

Hospitality and Tourism Higher Education in Australia: 1980 – 2020 and beyond

Abstract

Whilst numerous scholars have identified the most topical issues in hospitality and tourism higher education as a basis for closer investigation, few have examined the macro trends over multiple successive decades. This paper addresses the gap by exploring key trends over a 40 year period in the case of a major international provider of hospitality and tourism higher education - Australia. The authors focus on four aspects of provision (public universities, hospitality and tourism programs, Hotel Schools, and Regulatory Bodies) and proceeds to examine potential impacts for the future hospitality and tourism workforce.

Keywords: Australian Universities; hospitality and tourism programs; Australian Hotel Schools, and Australian Regulatory Bodies in Higher Education

Introduction

In the context of a highly competitive hospitality and tourism industry, educational institutions confront the challenge of preparing and presenting employable graduates who are able to enter the industry immediately on graduation. Globally, the sector employs over 322 million and contributes an estimated US\$2.3 trillion to the global economy (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018). There is an evident demand from industry for skilled, qualified, talented and enthusiastic graduates. In Australia, it has been estimated that there is a shortage of 123,000 employees to meet the increasing demands of hospitality and tourism in 2020 (Deloitte, 2015). This means that educational institutions are important stakeholders in preparing students to meet future workforce needs and job demands. The higher education sector in Australia is worth approximately AU\$17 billion (Group of Eight Australia, 2016), which equates to about one third of the current economic value of the tourism industry at AU\$47.5 billion (ABS, 2017). The provision of tourism and hospitality programs by education institutions has growth substantially over the past three decades, prompting ongoing attempts to attract prospective students (Goh, Nguyen and Law, 2017) and pressure on educators to prepare them for the rigors of the future workforce (Goh and Lee, 2018).

A combination of internal and external environmental factors has shaped and then reshaped the hospitality and tourism higher education sector over the past 40 years. Significant changes have included the absorption of University hospitality and tourism schools and departments into larger business faculties; a shift from practical-oriented curriculum to more theory-informed classroom-based learning; an expansion of internship and work integrated learning programs; increased prominence for private hotel schools; expanded online program delivery; greater scrutiny and quality assurance compliance

through regulatory bodies such as TEQSA; the introduction (in 2015) of the Australian Learning Standards for Tourism, Hospitality and Events academic programs; and the establishment (in 1992) of The Council for Australasian Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE). This paper identifies and discusses how the aforementioned changes have affected the hospitality and tourism landscape in Australian higher education and its prospective impacts on the future hospitality and tourism workforce. This is done with a focus on four main successive decades.

1980-1990

Australia inbound tourism grew rapidly during the 1980s, from approximately 1.1 million visitors in 1980 to an estimated 9.8 million visitors in 2019 (Tourism Research Australia, 2017). Local governments nationwide responded to the significant growth of visitation by expanding tourism infrastructure and resources such as airport facilities, road widening, enhancing retail provision and approval of accommodation developments. The substantial job creation prompted an accelerating growth of hospitality and tourism programs at universities and in VET (Vocational Education and Training), including the TAFE (Technical and Further Education) sector (Hobson, 1995). Undergraduate tourism and hospitality education at higher-level was initially offered by two institutions: University of Queensland (from 1974) and Victoria University of Technology (1978). Such pioneering programs were identified as being vocational and technical in their orientation (Green, 1987) and as being taught by faculty who generally lacked a PhD qualification and were arguably inadequately qualified (Zabel, 1992). This critique was partially based on the practical '*hands-on*' approach that was characteristic of the prevailing hospitality and tourism

curriculum (King, 1994), with a preference for appointing teaching staff who possessed substantial industry experience (Powers and Riegel, 1984).

1990 – 2000

The number of higher education hospitality and tourism programs contracted from 40 in 1980 to 25 in 1990 (Robinson, Breakey and Craig-Smith, 2010). This trend was symptomatic of a wider rationalisation within Australia's higher education sector (Dawkins Report (1988). One manifestation of such transformation was a shift by university hospitality programs from a vocational heavy emphasis to a more academic orientation. Practicums, work placements, and simulated learning spaces (such as training restaurants) were diminished, eliminated, and marginalised within many university hospitality and tourism programs. Meanwhile, private and for-profit initiatives were established, notably in the case of the Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School (1991). This offering of the Swiss Hotel Management Curriculum addressed a perceived gap in vocational provision across the Australian Universities. Such hotel schools offered a practical and more vocationally-oriented curriculum that addressed industry needs, initially partnering with universities to strengthen enhance their academic credibility in front of the regulator . These programs gained recognition for offering a practical and rigorous curriculum that incorporated practical learning facilities in a hotel setting that offered accommodation, front office, housekeeping, food and beverage outlets, kitchen, and event venues. Such elements were evidently attractive to students and gained industry endorsement (Frawley, Goh and Law, 2019; Goh, Nguyen and Law, 2017).

