

## **GUIDELINES 5**

### **MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN INDUSTRY AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN TOURISM**

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**December 1996**

Relations between any sector of industry and the higher education institutions that seek to educate students for and about that industry, are bound to generate a tension of interests. For example, on the one hand employers will wish to find that new graduate entrants to the industry are ready and able to make an immediate, as well as ongoing, contribution in the work place and will, therefore, expect a practical/specialist content in the curriculum; on the other, educators will seek to prioritise analytical, communicative and problem solving attributes in the curriculum in order to provide a sound basis for long term careers of graduates. The implications of such tensions for a tourism curriculum are more fully explored in NLG Guidelines 1 'Towards a Core Curriculum for Tourism: A Discussion Paper'.

In simple terms, three kinds of relations between the tourism industry and higher education can be identified. An arms-length approach with both sides taking somewhat entrenched positions, critical of each other. In many ways this is a caricature of relations between universities and industry in the 1960s and 1970s. The second is a co-operative approach in which specific projects are found to be mutually beneficial and where there is minimal change to existing practices of both parties. The development of industrial placements provides an example of this approach that quickly developed with the growth of tourism degree courses in the mid 1980s and is prevalent today. The third is more recent and may be described as a strategic alliance approach. This requires the parties jointly to seek to innovate and modify practices in order to solve common problems. In many ways this latter approach is the hardest to achieve but it brings the greatest rewards to both sides. Given the competitive pressures within higher education and the need to evidence quality, strategic alliance may become the prospective future shape of industry/higher education interface in tourism.

#### **Tourism Industry Perspective**

The tourism industry is a vital and dynamic economic sector that operates at the foreground of 'new' industrial structures and practices in the UK. Innovation in the industry is a vital part of competitiveness and potentially, universities are well placed to stimulate and diffuse new ideas and practices. Tourism is an industry that depends on its human resources as service quality is essential to economic success. The development of a graduate labour force trained in powers of analysis and communication is crucial. The industry is also keen to develop the hallmarks of a profession, and the proportion of tourism graduates employed will be a marker of tourism education gaining a professional stature commensurate with the tourism industry's economic importance. The various components of the industry require different attributes and skills from its employees and tourism courses which develop these skills and competencies are able, therefore, to offer graduates a very broad range of employment opportunities.

#### **Introduction**

#### **The Basis for a Strategic Alliance Between Higher Education and the Tourism Industry**

## Higher Education Perspective

The study of tourism in higher education has found strongest support in universities and colleges that purport to offer vocational higher education. The programmes of study often require periods of work placement and students and staff are encouraged to take on industry defined projects. The status of the study of tourism is greatly enhanced through co-operation with the tourism industry, and, as this Guideline demonstrates, this can take various forms.

Shifts in the funding methodologies of government towards an increasing emphasis on part-time study and the interests of employment and training agencies such as the TECs in England and Wales and the LECs in Scotland in new initiatives such as work-based learning, all increase the pressure on universities and colleges to work more closely with industrial partners to mutual benefit. It is often the case that universities and colleges offering tourism education see themselves as a part of the economic development of their locales. The patterns of ownership in the tourism industry are conducive to locally based initiatives and much of the good practice is founded on local and regional collaboration with small and medium sized enterprises.

Five main areas of co-operation are identified:

- Student Placements
- Staff Exchange and Collaboration
- Industry Advisory Panels
- Graduate Recruitment
- Research and Consultancy
- Student Projects

## Best Practice at the Industry/Higher Education Interface

### Student Placements

Student placements offer the industry a pool of flexible and intelligent employees who are generally keen to learn about the industry and apply new found skills. Universities benefit from the increase in understanding that is brought to the learning process by a period in industry. Most employers report that placements of less than six months are of limited benefit to them, although placements of a shorter duration can be beneficial in sectors of the industry where seasonality is a strong demand factor. One factor working against industrial placements is that Universities are under pressure from students and funding bodies alike to limit an undergraduate degree to three years of full-time study. This will limit the amount of time available for placements. The topic of student placements will be more fully explained in a forthcoming NLG Guideline.

### Best Practice for the Industry

- Invite universities to help in the selection of suitable candidates for particular placements.
- Provide an induction programme that assumes a low start point in the understanding of the student.
- Determine a job title and set a level of remuneration between clerical and professional grades.
- Consider overlapping placements so that informal knowledge of the organisation can be learnt from the outgoing student.
- Alternatively, develop a student placement manual as a student project and use as a resource for arriving students.
- Develop a mentoring approach in addition to line supervision.
- Early in the placement set tasks that allow students to complete them in a short time and gain a sense of making a contribution to the organisation.
- In addition to normal tasks at work try to develop one major project that sets realistic goals for the placed student to achieve.

- Conduct confidential exit interviews between the student, line manager and human resource manager.

## Best Practice for Universities and Colleges

- Begin the placement selection process at least six months before the placement period.
- Utilise the resources of students on placement or those recently returned from placements to stimulate student choice of placement.
- Control the search for placements, limit students to a maximum number of enquiries at any one time.
- Offer assistance to employers in selecting students for particular placements.
- Set out clearly in learning contract form the responsibilities of employer, student and university to include assessment methods.
- Allocate a supervising tutor at the outset of the placement. Require a supervisory visit to be made to monitor the placement.

## Staff Exchange and Collaboration

Co-operation in these areas can involve the secondment of staff, normally from universities to industry, the appointment of industry personnel as a visiting academic staff member, and guest lectures by representatives of the industry.

### Staff Secondments to Industry

- Universities and industry partners should not underestimate the lead time necessary to secure a successful outcome.
- Both parties should agree on the expected outcomes of the secondment at the outset.

