

Time to look at the stars? Reflections on bias and prejudice in hospitality management education

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ABSTRACT: This article reflects on a keynote presentation made at the 32nd Council for Hospitality Management Education Research Conference hosted at NHL Stenden University of Applied Science in Leeuwarden, The Netherlands. The field of study prepares managers who will organise the delivery of food and/or drink and/or accommodation in a service setting. The core concern of the article is to critique biases of higher education provision. The vocational nature of programmes tends to prioritise job readiness at the expense of some theoretical dimensions of the study of hospitality. These biases are compounded by a tendency to limit the industrial context to luxury hotels and restaurants. Students' career perceptions are thereby constrained and limited. The study of hospitality should adopt a critical studies approach; several recent publications might indicate avenues for further research and programme content.

KEYWORDS: critical hospitality studies, hospitality education, industry sectors, hotel schools

Introduction

Oscar Wilde famously declared that "we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars". I use this as a simple metaphor for some personal research insights and concerns about the narrow focus of much hospitality management education and research. The programme title of hospitality management emerged in UK programmes in the 1980s, taking a lead from the USA, replacing "hotel and catering" on course titles. Hospitality as a collective noun embraces a range of different clusters of sectors, but hints at an emotional and welcoming environment replacing commercial titles such as hotel, restaurant and bar that signalled food, drink and accommodation at a price (Blain & Lashley, 2014; Chibli & Lashley, 2018).

In common with many vocational programmes, hospitality management education gives prominence to job readiness and content that prioritises the knowledge and skills required of new industry recruits. This article argues that programmes tend towards industry relevance and pragmatic skill sets at the expense of critical thinking and the development of reflective practitioners. The article reports on a range of projects that define current education provision and the full range of careers available to graduates. It raises concern that a bias towards luxury provision has a limited effect on the real options available. Finally, the article highlights some examples of recent publications that provide a critical perspective, and gives insights into industrial practice to enhance the development of critical thinking.

Hospitality management education

Hotel and catering management education in higher education was first offered in four institutions in 1959. At the time,

programmes were technical in nature and management concepts and content were at a minimum. Over the next few decades, provision grew to higher national diplomas, first degrees and post-graduate courses aimed at preparing students for careers in management. In the early phases, courses were titled "hotel and catering", though by the later 1980s "hospitality management" emerged as the dominant programme title, and "hospitality industry" emerged as a collective noun to cover businesses dedicated to the provision of food and/or drink and/or accommodation. The *Review of Hospitality* defined these programmes as

a core which addresses the management of food, beverages and/or accommodation in a service context. The core includes a combination of college-based practical training and supervised work experience. The practical element is a defining characteristic that differentiates the subject from business and management courses (Higher Education Funding Council [HEFCE], 1998).

The *Review of Hospitality* was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council in response to suggestions that these programmes should be funded at the same rate as business studies courses, but the "laboratory element" spent in training kitchens and restaurants was a differentiating factor.

The *Review of Hospitality* report provided a valuable clarification of collective academic provision, and researchers recognised that the hospitality industry embraced a number of sectors that varied in the provision of food, drink and accommodation services. They identified six sectors, varied both in the cluster of provision and in the centrality that these services played in their core organisational activity. Table 1 lists these under direct and indirect provision. Direct provision

includes sectors where the core business is providing drink, food, or accommodation, or some combination of these as the core business activity. Indirect provision involves the supply of these services as adjunct to the core organisational activity. Cruise liners, for example, are in effect floating hotels, but the core activity is the cruise. Similarly, leisure clubs and retail stores may provide food and drink services, but the organisation's core activity is gym management or retailing. Welfare services in the form of hospitals, schools and prisons all provide combinations of food, drink and accommodation, but their core activity is in health care, education and incarceration.

Research was commissioned to provide insight into the nature of a diverse industry and its response to the development of a higher education sector providing vocational courses that produce graduates looking for management careers. The research produced sector reports into each of the service clusters identified in Table 1, including some questions inserted in an independent survey of 1 396 small firms. The findings of the survey plus the reports in each sector were later outlined in a study by Doherty et al. (2001), *The Impact of a Higher Education Qualification on Career Progression In The Hospitality Industry: Final Report*. The research found that hospitality education was providing graduates with the range of knowledge and skills that the industry required and that they were preferred to graduates of other more general disciplines. There was evidence that hospitality graduates also possessed a broader range of skills and knowledge that enabled them to take management positions in functional areas as well as those directly related to operations. These research projects provided positive evidence about graduates from these programmes and their subsequent performance in industry.

