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ACADEMIC PAPER

Reassessing the core of hospitality management education: The continuing importance of training restaurants

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Abstract

This paper addresses the role of training facilities within higher education hospitality departments. It identifies a range of historical and contemporary problems associated with these areas and reports on case study research undertaken with four UK institutions. The research identifies changes within the educational delivery provided by these institutions and suggests that training restaurants in these institutions still have an important role to play within the higher education experience.

Keywords: training restaurant; hospitality education

Introduction

Training restaurants in hospitality management education are in a transition period. Over the years, the “traditional” model for operations training, identified in this paper, has become an “expensive, resource-intensive, fixed location and fixed timetable” problem for many higher education (HE) institutions (Gillespie & Baum, 2000, p. 148). In a resource-sensitive HE

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environment the existence of training restaurants and kitchens (hereafter referred to as training facilities) is being called into question. Indeed, many institutions have already taken the step of cutting away these parts of the curriculum (Coleman, Jackson, Ritchie, Roberts, & Snelgrove, 2002) or instigating major changes in order to operate more cost-effectively.

Problems inherent in training restaurants have been identified by various authors over the last 15 years (Baker, Cattet, & Riley, 1995; Coleman et al., 2002; Cousins, 1993; Formica, 1996; Jones, 2004; Lashley, 2004; Morrison, 2003; Morrison & Laffin, 1995; Rimmington, 1999). These problems constitute antecedents for change and, as a result, would contribute towards decisions to retain or dispense with training facilities altogether.

This paper has the following specific aims:

1. To investigate problems associated with training facilities, in particular resource problems, staffing, research inactivity and issues of academic rigour, and to establish the extent to which these have resulted in a changed approach.
2. To establish the fundamental purpose of the training restaurant and investigate the extent to which it remains at the core of hospitality programmes in the UK.

The paper reports on case study research conducted in this area.

Training restaurants in hospitality education

Research in the area of hospitality management education and training facilities within hospitality academic departments often refers to a traditional model of teaching. It is important in the context of this paper that this model is identified along with any practical or academic issues associated with it. It is also important to deconstruct the rhetoric that surrounds this kind of terminology, which may not have had a positive effect on the facilities themselves and the perceptions held of them.

Traditional approaches to hospitality education were based on an amalgam of “craft, ritual and inherited practices” (Nailon, 1982, p. 137). Ladkin (2000) referred to traditional craft skills in hospitality education and Coleman et al. (2002, p. 3) identified the traditional focus of hospitality programmes as being centred on the development of “technical operational skills and competences with an emphasis being placed on food and beverage skills”. Gillespie and Baum (2000) stated that food and beverage teaching has been at the core of hospitality management programmes throughout Europe since the late 19th century and this tradition is maintained in some departments. Foucar-Szocki and Bolsing (1999) observed that hospitality programmes tend to stress practical skill development, and this emphasis on skills and competences, associated with a vocational and action orientation, is highlighted by Morrison and O'Mahony (2003) as the “traditional transmission” method.

There is some evidence of debate about this style of curriculum, however. Evans (1988) argues that hospitality programmes need to maintain culinary traditions, while Baker et al. (1995) criticised the way in which education approaches food and beverage knowledge and culinary skill. Baker et al. (1995, p. 21) identified a schism between the traditional “haute cuisine view versus the modern creative approach”. This view is supported by Cousins (1993, p. 289), who stated that food and beverage teaching “is still generally based on traditional concepts which are now increasingly at odds with modern day practice”. It should therefore be recognised that the traditional approach does not represent any kind of gold standard of operations education. It is one approach and, arguably, one that has not evolved to meet contemporary educational needs.

Some authors in the area make reference to the traditional facility that is (or was) found in hospitality academic departments. Morrison and Laffin (1995), while not referring directly to any traditional approach, emphasised that teaching restaurants and kitchens have long been established as experiential learning forums, while Morrison (2003) stated that in-house facilities are dominated by the traditional training restaurant and kitchen configuration. Dutton and Farbrother (2005) discussed the closure of traditional training restaurants and Baker et

al. (1995, p. 21) continued to highlight the problems of credibility and cost associated with a “production kitchen and public teaching restaurant”.

