

GUIDELINES 4

THE PROFILE OF TOURISM STUDIES DEGREE COURSES IN THE UK: 1995/6

Summary report of a survey undertaken by the NLG

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This paper provides a summary report of a survey initiated in 1995 by the National Liaison Group for Higher Education in Tourism (NLG) as a direct follow up to an earlier survey, *Profile of Tourism Studies Degree Courses in the UK: 1993*. The 1993 study was itself the logical successor of the first study of its kind undertaken in 1991/2 in connection with the former CNAAs' *Review of Tourism Studies Degrees* (Published in 1993). Through these initiatives it is possible to trace the development of degree level courses in tourism in the UK over the last decade.

The 1995/6 survey is concerned with undergraduate courses leading to the award of BSc or BA degrees (mostly with honours), and with postgraduate courses leading to the Award of MA, MSc, MBA, or Diploma. Tourism is included in the titles of all these awards although the range of titles used is very wide. This is discussed in Section 8.

The survey, the only one of its kind in the UK for Higher Education tourism courses, was organised by Victor Middleton in collaboration with David Airey, who developed the questionnaire, and Adele Ladkin. All were involved in the 1993 Report. The research and analysis for 1995/6 were undertaken by Dr Ladkin, who provided the tabulations from which this summary report was written by Victor Middleton.

It has to be stressed that the results of this survey are based on voluntary responses that universities and other institutions provided to a fairly lengthy questionnaire. The 1995 questionnaire was similar to the 1993 survey which achieved a high response rate of over 70%. As before, questions covered the institutions offering tourism courses and the courses offered, but the response rate achieved for 1995/6 was less than 50% notwithstanding several reminders. This fall in response may be due to growing pressures on staff time in the last three years and perhaps some loss of interest in a second wave of a survey. For future surveys we would recommend a reduction of questionnaire length to obtain only key information. Fortunately, because we have results from previous years, there is a valuable data base for exercising judgement as well as making direct comparisons with previous findings.

Survey response rates – Grossing up the results

In the 1993/4 academic year, on the basis of desk-work on published sources and telephone work, we identified 36 institutions, mostly new universities, offering 53 courses of which 27 were bachelor degrees and 26 were courses leading to postgraduate qualifications. Twenty six institutions provided usable responses in that year (72% of the known total).

Introduction

A Caveat

More institutions offering more degree level courses

For 1995/6 our desk work identified 43 institutions offering 75 courses of which 42 were bachelor degrees and 33 led to postgraduate qualifications. For 1995/6 we achieved 19 usable responses (44% of the known total). In both surveys the institutions are found throughout the UK, in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

As for the 1993 study, where relevant, the results are grossed up to represent the total number of courses using information obtained from the responses received. For example, if 17 undergraduate courses provided valid information on a variable, the results are grossed up by 42/17.

We conclude that the remarkable growth in the provision of courses we highlighted in 1993 has continued up to the mid 1990s. We record a growth of over 50% for undergraduate courses and just over 25% for postgraduate courses between 1993/4 and 1995/6.

Overall estimates of degree level courses in the tourism in the UK

NLG estimates of trends in course provision are summarised as follows:

	1991/2*	1993/4	1995/6
institutions offering courses	15	36	43
number of courses offered	22	53	75
of which undergraduate	12	27	42
of which postgraduate	10	26	33
estimated new enrolments	1,000	2,500**	4,415**
of which undergraduate	750	1,750	3,600
of which postgraduate	250	750	815

* Data taken from Middleton's Review for the CNA published in 1993

** Calculated by multiplying the known number of courses by the median number of places offered by the courses providing information. In each case 'new enrolments' means places on Year 1 of undergraduate courses, or on postgraduate courses.

These data are the best estimates which can be made of the growth in provision in the UK, relying upon voluntary methods.

We conclude that between 1993 and 1995, the number of enrolments on the first year of degree level studies in tourism rose in the UK by some 75%. Even allowing for some element of over-estimation, the numbers rose by around 400% from 1991/2, while the number of institutions offering courses (mostly new universities) tripled.

Staff profile of those teaching tourism in the UK

In 1995/6 institutions responding to the survey were employing a mean total of just over 7 full-time teachers of tourism (those teaching specified tourism subjects or course units) and 1.7 part-time teachers of tourism units. In addition the institutions employed a mean total of just over 18 full-time staff who contributed in different ways to the tourism courses, drawn from relevant disciplines and subjects ranging from economics and financial management to information technology and languages. A further 3.5 part-time contributing teachers were employed. These mean figures are the

average for all institutions, some of which run two or more undergraduate and two or more postgraduate courses.

These estimates, in terms of teachers per institution responding, are broadly comparable to those found in the 1993 survey. Grossed up to all institutions, we estimate a total of some 375 teachers of tourism units (compared with 200 in 1993). In addition, there are some 950 full and part-time teachers including all those who contribute to the conduct of tourism courses, (compared with an estimate of around 300 in 1993).

