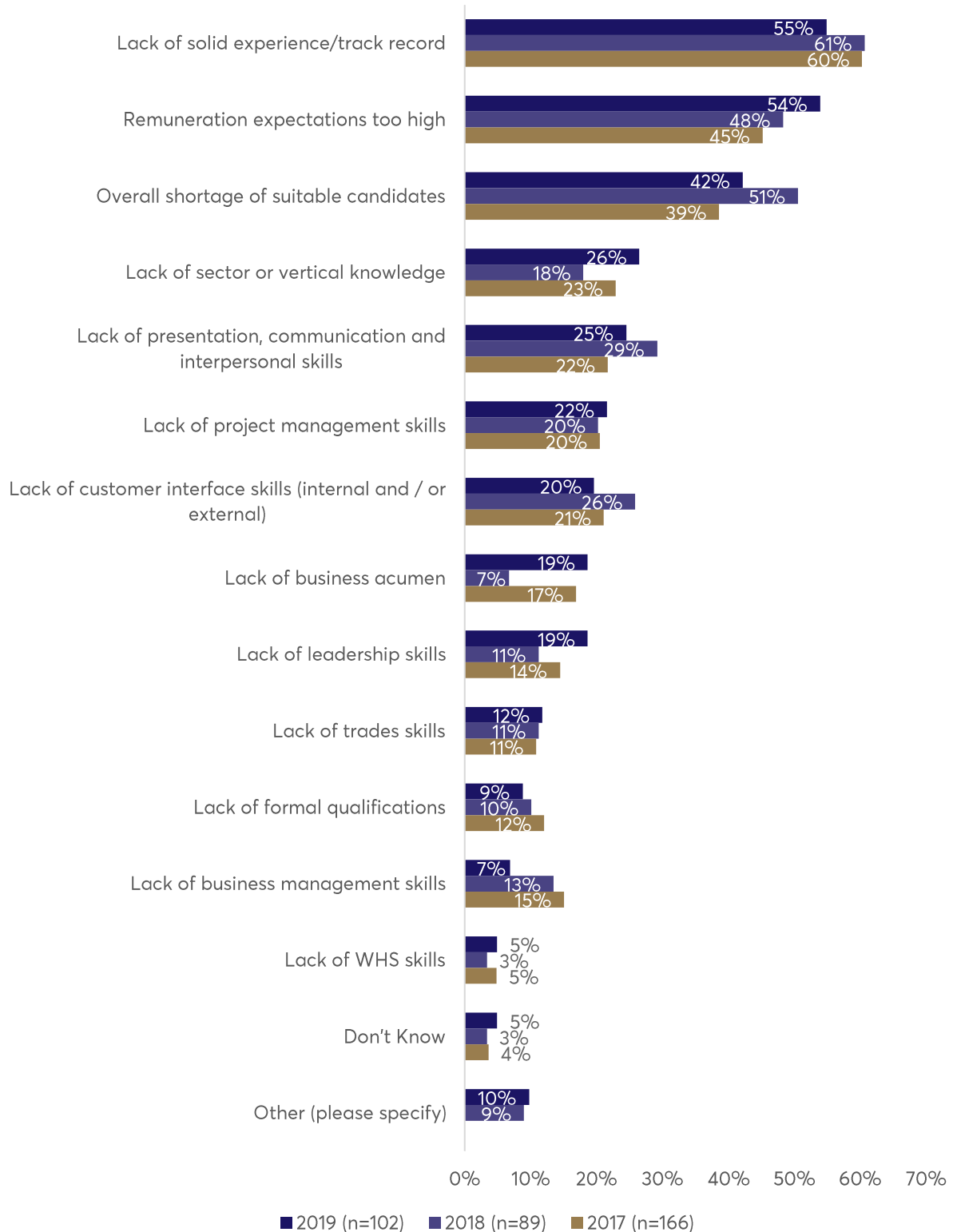
When recruiting business events staff, organisations most commonly encounter the constraints of a lack of solid experience/track record (55%), remuneration expectations too high (54%) and overall shortage of suitable candidates (42%).