In their discussion of hospitality management education, Airey and Tribe (2000) established that these courses were consistent with many other programmes aimed at vocational education. Table 2 reproduces their map of higher education provision. Vocational action programmes were aimed at job roles that involved task management in identified industries, in this case, managing the delivery of hospitality services.

An appreciation of the operational skills in hotels, restaurants and bars was a key strand in most programmes. In many instances, this involved workplace simulations in university and college-based training kitchens and restaurants and in a few training hotels. In almost all cases, these higher national diploma and first-degree programmes involved a one-year work placement. Typically, though not in all programmes, this

occurred in year three of a four-year course (HEFCE, 1998). The aim was that students should understand the nature of the array of hospitality services and skills that needed to be delivered when they entered full-time employment (HEFCE, 1998). Graduates were expected to be job ready and equipped with experience and skills that would enable them to be operational after minimal formal induction into the workplace.

The *Review of Hospitality* (HEFCE, 1998) and the "Impact" research (Doherty et al., 2001) helped confront industry assertions that these programmes were "unnecessary" or "over-academic". The provision was producing a fraction of the management roles. By the late 1990s, there were more than 8 000 students enrolled in 79 courses in 27 institutions (Airey & Tribe, 2000). The total number of graduates and diplomates in the subject was estimated to be between 2 000 and 3 000 per year. Given an estimated 250 000 managers employed in accommodation, bars and restaurants services alone, "there is no question of graduates flooding the market" (HEFCE, 1998, p. 8). Commenting on graduate entry into the industry, the same report stated that "initially, 80 per cent went into work connected with the industry" (p. 7).

Airey and Tribe's (2000) use of curriculum space also established the field as firmly located in a higher education framework. Laurie Taylor, a prominent commentator and intellectual, wrote in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* bemoaning the supposed threat to standards, and used hospitality management programmes as an example of the watering down of standards and the devaluation of higher education as more students participated. Subsequently, he was generous enough to write a supportive comment reviewing the publication of the book *In Search of Hospitality: theoretical perspectives and debates*. His initial criticism of hospitality education was symptomatic of many in the educational establishment and concerned about the growth of courses aimed at vocations beyond traditional professional programmes in medicine and education.

In part, these criticisms had a point because the vocational action nature of the programmes showed that a "how-to-do agenda" dominated the curriculum. A tyranny of relevance informed course content and student learning experiences (Taylor & Edgar, 1996). As a consequence the "how to do" had priority over the "how to think". Theory was only valid when it supported the practice of managing. This signals the first of my criticisms of hospitality management programmes, namely the tyranny of relevance and the "how-to-do" mindset. The approach seemed to avoid recognition of the need for "reflective practitioners" by over-emphasising the practitioner.

TABLE 1. The direct and indirect hospitality service sectors

Direct services	Indirect services
Hotels	Welfare services
Restaurants	Leisure and entertainment
Licensed retailing	
Contract catering	

TABLE 2. The use of curriculum space

	Stance	Reflection	Action
Ends			
Liberal		Reflective liberal	Liberal action
Vocational		Reflective vocational	Vocational action

Source: Airey & Tribe (2000)

Studying hospitality

The emergence of *hospitality* to replace *hotel and catering* in the 1980s presented an opportunity to create a theoretical underpinning. The study of hospitality could inform the study for hospitality. The study for hospitality focused on a range of direct and indirect service sectors as discussed earlier. The study of hospitality was outside of these sectors. Figure 1 provides a Venn diagram that indicates that hospitality could be studied in both the cultural and private domains as well as the commercial. The behaviour of hosts and guests is at the core of the hospitality relationship. The domestic or private domain enables the study of host and guest behaviour without direct commercial

