**Hospitality Leadership in Universities and the Public Sector - A New Programme for a New Audience**

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**Abstract**

This paper will review the development of level VII hospitality degree programmes aimed at full time employees in the hospitality industry. A review of existing academia will set the scene, after which an explanation and analysis of a new level VII degree developed at London South Bank University (LSBU) will be purported. This new programme is aimed at people who are in full-time employment working within the catering industry (specifically in Universities or the public sector) seeking to develop their career and enhance their practical management skills. Maier (2011) noted that the demands faced by employees of the hospitality industry whilst trying to further their academic knowledge has been seen as a stumbling block to the development of skills within this sector. Consequently, the incorporation of distance-based learning and flexible modes of delivery was incorporated into the development of this Masters programme. The paper will conclude that in order to meet the needs of full time employees seeking to gain Higher Education (HE) qualifications will require the HE sector to become more flexible and adaptable to the way in which they create and deliver level VII programmes.

Keywords: Hospitality Leadership, Masters Programme,

**Theoretical Context**

The hospitality industry is evolving and becoming more dynamic arguably due to the nature of customers, competition and the workforce. To reflect such evolution, educational programmes for hospitality need to be equally responsive and implement changes to their content, structure and methods of delivery to better prepare students for the uncertainties of the future (Sheldon, Fesemaier and Tribe, 2010). La Lopa *et al.* (2018) noted that the hospitality industry requires academics to provide innovative and transformative learning environments that prepare students for industry. The next generation of students entering Higher Education work in a technologically advanced environment which poses more challenges on academics to create courses that reflect such working conditions (Cho *et al*. 2002). Much academic study has focused on the development of courses that employ a constructivist pedagogy which is active and promotes the construction of knowledge through the actions and thoughts of students rather than the passive techniques that traditional lectures do not utilise (Grabinger, Dunlap and Duffield, 2011; Kolb, 1989).

Meeus, Oerlemans and Hage (2001) noted that interactive learning which reflects the exchange and sharing of knowledge could be advantageous to innovation in the classroom. The development of information technology has increased the scope of interactive learning and provided academics more innovative methods to create student interaction via the use of technology in context of the industry and within curriculum development (Hwang, Wu, and Ke, 2011). For example, the development of education software platforms such as Moodle and workplace simulations enable students to interact with one another, independently, and/or with the teacher. Information technology has changed the way both formative and summative assessments are developed through the use of online tests, online submission inclusion of video content (through the use of platforms such as Panapto), social media, online games and the development of videoconferencing.

Green and Sammon (2014) noted that the use of acting learning techniques has become common within hospitality education and pedagogy. They suggested that the field of andragogy, which is the art of teaching adults (and how adults learn) focuses on developing skills through peer learning, experiential learning and active learning. The latter is addressing how students learn rather than what they learn. Gainor *et al.* (2014) noted that the adoption of an active learning course design enables students to become empowered and provides easier engagement with the teaching material. Furthermore, active learning techniques are considered to be a reflection of the workplace which can create competition, interaction but also provide a comfortable arena for learning to occur (Gomez, Zervas, Sampson and Fabregat, 2014). However, MacDonald and La Lopa (2005) noted that when making a decision to transition from traditional lecture style learning to innovative active learning techniques incorporating information technology the academic themselves must have sufficient training, knowledge and skills to adjust the learning strategies utilise and gain the benefits of such a shift in learning strategies.

Hains and Smith (2012) identified the three most common barriers to the development of active learning when including information technology in the design of new programmes: organisational structure, faculty and students. Firstly, the organisation must provide sufficient equipment to enable academics in the delivery of such innovation. Secondly, faculty barriers as summarised by Brownell and Turner (2012) included lack of training, time, or incentives and absence of teacher recognition. Finally, student barriers have been noted as culture, gender, age, previous education, the discipline of study (Ke and Chavez, 2013). Effective development of new pedagogy in the hospitality arena requires an understanding of the relevance to the industry, level of study and the skills possessed by academics and students alike (Li, Lee and Law, 2012).