A lack of WHS skills (5%) and business management skills (7%) are less likely to be constraining factors for organisations.

The proportion of professionals citing lack of business acumen as a constraint has remained fairly consistent across 2017 (17%) and 2019 (19%).

What constraints do you encounter as an organisation when recruiting business events staff (i.e. meetings, conventions, incentives and exhibitions).

Please pick 3 which you think are most common



Unfilled vacancies are impacting stakeholders.

The impacts of the skills shortage are not just experienced within the organisation but externally too. For more than four in five professionals (83%) the unfilled vacancies have begun to affect their organisation’s stakeholders (i.e. customers).

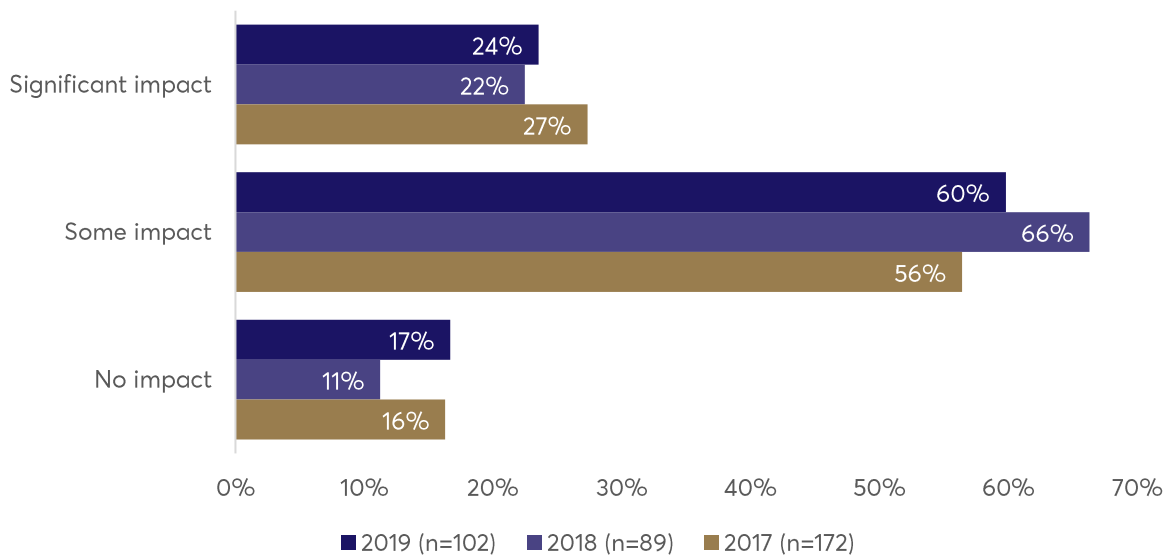
MEA can help close the skills gap

Professionals are most likely to believe MEA can help in closing the skills gap by promoting the

industry as a professional career path option (76%).