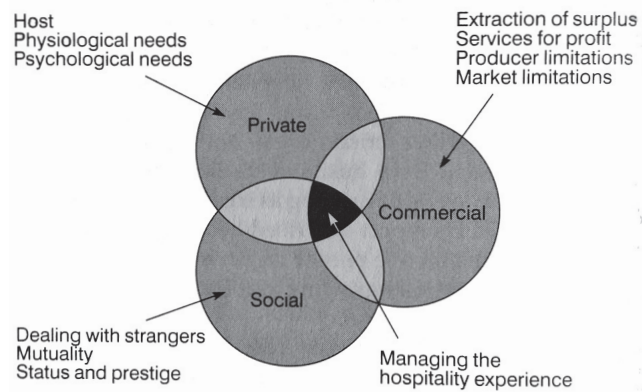


FIGURE 1. The domains of hospitality (Lashley & Morrison, 2000, p. 4)

transactions, though small hotels, guest houses and bed and breakfast venues typically involve both hosts and commercial guests sharing the same accommodation. The social/cultural domain embraces the study of expectations of hosts and guests across and between cultures. All human societies spanning hunting and gathering, agricultural and industrial societies oblige hosts to provide food, drink and shelter to all, without exception. Using a tree as a metaphor for the duty to offer hospitality, a Hindu proverb says: "The tree offers shade to all, even to those who have come to cut it down".

The study of hospitality engaged a number of social scientists who were invited to contribute to *In Search of Hospitality: theoretical perspectives and debates* (Lashley & Morrison, 2000), *Hospitality: a Social Lens* (Lashley et al., 2007) and the *Routledge Handbook of Hospitality Studies* (Lashley, 2017). These contributions came from anthropologists (Selwyn, 2000; Walton, 2017), sociologists (Ritzer, 2007; 2017; Wood, 2017), philosophers (Telfer, 2000; Derrida, 2002), historians (Still, 2017; Walton, 2017), geographers (Bell, 2007; 2017) and feminists (Brownwell, 2017).

Each of these books explores the study of hospitality from both the perspectives of an array of social sciences and as a ubiquitous feature of all human society through time and across the globe. The *Routledge Handbook* includes 33 chapters and 32 contributing authors from 12 countries and five continents. The front piece reproduces a quote from a Japanese poet: "In the shade of the cherry blossom tree, there is no such thing as a stranger" (Kobayashi Issa, Japanese poet, 1763-1828). This quotation has particular significance for this edited text on the study of hospitality. At face value, it makes reference to the tree as a symbol of welcome, because the tree offers shelter or shade to all, without discrimination or exclusion. The cherry blossom tree is also the national symbol of Japan. Many other cultures employ the tree as a metaphor for hospitality for the same reason. The quotation also provides more evidence of the international and universal nature of hospitableness as it was written in Japan about two hundred years ago. Issa's comment is poignant because it was written during the time of the Japanese *Sakoku*, or "closed country". For just over two hundred years, between the 1630s and 1866, contact with the outside world was severely restricted by the Tokugawa shogunate. This was introduced in response to Spanish and Portuguese missionaries preaching and making converts to Christianity in Japan, thereby challenging traditional

Japanese culture. Hosts were restricting entry to guests because guests were behaving in an unacceptable manner. Through his poem, Issa is arguing for a return to traditional Japanese hospitality where all strangers are welcome.

The study of hospitality is a companion to the study for hospitality by providing a series of theoretical frameworks that depart from the how-to-do agenda and the tyranny of relevance by stimulating theory and reflection. There is a cognitive underpinning upon which to better understand hospitality services and building competitive advantage through the hospitableness of service hosts and their guests. Yet, while there are some examples of the take-up of the concept, a narrow industrial pragmatism is stubbornly resistant to change. Commentators like Slattery (2002) see little value in the notion that a more profound understanding of hospitableness might help retain more customers and build a trading advantage. Like many practitioners, his myopia fails to recognise the value of hospitableness as a potential source of competitive advantage. The bias against theory leads to prejudice and discrimination against the outcome of academic enquiry that has the potential to build a loyal customer base founded on the quality of transactions between individual hosts and individual guests.

Study for industry

The industry encompasses an array of sectors that were outlined in Table1, but despite the job opportunities across this spectrum, academic context is often narrowly focused on luxury hotels and restaurants. Table 3 offers that hotels and restaurants in the UK employ 2.2 million people with direct sales of £87 billion, and represents 69 per cent of direct services.

The luxury element of hotels and restaurants is estimated to be 2 to 5 per cent of the provision, accounting for between 44 000 and 110 000 jobs, with annual revenue in the region of £1.7 to £4.3 billion, or just 1 to 3 per cent of direct services in the sector. Yet, this luxury hotel and restaurant sector dominates the industry focus presented on most hospitality programmes.