This liberal use of the term traditional is problematic, in the context of both training facilities and wider hospitality management education, as it is loaded with hidden values. The range of contexts that authors in the area pin traditional to creates a somewhat negative impression of the activities that are engaged in within these contexts. Whether it is an inherited pattern of thought or action or a long-standing specific practice, a traditional approach in any context suggests a strong link with the past or perhaps an unwillingness to embrace the future. If these parts of the hospitality curriculum really are at odds (Cousins, 1993) with modern day practice (both academic and industry) then the language employed is entirely appropriate. However, the word traditional does not reflect the diversity of the foodservice sector and, as this paper aims to show, the plurality of models that exist in hospitality management HE. If there is greater variety out there, and a more modern focus, then it is perhaps time to ditch the traditional, which only serves to marginalise the area further.

The overall purpose of the training facility within hospitality management education receives somewhat scant attention within current literature. However, authors such as Formica (1996) observed that education in hospitality and tourism was initiated to prepare students to supply the industry with entry-level positions, and Tribe (2002) agreed, suggesting that the purpose of vocational education is to prepare students for their chosen career. Ford and LeBruto (1995) highlighted the importance of hospitality graduates being able to “roll up their sleeves” within a curriculum built upon a practical operational basis. Morrison (2002), however, highlights the preoccupation with the world of work rather than with the many disciplines that help explain hospitality.

Funding and resourcing training facilities in hospitality education

In the UK, between 1976 and 1993, funding for HE fell by 40% (King Alexander, 2000). The resource demands that this has created have resulted in governments questioning “the basic tenets which have governed HE institutions’ conception of themselves and... approach to funding” (Bosworth, 1992, p. 106). Within the HE community it is realised that the changed approach towards the funding of HE has created “competitive higher education where higher education institutions compete with each other for funding from public and private sources” (Lynch & Baines, 2004, p. 184). At an institutional level “decision makers within universities will have to determine how existing resources are to be allocated between the competing claims that are put upon them” (Bird, 1992, p. 266). This suggests a strained resource environment, with institutions under increasing pressure to fund on a value for money basis: “increases in sophistication and hence cost in the infrastructure needed for leading-edge research leading to demands for greater selectivity and concentration of support for curiosity driven research” (Bosworth, 1992, p. 105). New funding models associated with the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK and similar systems in other countries give enhanced funding to research-active departments (King Alexander, 2000).

When allocating resources, Bird (1992) suggested that a rate of return model should be used, giving priority to activities generating the most substantial benefits. This has potentially serious implications for resource-intensive areas within HE. In this environment training facilities become just another area to be managed and assessed in a businesslike way, and herein lies the problem for training facilities in academic departments such as hospitality management.

Resource problems are mentioned specifically by Baker et al. (1995), who identified that vocational education in a training restaurant and kitchen is expensive. Research on institutions by Baker et al. (1995) highlighted the labour intensity and the call on departmental resources as negative aspects of operating training facilities. Morrison and Laffin (1995) stated that resource outlays come from more than just capital outlay on equipment: staffing levels (teaching and support) contribute to the drain on resources, and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 1998) verified that teaching equipment for laboratories has a short shelf life and that priority funding issues can dominate

budgets. Hospitality management equipment suffers as it is specialised and these departments cannot use equipment bought for other purposes, in the way that a science department can use equipment bought for research purposes for teaching. The need to follow complex legislation such as health and safety makes additional demands on capital and also staffing levels.

Morrison (2003, p. 6-7) identified that schools of hospitality are suffering from a lack of resources and are often reduced to “fighting to justify the funding associated with technical aspects and facilities”. She suggested that institutions face financial pressures as ‘cost-effectiveness’ is added to the underpinning pedagogical rationale to justify the inclusion of operational aspects within a HE framework.

Other options available to HE providers have been to outsource the operational element to further education providers (Baker et al., 1995). While there are advantages to this approach (highlighted by Baker et al.), principally in terms of cost, there are also disadvantages both in terms of a loss of control and quality of teaching.

