Stakeholders' views on the development of higher education hospitality programme in Bahrain: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

The hospitality and tourism industry in Bahrain is predicted to grow over the coming years with the development of new five star hotels, which will create new jobs to the Bahraini economy within the next 4-5 years. Currently there is limited provision of hospitality and tourism education, which is offered mainly at vocational level. This paper presents the challenges and opportunities for developing a hospitality and/or tourism programme in higher education in Bahrain. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders were conducted to explore the potential of such a programme in Bahrain. The findings suggest that there are skills gaps in two key areas, generic and soft skills. It also proposes that there is an opportunity to establish a hospitality programme at Bachelors level that should be supported with collaboration with an international institution to enhance the curriculum design and facilitate the programme development. Finally, public awareness is vital to support the image and the prestige of employment in the sector.

Key Words: *Hospitality, Tourism, Higher Education, Bahrain*

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Introduction

The Bahraini hospitality industry started growing in the 1980s when Bahrain was established as the new financial hub for the Middle East (after the relocation of several banks in Lebanon due to the civil war). Today, the hospitality and tourism industry is one of the main pillars in Bahrain's long-term economic development and diversification strategy known as "Economic Vision 2030" (http://www.bahrainedb.com). The latest data show that Bahrain currently hosts 115 hotels including 12 five-star multinational brands providing 3,193 rooms and 48 four-star with 5,327 rooms. The new luxury hotel developments in the pipeline include another 1,540 five-star hotel rooms by 2015 (Alpen Capital, 2012). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2013), with many plans to build infrastructure and transportation, the total contribution of travel and tourism to Bahrain's GDP is forecast to rise by 4.6% p.a. from $3.58 billion USD in 2012 to $5.98 billion by 2023, While these statistics are not a guarantee, some new initiatives and developments are already being rolled out to contribute to these figures, such as the development of more hotels and the introduction of higher education hospitality and tourism curricula.

Although the country ranks third in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) tourist arrivals (Bagaeen, 2013), Bahrain's hospitality industry is facing strong and growing competition from Dubai. The small UAE state has managed to be established as one of the world's top tourist destinations over the past ten years under the strong leadership of the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (Kampaxi, 2008). The hospitality and tourism industry in the region is also challenged by conservative Muslims who oppose the sale and consumption of alcohol, and support the implementation of Shariah law in hospitality and tourism, trends that are known as '*Halal Tourism*' and '*Islamic Hospitality*' respectively (IHS Global Insight, 2012; Scott & Jafari, 2010). Moreover, Bahrain's hospitality industry is dependent upon tourists mainly from Saudi Arabia, as since its inauguration in late November 1986, the most prominent catalyst for Bahrain's hospitality and tourism development has been the 26km King Fahd Causeway (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2008). After a dramatic drop in tourism arrivals caused

by the political unrest in Bahrain in 2011, the sector has returned to growth, and tourist arrivals are restored to pre-2011 levels (Alpen Capital, 2012). It is evident from the above that the context influences the path of tourism development in each country in the region.

The current situation in the Bahraini Hospitality Sector and hospitality education

From a manpower and human resources perspective, the private sector in Bahrain in general, and the hospitality and tourism industry in particular, has relied heavily for many decades on immigrant workers and expatriate managers. Bahrain as well as the rest of the GCC economies adopted the *rentier* economic model (Karolak, 2012) that relies solely on oil profits and distributes oil surplus among citizens in the form of free services and subsidies (Hertog, 2010). The depletion of oil reserves, the demographic change, and growing unemployment especially among young Bahrainis, however, has forced the government to implement a policy of Bahrainisation, which mandates that expatriates should be replaced by local workers and managers (Sadi & Henderson, 2005). In view to this, Table 1 shows the Bahrainisation requirements for the hospitality industry in Bahrain.

