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**ON THE STATUS OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT
PROGRAMS IN THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SECTOR**

**A SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION FINANCING
AND POLICY**

BY

**THE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY TOURISM AND
HOSPITALITY EDUCATION (CAUTHE)**

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THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SECTOR**

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Public discussion generated by the Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy and comments by some members of the Review Committee itself has questioned the inclusion of

tourism and hospitality management programs within the University sector. These comments apparently reflect a perception that tourism and hospitality have a vocational, sub-professional orientation, which makes this field more suited to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. Furthermore, it is implied that advanced analytical and management skills, which can only be developed within a university environment, are not required for this increasingly important sector of the Australian economy.

The Council for Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE), comprising representatives of the 26 Australian Universities currently offering undergraduate and/or postgraduate specialisations in tourism and hospitality, has prepared this response to these comments in an effort to ensure that the Committee might develop a more balanced and rational view of the role of universities in the tourism/hospitality field. Specifically, CAUTHE argues that:

- The inclusion of tourism and hospitality management programs among the specialisations offered by many universities is both appropriate and consistent with the social and economic interests of the Australian community;
- While the study of tourism and hospitality has multidisciplinary foundations, it has nevertheless become a distinct and coherent field of research and scholarly activity;
- International comparisons reveal that tourism and hospitality programs have become an integral part of the university systems in developed countries. Australia has a growing reputation as a quality provider of such programs because of the synergies that have been developed between research and teaching;
- Tourism and hospitality management programs are making a significant contribution to the performance of Australian Universities in the international student market. However, with the establishment of tourism/hospitality programs in Asian universities, a greater commitment to maintaining and enhancing our own programs will be necessary.

In order to support these propositions, we begin with an overview of the contribution of tourism to the Australian economy and the strategic significance of this industry in the global setting. Our comments therefore focus largely on issues listed in the review guidelines under themes one (the role of higher education in Australia's society and economy) and two (factors affecting demand for and provision of higher education). The emergence of tourism and hospitality as a field of academic research and scholarly activity within universities is then described in order to reinforce our argument regarding the appropriateness of tourism/hospitality programs in the university sector.

For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to **tourism** education (and research) as an abbreviation for **tourism and hospitality**. While there are subtle variations in the focus of, and approaches to, research and education in these two areas, there is also a nexus between them that justifies this approach.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TOURISM IN THE EMERGING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FABRIC OF AUSTRALIA

The emergence of tourism as a significant area of economic activity on a global scale is a reflection of the widespread transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society. Thus, tourism has become the fastest growing sector of world trade, with an average annual rate of 9.6 per cent in the 1980s (WTO, 1992). This compares with growth rates of 5.5. and 7.5 per cent in merchandise exports and commercial services respectively. From 1950 to 1991, international visitor arrivals increased nearly 20 fold from 25 to 450 million, and it is expected that this number will increase by a further 200 million, or 36 per cent, in the current decade (WTO, 1992)

Australia's share of international tourism has increased from 0.17 per cent in 1950 to around 2 per cent in the 1990s. A relatively high growth rate of 13 per cent has been experienced over the last decade. In this period, the number of international visitors increased more than fourfold, from 1,015,100 to 4,165,000 in the latest calendar year (ABS, 3404.0).

The growth in international tourism to Australia is expected to be sustained and may even intensify owing to geographical proximity to the emerging economies of Asia and the impetus of the Sydney 2000 Olympics. Tourist arrivals in the Asia/Pacific region (including Australia) have grown at double the world average rate (15 per cent, compared with 7.3 per cent) in the 1950-91 period, and this trend is expected to continue over the next decade (WTO, 1992). **Whether Australia can continue to benefit from this growth as it has in the past, however, will depend upon our ability to maintain and improve competitiveness in an increasingly competitive environment. This, in turn, relies on the application of effective management, planning and marketing approaches, all of which depend on a firm research and educational foundation.**

In the context of the trends described above, the contribution of international tourism expenditure to Australia's export earnings has increased from \$211 million in 1973/74 to \$16.1 billion in 1996 (Office of National Tourism, 1997). At 13 per cent, tourism's contribution to export earnings now exceeds that of traditional exports such as manufacturing, coal, wool and wheat (Department of Tourism, 1995). When the substantial domestic demand for tourism product (amounting to \$32.5 billion in 1993/94) is taken into account, tourism's contribution to GDP amounts to 6.6 per cent (ONT, 1997). Indeed, tourism now plays a more significant role in the Australian economy than both agriculture and mining. Furthermore, with the employment of around 535 000 people, or 9 per cent of the total workforce, being directly or indirectly attributable to tourism (ONT, 1997), it is envisaged that this area of economic development has the potential to counteract the negative impact of structural change on the employment and life opportunities of large sections of the Australian population.

