

Examining the internationalisation of Sport Management undergraduate degree programmes in the United Kingdom

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Aim of paper and research questions

Are UK undergraduate Sport Management programmes designed to prepare students for the international 21st century sport environment?

The aim of this paper is to provide a snapshot overview of Sport Management undergraduate degree programmes in the UK with particular focus on the “internationalisation” of such programmes.

Literature review

Over 10 years ago, Masteralexis and McDonald (1997) highlighted that the sport industry would require sport managers with international business capabilities. Shiels (2006) outlined that Higher Education Institutes have the responsibility of producing graduates who are “global citizens” capable of operating in the 21st century. Whilst the number of Sport Management educational programmes has grown worldwide, specifically in the US, Australia, and Europe, with emerging markets in Asia and South America, debate continues concerning the suitability and relevance of the curriculum content of these programmes with regard to “international” issues (Knight, 2004; Jones, Brooks & Mak, 2008).

In the UK, issues regarding internationalisation of the curriculum have in general, centred on definition and context (Black, 2004; Knight, 2004). However, as Kehm & Teichler (2007) discuss, internationalisation as a construct remains characterised by “fuzziness”, resulting in a lack of parity and agreement with regards to terminology and process. Within the framework of “Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism”, Black (2004) identified four main areas which contribute to the internationalisation of Higher Education; faculty, students, curriculum content and international alliances.

Issues of internationalisation specifically within Sport Management curricula have been discussed from an American perspective (Masteralexis & McDonald, 1997; Li et al., 2002; Jones, et al., 2008). Similarities can be drawn between Black’s (2004) identified areas contributing to internationalisation of Higher Education, and key issues identified within subject specific curricula, which include but are not limited to; academic staff expertise in international Sport Management education, opportunities for international exchange (academic staff and students), international collaborative research opportunities and ways of “internationalising” programme content (Masteralexis & McDonald, 1997; Li et al., 2002; Jones, et al., 2008). Indeed, Li et al. (2002: 180) stated that “the trend in the globalization of sport has provoked

sport management educators around the world to contemplate if sport management curricula should be internationalized so as to become part of this globalized trend.”

This particular paper will provide a UK perspective of Sport Management education, focussing on the issues of internationalisation of the curriculum, research, academic staff and student experience.

Research design and proposed data analysis

The Universities & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) “course search” tool was used to identify participants providing undergraduate degree (BA and BSc) programmes in Sport Management. A subject search was carried out using the term “sport management” (N = 156 programmes), including foundation degrees and joint honours. For the purposes of this study only single honours BA or BSc programmes were selected, to avoid repetition of results, only one programme per institute was identified (N = 36 programmes). An internet search identified limited relevant information relating to the course leader of the individual programme. Heads of Institute or school were identified and contacted via email in an attempt to determine the person responsible for the “Sport Management” programme (N = 31 programme leaders identified).

The survey was designed to collect the following data: (a) the programme profile, (b) admittance requirements, (c) National or International Association Approval (e.g. NASSM), (d) International aspects of the programme (e.g. international associations of staff, students or research, international study trips and related module content), (e) student employability; and (f) the profiles of academic staff. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the University of Worcester research ethics committee. The questionnaire was distributed via email to programme leaders (N = 30) and Head of Institute or School (N = 1). Initial contact with identified participants has been positive and a high percentage response rate is anticipated.

Discussion of progress

Prior to designing the survey, a wide body of literature was reviewed which covered subject areas such as, Sport Management as a discipline, Sport Management education and internationalisation of curricula, culminating in an extensive literature review. Data collection has commenced and it is expected that the descriptive statistical analysis will be completed by June 2009. It is proposed that this study will provide the first comprehensive overview of Sport Management Undergraduate Degree provision in the UK and the focus of “internationalisation” within this context will stimulate discussion regarding the design of such programmes and their effectiveness in preparing students for work in the international 21st century sport environment.

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