Table 1: Bahrainisation requirements in the hospitality sector

Activity code	Activity description	No	6-9 workers %	10-19 workers %	20-99 workers %	100-499 workers %	500+ workers %	Max allowed visas
5510	Hotels, camping sites	2	0	15	15	20	25	
551001	Five-star hotel	9	0	15	15	15	25	
551002	Four-star hotel	9	0	15	15	20	25	200
551003	Three-star hotel	9	0	15	15	20	25	100
551004	Two-star hotel	9	0	15	15	20	25	70
551005	One-star hotel	9	0	15	15	20	25	50
551006	Unclassified hotels	5	0	15	15	20	25	25

Source: LMRA (2012)

As a consequence, the development of the Bahraini hospitality and tourism industry was based on the presumption that its expansion would not only create new jobs (Bagaeen, 2013), but in contrast to the UAE and Qatar, would not require a massive import of foreign workers (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2008). However, the official statistics from the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA, 2012) show that in the past decade the vast majority of the newly created jobs in this industry went to expatriates. In this context, Louër (2008) argues that Bahrain is no different than the other GCC states, which rely on mass labour migration for the implementation of their development strategy.

Nevertheless, the hospitality industry in Bahrain struggles to maintain and grow its Bahrainisation rates. As shown in Table 1, Five Star hotels in Bahrain are responsible for meeting a 20-25% target of Bahraini staff, and they struggle to meet this quota (LMRA, 2012). Expatriate recruitment currently addresses staffing shortages at all levels of hotel employment, but attracting Bahraini staff remains problematic even at middle management level. Many locals because of the reputation of hotel bars, mixed gender staff and other features, perceive the hotel industry as an unattractive career choice that conflict with religious and sociocultural practices (IHS Global Insight, 2012). Even though these perceptions exist in Bahraini society, organisations such as the Specific Council for Training in Hospitality, Tamkeen, and the Ministry of Labour are working to alleviate the gaps through various funding initiatives and training support.

For more almost four decades the provision of hospitality training in Bahrain was offered at the Catering School in Muharraq. The government subsidised School stopped operating in 2007 leaving Bahrain with only one private vocational training provider in hospitality (Bahrain Institute of Hospitality and Retail, BIHR). In early 2013 the council was assigned the task of investigating the reopening of a catering school, which was previously run in Bahrain. Their study was conducted by KPMG and proposed the idea of international collaboration (Trade Arabia, 2013). If the Council decides to re-open the vocational hospitality school, they intend to completely rebuild a state-of-the-art facility. This action agrees with Rahman (2010) who claims that the shortage of qualified workers and the growing demand for trained skilled staff leads to a growing demand for the development of hospitality educational programmes, which should adequately prepare the workforce to meet the demands of the industry. In

addition, Sheldon, Fesenmaier & Tribe (2011) propose that there is a need for new paradigms of tourism education, and tourism educators should contribute to a productive world by developing a highly skilled workforce. Stuart-Hoyle (2003) similarly proposes that the most common purpose of tourism undergraduate programmes is to prepare students to work in the industry. Currently, there are no programmes in hospitality and/or tourism offered in higher education in Bahrain. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the potential of developing a hospitality programme in HE in Bahrain, by exploring and presenting the various stakeholders' views.

Literature review

Hospitality and tourism education received academic attention during the 1970s after a publication by Annals of Tourism Research under the theme "tourism education" in 1981 (Ayikoru, Tribe & Airey, 2009). Furthermore, there has been long debate about the knowledge hospitality and tourism courses should offer, as for many years the discipline has been vague and was not classified as a full academic discipline (Wattanacharoensil, 2014). Research suggests that the most important aspect of the development of hospitality and tourism educational programmes is the relevance of the curriculum to students' expectations and the needs of the hospitality and tourism industry. Hewitt (2006, p. 14) adds that the curriculum is considered as a course of study of a school. However, he continues that it is also important to consider the nature of the learner and practical social needs. If the purpose of hospitality and tourism education is to provide a starting point for the development of skilled workforce, then the dialogue with the industry and future students should be great (Ladkin, 2005). In reference to this, Riley, Ladkin & Szivas (2002) propose that tourism education has to balance 3 imperatives: the need to promote individual development, the need to advance knowledge and the need to be practical and relevant to the industry. At the same time, Casado (2003) proposes that hospitality curricula should be under scrutiny from educators, alumni, students, and industry professionals.