On the basis of economic considerations alone, tourism is playing a significant role in the transformation of Australian society. Equally, however, tourism is a socio-cultural and environmental phenomenon, which is having a significant impact on many facets on the Australian way of life. Whether or not these impacts are beneficial to Australians in the long

run will ultimately depend on how well tourism development is managed. Again, this will in turn depend on the research and educational input of the University sector.

TOURISM'S PLACE IN THE UNIVERSITY SECTOR

From the previous section it is apparent that tourism has the potential to make a significant positive contribution to the future social, cultural and economic well-being of Australians. The achievement of this potential is dependent upon the role university based research and education can play in establishing a planning and management regime which guides the development of the tourism industry towards competitive, socially responsible and environmentally sustainable alternatives. Without such a framework, many of the social, cultural and environmental resources that make Australia such an attractive tourist destination will be quickly degraded, and the opportunities the tourism industry provides for enriching the lives of Australians will be dissipated.

While, on the basis of the evidence presented so far in this paper, few would deny there is a national interest in developing strong tourism research and management capabilities, there remains a body of opinion which questions the appropriateness of addressing these needs through the university sector. This position is unsustainable in the light of international developments.

Those who question the inclusion of tourism in university programs invariably have a background in the more traditional disciplines. Ironically, some of these critics have disparagingly referred to tourism as a vocational field, when they themselves have backgrounds in fields such as medicine and law, which are fundamentally vocational. If like-minded groups had been allowed to dictate the direction of university education over the years, well established modern disciplines such as psychology, economics and sociology would have been relegated to a second tier educational sector. Indeed, if we go back far enough, medicine and law might also have suffered a similar fate. Just as universities of the 19th and 20th Centuries were required to respond to the needs of the community by producing graduates in these field, so universities of the 21st century will be required to produce graduates in more diverse fields to reflect the increasingly complex requirements of the transition from an industrial to post-industrial society.

Like many of the business and social science fields of study that have emerged in response to the demands of modern society, tourism is a multidisciplinary field of study. This is illustrated in Figure 1, which is the interpretation of tourism as a field of study provided in a popular text book (McIntosh, Goeldner and Ritchie, 1995). Despite this, tourism has become a distinct, coherent field of research and scholarly endeavour. This is evident in the number of journals now supported by the research community, with there now being some 24 international journals in the field. The oldest of these was established in 1962. A measure of the growth in tourism research activity, and its recognition as a priority area, is obtained from the fact that 15 new journals have emerged in the 1990s.

Tourism (and hospitality) are well established areas of academic endeavour in their own right. While a large proportion of tourism employment opportunities within Australia and throughout the Asia Pacific region will continue to be at the operative level and these occupations will be well served by the VET sector and its private sector equivalent, there will be a continuing and growing demand for managers with the necessary strategic and other higher level skills. Such skills are best learned in the university environment where critical thinking, systematic knowledge acquisition and research based teaching are emphasised. Reflecting the earlier observations regarding the nature of the field, therefore, the university approach to tourism education hinges on the leveraging of multidisciplinary research for the development of:

- The business concepts and techniques necessary for the management of effective, efficient and profitable enterprises; and
- An understanding of broader social issues, which is necessary if the management of tourism development is to proceed in a socially and environmentally responsible manner.

The curriculum which prepares graduates-to-be for a managerial role is typically nested within a more generic academic setting (most commonly a Bachelor of Business or Commerce, though also a Bachelor of Social or Applied Science). In such courses, the tourism and/or hospitality major field applies the more generic skills and knowledge provided elsewhere in the curriculum to tourism and hospitality specifically. This feature differentiates university level tourism and hospitality education very clearly from its vocational education and training equivalent, since it adheres to the university principle of emphasising knowledge of a total field (e.g. arts, social science), allowing students to relate to universal principles. This contrasts with the VET sector, with its stronger emphasis on competency-based training and specific vocational outcomes.

Tourism programs were initially offered at the university level in Europe (especially Switzerland) as early as the 1940s. In the United Kingdom, there are undergraduate tourism degree courses in 20 universities, while a number of these (e.g. Birmingham, Surrey, Strathclyde) have well established post graduate programs. In North America, over 120 universities offer degree courses in tourism, with 29 providing post graduate and research programs. These include major universities such as Michigan State, Purdue, Waterloo, Calgary, Cornell and Brigham Young. In our part of the world, New Zealand is experiencing an expansion in tourism studies with new degrees at Waikati and Victoria Universities joining those at Lincoln and Otago, while universities in South Korea, China and other Asian countries are moving quickly to establish programs in this area.