Staffing within training facilities

Cousins (1993) explained that, historically, early craft-based programmes were taught by practitioners from industry from top-end service providers. When programmes developed in the 1950s, operations teachers initially expanded to teach generic business subjects. However, further development in the 1960s and 1970s saw the development of management programmes, and growth in this area brought specialist teachers in from other disciplines. Better qualified than their operational counterparts, they began to develop research material pertinent to the industry. These teachers were more easily able to obtain promotion and as a result operations teachers sought development activities to take them out of operations (Cousins, 1993). However, Coleman et al. (2002) identified that breadth and depth of operational experience is seen as key to the success of operations teachers rather than a background characterised by higher qualifications, research and publication, suggesting that there has been no wholesale change of approach to staffing. Cousins also highlighted the workload requirement of operations teachers as another reason for the lack of development in the area. Some of the problems in these parts of hospitality programmes have been compounded by the general lack of research and educational development of operations teachers (Cousins, 1993). However, it also leaves us with something of a dichotomy with the existing models since working in the operational environment might be viewed as either a stepping stone to an academic career or somewhere for ex-industrialists to pass on their specialist skills.

Academic rigour within training facilities

The perceived lack of academic rigour and low perception of operations education was identified in the research by Coleman et al. (2002). Cousins (1993) identified the root cause of this perception as a lack of educational development, with staff unable to justify training facilities for hospitality management in an appropriate academic language. Cousins (1993) suggested that this led to a split between teaching in training facilities and teaching in the rest of the course. As a result, introductory classes in training facilities are carried out by less academically qualified (and usually lower-grade) staff. This results in the perception that operations is held in lower esteem than other parts of the curriculum. Some authors also critique the training itself. Lashley (2004, p. 9) observed that “managers are much more likely to need to consider the changes in customer eating fashions and their impact on popular restaurants than how to butcher a side of beef, or knock out frangipan”.

Practical education in training facilities is a “tangible manifestation of the differences in philosophy and delivery now in hospitality education” (Rimmington, 1999, p. 188). In other words, the theories and theorising of the academics do not necessarily mirror the practice of the operational staff. It may also be the case that each side (practical/hands-on vs theoretical/intellectual) has more in common than they realise and that neither position is fully defensible in isolation. The future is unclear but in the recent past Morrison and Laffin (1995, p. 26) stated that “teaching facilities should not be viewed merely as teaching laboratories

wherein students may learn the basics of food production and service". Aside from the lack of academic rigour, problems also exist in regard to a lack of research output from this area of hospitality programmes.

Research inactivity

Jones (2004) identified that experimental methodologies are appropriate and relevant to hospitality, and where better to conduct such research than in the "laboratory" provided by the typical training facility? However, rather than develop intellectual understanding, these facilities are often almost exclusively used for basic training.

There is limited evidence that certain universities are taking a proactive approach in this area. In particular, Bournemouth and Brighton Universities have invested heavily in new facilities (Dutton & Farbrother, 2005) and present a potentially bright, if untested, future for their work in this area. Recognising a "challenge to reconsider and reconfigure the skills based learning of their hospitality management students", Dutton and Farbrother (2005, p. 10) outlined the route taken by both Universities (the employing institutions of those authors) in diversifying their training facilities. The aim is to achieve the vocational learning demands of the programmes whilst balancing the resource implications created by a training facility. The solutions outlined demonstrate that the path of diversification does not have to reach the same destination, as each institution has adopted a different approach.

In what is essentially a promotional article, Dutton and Farbrother (2005) outline the objectives for the facilities, and these were based around generating both research and commercial activity, and using the facility to generate funds to support both these areas. For the students, there is still the opportunity "to observe consumer food behaviour in a live, but controlled environment" (Dutton & Farbrother, 2005, p. 11). It is clear from these two examples that departments need not deviate too far from existing models (Bournemouth) to create a more commercially viable learning environment. Alternatively, a more creative approach can be adopted and the diversification process can result in a creative learning environment with benefits in teaching, learning, research and commercial areas (Brighton).

Methodology

In order to effectively assess the role of the training facility within a contemporary academic environment and maintain meaningful characteristics of real events and locations, a case study strategy was chosen for the research (Yin, 2003). The main data collection method used within the case studies was semi-structured interviews. A stratified approach to interviewing was adopted, which gathered a wide range of opinion from individuals with a diverse range and level of interest and involvement in the process (Stuart, 2002). In this study, heads of department, academic staff and operational staff within the operational facilities were the research subjects. In all case studies, interviews were conducted with these diverse individuals. The use of multiple case studies would facilitate a strong sense of discovery while allowing analysis in terms of commonality between interviews (Gillham, 2005). Other supporting methods used in the case study were documentary analysis (class outlines, promotional and other course material) and direct observation, which took various forms including post-interview reflections and general observations generated during the case study visits. In the context of a case study approach triangulation of methods can "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 2003, p. 87) although, in the context of this paper, only evidence from the interviews is presented.