The hospitality industry is service oriented, hence it is important to consider the industry expectations and opinions. In view to this, Rahman (2010) suggests that hospitality curriculum should mainly focus on employers' perspective. In addition, Tribe (2002) and Morgan (2004)

propose that curriculum design in hospitality and tourism education is a complex construct of influences of all stakeholders such as students, employers and governmental bodies. Velo & Mittaz (2006) add that stakeholders' views should be continuously consulted in order to keep the hospitality and tourism curriculum abreast of the industry changes and norms. The content should reflect a balance of the demands of varied stakeholders (Felisitas, Molline & Clotildah, 2012). On the one hand, the hospitality and tourism curriculum in higher education should not be narrowed to vocationalism, as this "undermines genuine occupational preparation and also impoverishes the intellectual and civic roles that higher education can play" (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005, p. 16). On the other hand, it should not be too theoretical, as technical skills should also be developed (Chipkin, 2004; Woods, 2003; Casado, 2003). Tribe (2005) states that the lack of empirical research to base hospitality and tourism curriculum planning has been mainly addressed in general and in reference to the need of the industry. Some claim that the majority of the programmes are designed by educators who have little or no experience from the industry (McKercher, 2002). Moreover, students' motivation to pursue hospitality and/or tourism studies relies on their perception of the degree programme (Hearns, Devine & Baum, 2007; Christou, 2000). Thus, tourism education should not only rely on what the industry needs but also on the demands of other stakeholders (Airey & Tribe, 2005).

Moreover, standardisation of hospitality and tourism programmes appeared to be important especially in the UK environment. In view to this, tourism education should overcome its traditional focus and should be designed based on standards with a structured approach to curriculum development (Hatipoglu, Ertuna & Sasidharan, 2014). The curriculum should be context-related and not context bound (Smith & Cooper, 2000) and its planning should focus on philosophical questions relevant to the aims of education in addition to other sociological analyses (Wattanacharoensil, 2014), but still should be developed in such a way to produce graduates capable of making future innovations (Morrison & O'Mahoney, 2003), and university programmes relevant both for the present and future (Hawkins, Ruddy & Ardah, 2012). Therefore, a well-balanced approach is required to create a hospitality programme that emphasizes on the industry needs, as well as on the location and other local stakeholders' views.

Methodology

In order to explore both industry and student expectations of hospitality education in Bahrain, all relevant stakeholders were included in the sample for this study. The objectives of this research are to:

- Analyse current hospitality education opportunities in Bahrain;
- Investigate current recruitment needs in the sector;
- Identify resource support from educational institutions and government organisations;
- Explore the challenges and opportunities for the development of a hospitality programme in HE in Bahrain.

For the purpose of this paper a qualitative approach was used, as semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with various stakeholders in hospitality and tourism in Bahrain. Hotel managers (total 11 participants) were included to explore more about the need for hotel staffing, recruitment and training practices. Among these five were Human Resources and Training managers and five were General Hotel managers at 5 star hotels in Bahrain, as well as one manager at the Golf club. The Specific Council for Training in Hospitality (SCTH, 2 participants) was included to investigate their current actions and plans in reference to hospitality education provision in Bahrain. Government organisations, more specifically the Ministry of Culture, Under secretariat of Tourism (4 participants) were added as they influence curriculum design by creating initiatives. In addition, higher education institutions (2 participants) were included as they potentially may be the providers of a hospitality and/or tourism programme. Finally, a focus group was created with hotel employees (11 participants) who have been working in the industry for more than 3 years. They were selected amongst the hotels that participated in the study in order to investigate their perception and views of work in the hospitality industry. All employees were Bahrainis with prior experience in the sector. More details on the sample are available in Table 2.

The participants were asked to respond to 4 key areas such as to identify the educational opportunities of such a programme, the current and future skills of work in the sector, the future growth of hospitality education in Bahrain and to determine the most appropriate type / style of programme for the Bahraini context. Content analysis was conducted to identify any

key areas that concern those involved in hospitality management in reference to a hospitality programme.

Table 2: Sample of the study

Category	Stakeholder	Position
Hotel	Hotel 1 + Employees	Hotel General Manager Director of People Services Training Coordinator 3 employees
	Hotel 2 + Employees	Hotel General Manager 2 employees
	Hotel 3 + Employees	Hotel General Manager 2 employees
	Hotel 4 + Employee	Hotel General Manager Assistant Learning Manager HR Manager 1 employee
	Hotel 5 + Employees	Hotel General Manager HR Manager 3 employees
Council	Specific Council for Training in Hospitality	Chairman Executive Director
Club	Royal Golf Club	General Manager
Government	Ministry of Culture, Under Secretariat of Tourism	Undersecretary Special Projects Manager Director Statistics Manager