**The context of the creation of the programme**

At the end of 2017 The Universities Caterers Organisation (TUCO) approached LSBU about the possibility of creating a Masters degree programme for their middle management. The TUCO Academy offers a range of short courses and programmes aimed at developing practical skills for their members but lacked any level VII qualifications specifically aimed at catering within hospitality. At the same time, the academic staff at LSBU were keen to develop a new Masters programme and were looking for a gap in the marketplace for a new degree course. The collaboration of an industry partner and University working together developed a new programme aimed at a new audience - namely, Hospitality Leadership in Universities and the Public Sector.

This degree is co-sponsored by TUCO who are the procurement and staff development consortium for the hospitality and catering departments of over 500 UK Universities and Colleges of Further Education. LSBU and TUCO have been developing a working relationship for over two years. LSBU has undertaken research for TUCO regarding its market and members profile and needs, and has delivered three, successful, one day courses on product development and outsourcing. Unlike the commercial/private sector of hospitality, Universities and other public service providers such as hospitals, prisons, schools and civil service, do not have a high turnover of staff, which in hotels can be up to 30% per year compared to the national average of 15% (KPMG, 2017). This is largely because of the good working terms and conditions offered by the former. This, however, brings other challenges, notably, keeping staff motivated, developing their roles and careers and meeting their ambitions. This is particularly the case in cities where there is only one university and limited other public service hospitality opportunities.

The TUCO Academy aspires to be a first-choice provider for learning and development. They deliver a number of courses and development days which were designed and created to meet the specific demands from their members, including business outcomes and to recognise emerging trends in hospitality and catering. These include, statutory training such as health and safety, management courses, specialist food preparation and delivery courses and a number of study tours around the world developing cuisine and culinary techniques.

The development of the Masters programme with LSBU is part of the Academy aimed at aiding middle managers to progress into higher management roles either within their own institution or those of other members or other parts of the public sector. TUCO will sponsor their members’ fees. This is the first degree of its kind in the country. The distinctiveness of this course is the focus on hospitality within public services (particularly universities). The innovation and new approaches to strategic leadership within public services is somewhat different to private organisations. The accountability of such organisations and their approach to issues around sustainability, ethics and the changing nature of public services have been a driving force in the creation of this degree programme.

The programme itself takes as its *aim “the training of catering and hospitality managers to enable them to help achieve their organisation’s wide strategic aims and to further its cultural values*” (Course Prospectus, 2018). In this way hospitality services demonstrate their worth to and integral role within organisations. In Universities they contribute to the student experience, vitality of the University, wellbeing of staff and students, are a point of customer contact, help towards sustainable delivery of operations and help show the University to be modern and up to date with its services and service quality agendas.

Although the impetus for this degree has come from the LSBU / TUCO relationship it could be opened to other in-house, largely public service bodies, where hospitality is central to their customers’ wellbeing such as hospitals, prisons, airports, schools the growing care sector and the civil service.

**The contents of the new programme**

The degree programme specialises in leadership issues faced by hospitality management within universities and the public sector. The sectors face differing demands to that of the private sector and, therefore, provides a unique insight not offered by many other programmes within the United Kingdom. By using the concept of hospitality leadership as a framework the programme investigates issues around strategy, marketing, leadership, sustainability and product innovations. The programme intends to provide students with management skills (to enable them to further their career) and a critical understanding of good practice in hospitality leadership based within the organisational settings in which the students are working. The distinctiveness of the programme is its focus on public services (particularly universities). The changing nature and organisational pressures faced by universities and public services is addressed in this programme. Students are encouraged to find innovative and new approaches to strategic leadership that address such challenges and the system in issues around sustainability, ethics and the changing nature of their businesses.