### Visiting Industrial Tutors/Professors

Industry personnel who undertake to deliver duties in respect of visiting academic appointments should establish the expectations of universities. Visiting staff may find themselves involved in a range of duties including teaching and project or research supervision. If they are teaching they should familiarise themselves with the conventions and language that surrounds the delivery of courses in tourism. The NLG Guidelines 2 on External Appointments would be a good starting point.

- Universities should be clear about the duties expected and induct visiting tutors into unfamiliar academic processes including bureaucracies.
- Visiting tutors who are unfamiliar with university life benefit from the support of a mentor.

### Occasional Lectures by Industry Representatives

The majority of industry representatives who are willing to undertake guest lectures use a standard or stock lecture. Universities should encourage guest lecturers to 'customise' their presentation. This can be achieved by ensuring that the guest lecturer is made aware of the 'place' of the lecture in the course or module; the likely use of the material in the assessment process and the aim and objectives of the course. Guest lecturers should try to link their material to the needs of the particular situation.

- The raising of unresolved issues as questions for further study and, by implication, for future assessment is encouraged.
- A conversation with the link academic tutor as part of planning the lecture is always desirable.

- Rather than attempting to provide copies of supplementary material for all students it is better to give copies of supporting material to the tutor for accession to the library.

## **Industry Advisory Panels**

In the main, advisory panels are used to provide a sounding board to test the relevance of the ideas and activities of tourism educators and to canvass the opinion of industry on likely future directions in tourism education. Advisory panels usually meet twice or three times a year and universities should actively encourage an engagement with the development of the courses and the research and consultancy activities of the university.

- Universities should use advisory panels to foster meetings with staff and student representatives in order to provide first hand accounts of course delivery, reviews of summary minutes of course committees, involvement in defining research and consultancy opportunities and exposure to current projects, for example innovations in research or teaching and learning.
- Industry members should be encouraged to offer a frank critique of tourism education and universities should open up the process of education for review and evaluation.
- Members of advisory panels may be called upon to provide an industry viewpoint on more specific panels concerned with course validation and review. In these cases universities should brief industry panel members on their role at unfamiliar academic events.

## **Graduate Recruitment**

Universities can help their graduates in the following ways.

- Stress the importance of foreign language and IT skills as important assets in securing a first job after graduation.
- Foster a realistic set of expectations amongst tourism graduates.
- Encourage students to use any contacts developed during periods of industrial experience.
- Employers are encouraged to consider graduates for employment at any level in the organisation and to recognise the added value that graduates can bring to organisations even if they only occupy entry level positions for a short time.

## **Research and Consultancy**

The research and consultancy market for the tourism industry is a competitive field. Universities often find themselves working in partnerships with the private sector in providing research and consultancy services to the industry. Academic staff also undertake research and consultancy independently and often in association with a university's commercial division. In both of these cases there will be prescribed conditions under which such arrangements can operate. The following guidelines on best practice are intended as a supplement to such arrangements.

- Universities must be realistic about their ability to deliver within the client's brief.
- The matter of confidentiality of research and consultancy output should be clearly addressed at the outset of the contract. It is particularly important for the time period on confidentiality to be upheld.

- It is also advisable to resolve any issues relating to copyright and intellectual property rights at an early stage.
- Industry clients will generally not be too concerned with the process of carrying out a brief, provided it is of good quality, but it is advisable for universities to declare any involvement of students in data collection.
- Industrial clients should recognise that universities are often better placed to provide independent work. They are generally good at providing creative solutions to problems.

## **Student Projects and Research**

One particular problem area in the relationship between education and industry relates to the preparation of student projects and research. From the perspective of the industry they sometimes feel overwhelmed by requests by students for data and other material, some of which are ill-thought out. From the perspective of the students there is a major potential benefit from being able to base their work on real examples from industry. At their best, student projects linked with industry can provide a challenging and realistic experience which will not only benefit themselves but also the industry and their future employer.

An additional issue is to maintain a distinction between requests for information related to research carried out by research students and staff and requests for information, normally by undergraduate students for the preparation of project reports. It is crucial that the former, which often cannot be carried out without the support of industry is not jeopardised by overwhelming and ill-thought out requests by the latter.

### **Best Practice**

- Universities should develop procedures to guide requests by students for information from industry. There should be communication to all students at the start of their project and they should be designed to ensure that all requests are well thought out and co-ordinated.
- In designing student assignments and projects, Universities should be mindful of the need to restrict the requirement for students to contact industry to matters where it is essential and where there will be a real benefit.
- Universities should distinguish between the research and information gathering needs of research students and lecturers on the one hand, and undergraduates on the other.
- Universities should inform their industrial collaborators of the procedures adopted for requests for information by students. Where possible, industrial collaborators should comment on and influence the procedures adopted.
- Where students follow the procedures, industry should view favourably the requests for information.
- Universities should seek to establish a data bank of company information within their own libraries for student projects thus reducing the need for individual students to contact the industry.
- Individual firms or trade associations may consider establishing units that understand the varying needs of universities and develop appropriate communication strategies.

## **The National Liaison Group for Higher Education in Tourism (NLG)**

The NLG was formed at a national conference in October 1993 as an independent membership organisation to provide a focus for the development of tourism studies degrees and other postgraduate courses. Membership of the NLG is open to universities and colleges, commercial organisations and other bodies with an interest in tourism degrees and postgraduate qualifications who pay an annual subscription. Each member institution nominates a representative to the NLG. The Group does not have individual membership.

The NLG acts in an advisory capacity using peer group influence to achieve its objectives. It primarily serves the interests of those concerned with tourism studies at first degree and postgraduate levels but it liaises as appropriate with other groups concerned with related studies.

The comments of David Airey, Patrick Lavery and Victor Middleton on an earlier draft of this leaflet proved to be most helpful.

**Ack**