Findings

A summary of the participants' responses is available in Table 3. The participants in the study were asked to discuss the skills required to work in the industry. The skills identified were generic and soft, such as motivation to work. As per the SCTH there is currently a need of about 1000 managers, and a need for further training of hotel employees. Hotel managers identified as a major challenge the lack of appropriate training that has led to a gap in the above-mentioned skills and more specifically to the lack of human resource management,

communication, people and relationships skills, customer service and work ethics. They claimed that they are in need of recruiting Bahrainis that have the experience, the education needed for the industry, relevant work ethics, as well as the passion to pursue a career in the industry. Although funding is available from Tamkeen for in-house training, they proposed that relevant hospitality education should be provided as the industry is constantly growing and there is need for experienced trained staff.

Table 3: Summary of stakeholders' responses

Hotel Managers	Specific Council for Training in Hospitality	Employees	Ministry
There is general acknowledgement of the lack of a comprehensive hotel programme in Bahrain that incorporates both the vocational training as well as theoretical facilitated through a Bachelors degree. With a growing tourism industry, this may present an opportunity for such a programme	There are negative cultural perceptions of having a career in hospitality industry that can make it difficult to attract Bahrainis to the industry.	The participants in the focus group enjoyed many aspects of their careers, but there are also many alarming topics that they believe need to be addressed before the industry can grow such as; salaries, working hours and cultural perceptions. They believe that many Bahrainis have misdirected beliefs about the industry and this should also be addressed.	There must be an organized public relations effort in order to help improve the perception of locals on the industry and promote it as a viable career choice.
Even though several of the hotels have exclusive in-house trainings, they have found ways in which Tamkeen can fund them. The Five Star hotels have the intent to use any sponsorship and funding available to help grow their staff.	There are opportunities to support the hospitality sector in terms of education, but they should not overlap with what is already available in the market.		
The Five Star hotels do not currently need as much support training their current staff as much as they do with recruiting Bahrainis that have the experience or education needed for the industry as well as having the passion to pursue a career within the industry.	It can be difficult to encourage Bahrainis to have a career in the hospitality industry because of known factors of low salary scales and long working hours.		

Moreover, hotel managers reported that it is difficult to attract and retain sufficient supply of suitably trained employees. This is due to low wages and local people's perception of work in the industry. In addition, they proposed that they find it difficult to motivate staff to participate in further training, even though improved staff skills through training have the potential to increase their competitive advantage, increase productivity and their opportunities to advance their careers, as Velo & Mitaz (2006) propose.

The participants emphasized that a major challenge for working in hospitality establishments in the region is the perception of the type of work in the sector, mainly for females. This view agrees with Hawkins et al. (2012) study in Jordan, which is a similar to Bahrain context. They claim that Jordan's efforts to promote hospitality and tourism education are constrained by its poor image and a lack of understanding of the nature of work in the industry. Even the efforts made by the industry to change this perception are not appreciated by Bahrainis. Participants from the governmental organisation has proposed putting into practice a strategy that would generate awareness about the career opportunities that education and training programmes would create. They suggested targeting potential employees, existing workers, employers, young female Bahrainis and career counsellors in order to change Bahrainis' perceptions on employment in the hospitality sector. They claimed that it is vital to change the perceptions of Bahrainis about working in the sector, and to encourage greater investment by employers and individuals, otherwise the country will heavily rely on non-Bahrainis to fill the jobs. In view to this, Hawkins et al. (2012) propose that family decision-makers need to be targeted to improve the participation of women and youth. Similarly, the SCTH suggested that there are negative cultural and sociocultural perceptions of having a career in the hospitality industry, which makes it difficult to attract Bahrainis to the industry. Hindering factors that have been identified refer mainly to low salaries and the long working hours. They highlighted the fact that most of the unemployed Bahrainis come from a more conservative background; hence the perception of work in the industry is more negative amongst these potential employees. They proposed that hotels in Bahrain are currently not as interested in qualifications as they are in employees' attitudes. Moreover, they stated that also currently as per the salary schemes, qualifications do not necessarily mean a larger salary for Bahraini employees. In addition, based on the SCHT's official statistics, there is not much career progression, especially in 3-4 star hotels and employees can be stuck in the same job with the

same salary for years. Job opportunities in hotels are most likely to be found in administration, accounts, aales and marketing, and the health club/spa. In all of these areas the percentage of Bahrainis is relatively very low. Hence, they proposed that more Bahrainis should be hired in managerial positions that perhaps have higher prestige. Nevertheless, they should be properly trained within a higher education curriculum.

