

# Career with high demand

**Hong Kong offers a number of professional courses for those wanting to enter the bridal sector, writes Rachel Read**

**WEDDING PLANNERS**



Katemagg Chau (left) shares her bridal expertise by teaching a professional diploma course for aspiring wedding planners (above).

If you're renowned for your organisational skills, or find yourself sitting at a friend's wedding thinking, "I would have planned this better", perhaps a career change is in the cards. Thanks to the number of high-profile celebrity weddings and increasingly lavish celebrations, wedding planners have never been more in demand – and consequently, a whole industry of trainers, vocational courses and qualifications has sprung up in Hong Kong.

The Open University of Hong Kong has been offering a professional diploma in wedding planning and event management for more than five years. It is the only course in Hong Kong to be accredited by the Association of Bridal Consultants (ABC), the world's largest and oldest organisation for wedding professionals, and to be awarded Level 4 qualification status from the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications.

With more than 200 hours of tutelage, the course offers a comprehensive structure, covering every aspect of wedding and event planning, from understanding traditional wedding etiquette to mastering styling and photography, and managing banquets.

Particularly important to Katemagg Chau, a teacher for the course and one of Hong Kong's most experienced wedding planners, is the fact that it offers placement opportunities to students so they can experience the trials and tribulations of weddings in real life. And all course instructors have at least eight years of wedding planning experience, meaning students can learn "first-hand knowledge from industry practitioners".

Chau and Michele Li, founder of The Wedding Company and The Wedding Academy – which offers wedding planner training courses based on Li's 11 years of experience – have noticed an increasing number of aspiring wedding planners in recent years.

"Fresh graduates often fall into banking or law as dictated by their parents or chosen career path, but after a few years are attracted to a more creative direction," Li says.

Students come from different backgrounds and careers – and from both sexes too – but there are some essential skills that all prospective planners should

have. Chau and Li point to time management, communication, quick decision-making, attention to detail and good listening skills as being particularly important.

The wedding planning courses can be an eye-opening experience, with students discovering the graft behind the glamour of weddings.

Open University course graduate Gigi To was inspired to become a wedding planner after regularly being asked to help with friends' weddings and planning her own celebration. However, after completing the course, she soon learned that it was not all smooth going.

"Behind all the glamour, becoming a wedding planner is just like any other business, and there's a lot of hard work behind it – it's nothing like just helping your friends," To says.

Similarly, undertaking a wedding planning course can reveal aspects of the job you hadn't even considered. To mentions that one of the more surprising core skills she learned was "imaging – what you wear and how you carry yourself can have a huge impact on how your clients see you. Very often, the way you dress will determine what kind of clients you attract".

Of course, lectures and theory can only take you so far, and there's no substitute for real-life experience. Another graduate, Josee Wong, says the most challenging aspect of the course was "applying the logic and theories we have learned in class to a real wedding".

To says: "Only real-life experience can teach you how to handle emergencies such as bad weather, a grumpy relative or what to do when the entire wedding party is behind schedule."

As such, Li advises you pick your course carefully, and look for teachers who have real practical experience to impart rather than purely theory-based courses.

Given that Chau believes couples nowadays have "higher expectations" for their weddings and are consequently more willing than ever to hire someone "to handle the biggest event of their life", there has probably never been a better time to throw your hat into the fray and join the professionals.

**Only real-life experience can teach you how to handle [wedding day] emergencies**

GIGI TO, COURSE GRADUATE



Wedding planner Michele Li shares her 11 years of experience.

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