Although the question was rather more specific for 1995/6, and not directly comparable, we conclude that there are currently at least one thousand full and part-time lecturers involved in tourism courses expected to have a working knowledge of tourism as a subject for study at degree level. There is a core of around 350 staff who specialised in tourism subjects, mostly having career interests in the study. We do not have a survey estimate but it appears realistic to assume that since 1990, reflecting rapid growth in the courses offered, up to two thirds of these staff have begun for the first time to teach tourism subjects, or to teach their subjects on tourism courses that are new to them.

Two thirds of all undergraduate courses providing evidence for 1995/6 had first been offered since 1990. Just over half of the postgraduate courses had also commenced since 1990. Looking further back, it was only in 1986 that the first two undergraduate courses were offered in the UK, and at that time there were only 6 postgraduate courses.

By any consideration the growth in course provision has been remarkable. As discussed by Airey (1995) it has been facilitated by a combination of factors including strong demand from students, government encouragement for the provision of additional places in higher education and a growing emphasis on vocational courses since the 1987 White Paper on Higher Education, belief in the growth potential of the tourism industry as an employer, modularity of courses, and the relative ease (and low cost) with which tourism courses can be mounted compared with courses in science subjects and the traditional academic disciplines.

On the evidence supplied in 1996, it appears that around a third of courses are now provided in departments or faculties of business and management studies. About a fifth are located in departments of hospitality and tourism management, another fifth in departments of hotel and catering, and a further fifth in tourism, leisure and recreation departments. Most of these are vocational courses but there are an important minority of courses, provided for example in departments of sociology or geography, in which the vocational element may not be seen as important.

Not specifically covered in the survey findings, there is known to be an increasing tendency in the last three years for the creation of large 'hybrid' departments in new universities providing a range of courses spanning tourism, hospitality, leisure and recreation, and in some instances sports studies and service industries more generally. Typically provided within an overall focus of business studies, such large departments are greatly facilitated by the modularisation of courses which permits economies of scale in teaching. On this basis it is already possible for tourism related subjects to be selected from a wide range of course options on a 'mix and match' basis.

**Date course
commenced**

**Department/
Faculty within
which tourism
courses are
provided**

Extrapolating from these results and looking ahead, we conclude that the flexibility of this approach may well encourage the development of bespoke/self-selection degrees within a nominal tourism vocational focus. If this happens there will be some interesting challenges for course validation, quality monitoring, and maintenance of national standards. We predict a growing concern for recognition of a core curriculum for tourism courses, as identified in the CNAA Review (1993) and developed by Holloway for the NLG, (1995).

Course titles

In the desk-work for this study we noted a remarkable range of variations on titles/awards offered. The following are just a selection of the present options. Modularity means increasingly that tourism can be offered with almost any other subject and *vice versa*. It is not easy for prospective students to understand to what extent or depth, and with what focus the tourism element is included in each case.

Tourism Management
Tourism Business Management
International Tourism Management
Management and Tourism
Management and Travel Industries Studies
European Business Studies and Tourism
European Tourism Management
Business Studies with Tourism
Travel and Tourism
Hospitality and Tourism Management
Hospitality and Tourism
Tourism Studies
Leisure Services and Tourism
Tourism and Leisure
Tourism and Regional Studies
Tourism, Leisure and Services Management
Tourism and Social Responsibility
Sociology of Travel and Tourism
Recreation and Tourism Management
Languages with Tourism

There is currently no agreement on common terminology for use in titles, which clearly reflect the strengths and interests of the institutions and staff offering courses. One may wonder, however, to what extent this apparent 'richness of diversity' creates confusion among prospective employers and students seeking to evaluate different courses for their own purposes.

Mode of attendance and delivery

Most undergraduate courses (70%) are provided on a full-time basis, with some 30% undertaken on a mixed full-time and part-time basis. The reverse is true for postgraduate courses reflecting the fact that most offer Master degrees obtainable on a part-time basis by completion of a thesis. On the evidence supplied, although we think this may underestimate the current position, we were notified of only one postgraduate course available through distance learning and no undergraduate courses provided on that basis.

Significantly, in the courses providing our evidence, 8 out of 10 undergraduate courses are now operating on a modular basis. Three quarters of the postgraduate

courses operate on a modular basis. This represents a significant shift to modular provision since the previous survey in 1993.

Modularisation is now clearly the norm and dedicated courses with their own staff teams are the exception. Apart from a quantum shift in the flexibility with which tourism degrees can be offered, this shift also permits significantly larger intakes of students per course and greater apparent 'productivity' per teacher. It must also have some implications for the content and rigour of tourism courses and standards of provision across the country, which deserve debate.

