

5 MINUTES WITH...

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From the mad-capped 'Madchester' days, a taste of Australian culture, and some Arabian nights, Edinburgh Napier's Dr Jane Ali Knight has seen the full gamut of global events. The experience helps inform her delivery of an increasingly professional events education.

Recent Past: I've worked in festival and event management education for over 15 years. Firstly in Australia and then latterly in Scotland. During my time at Edinburgh Napier University I was lucky to take a sabbatical and go and work in the festival and events sector in the UAE. Moving to Abu Dhabi, in 2007, was an exciting time as the government was building the Formula 1 track, had just set up an arm's length organisation to develop concerts, entertainment and cultural festivals and had realised the need to diversify the economy away from oil revenues and the value of events to emerging destinations. As I arrived I noticed that they were starting a film festival and went along to a volunteer session and ended getting recruited and working on the next five festivals. We really were starting from scratch in terms of events knowledge and the ability to deliver huge, ambitious events. Half of the production staff were shipped over from the Toronto International Film Festival to deliver the event and for our first festival we had the most prestigious festival venue in the six-star Emirates Palace but didn't even have online ticketing or an audience. Thankfully the festival developed over the following years to be one of the premier film festivals in the region promoting Arabic and international film.

Before that: After studying at uni I worked abroad teaching English and then returned to my home town of Manchester to a flat opposite the then infamous Hacienda nightclub during the Madchester era. Those were crazy days and I ended up doing several jobs – working in The Green Room Theatre; developing a community dance project in Salford and training adult returners to work through improving their



business skills. The travel bug got me again and I spent the next few years travelling and working in the cultural sector in Australia. On my return to the UK I realised it was time to do something 'more sensible' and signed up to do a Masters in Tourism Management at Manchester Metropolitan University (there were no event management programmes at this time). The rest, as they say, is history.

Now: I am an Associate Professor in Festival and Event Management (yes there is such a thing showing the professionalism and progress of our subject area), working in the Tourism group here at The Business School. As well as my normal academic duties of research, teaching and supervision on our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Festival and Event Management, both here and in Hong Kong, I also lead on CPD and commercial activity for the school. This involves liaising and working with industry and designing and delivering our professional courses such as our Executive Certificate in Festival and Event Management and

our successful Destination Leaders Programme. I often speak on festival and event-related issues at conferences, seminars and with the media. Oh, and I still like to plan and deliver events and with my friend and food consultant and innovator Simon Preston I worked recently on recreating famous Scottish landmarks in Cake Fest Edinburgh and Cake Fest Scotland.

Base: Based here in Edinburgh, which was completely by chance as when I left Australia in 2002 I planned to move to the sunshine by the sea on the south coast. Instead, I ended up at the other end of the UK. I am so happy I did, though, as I love Edinburgh – its history, ease of living, village feel and vibrancy during festival time. Luckily, though, I get to travel quite a bit through my job so can still manage some winter sun!

Evolution: The area of festival and event management has come such a long way, certainly since my involvement here in Scotland. We are definitely now recognised as an industry with clear career routes and a vocational, academic

and professional framework to support this. In terms of the product life cycle we are definitely a mature event destination, one who other destinations look to for advice, support and ideas. For such a small country we definitely punch above our weight with an ability to be able to deliver events at every level – from innovative and quirky community events in remote islands to major events in our cities like Edinburgh's festivals and Glasgow's recent success in delivering a whole myriad of sporting events culminating in the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Best moment: Too many to mention but I suppose in terms of my academic career it had to be finally getting my PhD after studying for 10 years during which time I changed jobs, moved continents twice and acquired two beautiful daughters. From a practitioner perspective I suppose it would be those first years at the Abu Dhabi Film Festival when budget was not really an issue and we could stage amazing opening and closing parties and fly in celebrities like Jane Fonda, Susan Sarandon and Antonia Banderas for the night – but it was also small enough for the resident community and the local film industry to feel a part of it.

Is Scotland the Perfect Stage? That's not debatable, we have the Perfect Stage in terms of our landscape, size, artists and performers and we have the knowledge and expertise to be able to deliver a world class product again and again. It's not all rosy, though, and we do need continual government support and funding to retain this position and reinvestment into our events infrastructure – both in the key cities and regionally. It's critical to our future success.