The programme has recruited 10 participants including head chefs, restaurant managers and catering managers from several different universities around the country. For example, one student from Emanuel College at Cambridge University is currently the head of catering, whose responsibility includes catering to 700 students on a daily basis which has an annual turnover of £1.8 million, with 35 full-time staff and 60 casual staff offering a range of different food and beverage services. The teaching and learning strategy required to accommodate such students who are in full-time employment required careful consideration from the teaching team. Many of the traditional resources used by universities have been employed in the development of this programme. However, the need to provide a flexible delivery mechanism in order to recruit students and deliver teaching was utilised. To ask students who are in full-time employment to come to London South Bank University on a part-time Masters programme following the traditional semester-based approach would have been ineffective. This programme is aimed at people working in hospitality catering in universities and clearly asking applicants to come down to study during peak times of business was not plausibleConsequently, the modules are delivered in block teaching whereby half the sessions are delivered at LSBU and half are delivered using Skype for Business. Each block of teaching is delivered 2 days a week with a two-week break between each block. . The rationale for using Skype for Business as a delivery mode was devised when our research identified that the demands of visiting another institution in a different part of the country for a two-day teaching block placed a financial constraint on potential applicants. Therefore, the use of technology (namely Skype for business) was deemed an effective way to deliver this programme. The use of such technology allows students to attend lectures and workshops remotely and alleviated the need for costly travel and accommodation to attend the two-day block of teaching.

In order to provide an up-to-date curriculum it was vital that LSBU could learn from the experiences of industry to enable students to acquire the knowledge to be successful in the workplace. Barnett (1993) suggested that knowledge is an essential feature of modern society and he goes on to suggest that there is “*an absence of any proper understanding of these relationships, there will be influences at work which are beyond our general consciousness and, thereby, beyond our control”* (p.34). Consequently, the content of the modules and assessments listed below in Table 1 were created and designed in collaboration with TUCO, their partners and academics at LSBU.

Table 1: Modules and assessments for the Masters in hospitality leadership in universities and the public sector, *Source:* Author.

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| **Module title** | **Summative Assessment** |
| Hospitality Leadership | A 20-minute presentation providing a critical analysis of leadership styles and activities of the student’s employer with recommendations for staff development and training programmes. |
| Product and Market Trends and Drivers | A feasibility study based on market assessment forces and product development ideas for an innovation relevant to the student’s organisations future as a hospitality provider that produces financial forecasts and sets out the viability of the opportunity. |
| Strategy and Visioning | A strategic vision report detailing how hospitality services can help the participants organisation to achieve its strategic aims and highlights which products and service innovations may be required and what organisational structures may be appropriate. |
| Marketing and Merchandising | A comparative analysis of the student’s own organisations hospitality marketing with that of two other institutions, leading to a benchmarking report and set of recommendations. |
| Sustainable Design and Operations | A critical review of how sustainability is interpreted by the student’s employer to identify the demands that exist in addressing what often appear to be competing needs (economic, social or environmental). The analysis should be linked back to the strategic vision of the host organisation and identify the sustainability priorities for the next five years and the implications of working practices for the hospitality department. |
| Comparative Study (including field trip) | A written portfolio that identifies, analyses and academically justifies the transfer of ideas observed on the field trip to the student’s own institution. The portfolio will include ideas about an implementation programme would need to be followed in order to adopt new ideas (including: vision, market assessment, resource needs, training, finance and development timetable). |
| Hospitality Consultancy Report | An individual consultancy report based on the learning received throughout the programme. The report is designed to give participants the opportunity to undertake a piece of primary research and analysis within a field of interest or expertise which should show originality and should offer a worthwhile contribution to the existing body of academic knowledge. |

When determining the types of assessments for this programme the LSBU teaching team engaged with potential employers in the catering sector of public bodies and Universities to achieve a blend of different but relevant assessments. This meant that the assessments of the modules (noted above in Table 1) reflect the nature of the programme and the students on the course. Verbal business presentations, management reports, comparative reports and reflective writing are the methods employed to assess the students. These methods reflect the needs of employers in terms of what business skills they would expect a manager in hospitality to possess. Tesone and Ricci (2006) noted that practitioners hiring hospitality graduates considered teamwork, effective listening, verbal and written communication skills and the ability to project a professional image is most important. This programme is as Lowry and Flohr (2005) suggested focusing on discipline specific knowledge as well as general management in the curriculum to achieve such outcomes. The need for a dissertation was seen as defunct and the notion of a large consultancy report was viewed as both practical and relevant to the business demands of current operations. The skills associated with problem solving and developing conceptual/analytical ideas (as noted by Spowart, 2011) to enhance hospitality business development are central to the consultancy report.