A combination of purposeful and convenience sampling was used to select the final case study institutions. Three case studies were selected because their operational facilities had undergone a change process in their training restaurant and the final case study was chosen using a convenience method through contacts made at a conference. Overall, 17 interviews were conducted, spread between the four case study institutions. Research was conducted in situ and was carried out over the course of a single day in all four cases. An information sheet outlining the purpose of the study and how the results would be used was sent to all "gatekeepers" of the case study institutions, and all research subjects and institutions were guaranteed anonymity.

Yin (2003) introduced four tests to ensure the reliability and validity of case study research. In the context of this research three of these tests were used. Construct validity was ensured through the use of multiple sources of evidence (discussed earlier in this sections). External validity was achieved through replication logic (Yin, 2003) by researching the issue across multiple case study locations. Reliability was achieved through the use of a case study protocol. This encompassed information presented to the case study prior to the visit, questions and follow-ups asked during the interview process, and any other follow-ups that were required. This protocol was repeated across all case study locations.

Data analysis adopted a template analysis method (King, 2004). Emergent themes were written up in a template from the data gathered during the research process. The template was created using concepts, themes and dimensions. This is consistent with the creation of a template outlined by King. It was not the intention of this research to impose a framework on the data, but to let themes emerge as the research progressed. Only when each transcript was analysed were relevant quotes relating to the identified themes extracted. Each of these documents was then analysed separately and dimensions identified. The documents were then sorted by dimensions, in preparation for the writing process.

Results and discussion

Research findings are grouped into two distinct sections. The first section addresses the purpose of the training facility within the curriculum and the second introduces a series of elements common across the institutions in question. Quotes are coded to represent the case study number and the interview participant within the study.

In terms of purpose the research identified four themes: (a) preparation for the world of work, (b) developing skills and understanding, (c) underpinning the hospitality degree, and (d) providing a relevant hospitality focus and context. These are now explored in more depth.

Preparation for the world of work

There was commonality between all case studies in that the training facility played an important role in preparing students for a period of industrial placement. Operationally-focused classes equipped “students with the skills and knowledge of operational level work before they go out into their placement year” (Case 3, Participant 3).

The operational elements of the curriculum therefore assume considerable importance, particularly within a sandwich degree where a placement year takes up 25% of the degree as a whole. Training facilities, therefore, have goals to achieve in order that students can make an effective transition between the education and industry environment. These degree elements helped to build “confidence in the student... giving them... an overall understanding of what dealing with the customer in that environment means” (Case 2, Participant 1).

A strong placement year was emphasised at many points during the research and could initially lead the researcher to consider the extent to which the operations element of the curriculum is merely a means to an end, somewhere for students to learn basic skills before embarking on a period of supervised work experience. This is a theory in line with that of some of the authors in the area (Formica, 1996; Tribe, 2002). It would be a short-sighted interpretation of the evidence, however, but not without some truth. Given the vocationally-focused nature of many hospitality degrees, the preparatory element provided by the operations class takes on greater significance. Indeed, this career preparatory element is an area that has been praised by HEFCE (2001). However, the research identified that training facilities provided benefits beyond basic skills inputs.

Developing skills and understanding

A criticism of hospitality degrees identified within the literature is that the operational element of the curriculum provides only basic levels of skills, unchanged for years (Cousins, 1993; Jones, 2004). It was recognised by an interviewee that “we are not

training waiters, we are not training chefs, and that has changed over the years” (Case 1, Participant 3).

However, it was also identified that managers were:

expected to take their jackets off, roll their sleeves up and get stuck in and it's not as easy to do that if your background is in general business or you've studied HR or read history, or whatever. (Case 3, Participant 1)

It was felt to be important that the students had an understanding of some of the potential flashpoints in a hospitality environment:

We all are aware of the small clashes you get between waiters and chefs on a hot plate. I imagine then the restaurant manager or a food and beverage manager wading in with not a clue what it's like to work in these environments. (Case 2, Participant 1)

The need to understand staff in general was also highlighted:

You're working with different levels of people and if you don't know how they feel within their job, how they work, what are their priorities, what are their problems... it's very difficult to understand it as a manager. (Case 4, Participant 1)

What the research has identified is that this skills element is still important but the skill set has changed. This can be referred to as skills and understanding, and it is the understanding part that is, perhaps, the most significant. The student comes out of the operations education element not with a complete set of practical skills and the ability to create a crêpes Suzette but with an understanding of how operational elements fit together in order to satisfy the consumer as part of a wider picture in hospitality.