A study conducted for the Hospitality Institute examined the provision of education in schools in the USA, UK, the Netherlands, Dubai, Hong Kong and Switzerland. Five of the six operate a training hotel, and the UK only operates a training restaurant. Quasi-commercial ventures provide pre-employment, operational skills training in the facility. Kitchen and restaurant skills tend to be a ubiquitous theme, though hotel contexts enable some work simulations in the housekeeping, reception and wider hotel operation. Luxury provision dominates the focus on most of these programmes. There was limited coverage of wider direct or indirect sectors, thereby limiting student exposure to the full range of their career options.

TABLE 3. The hospitality sectors in government statistics

Sector	Employment (thousands)	Turnover (£-billion)
Hotel and related	530	27
Restaurants and related	1 680	60
Catering	887	33
Event management	25	3
Amusement and recreational activities	76	3
Hospitality total	3 198	126
Whole economy	35 087	
Hospitality as % of total economy	9.1%	

Two schools had "hotel" in the programme title and four had "hospitality management". The Swiss School established in 1883 had a high reputation linked to age and course fee: £16 885 in the Netherlands-based school compared to £117 606 in the Swiss school. Content was dominated by the how-to agenda. Graduates must be "job ready" and internships were mandatory in five of the six schools studied. Only the UK provider does not make internships compulsory for all, but this was encouraged. All courses in the sample were taught in English, but four offered other languages, i.e. French, German and Mandarin.

An analysis of papers presented at the 2018 CHME research conference confirmed this narrow pragmatic agenda. Of the 67 conference papers presented, just one explored a "study of" theme. All other papers were focused on the "study for" agenda. Eight papers were discussion papers that highlighted avenues for further research. One paper employed an element of quasi-experimental research. The majority of papers employed survey-based instruments: ten papers used solely questionnaire research; sixteen employed only semi-structured interviews; others used a combination of both. Some employed web page analysis. Most research involved direct hospitality sectors – almost all were focused on restaurants and hotels. None covered the public sector of fast-food provision. The upper end of the market dominates. Indirect service sectors, say on cruise liners or in hospitals were not mentioned. Bias towards luxury does not reflect the employment or contribution to GDP of the wider industry. All this indicates that the taught programme contents limit the focus of potential careers and do a disservice to student perceptions of the options for short-term jobs after graduation and long-term careers.

The prejudices of the "doing" agenda assumes stability in an ever-changing environment. It is assumed that yesterday is a guide to tomorrow and this pragmatism negatively impacts on critical thinking. It reinforces a student tendency to an *activist* learning style and theoretical principles are avoided. Fundamentally, it empowers practitioner influences on education and assumes that practitioners exist in a "real world" detached from university reality and research. Allowing practitioners to have undue influence discourages the role of higher education as partners with industry, and minimises the need for an educated and qualified managerial workforce. Many of these executives have risen through the ranks, from the low levels of qualified managers among industry managers, many of whom can be said to not know what they do not know. The Greek philosopher Socrates is believed by some to have observed that "[t]he best people learn from everything and everyone, mediocre people learn from their experiences, and stupid people already have all the answers".

Looking at the stars?

Above, I have argued that hospitality management education is subject to a number of biases that prejudice the design of higher education programmes and research in the field. Provision of food, drink, and accommodation services spans different sectors that include pubs and bars, fast food and chain restaurants, contract caterers, school meals, hospital catering, prison catering, cruise liners and retail chain stores, yet luxury hotel and restaurant contexts tend to be the ones in which national and international hospitality education provision is myopically embedded.

The discussion of recent publications is not intended as a blueprint through which to frame course content or research priorities. The exemplars are intended to explore critical thinking to investigate industry practice and alternatives. Critical thinking requires a questioning approach and a willingness to share the outcomes of robust research truthfully, unafraid to speak truths that may not be palatable to some audiences, but nonetheless reflect current practice as well as giving voice to alternatives.

Slavery and liberation in hotels, restaurants and bars (Lashley, 2021) was inspired by a conference theme resulting from my up-coming completion of a fixed term contract at Stenden University of Applied Science in the Netherlands. As the Director of Research in the Academy of International Hospitality Research, I had initiated an annual research conference aimed at promoting the Academy's research activities to colleagues, students and fellow academics. "Slavery and liberation" was the chosen theme as I was keen to organise an event that both gave voice to the powerless and suggested progressive alternatives to the way hospitality businesses are traditionally organised and run (Table 4).