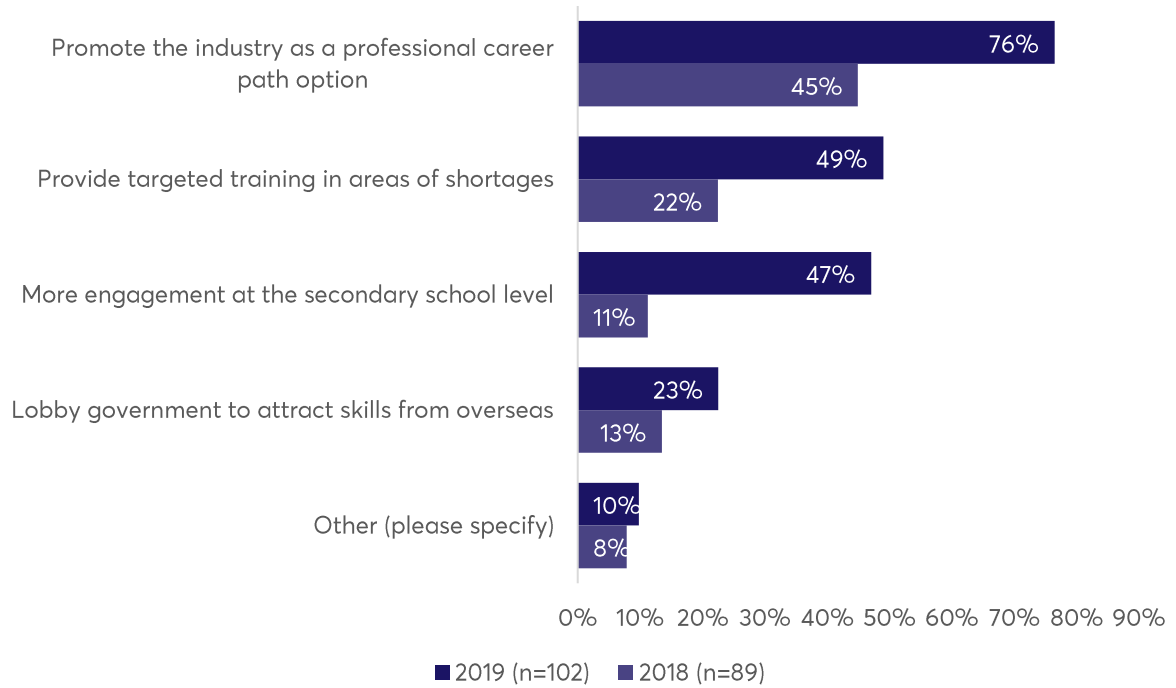
In 2019 professionals are also more likely to believe that MEA can help by providing targeted training in areas of shortage (49% cf. 22% 2018) and more engagement at a secondary level (47% cf. 11% 2018) as strategies to attract new talent.

To what extent do unfilled vacancies in your organisation impact other stakeholders, such as customers?



How can MEA assist in working with industry to close the skills gap?

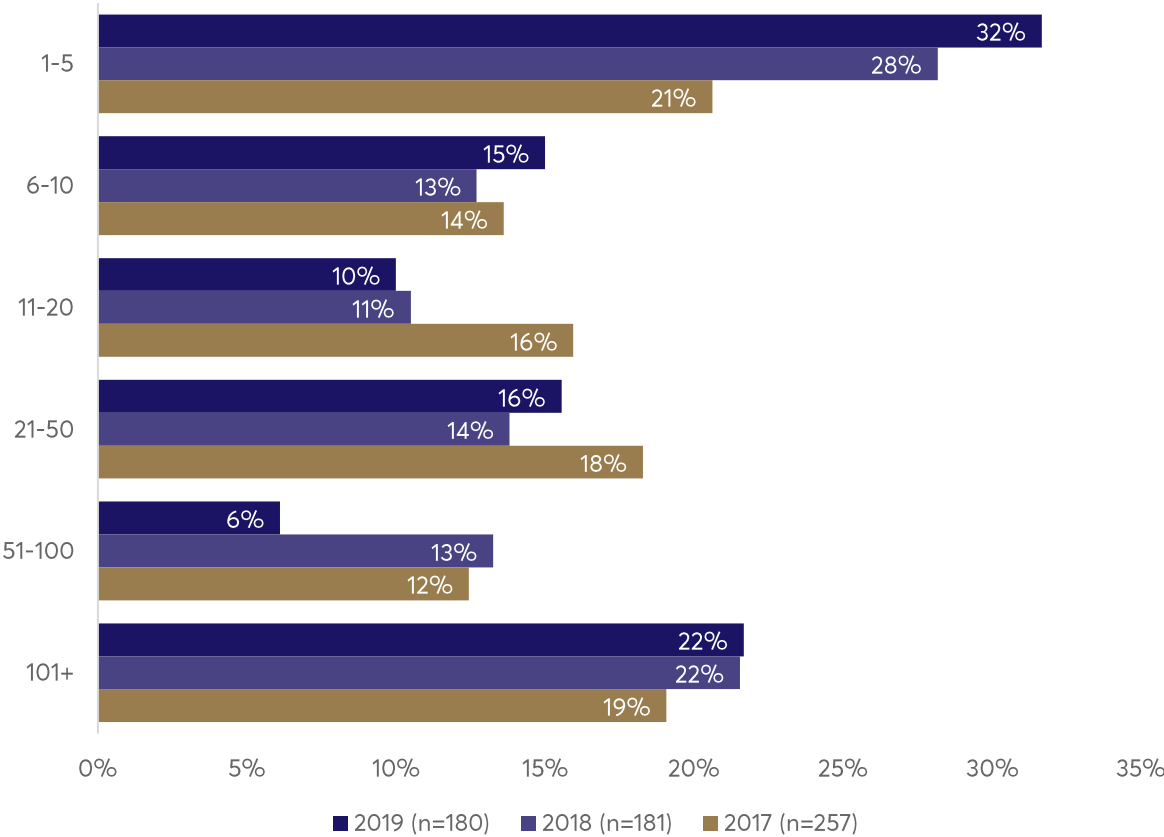
Please select all that apply.



