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*An employable graduate: essential awareness factors to the preparation of sport management practical experiences*

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**Abstract**

Managers in the sport management industry sector expect graduates from undergraduate sport management programs to have extensive practical experience and can demonstrate employability. The Australian-based study explored how practical experience can align undergraduate sport management industry sector learning with associated graduate employment. Specifically, the study identified awareness factors essential to the preparation of sport management undergraduates to undertake practical experiences and develop employability.

A job advertisement audit of 200 graduate-entry sport management positions stipulating practical experiences and a tertiary qualification were analysed. Findings revealed six industry awareness and four self-awareness factors. Each are associated with sport management industry sector employment and requisites essential to developing employability. Collectively, these factors formed a Pre-Condition Phase developed as a preparatory phase to the established Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984). Practically, twenty-two recommendations have evolved and are proposed to guide the SM industry and higher education sectors to collaboratively develop undergraduate employability through industry exploration, self-awareness, and practical experience.

**Keywords**

Practical experience, graduate employability, sport management industry, higher education

## Introduction

The increased global demand in sport, the individualised pursuit of sport and fitness activities, and recognition of health benefits associated, has shaped how sport is managed (Campos-Izquierdo et al., 2015; Hajkiewicz et al., 2013). Sport in Australia directly employs over 198,000 Australians in a variety of sport and related service roles demonstrating an increase of over 78,000 since 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). In addition, there are an estimated 2.3 million Australians occupying volunteer roles in sport (Wicker, 2017). The heightened demand in managing sport in Australia has influenced the increased number of universities and institutions offering undergraduate (UG) sport management (SM) programs (9 in 1988 to 16 in [2022](#)) and the subsequent enrolments and ensuing need for graduate awareness of the SM industry sector structure (Deane, 1992; de Schepper and Sotiradou, 2018; Zimmer and Keiper, 2021). Uncertainty however, of SM positions suitable for graduates exists. The general problem is the lack of consistent literature related to job classifications and standards associated with SM role functions in Australia, and the subsequent lack of associated knowledge provided within the higher education (HE) SM program curriculum (de Schepper and Sotiriadou, 2018; Emery et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2018). Consequently, graduates from UG SM programs are largely unfamiliar with SM industry sector expectations, structure, and operations affecting career choice (Barnhill et al., 2018; DeLuca and Braunstein-Minkove, 2016). Australian industry organisations such as [SportAccord](#) and the [Australian Sports Professionals Association](#), are dedicated to representing, engaging, and connecting groups from the sports industry. However, neither organisation is an industry accredited or industry governing body. In HE, the discipline of SM in Australia is represented by the academic association, [Sport Management Australia and New Zealand](#) (SMAANZ). As

such, the representation of the SM industry sector and the SM discipline within HE operate as separate alliances, portraying a disparity in unified and consistent industry roles and requirements (Miragaia and Soares, 2017). In Australia 80-90% of SM employers, for example, prefer a normative minimum of two years' practical experience of graduate applicants from UG SM programs, yet it is not uncommon for UGs to graduate with limited practical experience (Bradbury et al., 2021; Emery et al., 2012; Foster and Pierce, 2021). The term practical experience refers to work-related experience, either arranged as part of a course (practicum), undertaken on a voluntary basis or gained through paid employment (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007).

Our paper is organised as follows. First, is an exploration of the SM industry and HE sectors landscape in Australia. Following is an examination of SM graduate employment positions and respective industry requirements, noting the connection of workplace practical experiences. Subsequently, the preparedness of UGs to undertake practical experiences through practicum programs and develop employability is presented. Specifically, the existing collaborative efforts of the SM industry and HE sectors and the necessity of practical experiences to ensure UGs are employable upon course completion. Further, the theoretical underpinning is explored to develop the study's purpose and the collection methods and analyses adopted. Results are discussed presenting new theoretical and practical insights, connecting to the existing body of knowledge, and the development of recommendations for the SM industry and HE sectors. Finally, the study's limitations and recommendations for future investigations are presented.

## Literature Review

The competition for graduate jobs across all industry sectors, globally, has intensified employers' search for employable graduates who are a 'good fit' with their organisation and can adapt to the uncertainties of a rapidly changing future (Dinning, 2017; Ferns et al., 2019). According to McCrindle Research (2014), individuals will have 17 jobs/employer changes and five careers in one career lifespan (18-75 years of age), thereby placing pressure on HE programs to produce 'work ready' and competent graduates in their discipline (Dinning, 2017; Rufai and Rashid, 2015). Globally, the rise of the sport industry in the last 20 years presents a diverse range of sport career opportunities, influencing an increase in the enrolment numbers of UG SM programs (Lubisco et al., 2019; Siefried et al., 2021; Zimmer and Keiper, 2021).