Slavery is the most oppressive form of labour exploitation and is illegal in Western Europe and most of the industrialised world. Slavery, however, does exist across the globe, including in the UK and the Netherlands. While most hotel and restaurant organisations do not directly employ slave labourers, there are examples of slaves being used in the supply chain in farming and in subcontracted cleaning and housekeeping services. Hotels are increasingly being used as venues for prostitution and many of these victims of sexual exploitation are trafficked from their home location for that purpose. More directly, many hotels, restaurants and bars could be accused of engaging in a form of neo-slavery. Employers oppress the powerless through low pay and employment practices that predominantly serve the interests of the employer. Neo-slaves are not slaves in the original sense of the word, they are free to come and go as they choose, but they are enslaved by poverty and powerlessness.

TABLE 4. Contents of *Slavery and liberation in hotels, restaurants and bars* (Lashley, 2021)

Chapter	Authors
1 How would I feel? Slavery, neo-slavery, oppression and ethics	Conrad Lashley
2 Slavery ancient and modern: Global and national insights	Conrad Lashley
3 Slavery in Brazil: revelations from a destination	Roseane Barcellos Marques & Conrad Lashley
4 When is a guest not a guest? Human trafficking in hotels in The Netherlands	Erwin van der Graff & Conrad Lashley
5 Human trafficking and modern slavery in Europe's hotels	Alexandros Paraskeva
6 Neoliberalism: the empire strikes back	Conrad Lashley
7 Neo-slavery: and the weakest will suffer what they must	Conrad Lashley
8 Empowerment: boosting workforce enthusiasm?	Conrad Lashley
9 Trade union membership: the resistance power of the collective	Conrad Lashley
10 Worker co-operatives: justice and liberation	Conrad Lashley
11 The way things are, or are they?	Conrad Lashley

The book also presented participants with alternatives to the one-sided exploitative relationship implicit in slavery and neo-slavery. Employee empowerment proposes alternative management strategies for managing employees that engage with and encourage participation in delighting customers. Employees are also able to counterbalance the power of their employer through trade union membership that produces a "trade union dividend" via improved pay and working conditions. Ultimately worker cooperatives build organised structures that exclude employers because those who work in an organisation also own it. Workers' cooperatives liberate workers from oppression because they both own and work in the hotel, restaurant, or bar.

Studies in social sciences provide systematic insights into the causes and manifestations of prejudice and discrimination that lead to misogyny, anti-Semitism, religious intolerance, gay bashing and warfare. Social psychology illuminates the human tendency to demonstrate bias towards in-groups and out-groups. Authoritarian personalities identified by those wishing to understand the psychology of the perpetrators of hostility towards fellow human beings suggest that some individuals possess personality profiles that are prone to rigid orthodoxy that shape prejudiced attitudes and behaviours (Lashley, 2022; Table 5). Anthropology, through the study of social settings and cultures, highlights differing social structures, cultures and institutions that influence citizens; most importantly how the same issues are features of all societies, though the particulars are specific to the economic, social and cultural setting. Economic uncertainty, fear and a sense of inequity can lead to the scapegoating of those who seem different or are deemed to not fit in. The desire to seek someone to blame is a common outcome of economic hardship, but critical comment rarely looks to systemic flaws within free-market economies. Clearly, it is in the interests of the ruling elite to deflect criticism by encouraging conflict among the many rather than with the powerful few. The role and status of men and women and the perceptions of people from minority ethnic or religious groups can be better understood through cross-cultural enquiry. Societies that are unequal tend to experience more conflict and

TABLE 5. Contents of *Prejudice & discrimination in hotels, restaurants, and bars* (Lashley, 2022)

Chapter	Authors
1 The psychology of discrimination	Conrad Lashley
2 Hidden in plain sight? Covert prejudice and subtle discrimination	Conrad Lashley
3 Aesthetic labour and discrimination	Dennis Nickson
4 Fat boys don't fly: The tyranny of the thin frontline	Conrad Lashley
5 Five-star racism	Latifa Benhadda
6 Why women don't become chefs	Conrad Lashley
7 The boy's club: gender bias in hospitality hierarchies	Maria Gebbels
8 Gender profiles in Chinese organisations	Pola Wang
9 The poverty of luxury: bias in hospitality management education.	Conrad Lashley
10 Inequality in the Brazil labour market	Roseane Barques Marques
11 The bolthole of self-employment: migrant workers avoiding prejudice and discrimination	Jerome Oskam, Adele Ladkin & Maja Turnšek
12 Looking at THEM and seeing US	Conrad Lashley

record a lower quality of life for those living in them. Sociology investigates social structures and social relations in a society and generates insights into social class and gender relationships. While all these subjects seem unrelated to the study of employment in hotels, restaurants and bars, the subsequent chapters in the book draw heavily on social sciences as a way of giving meaning to employment relationships and rigidities in the sector.