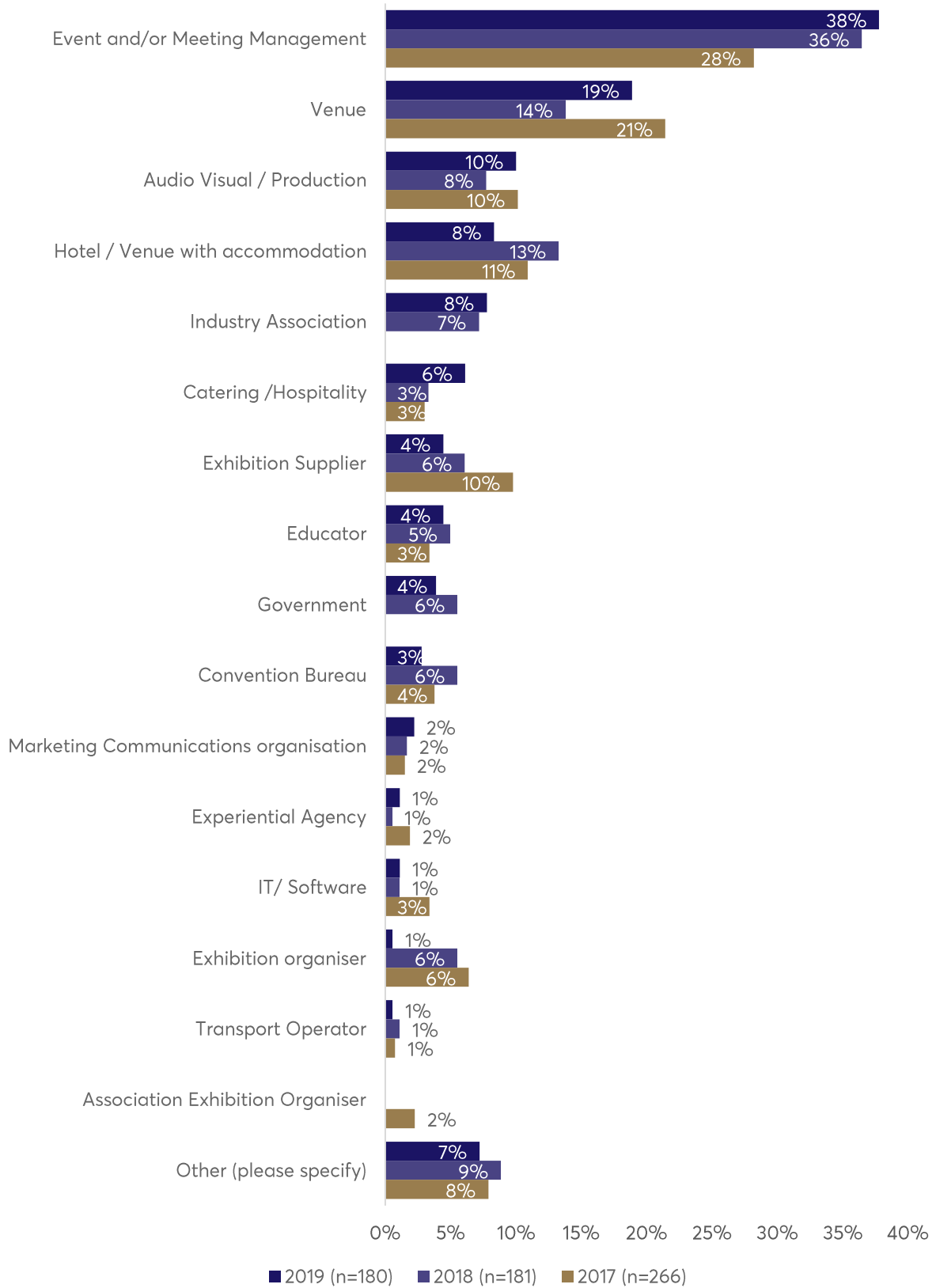
* Question was not included in 2017 survey.