In Australia, the competitive SM job market attracts highly qualified applicants from academic disciplines such as business and public health (DeLuca and Braunstein-Minkove, 2016; Siefried et al., 2021). There is a positive association between practical experience and graduate employability, and the application of subject knowledge, skills, and career development learning (Brown et al., 2018; Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Smith et al., 2018). However, studies have shown that sport managers are dissatisfied with the level of HE graduates' work readiness (DeLuca and Braunstein-Minkove, 2016; Zimmer and Keiper, 2021). Accordingly, there is a need to establish a shared vision between industry and HE on what it is to be 'work ready' and employable in specific industries (Dinning and Brown, 2016; Foster and Pierce, 2021; Kinash et al., 2018). The problem is further typified by specific industry standards, accreditation and job classifications that are yet to be formally identified as core to the SM discipline and aligned with the SM industry and HE sectors (Emery et al., 2012; Foster and Pierce, 2021; Keiper et al., 2019).

Formal recognition and engagement of competency standards for industry-specific task performance (accreditation) provide perspective on the expectations of graduates entering the profession, and relevant courses of study (Barnhill et al., 2018; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Mathner and Martin, 2012). Available industry accreditation standards assist Australian universities to develop curriculum and associated practicum programs, to assess UG and new graduate performance (Ingvarson et al., 2006) and provide external accountability to deliver quality education (Yiamouyiannis et al., 2013). Accreditation standards focus on UGs' respective knowledge of the complexities of an industry sector. Oliver (2010), however, notes that HE providers are rarely benchmarked from an industry perspective, in terms of whether their graduates possess the requisite industry employability skills and attributes. Further, Kinash et al., (2016) contend that HE disciplines should know the respective career options and outcomes and be specific regarding career pathways.

Despite the injection of a suite of subjects covering sport finance, sport administration, sport marketing, and practicum into UG SM programs, UGs are still reporting that guidance lacks on navigating the industry (de Schepper and Sotiriadou, 2018; Emery et al., 2012). At stake is the potential disconnect between a graduate's expectations of the industry and reality (Barnhill et al., 2018; Jackson and Wilton, 2017; Zimmer and Keiper, 2021). Rosenberg et al. (2012) contend that students enter universities expecting to acquire the requisite knowledge, skills, and attributes to perform their jobs upon entering the workforce and to advance their careers. Similarly, employers expect that a university education will equip graduates with employability skills related to those required to perform their jobs (Dinning and Brown, 2016; Rosenberg et al., 2012). Both viewpoints emphasise that accurate industry expectations are likely to influence

occupational choice based on the expected satisfaction of an UG's career (Barnhill et al., 2018; Jackson and Wilton, 2017; Zimmer and Keiper, 2021).

In HE, UGs experience career development learning by taking responsibility for the direction and advancement of their own careers and interpreting the meaning of career success relative to their own unique criteria (Healy et al., 2020; Law and Watts, 2003). The Decision Learning, Opportunity Awareness, Transition Learning and Self-Awareness (DOTS) Model (Law and Watts, 2003), adopted by educators worldwide, incorporates career development and career development learning strategies (Andrews, 2014). DOTS engages learners to focus on self-learning, the world of work (career development content) and to establish the essential skills to navigate a successful and satisfying career (career development process) (Law and Watts, 2003; McMahon et al., 2003).

A distinction between employment outcomes and employability can be portrayed (Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), 2016; Kinash, et al., 2016). Fundamentally, graduates need a strong foundation of industry knowledge, respective skills, and attributes to be productive managers and effective leaders, and to identify personal brand that influences perceived career success, employability, and job performance (Gorbatov et al., 2021; Khedher, 2019; Majeski et al., 2017). Essentially, learning occurs when knowledge is created from a combination of comprehending experience and conveying the learning, rather than from instruction (Bergensteiner et al., 2010; Kolb, 1984).

In particular, experiential learning emerges through the transformation of [practical] experience (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle highlights the significant role practical experience in combination with education, plays in the learning process and the notion that 'learning how to learn' enhances the learner's relativity to these experiences and graduate outcomes (Kolb, 1984; Kolb and Kolb, 2018). The Experiential

Learning Cycle highlights the benefits of holistic educational experiences to assist learners to navigate practical experiences through a four-phased cycle of experiencing (Concrete Experience), reflecting (Reflective Observation), thinking (Abstract Conceptualisation), and acting (Active Experimentation), and is depicted by a four-phased cycle (Peterson et al., 2015; Vinales, 2015).