In the 1993 study, we measured the mean number of applications per undergraduate course offered at between 340 and 430 in the years 1991 to 1993. For this survey we found a mean of between 441 and 485 (for 1995/6). Dividing this figure by the average of around 85 places available for courses produces a figure of between 5 and 6 applicants per place offered. Compared with the evidence of the 1993 survey, the average course size appears to have declined slightly from the figure of around 95 but this may be no more than a reflection of our sample size. Of course, the most successful courses do better than this, with ratios of 10 applicants for every place on some courses.

For postgraduate courses the mean number of applicants per course varied around 100, which appears rather down on the figures recorded in the previous survey. On the other hand, the average course size on the evidence supplied to us on this occasion was only two thirds that of courses prior to 1993/4. It is currently around 25 students per postgraduate course.

We conclude that there is no evidence of slackening in demand for undergraduate courses up to the enrolments for 1995/6. There appears, however, to be some signs of slackening in the demand for postgraduate courses with an average of around 4 applicants per place offered.

The evidence for 1995/6 confirms the finding in 1993 that undergraduate courses are dominated by female students with a median ratio of 75 women for every 25 males applying over the three years 1993 to 1995. The sexes are rather more evenly matched on postgraduate courses where the median ratio is closer to 45 (male) and 55 (female).

By age, the findings are that nearly 75 per cent of undergraduate enrolments are in the range 18-21, consistent with their appeal to immediate or recent school leavers seeking full-time courses. The postgraduate students are obviously older with some 33-40 per cent aged over 25 at the time of enrolment. This is consistent too with the higher interest in part-time postgraduate courses.

The employment of graduates and postgraduate on completion of their courses is an issue of vital importance, especially in the context of rapid growth in the number of graduates seeking jobs. It appears clear, however, that most institutions do not have adequate records and updating systems for establishing the careers taken up by their graduates. The issue is complicated because many students do not find immediate jobs and lose touch with their tutors; many others are from overseas which makes communication more difficult. As in the previous survey, the evidence supplied to us comes from only a small number of courses and must be treated with caution. It indicates that around a third of graduates over the last three years are in tourism careers, with another third in other service sectors. Others are in non-service sector or other forms of employment, unemployed or simply unknown because they have not kept in touch with their institutions. Postgraduates appear to do rather better with

Applications for tourism courses and places offered

Student profile and employment indications

around half finding employment in tourism and between 15% and 20% in other service sectors.

We hesitate to draw any conclusions from the employment indicators other than the obvious fact that most graduates do not find early employment in the tourism industry. This is not necessarily a bad thing as most modern degrees aim to provide transferable skills appropriate for a range of careers. That said, there is an issue to resolve for vocationally orientated degrees if employment opportunities are as limited as the available evidence suggests, and the output of prospective employees continues to increase rapidly.

Duration of courses and industry experience

The evidence for 1995 indicates that half of undergraduate courses are for three years duration and the other half are for four years. Duration clearly influences the role for industry placements/experience although three quarters of such courses made placements a formal part of the degree. This varied from a requirement of between 10 and 15 weeks (40%); 22 weeks (15%) and 48 weeks (40%). The remaining 5% was a requirement for two vacations' work experience.

Postgraduate courses also vary significantly in length, with around a third having a taught duration of just twenty weeks. Half have a taught duration of between 26 and 30 weeks with the remainder lasting for a year. Because of their short duration, industry experience is typically not an element in postgraduate tourism courses.

It is widely recognised that industry placements play a valuable role in tourism courses in promoting good relations between universities and employers. Evidence from other surveys indicates that they are well appreciated by students and can help in securing future employment. The pressure on universities to reduce costs by reducing the length of courses over the next five years, combined with student pressure to limit their borrowing needs, could have important implications.

Concluding remarks

At postgraduate and degree level, tourism has been a subject of study for nearly twenty five years in the UK. The first two postgraduate courses enrolled their first students in 1972. The first two undergraduate courses enrolled their first students 1986. This report identifies the scale of growth in the provision and the continuing popularity of tourism as an area of study in higher education throughout the UK in the 1990s.

Rapid growth is a remarkable feature of tourism education at degree level and it has helped to generate a massive expansion of tourism teaching in schools and further education institutions through the tens of thousands of students now enrolled on GNVQs in leisure, recreation and sports studies and, to a lesser extent, in the longer established hospitality management courses. This report identifies another equally remarkable feature of tourism degrees, the growing diversity of courses, influenced strongly by the rapid shift to modular provision for the great majority of courses.

We believe a key issue for tourism studies over the next few years is likely to focus on how far the subject can not only retain, but also develop its coherence against powerful pressures for diversification and fragmentation, and the recent blurring of distinctions between courses in tourism, leisure, recreation and hospitality.

References

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