SPORT MANAGEMENT GRADUATES - WHAT DO THEY DO?

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Abstract

Many researchers (Patel, 2008; Jordon, 2008) have suggested that Higher Education (HE) provision has changed dramatically over the past few decades, which has had a profound effect upon service delivery. In recent years, researchers have suggested that higher education provision has largely been driven by central government reforms related to new funding, accountability, accessibility, and more recently employability agendas (Bennett, Dunne, & Carre, 2000; Brookes, 2003). The rise in student numbers, student fees and new degree structures have all added to the debate, which researchers suggest have led to many tensions within higher education systems (Kehm, Michelsen & Vabo, 2010). Stuart-Hoyle (2007) emphasises the pressure being placed on HE by Government with regards to widening participation and suggests that the importance of curriculum design is vital to meet the changing nature of HE and at the same time meet industry and students needs.

Kang, Wu & Gould (2005) also suggest the importance of understanding industry expectations and what skills and competencies are required by the sector. One of the weaknesses they found in their research was the "need to keep the curriculum current (p.46). Given the macro changes within the sport industry, having a contemporary understanding of the knowledge, skills and competencies required of sport students is vital within HE provision. However, Jordon (2008) suggests that sport curricula in HE, often appears to have simply evolved with little thought processes going into it.

Fleming and Ferkins (2005) have also expressed similar concerns regarding sport programmes in HE, they acknowledge the growth and development of sport programmes, mainly due to the professionalization of sport. However, they state that there has been little research into the importance of the sport curriculum, especially with regards to programmes with an emphasis on the management of sport (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004). The need for a greater awareness of the skills and competencies that are required within the sport industry is a growing concern for many (Morgan & Kingston, 2010) Lei Hu (2010) suggests that an understanding of competencies is vital and is a "major step towards the professionalization of the very important fields of training and development" (p.66).

Busby & Gibson (2010) also suggest the need to develop graduates with a range of skills and competencies that will prepare them for the careers that they choose. They identify transferable skills including teamwork, presentation and IT skills and suggest that HE can enhance graduates employment chances, when they teach such skills within their curriculum. Other important skills recognised include: research skills (Allin, 2010); e-learning skills (Beard, Wilson & McCarter, 2007); numeracy and literacy skills (Wilson et. al, 2006); entrepreneurial skills (Chang & Hsu, 2010); critical reflection skills (Fleming & Martin, 2007); language skills (Hjalager, 2003); practical skills (Morton, 2008); problem solving skills (Martin, West & Bill, 2008) inter-cultural skills (Butts, 2007); entrepreneurial skills (Brizek & Poorani, 2006) and citizenship skills (Hums, 2010).

Chappelet (2009) states that whilst the development of key skills in sport management graduates is fundamental, a greater understanding of what sport managers "actually do" is necessary. He acknowledges that the sport industry has changed dramatically in the past few decades and that it is time to gain a greater understanding of the requirements needed of sport managers, if we are to equip students with the necessary skills to fulfil the roles that industry require. Similarly Dale & McCarthy (2006) suggest that there is a skills shortage within the sport industry and that a "supply of skilled and well-qualified labour is crucial for the long-term visibility of the industry" (p.49).

Given the concerns expressed above, researchers have joined together to gain a greater understanding of industry needs with regards to international sport management positions. The study involves undertaking an occupational audit of international sport management positions and analysing sport management employment opportunities. It is clear from the research highlighted that there is a great need for an investigation into the sport management industry. This study will help to identify current sport management positions, generic and specific essential criteria, and the skills and competencies expected from potential employers. It will also attempt to investigate HE provider's awareness of the industry expectations and their understanding, when developing sport management curricula. Finally, it will attempt to build a theoretical framework for the future pedagogy and curriculum development of sport management university education. Such findings will aid both Institutes of Higher Education that provide sport management programmes, employees within the sport industry and ultimately students who study such sport management courses.

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