Conflict and hostility in hotels, restaurants and bars (Lashley, forthcoming) is a text about conflict as it applies to the hotel, restaurant and bar sectors (Table 6). Conflict in these organisations involves all stakeholders, including employees, employers, customers, suppliers, host populations and regulators.

Harmony is the ideal setting for the provision of food, drink, and accommodation services, yet the potential for conflict exists in transactions between each of the parties. Employers and employees have conflicting interests over pay and working conditions as well as the way managers treat staff, and the way staff treat managers and their official duties. Staff may be in conflict with other staff; kitchen/restaurant clashes is a classic example. But sexism, racism, homophobia and individual bullying are also conflictual. Those in senior management positions may be in conflict with other organisation members because their personality types tend towards psychopathy and the creation of a Machiavellian culture. Staff and customers may be in conflict because of staff behaviour, or due to customer rudeness. Customers may be in conflict with each other due to inappropriate behaviour, due to rowdiness or drunkenness, for example. Customers may be in conflict with the business

TABLE 6. Proposed chapter contents of *Conflict and hostility in hotels, restaurants, and bars* (Lashley, forthcoming)

Chapter	Author
1. Conflict theory	Conrad Lashley
2. The menial work in the tourism and hospitality sector: the commercial hospitality to the guest and the hostility to workers' health	Leandro Brusadin & Kerley dos Santos Alves
3. Does power corrupt, or are the corrupt attracted to power?	Conrad Lashley
4. Accepting the unknown other	Ana Paula Garcia Spolon
5. Precarious work: a hidden face of the neo-slavery and inequality in the Brazilian labour market	Roseane Barcellos Marque
6. Conflict and hostility in gastronomic establishments in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: a view of the LGBTQ+ community	Flávio Peixoto Martins & Ana Paula Garcia Spolon
7. Hospitality and hostility in the relationship between stakeholders	Elizabeth Wada
8. Employer engagement with human trafficking	Rodney Westerlaken
9. Conflict by staff against employers	Li Ding
10. Tall poppy syndrome (between staff)	Lyndsey Neil, Nigel Hemmington & Ayeesha Taylo
11. Rude customers and employee responses	Adrian Martin
13. Conflict by the state over alcohol sales	Ann Cameron
14. Tourists Go Home! Exploring conflicts between residents and visitors	Conrad Lashley

by not paying bills or making unwarranted complaints. There are a growing number of popular destinations that are becoming overwhelmed by unrestricted visitor numbers. The book provides insight into some of these issues by adopting a multi-dimensional approach to the potential for and causes of conflict in hotels, restaurants and bars.

Conclusion

Hospitality management programmes aimed at industry management roles lead to a vocational action – a “how-to-do” agenda. Pragmatic consideration creates a tyranny of relevance where all content is judged against its link to the world of work and making students “job ready”. But if it is possible for the study of and study for hospitality to broaden consciousness, as well as industry relevance, it is necessary to study hospitality as a ubiquitous human phenomenon. The obligation to be hospitable is present in *all* societies.

The industry and pragmatic focus is further compromised by a bias towards hotels and restaurants, specifically the luxury versions. Yet, the luxury hotel and restaurant sector represents a small fraction of job opportunities in the sectors concerned with the provision of food, drink and accommodation. Research comparing a sample of training facilities in six countries reveals that this is not just a UK problem. International comparisons revealed that most were named hotel schools and all of them outside the UK had training hotels on campus.

The consequence of this bias for job readiness and the world of work in a narrow set of establishments has led to a how-to-do agenda and that has limited the development of critical skills. By implication, this elevated the industry context when the core concern for educators and researchers must be the empowerment of students for their own benefit as citizens, but also as a means of creating management personnel who are reflective practitioners able to deal with an environment where the certainties of yesteryear are unlikely to match the realities of tomorrow. Perhaps more than ever, hospitality educators need to be looking at the stars.

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