

The flags of 12 nations were on display at BIGGA House on 15, 16 and 17 April when 24 delegates from Belgium, Britain, Canada, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Switzerland and the United States attended the World Conference on Greenkeeper Education and Training.

# World Education Conference



Above: Back row: Philippe Mallaerts (Belgium), John Van Hoesen (Netherlands), Clive Osgood (BIGGA), Clus Detlef Ratjen (Germany/FEGGA), Martyn Jones (Myerscough), Neil Thomas (BIGGA), Paulo Croce (Italy), Ken Richardson (BIGGA)  
 Centre: Sami Collins (BIGGA), Margeir Vilhjalmsson (Iceland), Kate Entwistle (STRI), Jaqui Atkin (Canada), Sergei Dolmatov (Russia), Gilbert Ayer (Switzerland), Gordon Child (BIGGA), Stal Bo (Norway), Daniel Ward (GCSAA), Dimtrie Boutyrin (Russia), Dean Cleaver (FEGGA)  
 Front Row: Carol Borthwick (Elmwood), Elliott Small (Chairman BIGGA).  
 Not in Picture: Paddy Holahan (Ireland), David Golding (GTC)

In his welcoming remarks, the Chairman of BIGGA, Elliott Small, welcomed delegates and said that 'although the countries represented may differ in culture and be separated geographically, the basic principles of greenkeeping are the same all over the world. Therefore, it must follow that greenkeeper education and training should also be similar. He hoped that the gathering together, over 3 days, of representatives from so many countries could help to bring the world of greenkeeping closer together.

The first afternoon looked at two differing (or so we thought) approaches to training, the British Experience and the North American Experience.

The session on the British Experience was led by David Golding, Education Director for the Greenkeepers Training Committee (GTC). David said that the British model of greenkeeper training was a useful model for other countries to look at but the industry was working on the model continually to improve it.

David went on to describe the structure of the GTC, how it is

funded and managed. He showed how the Technical Committee fitted into the structure and illustrated its role and stressed that the GTC was an employers' organisation.

He stressed that all British qualifications were related to Government Standards for both vocational training (work based) qualifications and work related qualifications and went on to describe the roles of lead bodies, awarding bodies and training providers.

He described the structure of Vocational Qualifications. He stressed that the qualifications belonged to the industry and were based on skill i.e. the ability to do the job but also included knowledge requirements. To assess candidates required qualified industry assessors and the GTC had trained over 700 assessors, the highest number in the Land Based Industries. David showed how all greenkeepers could achieve vocational qualifications even if they had been in the industry for many years.

David then went on to describe work related qualifications and said how colleges were making these courses, which

include a first degree, more accessible to people in work by providing them on a distance learning basis.

David was followed by Carol Borthwick, from Elmwood College, who illustrated the facilities of Elmwood, stressing that the main area of operation was greenkeeper training, golf course management and golf course design. She showed an impressive list of facilities and showed how they were used for training purposes.

Carol showed how the college had strong links with the R&A, the GTC, BIGGA, the Scottish Golf Union and a number of colleges and universities. She then described the structure of courses in Scotland and highlighted that all courses were modular which allowed greater flexibility.

Elmwood's connections with the rest of the world was of great interest to the delegates and Carol described how the college was working with the Chinese to develop greenkeeper training in China by giving students the skills and knowledge to be able to set up their own training courses 'in country'.





Following a brief input from Martyn Jones, of Myerscough College on some of the differences between English and Scottish Colleges and on the facilities at Myerscough, Daniel Ward, Curriculum Manager from the GCSAA described the approach to training in the United States. Daniel showed that there are as many myths about education and training of superintendents in the US as there are about US golf courses being mini Augustas. He explained how the whole structure of education and training in the US was being changed by the introduction of the Professional Development Initiative (PDI). Many US Superintendents saw PDI as a threat and there was a high level of opposition. PDI had combined what the Superintendents felt was the job with the requirements of golfers and with golf club owners to come up with a list of competences (the ability to do the job and the knowledge to go with it). Superintendents can assess their competences against a plan and from the results, they can judge what training is required. The scheme has led to a massive change in the way that education and training courses are presented and in the content of seminars, courses and workshops.

The new system gives credit for on the job training but leaves assessment to individual superintendents.

Jacqui Atkin, Professional Development Manager with the Canadian Superintendents' Association (CGSA) said that she hoped that she would be able to get as much out of the conference as she could to help in her own quest for knowledge. The CGSA has the objective of getting all Canadian superintendents up to the National Occupational Standard. The standards are based on what a superintendent is expected to do. The Association is also looking at ways of presenting training eg. college, seminars, on course, Internet etc.

The first afternoon showed that three different countries had very similar ideas when it came to greenkeeper/superintendent training ie they all were looking at competence. How competence was achieved and assessed was approached in different ways but the underlying theme was ability to do the job against National Standards.

Day 2 began with a brief recap before delegates split into 4 groups to discuss the points raised and to exchange ideas before returning to present group solutions to greenkeeper training problems.

#### Points of concern were:

1. No access to college in many countries with limited number of golf courses.
2. Funding of training.
3. Language problems.
4. Non standardisation of training and job specifications.
5. Limited opportunities for student exchanges.
6. Legislation. (Planning, pesticides, water)
7. Educating employers.
8. Status of greenkeepers/

#### superintendents.

#### Solutions presented were:

1. Use technology to improve dissemination of information.
2. Use technology to translate information.
3. Use international support/co-operation to change/prevent the effects of legislation.
4. Produce a common framework of standards and have regional variations around it.
5. Educate the educators and the employers.
6. Look for greater collaboration.
7. Standardise titles and job specifications.
8. Access funding.