Practical experiences undertaken in UG SM programs provide an important learning environment including practice that is informal, contextual, and social (e.g., in terms of customer interaction) (Bradbury et al., 2021; de Schepper and Sotiriadou, 2018). Adapting student learning from the classroom to the workplace is one which assists UGs in SM to make the connection between coursework and the workplace (Bradbury et al., 2021; De Luca and Braunstein-Minkove, 2016). Subsequently, employers believe UGs with practical experiences as best prepared, equipped, and marketable, and are more likely to be offered full-time employment opportunities as graduates (Brown et al., 2018; Ferns et al., 2019). In Australia, Sotiriadou (2011) reported that 65% of UG SM programs provide practicum subjects, noting that these subjects were more likely to be an elective. The paradox of Sotiriadou's finding is that a year later, Emery et al., (2012) found that 90% of SM employers surveyed expected a minimum of two years' practical experience. In contrast, in the USA at UG and graduate levels, mandatory practicum (internship) is integrated into the SM curriculum for 86% of UG and graduate programs; and 77% of UG, Masters, or doctorate SM programs feature an experiential learning component (Brown et al., 2018). Twelve Sport Management Program Standards were developed by the Sport Management Program Review Council (created by [North American Society for Sport Management](#) and the [National Association for Sport and Physical Education](#)) (Bradbury et al., 2021). Included is a mandatory requirement of UGs to complete a minimum 400 hours of

practical experience following junior year in preparation to enter the industry (Bradbury et al., 2021). This requirement emphasises the necessity of mandatory practicum in UG SM programs to avoid a mismatch of employer expectations relating to UG industry preparation (Emery et al., 2012; Keiper et al., 2019).

Job classifications are the industry-specific constituents of graduate employability and respective perceived industry requirements, which act as an informal base of the requisites expected by industry employers of university graduates (Keiper et al., 2019; Kinash et al., 2016). In Australia, [Sportspeople](#) (a sport specialist recruitment service) conducted organisational reviews and workplace surveys continually since 1999 (Emery et al., 2012). Pre-identified job classifications representative of the Australian sport, fitness, and aquatics job markets have evolved from findings (Sportspeople, 2022).

To explore job classifications specific to the graduate employability of UG SM students, we conducted an Australian-based study. The purpose was to identify position prerequisites which would determine factors associated with graduate employability. In doing so, awareness factors essential to the preparation of SM undergraduates to undertake practical experiences and develop employability were identified. Our study forms the first stage of a larger three-staged study to determine how practical experience can align the learning, development, and subsequent capacity of graduates from UG SM programs. Once awareness factors are identified from the job advertisements audit (stage one), findings will allow us to explore employer perceptions of these factors (stage two), and further distinction on the composition of graduate employability skills and attributes (stage three).

## Method

A quantitative method was adopted based on a job advertisement audit in the state of Victoria, Australia. SM industry sector positions available to graduates were examined in the form of job advertisements to identify position prerequisites which would determine factors associated with graduate employability (Emery et al., 2012). Victoria was the selected state due to the crowning of Melbourne as the sporting capital of the World (Rovere, 2016), with an abundance of sport facilities and home to 37 of the 96 recognised national sport organisations head offices (Sport Australia, 2021). The audit, which commenced with a pilot audit, examined job advertisements and corresponding job descriptions.

### Pilot Audit

The initial focus of the three-week pilot audit was to confirm criteria and terminology that represented UG SM graduate/entry level jobs (Emery, et al., 2012). Key job websites were identified by the relevance of the positions advertised to the criteria of this study. The pilot audit also identified the most appropriate process to streamline data-collection. Job title and job description terminology influenced the distinction of graduate or entry-level jobs (Reeves and Hahn, 2010; Kennan et al., 2008).

**Data collection.** The criteria for the advertised positions collected weekly included job location (Victoria, Australia) that were graduate-entry level and stipulated the prerequisites of practical experience and a tertiary qualification (or specific degree). The key words ‘sport’ and ‘recreation’ were used to identify appropriate SM positions. The term ‘practical experience’, and the associated specification of a ‘tertiary qualification’ or specific ‘degree’, guided the job advertisement audit collection, and identification of the titles that indicated entry-level positions (Field, 2009; Reeves and Hahn, 2010). Data was

recorded onto an MS Excel spreadsheet into corresponding key themes representing specific details of the advertised position.

**Data analysis.** Data from the key themes were exported from the MS Excel spreadsheet to IBM SPSS 22. The data were analysed adopting text coding and descriptive statistics with a content analysis to detect patterns (industry awareness factors) and themes (SM job classifications) of the SM industry sector. Data were validated by adopting a cross-check of content with the authors of this study to justify the key themes (Harwood et al., 2015; Pradana et al., 2019). Position titles, in terms of seniority and titles specific to a graduate or entry level position were identified. The terms manager (unless used in combination with the terms senior or general), coordinator, assistant, leader, or officer, characterised the graduate or entry-level positions (Figure 1) and were key to the data collection in the audit.