Underpinning the hospitality degree

The transferable nature of the knowledge obtained through the training facility results in a curriculum that can underpin many other elements of the hospitality management course. Interviewees recognised that the characteristics of hospitality “are nicely highlighted in operations classes that actually [apply] in all kinds... of work, not just hospitality work” (Case 2, Participant 5). On a basic level the training facility gave students “something to relate their academic studies to” (Case 3, Participant 3).

The underpinning aspect was also formalised through learning outcomes in some of the class documentation. “The academic and transferable employability skills developed through this unit support all the other units of the course” (Case Study 4, Participant 2). Without this element hospitality students, arguably, lose a point of reference upon which the theoretical elements of the course can be applied throughout the degree. This correlates with Coleman et al.'s (2002, p. 2) statement that the training facility is a “fundamental and major contributing component of Hospitality Management Programmes”. On this basis the curriculum could be delivered with this underpinning in mind so that there is improved synergy between the operational and pedagogical elements.

Providing a relevant hospitality focus and context

Although not picked up by the literature in the area, it was highlighted by two senior academics interviewed that the training facility provided more than just practical and academic benefits for the department.

They contribute a lot to the life of the department as well. They give students a sense of what it's like to work within a hospitality environment. (Case 3, Participant 3)

The training facility also gave students the opportunity to become socialised into key aspects of hospitality:

It is important to have an essence of hospitality in a school. Without it how do students become socialised into the hospitality environment/way of thinking? With it you have the noise, the smells, the deliveries, the refuse, the issues, the customers, the problems. It's something that you don't normally get in a business school. It makes us different to other departments. (Case 2, Participant 4)

Of the four purposes identified in the research this one, perhaps, is the most challenging to justify as its benefits will be largely intangible.

The research was also able to identify commonality with key elements of the models used within the separate case study institutions. The five elements that were identified by the research were (a) vocational action and reflective vocational elements in the curriculum, (b) generating revenue, (c) level of realism in operations, (d) research potential, and (e) staff who can support these elements. These are explored in the following sections.

Vocational action and reflective vocational elements in curriculum

Reflective elements were incorporated in all the case studies research. They were used as an assessment mechanism in one instance so that tutors could "introduce a higher level of learning... in order for them to analyse their skills development and to reflect upon that and to project for the future" (Case 3, Participant 1).

Reflection was used by interviewees as a learning tool to aid student understanding about what occurs in operations: "at the end they write reflective essay on how it works and their role within that... it's reflection from the management, analytical perspective" (Case 4, Participant 1).

One institution used Kolb's Learning Cycle to facilitate the students' learning experience:

They are expected to reflect upon how they've moved around the learning cycle and what their learning experience has been, and also what they might need to do to improve their learning in specific situations. (Case 3, Participant 1)

Reflection offered further evidence of training facilities underpinning the degree:

You need to put in place a structure which encourages students, not only to have an experience, but to learn from that experience, to reflect on that experience, to think how they might adapt their behaviour in the future and also when they come back from their placements, be confident that they have a greater understanding of the context of the hospitality industry so that their studies in the advanced stages of the programme make more sense. (Case 3, Participant 3)

All case studies used reflective practice in some form or other in their programmes. This ranged from students reflecting on a period of supervised work experience or their period of time within the training facility, to more targeted reflective projects that were attached to certain specific projects, such as running an event. The benefits of a more reflective vocational approach seemed to be clearly understood. Students engaged at a higher level of learning and were able to analyse and be self-critical about their own development. Students were also asked to reflect from a management perspective, which required a more analytical approach. In many cases this kind of learning was also linked (both formally and informally) to some form of professional development planning, which gave further evidence of the underpinning role which could be assumed by the training facility, a conduit through which students could identify their own learning requirements and act on them accordingly.

Based on the evidence of this research, institutions have moved beyond the purely vocational action curriculum to incorporate more reflective vocational elements. This enables

the hospitality student to engage with an important set of both operational and cognitive skills. This is therefore a key element and acts as a foundation, underpinning the student's ability to learn throughout the degree.

