

# SPORT MANAGEMENT GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT - AN INTERNATIONAL AUDIT OF EMPLOYER NEED

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## Abstract

### Rationale

Despite the soaring costs and demand for University education, widespread concerns remain at the vocational preparedness of graduates across a plethora of subjects, not least in the emerging field of sport management. To professionally equip graduates for study-field employment minimally entails an in-depth understanding of contemporary industry practice, employer expectations and the nature of the sport management profession. Whilst course claims are frequently made to fitness for employment purpose, limited empirical research has been undertaken to identify employment opportunities and the selection criteria used to appoint sport managers.

### Aim

The purpose of this international study is to determine and compare the employer needs of sport management positions in Australia, New Zealand and England. More specifically it seeks to identify the nature of study discipline employment opportunities, the management and leadership expectations, as well as the employability skill set and selection criteria of sport management entry level positions.

### Theoretical underpinning

The conceptual and analytical framework for this research is based upon the Service Skills Australia (2009) definition of the sport industry, the ENSSHE & EOSE (1997) sport management occupations classification scheme, the national graduate employability skills of BIHECC (2007), and the management and leadership occupational standards of the UK (Management Standards Centre, 2009). These provide a comparative and benchmarking standard by which the work activities and people needs of sport management positions can be profiled.

### Methodology

A national occupational audit of convenience, replicated in three different countries, was carried out over a six month time period. Sourced from the primary employment websites, both generic and sport-specific, of each participating country, this entailed a weekly collection of all publically available e-promotional materials of paid sport management positions. Regardless of management level, all full and part-time employment data were collected and then screened to remove job and position duplications as well as positions that realistically sport and recreation management graduates would be ineligible for. The data were then systematically organised in Microsoft Excel, before being exported and analyzed using SPSS and NVivo software.

### Results

Whilst comparative data are still being analysed, the Australian data set for example comprise a data collection frame of 684 positions - 10% team leader, 64% first level manager, 23% middle manager, and 3% senior management positions. The diverse range of opportunities is exemplified by different job titles, sector involvement, responsibility levels and more than 35 individual sport specific roles.

The presentation will further provide comparisons of average base salaries, the type of management and leadership activities employers expect, both at the general competence cluster and specific individual levels, the required skill sets and essential selection criteria particularly focussing on entry level (team and first level) management positions. National similarities and differences will additionally be reported.

### Implications and conclusions

These findings possess important management implications at the industry, sport organisation, university and student levels. For example, at the University level they can assist in better promotion, industry definition and course delivery against government initiated fit for purpose agendas, and at the student level they can help create more realistic employment expectations and act as valued differentiators to improve individual recruitment prospects.

Further research is required to validate these findings, particularly adopting other stakeholder perspectives, and bridge the gap between educators who are strongly influenced by academic rationales and employers who are driven by practical realities. Enhancing the transition and development of more employable sport management graduates can only help to produce more competent highly skilled sport managers and professionalise the industry in the future.

References:

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