Happy New Year everybody. Those of a lucky enough to be in employment and returning to work after the festive break, will no doubt face ongoing difficult times as the UK economy still seems to be stuck in a deep economic rut.

We hear more and more golf clubs are struggling to stay afloat and some radical measures are having to be taken to keep the business going.

The GTC sincerely hopes that employers look to maintain and improve the standards offered at their clubs by investing in staff development.

At the majority of golf clubs, certainly in Europe, a small team of multi-skilled operators, led by a qualified competent Course Manager has managed to work its way through previous recessions (showing my age now!).

The British greenkeeper education and training system supports those employers willing to invest in staff skills with Government funding being available through the Apprenticeship Scheme and other funding initiatives.

The Scottish and Welsh Governments have introduced schemes to support clubs in considering recruiting new apprentices and more recently the UK Government has proposed a Youth Contract, which again is designed to give employers funding to support the employment of apprentices.

Scotland has Employer Recruitment Incentives and Flexible Training Options available and while it is often difficult to keep track of new initiatives such as these and they are often subject to change at short notice we do encourage employers to contact their Quality Assured Centres for the most up to date information.

Greenkeepers themselves can also apply for funding for Scholarship and Bursaries available through organisations such as BIGGA and The R&A as well as individual funding initiatives such as the LIA in Scotland.

I hear more and more stories of professionalism by Course Managers when developing their course maintenance and development budgets for their employer to consider.

"Making the case" for new equipment, materials and staff isn't easy at the best of times but all of these skills can be gained through training and a well presented case can engage an employer especially when they see the projected benefits from the proposals.

While we would always prefer golf club employers to recruit sufficient full time staff to maintain and manage the golf course to the highest possible standards we also have a tradition of using part-time and volunteers to do the Course Manager/work Greenkeeper.

The standards now expected at the majority of golf clubs are at levels which demands on both employers and their employees have never been greater.

Why have standards been set so high? Clearly golf courses chosen for the televised tournaments ensure adequate resources are provided for their staff to present excellent playing surfaces for the leading golfers in the world to show off their skills, but without knowledgeable and skilled greenkeepers, the game at all levels would undoubtedly suffer.

The GTC has maintained a career structure which can be used for apprentice greenkeepers to progress but also for every other person employed or volunteering to play their part on and off the golf course.

I know many of today’s top Course Managers have to learn so many skills far beyond the apprenticeship and together, with helpful comments from these Course Managers who have stepped up to becoming General Managers, we must now ensure our Quality Assured Centres and the Training Providers support the next generation, with quality education and training programmes aligned to the National Occupational Standards recently agreed for the sector.

How can we ensure these training courses are available?

The National Occupational Standards cover craft, supervisory and management skills and the knowledge required and are written in a format which can be transferred into short training courses or full qualifications.

The GTC promotes both formal and informal education and training for both greenkeepers and golf club employers.

The National Occupational Standards are sometimes better explained as UNITs and all can be delivered through training courses but to date mainly used to cluster Units together to make up vocational and college based qualifications.

So whether you are an apprentice, assistant or deputy greenkeeper, Head Greenkeeper, Course Manager, volunteer or Chairman of Green, the GTC can assist you to have a meaningful contribution to supporting your golf course business aspirations.

The GTC Quality Assured Centres are available to assist employers access contact all of the new Government funding from Apprenticeships, Youth Contracts to other schemes as they become available to assist trainees develop their skills and knowledge and for employers to employ “more hands”.

Check out the National Occupational Standards and the GTC’s Quality Assured Centres and Training Provider network on the GTCs website www.gtc.co.uk.

Happy New Year! I can’t believe another year has passed – where did 2011 go? Rachael and I wish you all health, wealth and happiness for 2012.

The focus this month is firmly on Harrogate Week and specifically, for the LAD department, the Continue to learn education programme.

Continue to Learn at Harrogate Week
Harrogate Week kicks off the year in grand style with the Continue to learn education programme running from Sunday 22 to Thursday 26 January. For those of you that haven’t booked yet, fear not, you can book up to Wednesday 11 January 2012.

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