Agnar Kvalbein, Principal at Gjennestad Horticultural College in Norway closed the morning session with the Norwegian approach to greenkeeper training. He said that their research on both sides of the Atlantic had shown that competence was the key but that knowledge was an important part of competence. The further education system in Norway differed from that in Britain and from that in the US. Therefore, his college had designed a course that was based on attracting full time students who would be taught theory in golf clubs and skills on golf courses. They hope to develop a pool of greenkeeper assessors and to open up training and qualifications to existing greenkeepers.

The afternoon session began with Ken Richardson outlining the proposed continuing professional development scheme for BIGGA members, which is due to be launched in July. The scheme is intended to encourage members to continue learning throughout their careers ie. lifelong learning. It is hoped that it will not only develop an individual's skills and knowledge and raise the status of all greenkeepers but also allow golf club officials to compare and contrast individuals when recruiting new staff and improve playing conditions for golfers.

Daniel Ward followed with a detailed look at the GCSAA's Professional Development Initiative. The Professional Development Initiative was being undertaken to improve the knowledge skills and abilities of the professional superintendent. It is hoped that this will lead to:

- Increased salaries
- Enhanced job security
- Intensified recognition as a key member of the golf course management team.

The PDI model, shown above, shows that the process is continuous ie golfers' needs define competences which identify the need for education which leads to marketing opportunities etc.

The GCSAA is, currently, matching their curriculum to their gap analysis, developing their curriculum to match needs and assessing the standards of external trainers.

Although suffering from some early problems, the GCSAA feel that PDI is

the best way to ensure that the superintendents of the future have the skills and knowledge necessary to maintain their golf courses.

A fairly heated discussion then took place on 'Who should pay for greenkeeper training'. All delegates had very strong opinions on who should pay and gave details of who did pay for greenkeeper training. Those paying for training currently were:

- Individual greenkeepers/superintendents.
- Governments through grants etc.
- Golf club owners.
- Associations with help from sponsorships.
- Federations and Unions.
- The R&A

Mr Gordon Child explained that British Golf Unions contributed funds to greenkeeper training through at a rate of 8p for each registered golfer. He also explained that if each golfer paid £1 into greenkeeper education then all greenkeeper training would be free. The delegates came to the conclusion that it should be individual golfers who should pay for greenkeeper training. They use the golf course and expect high standards of maintenance, which is impossible to achieve without high quality training.

The final day began with briefings on the BIGGA Master Greenkeeper Certificate and the Certified Superintendents Schemes in Canada and the United States. Both the CGSA and GCSAA had similar certification systems which were also similar to the BIGGA Master Greenkeeper Certificate. However, the MGC Standards were higher. Delegates felt that it should be easier for Master Greenkeepers to become Certified Superintendents of CGSA and/or GCSAA and vice versa.

Ian Grady, Regeneration Manager from Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, then gave a very informative talk on European funding, basing his talk on work done to establish a greenkeeping academy at Bowring Golf Course, home of Tommy Givnan, the 1999 TORO Student of the Year. Ian made it very clear that funding was available from Europe for a variety of projects. Knowsley had accessed funding to establish a greenkeeping academy at Bowring and 12 students were currently under training. Ian said that funds were still available for a wide range of projects and pledged the support of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council to anyone wishing to make a bid for funding.

Technology was the byword for the next presentation given by Tony Frascina an expert in distance learning. He showed that a number of methods could be used to train greenkeepers at a distance eg. in countries that did not have their own training system. Simulation, video (on CD, DVD or tape) and the Internet could all be adapted for greenkeeper training, however, Tony also said that paper eg. books etc could still be useful in certain circumstances. Delegates felt that current

#### Professional Development Initiative Model



technology using CD, DVD, video, TV and the written word could be useful to allow countries with a small number of greenkeepers to gain access to training. They also agreed that the Internet would be a useful, low cost training aid once speed of access was improved.

The penultimate session of the conference was on work permits, visas, job swaps and exchanges. It soon became apparent that it was easier to travel from Europe and work in a different country than it was to come to work in Europe. Martyn Jones and Carol Borthwick had a wealth of experience of placing student greenkeepers at colleges in the US and had attracted some students from outside Europe. The general feeling was that it would be difficult to set up an international exchange scheme, however, all delegates said that they would give all possible help in individual cases.

The final session was led by Elliott Small and came up with a number of outcomes/commitments. These were:

1. Link all Internet Sites to all other relevant sites.
2. Use e-mail to issue news letters, updates, forthcoming events, training opportunities etc.
3. Continue to make contact through meetings of smaller groups eg. colleges. Ensure that the same standards are set, worldwide. Attempt to standardise job specifications. Attempt to standardise job titles. Hold more 'virtual' meetings using eg. chat rooms, video conferencing, telephone conferencing. Hold further International meetings 'as required'.
4. Exchange information on public relations measures. Attempt to improve status of greenkeepers/superintendents.
5. Exchange magazines and journals.
6. Make teaching material available.
7. Allow access to members areas on Internet site for association officials.
8. Attempt to make Internet sites multi lingual.
9. Develop distance learning packages.