Respondent characteristics

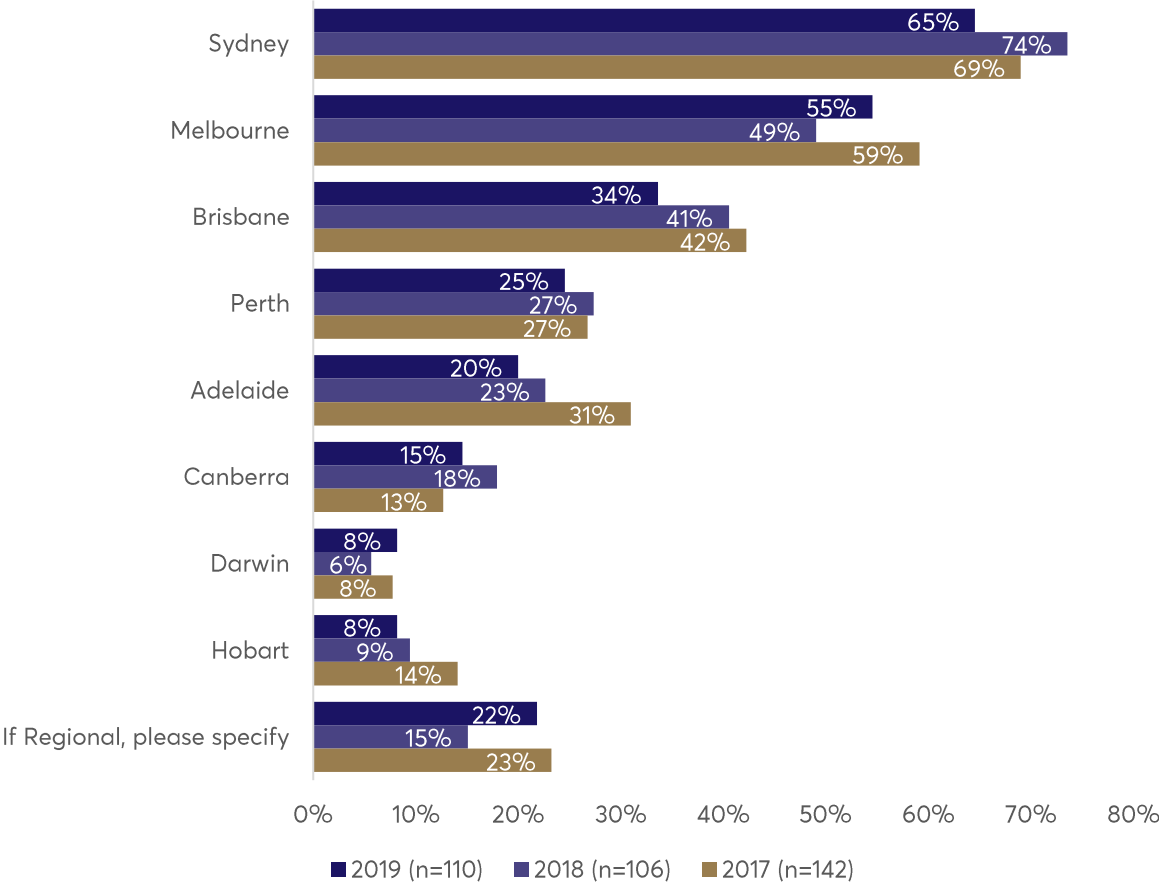
How many full time staff do you employ?



