

# **GUIDELINES 1**

## **TOWARDS A CORE CURRICULUM FOR TOURISM: A DISCUSSION PAPER**

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Tourism has now been taught in higher education and at postgraduate level in the UK for over 20 years with undergraduate courses commencing in 1986. In that time, a variety of approaches to curriculum design have developed – far too many to list here. With the multiplication of new courses in tourism in higher education, especially since 1990, we have seen greater diversity in approach to curriculum design. Paralleling this has been uncertainty among curriculum designers about what to include and what to exclude in a tourism curriculum. As new topics such as sustainable tourism develop, room has to be found for them within the syllabus; as international links are formed, so often are efforts made to internationalise the curriculum to meet the needs of exchange students and the potential needs of UK students planning to work within other countries. There is at the same time an understandable reluctance to jettison material which has stood the test of time.

Simultaneously, resource pressures are requiring many educational institutions to modularise their programmes, forcing tourism into one of a series of ‘themed pathways’ rather than the traditional approach of a distinctive and clearly identifiable course. This ‘pick and mix’ approach, while offering students the richness of choice, raises further doubts about what exactly should constitute a vocationally orientated ‘tourism course’. The growing practice of linking tourism with a range of other subjects, using modular course structure flexibility, focuses attention on what is the minimum tourism content for a course which includes tourism as part of a degree title.

These pressures may produce overload on the part of educationalists, a dangerous trend to breadth rather than depth which can threaten academic rigour, and serious confusion on the part of tourism industry employers, who do not know what to expect of a graduate in tourism and are now calling for some common standards which will allow comparisons to be made. The situation is further confused by external pressures to develop common core programmes for leisure and tourism, or for recreation and hospitality, while there is uncertainty within academic circles as to whether tourism can be justified as a stand-alone body of knowledge, or whether it should be underpinned by a core discipline such as business studies, geography or economics.

It is for these reasons that the NLG devoted so much of its time in its first year to examining the need for a common core in tourism studies, talking with educationalists and employers alike in an effort to achieve the basis of a curriculum that will satisfy the employers, while maintaining academic rigour and meeting student needs for a programme of studies that will be both enriching and relevant to their long-term future careers in the travel and tourism industry. It has to be recognised too that tourism degrees should provide a basis for other careers in service industries.

The objective has been to find a common core for which broad agreement can be reached, which will at the same time provide institutions with the scope and flexibility to employ diverse approaches in the design of individual syllabi.

## **Introduction**

## **The Tourism Core Curriculum**

These debates contributed to the establishment of a national conference, bringing together academics and members of the tourism industry, which took place in London in December 1994. An important aim of the conference was to solicit views on the seven 'areas of knowledge' on which the committee members of the NLG were agreed, and on the basis of these views to reach some consensus on the body of knowledge which would be acceptable to both academics and practitioners in the tourism industry. These areas of knowledge are now identified:

- **The Meaning and Nature of Tourism**  
Definitions, social and other conditions and determinants of tourism, and tourism motivations
- **The Structure of the Industry**  
Description and interrelationship of the main component sectors and their operating characteristics
- **The Dimensions of Tourism and Issues of Measurement**  
Scope, geographical knowledge and perspectives, patterns and determinants of demand, natural and other resources for tourism. Sources of data and the management of information
- **The Significance and Impact of Tourism**  
Economics of tourism, costs and benefits. Assessing economic, social and environmental impacts
- **The Marketing of Tourism**  
General marketing theory and its particular application to tourism, consumer behaviour
- **Tourism Planning and Development**  
Destination and site planning. Financial implications. Partnership issues and sustainable tourism
- **Policy and Management in Tourism**  
Public sector policy. Organisations in tourism and visitor management issues.

It is not intended that each of these subjects should necessarily form a distinct module within the framework of a tourism degree – rather, that an institution seeking national recognition for their vocational degrees should encompass each of these core themes and in sufficient depth to satisfy employers and course validators that adequate knowledge and understanding of the key issues will be imparted.

## **The Views of the Conference**

In the event, most of the critiques directed at the proposal centred on peripheral issues rather than on the seven core areas, for which there was broad acceptance, although some academics feared the danger of the core areas becoming overly prescriptive. Stress was placed on the need to determine and make clear the basic philosophy and aims of vocational tourism programmes. The case was also made for sector-specific tourism option modules which would address the needs of regions or local businesses. This would not prejudice the argument in favour of a common core curriculum designed to provide flexibility of employment, allowing organisations to adapt to change and graduates in tourism to move freely between the various sectors of industry as job opportunities dictated.

There was support for the underpinning of tourism degrees through an overarching discipline, but it was recognised that such a discipline would be determined by factors such as individual educational institutions' mission statements, the availability of staff expertise, and to some extent regional employment needs. It is clear, however, that many employers in the industry strongly support a business or management studies framework for vocational tourism degrees.

Several contributors to the debate, especially those within the industry, emphasised the importance of customer-centric programmes, with the concept of service permeating the curriculum as a whole, rather than being concentrated only within the marketing field. Some delegates questioned why marketing as a management discipline should have been singled out as an essential core, while other management functions such as human resource management were ignored. However, it has not been the objective of the NLG necessarily to prescribe a business or management studies underpinning for tourism degrees.

The conference made clear that employers should have the right to expect that any tourism graduate or postgraduate would be capable of demonstrating reasonable familiarity with global travel and tourism geography, but accepted that this knowledge could be subsumed within the core areas identified. Employers also consider that core skills of numeracy, literacy, communication and customer orientated personality characteristics are fundamental requirements for employment at graduate level.

The case for compulsory foreign languages within the tourism core curriculum was examined, but delegates supported this only for those programmes clearly identified as being international in scope (such as the BA in International Tourism Management).

No decision was taken by the conference on a prescribed minimum number of class contact hours for the delivery of the tourism core; NLG committee members, however, endorse the CNAA Review (1993) which recommended a minimum of 300 hours to cover the tourism core in a 3 or 4 year undergraduate degree.

To obtain a unanimous consensus among a wide cross-section of employers and academics, many with strongly held views, would perhaps have been too much to hope for. However, the NLG does feel that the process of discussion and negotiation which has been undertaken both at the conference, and more informally with academics and senior members of the tourism industry, has reached the point where they can confidently present for adoption the seven areas of knowledge outlined earlier in this document. Adoption would imply acceptance by employers of the relevance of the qualification for graduate recruitment into the travel and tourism industry, and by academics of the need to ensure that any vocational degrees in tourism offered within their institution would incorporate the areas of knowledge recommended by the NLG for such programmes. NLG accept that tourism as a body of knowledge is properly accessible for a wide range of courses in higher education. Increasingly, some of these courses may not seek to develop within a vocational orientation. These recommendations are for courses which refer to employment opportunities in tourism in the prospectuses they issue for prospective students.

## **The NLG Recommendation**

*Review of Tourism Studies Degree Courses*, CNAA Committee for Consumer and Leisure Studies, February 1993.

## **References**