According to Leate (2013) the results of previous efforts to launch a campaign to encourage more Bahrainis to take up jobs in hotels and other hospitality establishments were not very encouraging. SCTH argued that there is an imperative need to encourage and persuade Bahrainis to enter the industry, which requires coordinated action from all the hospitality related stakeholders from both the private and the public sectors.

A focus group was conducted with hotel employees, in order to get a better understanding of how employees view work in the hospitality and tourism industry. The participants were asked a series of questions in order to learn from accomplished Bahrainis in the industry about how they have built their careers, what challenges (if any) they faced, as well as advice on how to promote this industry as a career path for Bahrainis. The participants discussed the positive aspects of work in the hospitality industry including the interaction with guests and meeting people from different cultures, from all over the world. They acknowledged the satisfaction of being able to help a guest and receiving positive feedback as being very rewarding and motivating. They also argued that working in hotels is not boring at all since every day presents new opportunities to learn and brings different problems to solve. Another benefit of working in hotels is job rotation in different departments. This provides a well-rounded experience for employees and helps them develop themselves and be more productive. With regard to the negative aspects of the job, cultural barriers appeared again on the top of the list especially for female employees. Traditionally the conservative Bahraini mentality holds that females should not work in hospitality as this is not considered to be an '*appropriate*' and respectable career. In addition, shift work makes it difficult to maintain a social life and spend time with family. The low salaries and the limited promotion and pay-rise opportunities seemed to be the main problem for Bahraini hotel employees. Some of the participants had attended training programmes in various hospitality institutes in Bahrain, including BIHR and Baisan. They stated, "*regardless of whether you have a diploma or not from these institutes, you start*

on the same salary as someone with no diploma". On the other hand, they proposed that the acquisition of a bachelor's degree might guarantee a higher entry-level salary and better position in some of the five star hotels. The participants also argued that it is challenging to study when you have a career in hospitality because the schedule is very demanding. Nevertheless, they confirmed the claim by hotel managers and stated that it is often the case that the luxury hotels send their employees on various trainings or courses during the year. Interestingly, they proposed the development of a collaboration programme where students could go to school and at the same time earn money by working at hotels as part of their studies. This view is in agreement with Giousmpasoglou (2012) who proposes that employees at managerial positions should hold relevant degrees with studies that include both theoretical and practical content.

In addition, hotel managers and more specifically the HR managers proposed that young Bahrainis are prepared to accept managerial positions, but they are reluctant to accept any service positions, especially those related with the Food and Beverage Department. In view to this, Sadi & Henderson (2005, p.252) argue that "promoting greater receptivity toward working in the service industries is a long-term process and may necessitate salary increases", but this action alone does not seem to be the remedy for the skills shortage in the Bahraini hospitality workforce as proposed by the Allen Consulting Group (2009). In addition, hotel managers argued that the removal and replacement of expatriates with locals hospitality graduates might not be feasible and could have a negative impact in the sector's Bahrainisation efforts because of the candidates' lack of preparedness and job related skills, which may lead to high employee turnover in the industry.

There was a general acknowledgement by the industry stakeholders of the lack of a comprehensive programme in Bahrain that incorporates both practical work related as well as theoretical aspects of hotel management, facilitated through a Bachelor's degree. The training and education providers suggested that there was a gap in the provision of training and certification as well as the provision of hospitality related degrees. Developing such specialised education and training programmes would assist in narrowing the skills and competencies gap amongst hospitality and tourism employees in Bahrain (Alpen Capital, 2012). Tayeh & Mustafa (2011) suggest that the perceived low status of hospitality as an

academic discipline in this region has caused many institutes and universities not to consider the introduction of new hospitality training programmes and education courses. Nevertheless, the education providers continued by proposing that the creation of these programmes should be facilitated with external partnerships with international reputable institutions that offer similar programmes along with an awareness raising campaign to potential students. Moreover, they claimed that the current prevailing work culture in Bahrain seems to be incompatible with the multinational hotel chains' work ethic. In view to this, they argued that certain Western work ethics and practices should be adapted or modified to suit the local culture, which could be a challenge for hospitality education providers. Like most of the youth in the GCC region (Sadi & Henderson, 2005), young Bahrainis have grown used to a comfortable lifestyle and take many privileges for granted; for those who wish to work in the hospitality industry it means that this attitude has to be challenged in order to match the demanding nature of the job.