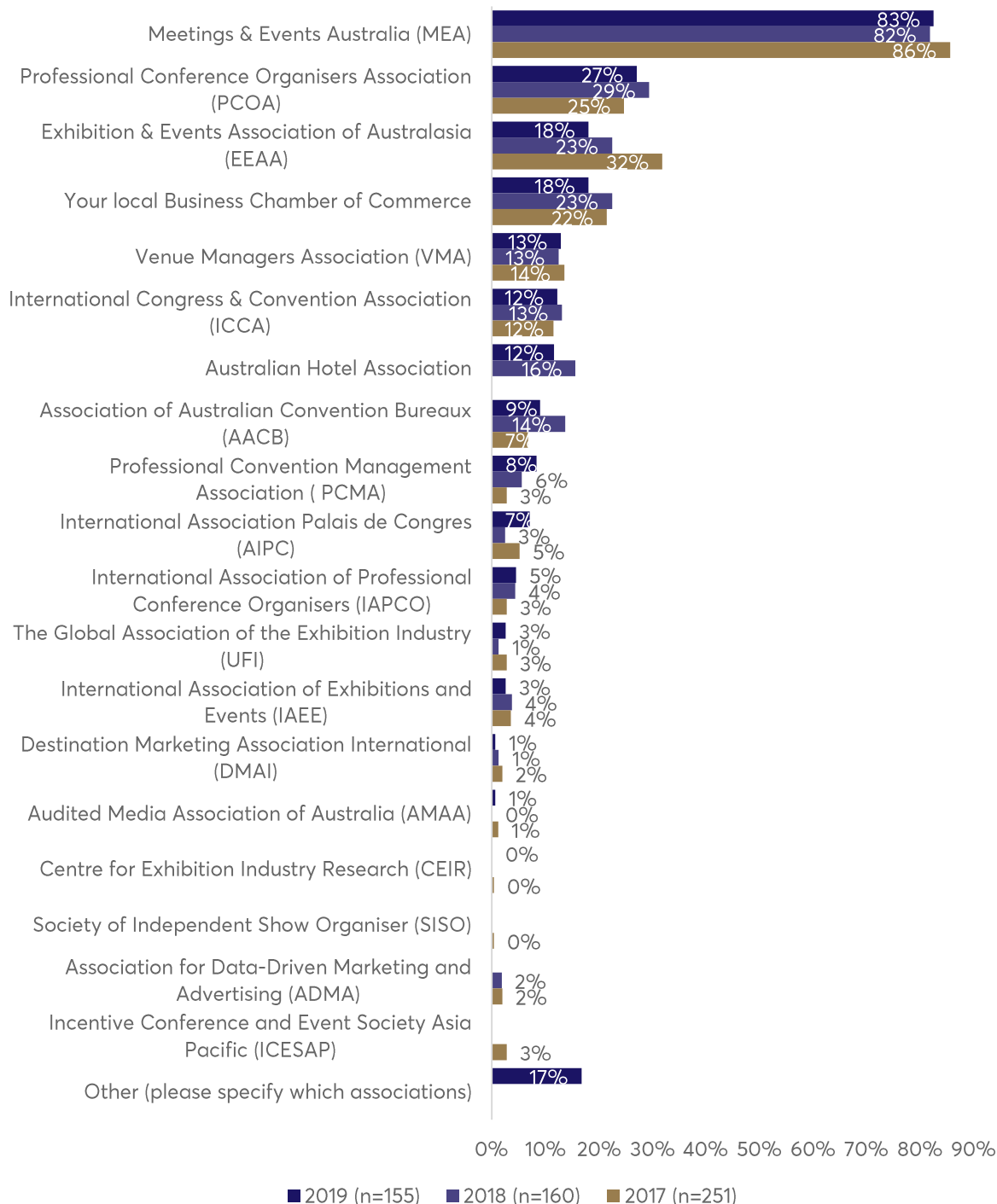
Please select your industry sector from the following:



If you have multiple sites/offices could you please indicate the location of each one.



Please indicate which industry associations you/your organisation is a member of:



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