

EDUCATION

Managerialism and academic snobbery are eroding the soul of hospitality education but it's not too late to reclaim its purpose, argue Dr Charalampos (Babis) Giousmpasoglou and Professor Ioannis S Pantelidis FIH.

REALITY CHECK REQUIRED

For decades, the UK led Europe in postgraduate hospitality management programmes that combined academic rigour with the realities of service and leadership. It was about learning by doing, understanding people, experiences and what it means to serve. Those qualifications created generations of leaders who could balance business acumen with empathy and creativity.

We had a strong connection between academia and the industry. Training restaurants, live projects and partnerships with hotels and restaurants weren't extras; they were central to learning. That combination of theory and skills made hospitality education unique. Now only a small minority of such courses exists.

The problem isn't external; it's within universities. We're seeing what we call 'managerialism': the corporate logic that treats education like a business.

Everything is measured against financial targets, performance dashboards, publication counts and value for money indicators. It has turned educators into compliance officers and leaders into data managers.

For hospitality, that's particularly damaging. Our discipline is about people and practice, things that can't be captured on a spreadsheet. Successful labs, although cost heavy, deliver added value to universities, industry and society that is often difficult to measure in traditional financial terms. Yet hospitality syllabuses in many UK universities are under pressure to look like generic business degrees, stripping away the very experiential components that make them meaningful.

There's a long-standing bias in universities that views hospitality as "soft" or vocational, somehow less intellectual than finance or economics. That perception still influences funding, staffing and promotion decisions. Those who are removed from the sector do not understand the unique aspects that create psychologists, entrepreneurs and leaders of leaders.

Ironically, those with decades of industry knowledge – people who have led hotels or restaurants – are often sidelined because their research is applied, not theoretical. We end up valuing citation metrics over professional world impact, creating a system where hospitality education risks losing touch with its roots.

There are, however, still fantastic examples of prospectuses across the UK and Europe that stay true to our discipline's values, integrating practice with theory, maintaining close industry ties and celebrating the human side of learning. They're small fortresses, but they show what's possible.

The way forward is to reclaim our identity. Universities must recognise that hospitality knowledge is not lesser because it's practical. Reviving dedicated hotel schools, re-empowering departments, and valuing practice-based research are not nostalgic ideas; they're essential for renewal.

Universities should be proud of being practical. The ability to serve, to care, and to create meaningful experiences is as intellectually rich as any theory. We need to remind ourselves that hospitality is a deeply human endeavour.

And to students: never underestimate the value of learning through doing. The future of hospitality will be shaped by those who understand both people and performance, who see education not as a checklist, but recognise it as a craft. 🍷

Read the full critical review paper here: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2025.100581>

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