[Insert Figure 1.]

## **Audit**

Position advertisements with corresponding job descriptions were collected weekly over a six-month period to capture current postings. In total, 12 sport-specific and non-industry-specific websites were accessed to source job descriptions. The selected sport-specific websites (e.g., Sportspeople, Sport and Recreation Victoria, and Sport Australia) were prominent sporting organisations offering job recruitment services. The non-industry-specific websites (e.g., Seek, Jobseeker, and Career One) represented major, recognised Australian sites (Kennan et al., 2008) that actively promoted sport employment.

**Data collection.** The publicly accessible job descriptions that met the criteria were downloaded, screened for duplicates (Lubisco et al., 2019; Reeves and Hahn, 2010), and recorded on a summary page noting websites visited and dates accessed. Job descriptions were numbered and stored in an electronic folder in corresponding job number order. Annual salary identified in the job descriptions was calculated for an hourly or part-time rate or identified from a specific salary band.

**Data analysis.** In the absence of job classifications aligned to the SM industry, the Sportspeople job classifications provided a reference point based on its distinguished representation of the broad sport industry in Australia (Smith and Smolianov, 2016). There were 27 Sportspeople classifications used to categorise advertised industry positions for sport, aquatics, and fitness. The audit in this study identified six from the 27 classifications which portrayed SM graduate-entry level positions requiring practical experience.

1. Administration/Finance/Operations
2. Coaching/High Performance
3. Customer/Membership/Athlete Services
4. Development/Participation/Programs
5. Events/Competitions
6. Marketing/Media/PR/Communications

The job description analysis associated with these six classifications revealed requisite applicant skills, knowledge, and applicable experience. Respective content was grouped according to the associated position function/activity that the job classification represented, not the SM sector (e.g., local council) it represented (Javed et al., 2015; Zhu et al., 2016).

Following the audit, data were exported to IBM SPSS 22 for analysis. Textual data, derived from the job advertisements and corresponding job descriptions, were numerically coded (Lubisco et al., 2019; Pallant, 2013) for analysis e.g., Job Classification 1 = Administration/Finance/Operations. These descriptive statistics were presented as frequencies and percentages. Mean and SD were calculated for salary and experience (years).

## Results

Two hundred position advertisements with corresponding descriptions were collected in the six-month audit (2015). Nine key themes were generated using frequencies and descriptive statistics, each providing industry information and requirements: organisation type, graduate-entry terms, job status, salary, required tertiary qualification, required experience (type), experience (years), Working with Children Check (WCC) and required training and requirements.

A typology was created of the number and range of organisations advertising SM roles with the requirement of practical experience and a tertiary qualification. The results revealed state sporting associations (19%), local government (13%) and sporting clubs (11%) as the main organisation types which advertised the highest number of positions. Predominantly, these organisations service local sporting communities in a range of positions targeted at entry-level graduates. The key graduate-entry terms identified in respective advertised position titles included manager (36%) and coordinator (34%), followed by officer (20%). A total of six key graduate-entry terms were identified from our study and are listed in Table 1.

Identified from the job status and salary data was that most of the positions advertised were full time (65.5%). The job descriptions related to 70% of the advertised positions did not state a salary amount thereby restricting attempts to gauge an average salary for graduates from SM programs. However, 8% of the remaining job advertisements representing graduate-entry SM positions attracted the highest salary bracket of AUD 61,000-70,000.

Specific industry disciplines, which relate to the required tertiary qualifications expected of a potential job applicant, were mentioned 368 times indicating that several job descriptions identified more than one qualification. Among these mentioned, 32 individual disciplines were identified depicting a multitude of essential knowledge and skills that can be applied within a SM workplace from interrelated industry disciplines. The required tertiary qualification of sport management (18.47%) was the most requested ahead of recreation (10%), business/business management (7.88%), and marketing (7.6%).

Sixty-five specific experience categories were identified from the 534 times a required type of industry experience was mentioned in the 200 job descriptions portraying a myriad of underlying knowledge, skills, and personal attributes valuable to the workplace. Many of the job descriptions listed more than one required type of experience. Sport (5.76%), event management (5.58%), marketing (4.46%), customer service (3.72%), project management (3.35%), and sport/business administration (3.35%) followed as the most sought-after experiences representing varying working environments. Three of these top six required experience in management/an ability to lead others. Although low, these statistics highlight the broad sport management working landscape to create a realistic picture of the extent of industry expectations required to perform jobs in sport management.