Generating revenue

The purposes of a training facility have been outlined earlier in this chapter. Whether it is preparing students for placement or giving greater levels of skills and understanding about the industry, the main purpose of the facility is not to generate revenue. However, given the resource-intensive nature of these facilities, identified earlier in the paper, some kind of revenue generation is required in most cases. Indeed there is an expectation, identified by interviewees, that revenue needs to be made and that these facilities are encouraged on the basis that they are "expected to generate revenue and to not be a drain on resources and if it makes a good surplus I think that's all the better" (Case 3, Participant 1). This expectation was not always the case and for one department it was "purely the school's decision to make it commercial in order to reduce the subsidy paid by the university until there was no subsidy" (Case 2, Participant 4).

Operational facilities were easier to justify if they were making a financial contribution. However, it was foreseen that "the tables would turn slightly, I'm sure, if it was draining cash out of the department" (Case 3, Participant 3). This issue was identified by another interviewee: "What we can't do is decrease our contribution... If we do not meet our budgets, then we'll be threatened" (Case 4, Participant 1).

There was a strong sense from one interviewee that, having established a new model for operations education, they wanted to keep developing and could see a future in the area:

If we want to keep progressing we've got to keep spending, and in order to keep spending it's got to come from somewhere... if the building doesn't start to generate revenue we won't get more coming in. (Case 1, Participant 2)

A more commercial focus is, however, not without its problems, with one participant noting that "some things that are good commercially are not necessarily good for a training restaurant" (Case 2, Participant 2). The dangers associated with this approach were noted by one academic member of staff:

I certainly have experienced in the further education sector where there were significant financial pressures on the restaurant to perform. It was at the expense of the quality of the training and the student experience. (Case 3, Participant 1)

It was therefore seen as important to retain an educational focus and one interviewee was keen to stress: "The students have always and will always remain the first priority from everyone's point of view in this department" (Case 3, Participant 2).

Interviewees were realistic that while training facilities are not going to generate substantial profits, it is important that they are seen to contribute towards the operating costs. This includes maintaining the facility or contributing towards further improvements. However, it was perceived to be difficult to generate money in any serious way given the restrictions enforced on these facilities. Staff working outside university working hours are paid overtime, and in one case study a cap was placed on the prices that could be charged in the facility. The primary reason for one university funding a new facility was that it could operate in a more commercial way until the subsidies paid by the university were reduced to the extent that there was no subsidy. This places the training facility in an awkward position where generating revenue becomes a fundamental aim of the business. This could be more problematic for the educational side, as commercialism and training might not always mix effectively. There was no real consensus as to whether balancing educational and commercial was problematic, although there were suggestions that commercial pressure might have a detrimental effect on the students' learning in the long term. However,

generating revenue through operations does aid the facility when creating a realistic learning environment.

Level of realism in operations

The commercial objectives of a training facility do not necessarily have to clash with the educational objectives, and in two of the case studies investigated the commercial aspects were seen as central to the level of realism in the operational curriculum:

It says something about the fact that we think it's a realistic environment. Now, if it was a stuffy old training restaurant that bore no resemblance to what was going on in industry, people would not want to use it as a dining room for corporate events, parties, weddings and all the rest as they clearly do at the moment, so it speaks of the realistic environment that we've tried to create, that we can sustain such a level of business that it is profit generating in a way. (Case 3, Participant 3)

The commercial systems introduced also benefited the education goals of the facility:

We've just bought a computer back-of-house system. Cost us about five and a half thousand pounds and that has all our administration systems in there, so now we'll know what GP profits are, what our food costs were for that week ... that sort of management, therefore the students have that to reflect on their business week. (Case 4, Participant 1)

So the level of revenue generation that a training facility has to maintain does have an impact on the training that the students receive and presents a range of benefits, issues and problems. However, running a more commercial environment can also benefit educational aims and ensures that students operate within a more realistic environment.

If students are to get the maximum benefit from their operations education then it would seem prudent to ensure that they understand why customers use the facilities, how much they spend, whether costs have been met as a result and reflect on how improvements could be made to ensure that revenue generation can be improved. If students can be taught to operate and reflect in a businesslike way then they will be better prepared than the student who does not understand the commercial issues. This is further evidence of the training facility underpinning other elements of hospitality and giving students a context within which they can apply theories and concepts elsewhere in the degree.