In further reference to the content of the programmes i.e. in terms of type and style, it was proposed that the programme should integrate theory with practice, as internships were identified as a key element. These suggestions agree with many studies on the development of hospitality programmes. For example, Giousmpasoglou (2012) claims that facilitating hospitality related programmes requires more resources than other traditional study pathways do. Additionally, Pinto (2013) and Marinakou (2012) propose that hotel management programmes require labs for practical training and training kitchens in which hands-on skills are taught. Some reputable hotel schools are even responsible for running hotels or restaurants on their campus for training purposes (Airey & Tribe, 2005). The skills needed to succeed in such programmes can be broken down into vocational and theoretical skills. The most highly rated and known hospitality programmes contain a mix of both styles in order to produce graduates who not only know how to complete all of the chores involved in the industry, but also have the competencies needed to manage those functions and the teams of people delivering them. They combine sound theory and craft-based learning with professional internships. A typical programme would consist of semesters that have a balance of being on campus and gaining practical training through an internship with a hotel in line with international practice (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2013). Work-based learning provides hospitality students with comprehensive skills desired for employment in the

industry. These include people skills, communication, work ethics, understanding work culture and sense of professionalism among others (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2013; Martin, Fleming, Ferkins, Wiersma & Coll, 2010). The success of the internship programmes attached to the hospitality degree requires very good industry links, and the development of personalised relationships between faculty members, students and industry representatives. Another challenge identified by education providers was gaining the experience of applying skills in parallel with classroom studies, which is a crucial element of working in an industry such as hospitality. Graduates should be able to not only manage tasks, but also perform them on their own. Interestingly, education providers, hotel general managers and employees agreed on the above, which is an opportunity for the development of the content of such a hospitality programme. This proposal affirms a study by Acola (2006) who proposes that the hospitality and tourism curricula should meet both students' expectations and the needs of the industry, hence the inclusion of internships should be an integral part of such a degree programme.

Finally, the education providers and the SCHT highlighted the opportunity to explore the potential collaboration with a reputable hotel school or university. The on-going reform in Bahrain's tertiary education renders the need for an international collaboration and/or validation almost imperative (Karolak, 2012). Similarly, Knight (2011) suggests that a strong collaboration could also attract overseas students (especially from the GCC region) and thus enhances Bahrain's efforts to create an education hub. This model seems to work very well in the GCC, since all of the current existing hospitality programmes are either franchised or validated by European, North American or Australian higher education providers.

Conclusion

The hospitality sector in Bahrain is growing and tourism is one of the main pillars of growth in the 2030 vision in Bahrain. Although, Bahrainisation rates are low in the hospitality industry due to the negative perception of work in the sector, poor wages, long working hours, and working in an environment that can be incompatible with religious and/or cultural issues, many organisations are trying to support the industry and are in favour of the development of higher education hospitality programmes in the country. In the Bahraini context the

development and the provision of higher education hospitality programme faces great challenges as there is reluctance by locals to recognise the value of work in the industry. The opportunity for Bahrain lies on the support of government authorities and relevant bodies to tailor a programme to the industry needs and the professional skills required. The authors suggest that such a programme may contribute to the development and/or improvement of employees' skills and attributes, to the increase of professionalism and to sustain local communities' perception of work in the industry. The creation of a new hospitality degree requires the coordinated efforts from everyone who has a vested interest in creating new career paths for the talented young Bahrainis who really aspire to avail themselves of an exciting job opportunity in the hospitality industry. The programme should combine theory with practice, and should aim at developing these skills that the current sector is lacking such as communication, customer service and work ethics. Internships are found to be an effective medium to accomplish the above; employers and other stakeholders are found to be ready to contribute to the success of such a programme and can offer employment to hospitality graduates. The results of this study may benefit hospitality higher education providers in Bahrain in their effort to develop hospitality programmes, and those involved in human resource development in the hospitality and tourism industry in the country.

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