The number of years of experience required/desired of applicants was not stated in 164 (82%) of the 200 job descriptions collected. In consequence, this lack of transparency affected our ability to gain a strong picture of the required years of practical experience required by a graduate to enter the SM industry sector. The required number of years of experience identified by the 36 respondents ranged from one to two and a half years and is presented as an overall mean and standard deviation in Table 1. The most requested additional requirements and training were driver's licence (18.27%) and first aid (14.55%) respectively, providing specific context to the nature of the sport working environment. The top six results for each key theme identified from the audit, with associated number/percentages in descending order, are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

*Job Advertisement Audit Results*

<b>Key Themes</b>	<b># (%)</b>
<i>Organisation Type</i>	<i>#/200 (%)</i>
State sporting association	38 (19)
Local government	26 (13)
Sporting club	22 (11)
Sports and entertainment	21 (10.5)
Peak/National sporting body	20 (10)
YMCA	19 (9.5)
<i>Graduate-Entry Key Terms</i>	<i>#/200 (%)</i>
Manager	72 (36)
Coordinator	68 (34)
Officer	41 (20.5)
Leader	14 (7)
Assistant	4 (2)
Graduate	1 (.5)
<i>Job Status</i>	<i>#/200 (%)</i>
Full time	131 (65.5)

Not stated	37 (18.5)
Part time	23 (11.5)
Casual	7 (3.5)
Flexible – Full time or part time	2 (1)

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<i>Salary (AUD)</i>	<i>#/200 (%)</i>
Not stated	140 (70)
\$61,000-\$70,000	16 (8)
\$41,000-\$50,000	14 (7)
\$71,000-\$85,000	12 (6)
\$51,000-\$60,000	10 (5)
\$86,000-\$110,000	8 (4)

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<i>Required Tertiary Qualification</i>	<i>#/368 (%)</i>
Sport management	68 (18.47)
Not stated	63 (17)
Recreation	37 (10)
Business/Business management	29 (7.88)
Marketing	28 (7.6)
Sports administration	19 (5)

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<i>Required Experience (Type)</i>	<i>#/534 (%)</i>
Sport	31 (5.76)
Event management	30 (5.58)
Marketing	24 (4.46)
Customer service	20 (3.72)
Project management	18 (3.35)
Sport/Business administration	18 (3.35)

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<i>Experience (Years)</i>	
Not stated	82%
Mean	1.04
SD	2.79

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<i>Working with Children Check</i>	<i>#/200 (%)</i>
Not stated	113 (56)
Yes	69 (35)
No	18 (9)

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<i>Additional Requirements and Training</i>	<i>#/323 (%)</i>
Not stated	95 (29.41)
Driver's licence	59 (18.27)
First Aid	47 (14.55)
Police check	24 (7.43)
Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)	22 (6.82)
Advanced level coaching	20 (6.19)

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### **Discussion**

A positive association between practical experience and graduate employability, through the application of subject knowledge, skills, and career development learning (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Law and Watts, 2003) has been supported in this study. The nine key themes revealed in the audit results were translated to form six associated industry awareness and four self-awareness factors. In our study industry awareness factors refer to the individual elements associated with SM industry sector employment recognised as essential to developing employability. Self-awareness factors refer to the elements required by UG to understand and develop a sense of self that represents a unique individual (Law and Watts, 2003). Collectively, these awareness factors are essential for UGs of SM programs to understand prior to undertaking practical experience.

The six industry awareness factors to emerge were: job classifications; advertised employment; structure of industry sector; interrelated industries; additional requirements and training; and job status and salary, from the key themes identified from the audit. Combined these established an Industry Awareness component. The four self-awareness factors identified were: degree knowledge, skills, and application; emotional intelligence; career development learning; and reflect, assess, and evaluate. These awareness factors emerged predominantly from the three key themes identified from the audit: required

tertiary qualification; required experience (type) and the additional training and requirements. Combined, these awareness factors comprised the Self-Awareness component. Both components formed the Pre-Condition Phase prior to undertaking practical experience.

### **Pre-Condition Phase**

The Pre-Condition Phase was developed to interconnect and theoretically expand the Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984). This phase prepares UGs for practical experiences and becomes the preliminary step to the Experiential Learning Cycle that students address prior to undertaking practical experience. More specifically, the two components within the phase, Industry Awareness and Self-Awareness, complement and potentially enhance learning developed during practical experiences.

The two components of Industry Awareness and Self-Awareness align with Opportunity Awareness and Self-Awareness elements of the DOTS career development framework (Law and Watts, 2003), and are specific from a SM perspective. Industry Awareness and Self Awareness components build on DOTS to encourage UG exploration of industry and [them]self, to strengthen their ability and apply learning through workplace practical experience. The Pre-Condition Phase, preceding the four phases of the Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984), allow UGs an opportunity to understand and consider the composition of industry, respective opportunities, and build self-capacity and practical experiences (Figure 2).

