

THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME FOR POSTGRADUATES IN SPORT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Aim of paper

The paper will focus on the methodology employed to activate an internship within a postgraduate programme in sport management and to analyze initial progress and results and to assess the effectiveness and value of the internship experiences using a case study approach. The intention is to learn from the positive and negative aspects of these case studies in order to further develop the internship programme and improve the student experience.

Organizational context

Following the six-year Periodic Review process held within the Business School of London Metropolitan University in August 2010, the well-established MA Sport Management programme received revalidation at the end of November 2010, with the major amendment being the addition of a 12-week internship as an option to a dissertation. This was a watershed decision by the University as the Master's in sport management became the first postgraduate programme within its large business school to offer this option. In order to introduce the internship for the spring entry, urgent planning and activation were required to be put the option in place. This paper discusses the methods used and the outcomes achieved after the first semester and looks forward to further developments required to provide students with a relevant experiential opportunity to improve their skills, make beneficial contacts, and obtain gainful employment in the sports industry on graduation. Educational issues, experiences

Some university programmes take a strong vocational approach to sport management education, de-emphasizing theoretical learning and moving towards practical tools and operational thinking (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003). The sports industry has strongly encouraged this trend that is often manifested in experiential learning such as work experience and internships. The postgraduate course leader that headed the MA in sport management course's

revalidation process believed that it was the right way forward for the course, and one that would both aid recruitment and employment opportunities for the students. It was a development that would expand the University's outcomes-oriented approach to education, without discarding the academic rigour of the course from which future leaders in the sports industry would derive real advantage.

The UK's Quality Assurance Agency's benchmark statements for Sport (2008) recognise that the study of sport has intrinsic intellectual value yet at the same time programmes of study that have the ability to enhance the students' employability and career preparation (QAA, 2008). Within the QAA subject benchmark heading of 'Hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism' there is no specific requirement for students on sport degrees to undertake work experience or placement, or indeed to complete a compulsory dissertation in master's courses.

Although the QAA benchmarking statements provide guidance regarding curriculum content, the fact that Universities retain autonomy of programme design may effect the definition and consistency of sport management degree content and London Metropolitan University has some flexibility on the matter by stating in the University's PG Scheme framework (5.3.2, p. 24):

In subject areas where the dissertation/project typically involves a significant artefactual element of output (e.g. arts, design, architecture, etc.) different requirements necessarily apply, though there is an expectation that it will involve an equivalent volume of work, include an element of research, and that assessment will include at least one element that is a written piece of critical analysis or reflection.

For these reasons, the revalidation required the new internship module to include a research project. The other central assessment is a portfolio that includes a weekly diary that incorporated both reflection and critical analysis, and the submission of an evaluation form completed by the supervisor within the host organization. The paper will discuss the methods used to design the internship programme, how the initiative will be assessed and the outcomes evaluated. It will analyse the techniques employed to guide and support students in gaining and pursuing an internship, assess the reasons why students failed to secure one, and the ways of offering guidance for further advancement of the students on completion. Implications for sport and sport management

The present dire economic climate has made it particularly difficult for graduates to secure relevant employment on finishing their degrees and a lack of relevant experience and contacts are frequent barriers to obtaining a first job. Internships are a way of potentially providing postgraduate students with both but the nature of the internship, the criteria for acceptance, and the assessment attached to it, are critical if the experience is to be a productive one for the student and to meet the University's academic criteria.

The number of postgraduate sport management courses in UK Universities offering an internship option to a research project, such as a dissertation, is still relatively small. This paper may encourage other Universities within the UK, and indeed other European countries, to consider introducing a similar option in the best interests of the students.

References:

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