Consideration of research potential

If revenue can create a buffer that stabilises the operational position of the training facility then arguably so could a research agenda. Research output has the potential to generate income for the academic department as much as operational activity (if not more so). Only two of the case studies investigated engaged in any notable research activity. Case Studies 2 and 3 did not identify any significant research activity and had not used it explicitly as a research tool. Case Study 4 did not have a research purpose in operations. However:

Traditionally, we have ... we are quite strong on research [and] we do a reasonable amount in consumer behaviour, we've done a lot of work on behaviours within the restaurant ... we've been doing that for a number of years and so a lot of papers have come out of that. (Case 4, Participant 1)

However the research purpose was not fundamental to the training facility:

The staff that use it, choose to use it because we have a tool we can use. We're not told "You have a facility there, use it". (Case 4, Participant 1).

Only one of the case studies had a significant research purpose and was "in the process of the appointment of a Professor in Food Hospitality & Culinary Arts, to lead, to take the

leadership of research in the area and set up, allied to our operations unit, a research unit". (Case 1, Participant 3).

The literature reviewed earlier identified how research inactivity was seen as a threat to the traditional training facility (Baker et al., 1995; Rimmington, 1999). The demands placed on staff in operations teaching slowed the growth of this area of hospitality management research (Cousins, 1993). The use of the word laboratory when describing the training facilities was used largely to attract the higher unit of resource associated with laboratory training rather than to show genuine intent to engage with any kind of serious research agenda.

This lack of research output is being pro-actively addressed in one of the case study institutions where the new facility was designed with a specific aim of becoming research active. This aim is seen in the design of the facility itself, which contains elements designed specifically in a research context such as an advanced lighting system which can be used to assess customer behaviour under different conditions and digital video cameras which observe consumer/provider interaction. This research agenda would not have been possible without the new facility, and indeed following a research path was seen as a strong bargaining chip used to obtain funds for the new facility. Another institution had historically been strong on research and had utilised the training facility for research purposes, but not in any formal way, and this was seen as secondary to the primary purpose of the facility. Other institutions had not made any serious attempt to use the training facility as a research tool. The opportunities for training facilities being used seriously for research is, as yet, unfulfilled, with the case study in this research engaging, at present, on an aspirational level only.

On the basis of the research in question it is therefore difficult to see how, at present, a research agenda can be effectively introduced in an operational context. What is clear is that it would be difficult to focus on both revenue generation and research given the staffing situations and external pressures outlined in this paper. A research focus is one that requires more groundwork and infrastructure in place for it to work effectively and this is where a strong research individual (such as a professor of culinary arts) is required to drive a research agenda. This leads to the consideration of the staff required within the operational environment.

Staff who can support these elements

Historically, institutions looked for ex-industry practitioners to provide the teaching element (Coleman et al., 2002; Cousins, 1993) and this resulted in a strong operations focus, arguably a key reason behind some of the problems of the traditional model. The nature of the teaching, it could be argued, requires a certain kind of operational experience given that skills and understanding are important outputs of the operational element. One case study location had significant opinions on the grading of staff from a historical perspective:

It used to be that those who ran the activity in that side of the department were on the academic pay scale. "Chef Lecturers" we called them. It didn't work. There were people who were neither academics nor chefs and they were in some mysterious world in between. They thought they were academics and they thought they were chefs, and really I thought they were neither. (Case 3, Participant 3)

This statement appears to support the existing research in the area regarding staffing (Cousins, 1993). The employment, therefore, of non-academic personnel in this environment was supported by this institution which had:

put in place a new team of chefs from industry, not from an academic background at all, but had them work in close association with academics from an operational background... what we were trying to do was bridge the gap in a sense, recognise that commercial chefs were much better at creating a realistic environment but using operational academics to help instil an understanding of what it takes to create a learning environment. (Case 3, Participant 3)

The research did not produce a clear consensus on the most appropriate blend of staffing required for training facilities, debate centred on the blend of both academic and non-academic staff in the area. On the one hand, using academics would seem to give access to appropriate higher-level teaching and an understanding of the blend of skills required, along with the ability to link the theory and practice elements effectively. On the other hand, a team with a greater operational focus and background could provide students with realistic experience while creating a learning environment in conjunction with academic staff. A better balance was evident for the students who could engage with the focus of the operational staff whilst the academic team could link the practice back to the theory and handle assessment more effectively. Issues relating to non-academics assessing work were identified by one interviewee: "You've got to keep a real handle on non-academics' involvement in assessment and so on. There are issues there that need to be monitored". (Case 3, Participant 3).