[Insert Figure 2.]

**Industry Awareness component.** Results from our job advertisement audit revealed that sport managers assume graduate applicants have industry awareness. Six specific industry awareness factors were identified as essential for UGs of SM programs to understand prior to undertaking practical experience and comprise the Industry Awareness component of the Pre-Condition Phase.

The identification of industry awareness factors supports the notion that clear and detailed job advertisements are important, providing individuals with a starting base from which to make an occupational choice based on the expected satisfaction of a specific career (Jackson and Wilton, 2017; Keiper et al., 2019; Mathner and Martin, 2012). As such, accurate depictions of an industry will reduce the potential for inconsistencies between an UG's expectations and reality (Nicholas and Handley, 2020) and will also provide guidance on how to correct general industry misconceptions (Brown et al., 2018; Mathner and Martin, 2012).

Recently in SM, employers have identified specific skills they desire SM graduate applicants to possess (de Schepper and Sotiriadou, 2018; Emery et al., 2012; Tsitskari et al., 2017). Yet, absent from these studies is an industry accrediting body in Australia, to guide the SM industry, UG SM courses and students on what standards are required. Identified from our study as one of the industry awareness factors is [six SM] 'job classifications'. These classifications are the first in Australia to outline the qualifications, skills, job knowledge, and responsibilities specifically for the SM industry sector (Emery et al., 2012; de Schepper and Sotiriadou, 2021).

The job title terminology from advertised employment can determine graduate entry-level positions within the sport industry (Emery et al., 2012; Kennan et al., 2008; Reeves and Hahn, 2010). Our study identified the graduate entry-level job title terms of assistant,

officer, coordinator, leader, and manager. Coupled with the identification of job classifications, these key terms provide new industry awareness reference points for graduates to navigate 'advertised employment', another of the six industry awareness factors.

The 'structure of industry sector' awareness factor related to SM workplace settings. State sporting associations and local government were identified in our study as the two main SM sectors that advertised positions, and which provide participation/sporting opportunities for community-based organisations. Despite these positions focusing on SM graduates, a cross-discipline interconnection became evident and formed the foundation of the 'interrelated industries' awareness factor. Marketing and business/business administration for example was in the top four discipline qualifications of graduate applicants highly sought by SM industry sector employers. In addition, the required experience type, excluding sport [sector] experience that were considered the most desirable were event management, marketing, and customer service. Findings signify the need for cross-discipline knowledge and skills required by SM graduates. In particular, event management, marketing, and customer service have previously been identified as desirable across many industries and represent the requisite skills that employers stipulate are closely connected and highly transferable across various industry sectors (FYA, 2016).

The types of requirements and workplace training employers seek from a SM graduate, in addition to their UG degree, were identified in our study and form the 'additional requirements and training' awareness factor. These include a driver's licence that facilitate employer assurance the graduate can undertake roles at sporting associations that service clubs across multiple and/or large geographical areas (Hoye et al., 2018). A Working with Children Check and Police check indicate the age and composition of the

participant base utilising services from non-profit community organisations, most commonly at a sporting club or school sport setting (Eime et al., 2016). Training includes advanced level coaching certification, Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and first aid pending on the workplace environment that is typically staged in a physical setting and/or where large groups of people gather (Kolar and von Treuer, 2015).

The job status of most (65.5%) graduate-entry positions advertised were full time as identified in our study. This could indicate the sport sector employer recognition of the importance of graduate-entry positions in workplace structures, which is positive based on the reliance the SM sector has on volunteers (Hoye et al., 2019; Wallrodt and Thieme, 2020). Conversely, the identification of salary is an important factor influencing the career choice of graduates based on the expected satisfaction of a specific career (Mathner and Martin, 2012). Combined, 'job status and salary' formed the final industry awareness factor.

**Self-Awareness component.** The Self-Awareness component embraces the identification of four awareness factors identified in our study to enhance an UG's practical experiences. These four awareness factors align a graduate's ability to develop and apply key competencies and skills, through reflection of their subjective practical experiences. Fundamentally, factors which help contextualise learning from practical experiences include an associated awareness of the self and are essential in any industry (Nicholas and Handley, 2020; Parker and Ohly, 2008).

The 'degree knowledge, skills and application' awareness factor evolved from the audit which identified requisite qualifications relating to 32 industry disciplines from the graduate-entry SM position advertisements. The large number of disciplines identified is indicative of the notion that individuals who train for one job will gain transferable skills

that are practically applicable across 13 other jobs due to the similarity of the skills employers' demand (FYA, 2016). Strongly connected with the qualification disciplines outlined is the required experience (type) identified from the audit.