The proliferation of university-based tourism management programs is a response to the growing demand for qualified professionals within the industry. Within our own region, the Pacific Asia Travel Association has observed that the demand for suitably qualified people to take up positions at management levels is exceeding the capacity of universities to supply them (PATA, 1992). The clear implication of this is that, if Australia withdrew from the provision of tourism and hospitality management programs at the university level, other countries would readily take advantage of the situation and market opportunities for the export of our educational product would be lost. The

Australian tourism industry would also become less competitive owing to the decline in the supply of quality management staff.

In Australia, there are now some 26 of the 40 universities offering degrees in hospitality and tourism, with the first programs at the degree level being offered in 1974 and 1978 respectively. University based tourism and hospitality programs have made a significant contribution to the performance of Australian universities in attracting overseas fee-paying students from Asian countries in particular. Our programs in this area have a good international reputation and are competitive largely because of the synergies that have been developed between research and teaching. However, with the development of university-based programs elsewhere within the Asia/Pacific region, a greater commitment to enhancing programs in the Australian system will be necessary if our competitiveness is to be maintained. Equally, the continuing competitiveness of our tourism industry itself relies on such a commitment.

Over the period since the 1970s, individual institutions have adopted their distinct approaches and the dialogue between educators across institutions has been (until recently-see below) relatively limited. Despite this, a common curriculum similar to that which characterises other professional fields has emerged. The establishment of a core **university** tourism and hospitality curriculum has been evident in other countries. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Council for National Academic Awards proposed a standardised curriculum. Universities have been reluctant to adhere to a prescribed learning formula, but the existence of a set of common principles is an indication of the growing maturity of the field. The emergence of core principles has typified other academic domains such as economics, psychology sociology and, more recently, marketing.

In the tourism and hospitality fields, a close relationship has been established between Australian university providers and the VET sector, through articulation arrangements. The university sector, however, has its distinct inter-institutional association (the Council for Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education or CAUTHE), whilst the VET sector works substantially under the guidance of the national training board (Tourism Training Australia) and has its own representative body. The main event on the CAUTHE calendar is its annual Australian Tourism and Hospitality Research Conference, which regularly attracts as many as 250 participants including many from overseas. The VET sector is invited to participate in the conference, but does not play a major role because of the lower priority given to research in this sector. The CAUTHE conferences are testimony to the lead role that Australian researchers are taking in the development of professional tourism education and research internationally. This event exemplifies the strong cross-fertilisation between research and teaching.

CAUTHE has also played a key role in promoting research in the tourism and hospitality fields through the preparation of its submission to the Australian Research Council (ARC) on 'Tourism Research in Australia: A Strategy for Mobilising National Research Capabilities'. A copy of this report is attached.

CONCLUSION

As indicated at the beginning of this submission, CAUTHE's response to the Review has been largely motivated by the need to refute ill-informed public comments on the nature of tourism and hospitality education made by some members of the committee and others. We trust that, after examining the information presented above, members of the Committee will have a better understanding of this field and its relevance to the long term social and economic interests of the Australian community. On the latter point, it is obvious that tourism is a significant growth industry, the planning and management of which needs to be informed by university-based research and education if sustainable outcomes are to be achieved.

In adjusting to change, universities need to be sensitive to the changing socio-economic environment which influences community needs, and the changing configuration of disciplines that are both a reflection of broader changes in society and the on-going evolution of ideas. Tradition in universities remains an important basis for preserving the standards of rigour and independence that are essential for their role. However, tradition too often becomes the enemy of the visionary approach that is so necessary to successfully confront new challenges. The inertia of university systems and power structures resist change, and in the process make universities less responsive to emerging community needs. It is our view that the questions raised about the appropriateness of tourism programs in the university sector are a reflection of this inertia, rather than any limitation of the field in terms of academic criteria.

While the study of tourism and hospitality has multidisciplinary foundations, it has nevertheless become a distinct and coherent field of research and scholarly activity. International comparisons reveal that tourism and hospitality programs have become an integral part of the university systems in developed countries. Australia has a growing reputation as a quality provider of such programs because of the synergies that have been developed between research and teaching. Tourism and hospitality management programs are making a significant contribution to the performance of Australian Universities in the international student market. However, with the establishment of tourism/hospitality programs in Asian universities, a greater commitment to maintaining and enhancing our own programs will be necessary.

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