

## **Enhancing the employability of and level of soft skills within tourism and hospitality graduates in Malaysia: The Issues and challenges**

### **Abstrak**

The quality of tourism and hospitality graduates from the local universities in Malaysia has often been critical from the aspects of employability and attainment of soft skills, such as communication skills, social skills, mastery of the English language and thinking skills. This paper examines the key issues of graduate employability and their attainment of soft skills within the higher learning institution. It highlights the importance of soft skills and the lack of the same amongst graduates when seeking employment. Subsequently, it discusses the implementation and attainment of soft skills with reference to the tourism and hotel management programmes. It also points out that Malaysian local universities or educators must ensure the attainment of soft skills by graduates via teaching and learning activities, the application of the student centred learning approach and the provision of adequate opportunities for undergraduates to communicate, develop higher order thinking skills and solve real-life problems. The paper shares a conceptual framework of soft skills and methods as well as common approaches to develop soft skills among graduates; recommendations for enhancing graduate employability are proposed. It suggests that incorporating soft skills into the academic curriculum is vital. Simply, soft skills are perceived as critical skills for employment in Malaysia, as they enhance the employability of the graduates within the tourism and hospitality industry. Generally, the employers tend to employ a holistic human resource that is not only knowledgeable but also competent in both technical and interpersonal/ human skills. This implies that local universities must recognise that the core knowledge, professionalism and functions of tourism and hospitality management are vital to the employability of tourism and hospitality graduates. The challenges faced in enhancing employability include the pedagogy, implementation and assessment of soft skills by the teaching staff, quality and training of teaching staff as well as the perception of soft skills by the graduates. Aside from introducing soft skills

within the curricula, educators must ensure that the teaching and learning take into consideration the student centred learning approach and provide adequate opportunities for undergraduates to communicate, develop higher order thinking skills and solve real-life problems.