Specifically, the 'career development learning' awareness factor was determined from the underlying knowledge, skills and personal attributes required from the top six experience types: sport, event management, marketing, customer service, project management and sport/business management. Our study's findings support the notion that career development learning requires self-awareness to understand the working environment to establish the essential skills, to transition into the workplace and to follow a satisfying career (Nová, 2015; Yorke, 2006).

Links to emotion [emotional intelligence] learning is depicted in the range of experience types identified from the audit were that three of the top six require experience in management (event, project, and sport/business) which requires a self-awareness to lead others. Hence, this connection is how the 'emotional intelligence' awareness factor evolved. More specifically, creating the link between opportunities and self-capability to make decisions and apply these learnings from practical experience (Jackson and Wilton, 2017).

The 'reflect, assess, and evaluate' awareness factor evolved from the additional training requirements identified from the audit which proposed the important certifications or qualifications essential or desirable in the SM workplace. These findings illustrate that applicants who recognise workplace requirements or gain additional training demonstrate an ability to reflect, assess, and evaluate; all are products of practical experiences undertaken. Each contribute to the development of a social awareness of the organisational

context (de Schepper and Sotiriadou, 2018) in relation to individual capabilities and to making informed career choices (Jackson and Wilton, 2017; Mathner and Martin, 2012).

### **Recommendations**

Broadly, the notion of five career changes and 17 jobs in one career lifespan (McCrindle, 2014) reflects significant change, unpredictability of industry transformation and associated job roles (Ferns et al., 2019). It further reflects the demand for innovative, adaptable, and resilient graduates, on a global scale (Ferns et al., 2019). Importantly, producing employable graduates requires centralised, extensive, and thorough collaborations between industry and HE (Ferns et al., 2019; Pollard et al., 2015) and is supported by our study's findings. This would foster UG preparation for a career within SM through practical experience to enhance experiential learning. Hence, recommendations have emanated from our study related to each awareness factor of the Pre-Condition Phase. Each encourage a collaborative approach and provide guidance to managers from the SM industry sector and coordinators of UG SM programs to enhance an UG's practical and theoretical understanding of the SM industry sector.

#### **Industry Awareness**

Twenty-two recommendations were identified for the Industry Awareness component. The recommendations include 11 for managers from the SM industry sector and 11 for coordinators of UG SM programs. Collectively, the recommendations highlight the provision of UG SM program employability outcomes should involve extensive planning, implementation, and collaboration with managers from the SM industry sector (Table 2). Essentially, such collaborations can enhance the employability of graduates

which is a desirable outcome for the industry and HE sectors (de Schepper and Sotiradou, 2018).

**Table 2***Industry Awareness Recommendations*

Pre-Condition Phase	Awareness Factors	Recommendations	
		SM Industry <i>Managers from the SM Industry Sector</i>	Higher Education <i>Coordinators of UG SM Programs</i>
Industry Awareness	Job classification	Create job descriptions that are thorough, distinguish function, indicate appropriate job classification and length of experience desired.	Introduce six job classifications with examples of job roles, organisations, clients, and workplace settings.
	Advertised employment	Provide a clear organisation background and role purpose on job description. Consider job description terminology used to indicate graduate-entry level positions. Articulate key tasks, responsibilities, and internal and external collaborations.	Educate how to deconstruct job descriptions. Educate how to relate to entry-level job descriptions. Promote range and intricacies of expected SM roles.
	Job status and salary	Indicate salary level in advertised job descriptions.	Educate about industry expectations: time fractions and salary in a range of jobs in the three SM sectors (commercial, non-profit, and public).
	Structure of industry sector	Provide practical opportunities for UGs to experience a SM workplace setting. Represent the SM sectors through engagement with higher education.	Provide opportunities for UGs to undertake practical experiences within SM workplaces settings. Identify SM sector operations and service provisions. Identify employment pathways of the three SM sectors.
	Interrelated industries	Provide practical experiences in a range of SM functions within various departments to showcase transferable workplace skill sets.	Instruct how to recognise, transfer, and apply relative skills from one industry to another.

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	Provide practical experiences to showcase industry professionalism, internal and external collaborations, partnerships and working relationships.	Outline benefits of using critical reflection for UGs to recognise transferable skills across sectors.
Additional requirements and training	Clearly indicate additional requirements and training in advertised graduate-entry level job descriptions. Induct and educate UGs about OHS procedures, workplace operations, policies, procedures and provide employee introductions.	Address UG safety in the workplace, specifically within physical sporting environments, risk assessment, liability, and duty of care.

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## **Self-Awareness**

Nine recommendations were identified for the Self-Awareness component. Four are for managers from the SM industry sector and five for coordinators of UG SM programs. By recognising the four awareness factors and associated recommendations (Table 3), managers from the SM industry sector and coordinators of UG SM programs, can contribute to the personal and professional preparation and development of UGs. Strong industry and HE collaborations can foster social and preparatory skills to further enhance graduate employability (de Schepper and Sotiriadou, 2018).