These issues were not divulged but a need to strengthen the academic aspects of this area was highlighted. This system was in evidence in other institutions where an academic had management of the operational element built into their workload, which aided the operational element, ensuring that it retained an appropriate focus. The use of non-academics in operational positions might not always be of benefit and one respondent felt that non-academic personnel might not be able to deliver as effective a training package and pick up on key points of learning within the training process. This was true in another institution where there was a sense of conflict between staff who saw themselves as running a commercial operation and those who perceived themselves as running a training operation.

Given the importance of the skills and understanding focus of the training facility and the sense of realism that is provided by a revenue generating facility, utilising the skills and experience of staff who have previously worked in an industrial setting is important. However, arguably, it must be tempered with a need to provide some level of academic input in order that the students can make the correct links between theory and practice. Some consideration might also need to be given to how non-academic staff are prepared for teaching within an academic environment.

Conclusions

This research has considered the role of the training restaurant within contemporary hospitality management departments. This can be summarised as follows:

- preparation for the world of work
- underpinning the hospitality degree
- developing skills and understanding
- providing a relevant hospitality focus and context

The training facility was recognised as important by participants in the research. There seemed to be general acknowledgement that it was a valuable asset for the respective departments but that it also needed to send out the right message to external stakeholders. It could also be argued that a core focus of the training facilities remained the provision of vocational action-type skills despite repackaging by the institutions in question.

There was recognition that previous manifestations of training facilities in hospitality departments were viewed simply as somewhere to eat by external staff and clients. The extent to which these perceptions have changed requires further investigation from staff not working within hospitality departments, as those interviewed in this research will have been keen, considering their vested interest, to project a positive image of operations education within their department.

This research has also been able to identify key elements within the training restaurant that deliver on their purpose. These are summarised as follows:

- vocational action and reflective vocational elements in curriculum

- level of realism in operations
- generating revenue
- consideration of research potential
- staff who can support these elements

Providing students with a valuable opportunity to engage with vocational action and also with reflective vocational skills was identified as an important aspect of learning within the training facility. If students are to develop into the philosophical practitioners advocated by current research then the foundations for this could be introduced via the training facility. If students are to receive a wider, more appropriate knowledge from their exposure in this area then this research suggests that they engage with as realistic an experience as possible. Students who engage with actual management decision-making, real consumers, and appropriate levels of pressure can, arguably, more adequately prepare for a future in the industry and more effectively reflect on working in operational areas.

Thus far, research in the area has largely focused on the problems associated with training facilities and not with how they can be developed to enhance the hospitality management curriculum. This research has identified that training facilities still have an important role to play within a HE environment. Training facilities can support the wider curriculum, aid student development and generate income for the department. The extent to which training facilities can provide the quality of research output needed by contemporary academic institutions remains in doubt. Current efforts in the area are no more than aspirational and should, therefore, be the subject of future research in the area. In an emotive article in 2004, Professor Peter Jones from the University of Surrey stated:

I refuse to accept that just because operational aspects of hospitality provision are didactic now, they always have to be. I refuse to accept that these subjects cannot be more intellectually challenging. I refuse to accept that they cannot effectively contribute to developing critical thinkers. In fact I routinely argue the opposite. (Jones, 2004, p. 7)

This paper provides some interesting new evidence to support the above statement. The challenge is to ensure that there is a sound pedagogical reason for the centrality of operational facilities within hospitality education for future generations. In a resource-conscious and research-focused HE environment this is always going to be problematic but not, perhaps, insurmountable.

Limitations and future research

This paper has presented the purpose of the training facility in a broad sense. There are, however, limitations to the research and these present opportunities for future researchers in the area.

The research did not investigate the extent of the usage of training facilities across different levels of the curriculum. A more holistic account of the activities of training facilities would perhaps indicate how the overall value to a greater extent.

Research into the overall cost-effectiveness of an in-house training facility is still required. Although all the institutions researched in this paper had chosen to re-equip, there was recognition of cost and the need to be cost-effective.

Finally, this paper presents something of an introverted account of training facilities within the UK. A research study with a wider perspective would be a valuable contribution to the area. In particular, an international study would provide more evidence of the purpose and effectiveness of training facilities, whilst a stakeholder-type investigation would give voice to the other parties that have an interest in the hospitality management degree, namely students and industry practitioners.

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