**The innovation of the programme**

It was in discussion with potential students and the TUCO Academy that one of the biggest problems this programme faced in terms of recruitment was overcome. The validated programme required students who were full-time employees to visit LSBU for the two-day teaching blocks. Given that students were working in Universities around the country the cost of travelling and overnight accommodation seemed to be a major flaw in the attractiveness of this programme. The financial and time constraints were considered too much of a burden for many potential students. Consequently, the need to find an innovative approach to the delivery of this programme resorted to the consideration of technology aiding the mode of delivery. Bergendal (1983) noted that the knowledge traditions within higher education were based “*on explicit and implicit assumptions about knowledge”* (p.45) and it is perhaps these assumptions that can stifle the creativity of academics in the way in which they deliver their programmes that create organisational stagnation and lead to loss of productivity.

Firstly, the idea of using lecture capture was deliberated upon. However, lecture capture is asynchronous and does not permit interaction between the lecturer and students. Therefore, finding a synchronous videoconferencing system seemed much more applicable and LSBU had access to Skype for business which was deemed the most practical tool to enable lectures and seminars to take place whilst alleviating the need for students to physically come to LSBU for the sessions. This technology allows for interaction, real-time communication (between the lecturer students), the use of an interactive whiteboard and traditional PowerPoint slides. Therefore, the burden of travel and accommodation was removed. Although unconventional and untested within UK hospitality Higher Education institutions this approach has been approved and adopted by students, TUCO and LSBU teaching staff. Distance education of this type is not untested. One of the first studies carried out with regards to distance learning was conducted by Fillion *et al.* (1999) who found that students who studied remotely were less satisfied than those students who studied at a campus, but the distance learners achieved better results than those based at the campus. Conversely research by Klibanov *et at.* (2018), after an exploratory study, identified that students on distance learning programmes achieved slightly lower scores when compared to students who physically attended the education campus. They believed that students based at a physical campus might be more comfortable asking questions regarding course material during face-to-face encounters either before/after class or during faculty members’ office hours.

The work of Aslam (2017) identified that videoconference approaches to teaching (in politics) was beneficial to develop higher order skills of “evaluating” and “creating” as long as it is integrated into the course’s learning design and its use is clearly linked to intended learning outcomes. The programme at LSBU will utilise 50% “room-based interactions” and 50% “desktop videoconferencing” for each module. This will help address the issues noted by Klibanov et al. (2018) and Aslam (2017) in order to reap the benefits of both approaches.

**Conclusions**

The need for consulting the industry partner in the development of this programme has been one of the key strengths of this Masters degree. The financial incentive given by TUCO to potential applicants (in terms of their bursary), the availability of their resources and their support has driven the success of this programme. From the initial idea, to the content of modules, to the validation and mode of delivery the support of the industry partner has been a paramount importance. Without the support of TUCO and their drive and determination this programme would not have taken shape as it has. The world of academia often seems quite slow to react to the changing nature of students and their demands. Armed with an industry partner this programme was able to be flexible and responsive in the way it was developed and as it matures. Being responsive to customer needs in the hospitality industry goes without saying. However, such flexibility is not often quite so forthcoming in meeting the needs of students. Pierce (1971) suggested that students “*change through activities which generate for them new and significant experiences. The curriculum, then, is those activities which are cultivated in an attempt to generate valuable experiences*” (p.278). Consequently, the opportunity to develop a Masters programme and re-evaluate our current assessment strategy at level VII has provided us with the opportunity to reflect on what we are doing, report on what has happened, make connections between issues that have occurred, reason what can be done differently and reconstruct new and existing programmes. As Ryan and Ryan (2013) suggested the relevance of reflection in the development of programme objectives and assessments should involve a systematic, developmental approach that allows for reflection and responses. Therefore, a static approach to programme development is not forward thinking and course teams should consistently reassess their offerings. The ability to be flexible in the delivery of academic programmes is something that should be considered more thoroughly, after all, the hospitality industry is responsive and adaptable to customer needs so should the world of academia be as well.

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