**Table 3***Self-Awareness Recommendations*

Pre-Condition Phase	Awareness factors	Recommendations	
		SM Industry <i>Managers from the SM Industry Sector</i>	Higher Education <i>Coordinators of UG SM Programs</i>
Self-Awareness	Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills	Work with coordinators of UG SM programs to understand practicum requirements and expected outcomes.	Collaborate with managers from SM industry sector to deliver practicum opportunities aligned with course learning outcomes.
	Career development learning	As an Alumnus, keep connected with the alma mater to showcase SM industry, opportunities, and pathways.	Track university SM Alumni. Collaborate with SM program lecturers in all year levels to offer course career development options.
	Emotional Intelligence	Consider and map the EI and other leadership traits of practicum supervisors.	Educate what constitutes EI, and how to enhance, when undertaking practical experiences.
	Reflect, assess, and evaluate	Collaborate with coordinators of UG SM programs to gauge feedback processes and evaluation of graduate employability/competence.	Map course subjects including self-reflection, assessment, and evaluation within a range of learning environments to demonstrate graduate employability.

## Conclusion

Our study's findings highlight the necessity of UG knowledge of the SM industry sector and themselves to prepare for practical experiences. The significance of direct industry practical experience is reinforced in theoretical employability frameworks (e.g., Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Rosenberg et al., 2012) and an Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984). The formation of a new Pre-Condition Phase (Industry Awareness and Self-Awareness components) includes six industry awareness and four self-awareness factors. The awareness factors introduce UG learning from the perspective of gaining preliminary industry and self-awareness before practical application within the workplace and throughout the four phases of the Experiential Learning Cycle. Specifically, the awareness factors collectively form the foundation of an industry profile and signify a pathway to the attainment of graduate employability through practical experience.

As competition for employment within the SM industry sector has increased significantly over the years, so too has the demand for SM practicum opportunities where employers can observe and contribute to the development of necessary workplace skills of UGs (Brown et al., 2018; Zimmer and Keiper, 2021). Findings from our study, namely the Pre-Condition Phase, acts as a starting point (stage one) for a larger, three-staged study. The industry and self-awareness factors identified in this Pre-Condition Phase determine how UG preparation to undertake practical experiences can align their learning, development, and subsequent competence in a SM workplace environment. The following two stages of the larger study will address employer expectations and what they perceive as 'work ready', and how this can be achieved in UG SM programs. In doing so, these perceptions will build the reliability and trustworthiness of the data and the development of recommendations to encourage SM industry and HE sector collaborations to develop knowledgeable graduates who are aware of the industry and their employability.

Limitations of our study include the geographic collection of data, specifically the collection of Victorian-based job advertisement data from national recruitment websites. The collection and audit of job advertisements explored the landscape of the SM industry sector in the state of Victoria (Australia) with Melbourne as the world's sporting capital (Rovere, 2016), thereby geographically limiting the number of audited job advertisements. In addition to this limitation was the absence, in most job descriptions collected, of the required years of experience and salary range of the advertised positions. This lack of transparency affected the conclusions derived from the findings. Another limitation related to the length of time that has passed since the job advertisement audit was conducted. The rapid growth of sport and subsequent increase in demand for UG SM programs over the last seven years may have affected the job criteria within advertised positions (Hoye et al., 2018; Lubisco et al., 2019), potentially prompting an increase in full time and/or part time positions advertised and the prerequisites of applicants (Lubisco et al., 2019). Hence, a broader range of job criteria, including those related to practical experience for graduates in SM positions may now be appropriate. It does however provide a benchmark for future research.

Future research could build from the six job classifications identified in our study to explore the range of opportunities advertised for graduates of HE SM programs. Globally, this is noteworthy, based on the limited research relating to SM industry sector expectations of employable graduates that specifically define job classifications, industry standards, and alignment of SM curriculum and learning. Future research could also explore the unification of SM academic associations (e.g., SMAANZ, [World Association of Sport Management](#), [Commission of Sport Management Accreditation](#)) and industry associations (e.g., SportAccord, Australian Sports Professionals Association) to pilot/implement the Pre-Condition Phase. The purpose of a unification would be to develop global standardised and aligned job classifications, industry standards and a commitment to build practicum career

pathway opportunities for UG students. Finally, the Pre-Condition Phase could be piloted in future research to industry disciplines other than SM, offering practicum programs. The awareness factor recommendations can provide guidance to corresponding industry and HE sectors on how these factors can be adapted and implemented to their respective UG cohorts.

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