The Council for Australian (subsequently Australasian) Universities in Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE) was established in 1992 to provide a networking platform

for educators through the hosting of an annual conference (CAUTHE, 2019). This initiative provided a professional representation medium for Australia (and later New Zealand) based academics and was important for raising awareness about tourism and hospitality education. This coincided with a tightening of quality control across higher and vocational education with the establishment (in 1995) of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). In regulating qualifications within the education and training system the new agency provided an underpinning for the national system of qualifications, encompassing higher education, vocational education and training (VET), and schools (Australia Qualifications Framework, 2019). Learning outcomes were assigned to each AQF level by type of qualification, thereby positioning universities within the domain of theory driven knowledge, and emphasized the strength of TAFE institutions around vocational skills (Hobson, 1995). This institutional differentiation occurred at a time that the hospitality industry expressed a preference for recruiting graduates who had already acquired practical experience (Moreo, Green and O'Halloran, 2018).

2000 – 2010

Tourism in Australia endured many challenges through the first decade of the new millennium. The so-called '*mining boom*' conditions generated competition for the export oriented services sector, including tourism. World prices for Australia's mining exports tripled between 2002 and 2012 and investment in the mining sector increased from 2 to 8 per cent as a proportion of GDP. Though the economy continued to grow which was good for aggregate domestic tourism demand, the Australian dollar reached historically high levels thereby discouraging inbound tourism and stimulating outbound travel. Other sectors offered

relatively more lucrative careers and demand stagnated for academically oriented tourism courses offering imprecise career outcomes. This period coincided with the increasing deregulation of higher education. Though public institutions continued to possess a near monopoly of university sector provision, there was a proliferation of private higher education providers.

In 2000, the Australian government established the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) to ensure that quality would not be undermined in a less regulated environment. Its scope extended to the full spectrum of higher education. Meanwhile, a hospitality and tourism specific quality initiative was born (in 2004) - the Tourism and Hospitality Education International Centre of Excellence (THE-ICE, 2019). THE-ICE was established and funded by the Australian Federal Government (2004 – 2008) to promote education strengths, as one of five International Centres of Excellence. Until 2008, it was managed by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC), which was at that time then the world's largest tourism and hospitality scientific research centre. This governing structure encouraged a strong nexus between education and research, which proved to be important to underpin the longer-term development of tourism and hospitality education. THE-ICE aimed to recognise and develop excellence in tourism and hospitality education in Australia, and to promote such excellence to prospective international students.

The strength of hospitality and tourism research was evident through the first decade of the new millennium (2000-2010), despite the challenges posed by the mining led economy. At its peak, the STCRC supported scholarships for over 170 hospitality and tourism PhD students across Australia and engaged in funded research projects through university, industry and government partnerships. However, in mid-2010 and following a decade of

activity, the STCRC discontinued its work sending a discouraging message to University tourism and hospitality providers. Many universities proceeded to close their hospitality and tourism departments and/or to absorb them within business schools. Whilst its advocates promised enhanced synergies, the loss of department heads and their budgets reduced future capacity to sign up to international tourism and hospitality networks. Meanwhile the private education sector faced a different challenge – potential loss of reputation. Meridian International Hotel School, a substantial college operation in Melbourne and Sydney went into liquidation in 2009, leaving 2,000 students stranded and conveying a negative impression about of the sector to the public (ABC News, 2009).

2010-2020

Tightened scrutiny from government regulatory and quality assurance bodies was a growing challenge for hospitality and tourism education providers during the period 2010-2020. In 2011, the government abolished AUQA and transferred its legislative functions to the new government agency = the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA, 2019). The agency was established to regulate and assure the quality of Australia's higher education sector using the 2015 Higher Education Standards Framework . The framework was constructed around seven quality dimensions, including student participation, teaching, and research. With the prospect of receiving accreditation for a period of up to 7 years and in the face of strict TEQSA compliance, higher education providers have been required to demonstrate greater student accountability.

A notable milestone for hospitality and tourism research was the establishment in 2012 of Excellence in Research Australia (Australian Research Council, 2019), replacing the previous Research Quality Framework (RQF). One of the more contested initiatives was the

introduction of a system that ranked journals into 4 tiers - A* (top 5%), A (next 15%), B (next 30%), and C (next 50%). In the face of reluctance on the part of the academic community, the ERA journal rankings list was discontinued in 2012 and Universities proceeded to develop their own versions. For tourism and hospitality, the most notable development was the listing endorsed by the Australian Business Deans Council (2019). This listing is now used by most Australian universities as a quality benchmark for research publications, with tourism and hospitality researchers focussing their activities on the 1506 Field of Research code.

In 2015 the Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT, 2016) sought to enhance the consistency of tourism and hospitality higher education programs by commissioning the Threshold Learning Outcomes Standards project. The project generated a set of nationally agreed upon and articulated threshold learning outcomes (TLOs) for higher education in tourism, hospitality, and events. It was an important development in establishing a coherent system of educational program delivery by offering providers clarity and consistency through aligning curriculum-learning outcomes with the demands of students, industry, and regulatory bodies.

The shifting regulatory landscape coincided with amalgamations and acquisitions across the higher education sector that extended to private hotel schools universities. These led to a shift in the positioning of private and public provision. In 2016, the Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School (BMIHMS) and William Blue College of Hospitality Management were purchased by the Laureate Education Group and henceforth formed part of Torrens University Australia (BMIHMS, 2019). Then in 2018, Charles Darwin University sought to extend its vocational portfolio by acquiring a private hotel management school (ICHM – International College of Management) (Charles Darwin

University, 2017). Through the extended period of regulatory uncertainty, some hotel schools closed and/or diversified into the provision of accommodation services. For example, the Australian International Hotel School in Canberra (previously affiliated with Cornell University) closed in 2013 and was replaced by the provision of commercial accommodation services, becoming Hotel Kurrajong (managed by TFE Hotels) (Wilkinson, 2013). Another notable event and rationalisation was the closure of the Hospitality and Tourism program at the highly ranked University of New South Wales, which ended (in 2013) its partnership with Kenvale College to deliver practical hospitality offerings. The various amalgamations and discontinuation of less tightly organised partnerships in part reflected increased scrutiny by TEQSA in the face of unscrupulous providers such as Vocation Ltd which entered administration in 2015 displacing 12,000 students (Thomson and Danckert, 2015), and Careers Australia Group which abruptly closed its 14 Australia-wide campuses, affecting 15,000 students (Cook and Jacks, 2017).

As traditional modes of educational delivery are under increased scrutiny, tourism and hospitality institutions and educators are grappling with the need to deploy digital technologies with a view to enhancing teaching and learning. These include the incorporation of learning management systems such as *'Blackboard'*, teaching pedagogies such as *'flipped classroom'*, simulation software such as *'HOTS'*, experiential learning such as *'field trips'*, distance learning, E-textbooks, and student classroom engagement gadgets such as *'Polleverywhere'*. A notable contribution to extending access to hospitality and tourism education has been the University of Queensland initiative to offer Australia's first (in 2018) Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in Tourism and Hospitality (Dodd, 2016).

2020 and beyond – What the future holds for Hospitality and Tourism Education

With Australia's highly dispersed population across a wide continent, it will always be challenging to deliver learning away from major urban cities. This ongoing challenge merits an ongoing role for technologies as an enhancement for access by individual learners and by enterprises. Whilst quintessentially global rather than national in their reach, tailored MOOC programs offer the prospect of enhancing both the breadth and depth of program delivery across Australia.

At the time of writing a modest resurgence of university hospitality and tourism provision is evident. One of the two original degree providers (Victoria University) recently established a "virtual" School for the Visitor Economy, which connects higher education, and TAFE. Torrens University has enrolled a substantial masters cohort in hospitality management in Melbourne, away from its established bases in Adelaide and New South Wales and Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia has been reinvesting in its tourism and events programs through the recruitment of additional faculty. Two institutions (Griffith and Queensland) featured highly on recent global university rankings in the hospitality tourism and leisure categories. The prospects for graduates have also improved with renewed growth in the tourism sector in Australia following the end of the resources boom. This has prompted renewed recognition of the centrality of the services sector to the Australian economy. Meanwhile, there is substantial ongoing investment in new hotel properties and intense awareness of the vulnerability of key tourism assets such as the Great Barrier Reef and Uluru. These factors suggest an ongoing need for high quality hospitality and tourism education and research. Whether the response to tourism related challenges that cut across environment, sociocultural and political issues as well as economics can be addressed from an exclusive focus of scholarship which is located within faculties of business

remains to be seen. Finally, there is further work to be done to ensure that hospitality and tourism careers are viewed as attractive by those contemplating higher education. This will be an ongoing challenge for educators as they prepare their for the future hospitality and tourism workforce.

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