

Introducing a course policy

I very much enjoyed a short visit to Harrogate and meeting so many old friends after a number of years. Discussions, debates on generalities and technical subjects over a beer, a coffee or in the dining room left me with the profound impression of a major change in the profession of greenkeeping since I had last been involved.

Now there is so much confidence and total command of the subject and the ability to communicate precisely and convincingly. Much of this has to be due to the educational programme so well run by BIGGA and others. But it also owes something to the support of clubs as well, of course, to those who have taken up the challenges which faced them.

We all know that every course and club is different. But I was surprised to hear of so many common problems. And yet one of the tools to overcome many of these problems has not been taken up as strongly as I had thought. Even in the March issue of Greenkeeper International Chris Haspell from Denmark and Barney Wright both refer to it. I am talking about the Course Policy - Chris calls it a Plan - and although we got it going some ten years ago it has not been executed as widely as I had believed. The advantages of such an approach supported by Committees and agreed by members, are substantial.

- It clearly defines roles and responsibilities of Committees, Secretaries, and Course Managers
- It simplifies communication with members and avoids misunderstandings
- Ensures continuity and avoids piecemeal decisions
- Improves morale and efficiency of greenstaff
- Establishes a code of conduct of all on the course which enhances safety

If you are still not convinced read Chapter 6 of Malcolm Peake's "Confessions of a Chairman of Green".

Duncan McGilvary has made some excellent points which will surely be followed up. If the implementation of a Course Policy needs a little help Ed McCabe or myself are available if contacted at our club, Brokenhurst Manor GC.

Arthur King, Lyminsteron

Email your news, views and letters to:
scott@bigga.co.uk

A right to reply from Denmark

Having just read the February issue of Greenkeeper International I feel I need to reply to three of the letters written in the magazine.

I would first of all like to thank Alex McCombie for his kind words regarding the article that I wrote in the January issue of Greenkeeper International and also the positive reaction I received from colleagues at Harrogate. It appears that it has made people realise that the future is not about green is beautiful but the grasses that we are trying to grow and our goal must be to achieve greens that can survive with limited fertiliser, water and no chemical control. This will become the reality in the UK in the near future and if you have 100% Poa greens you should start worrying now and make that change.

Alex is right in that Education is the key if golf members are to understand what needs to be done to ensure quality greens in the future when you have no chemical control.

Imagine the scenario. You have poa greens, no fungicide and it is October. It has been raining for two weeks and is 14 degrees. You have a serious outbreak of fusarium. What can you do? The answer is nothing except watch as 50% of your green is taken out by the disease. Now who will be blamed for the poor state of the greens? You of course and your job is on the line as your greenkeeping abilities are questioned.

The above scenario is the reality now here in Denmark except through educating and communicating with

our members they accept that the greens will have problems until we eliminate the poa. Are your members ready to accept the same?

I should also like to thank Richard Penley-Martin, Secretary, Stoneham Golf Club, for his comments and making me aware that the Secretary is responsible for running the whole company and not just one part of it. This is not the case at many clubs today.

I am however happy to say that outside of the UK European clubs are run differently and that Course Managers are allowed to solely manage the golf course which is the reason they are employed in the first place and at our club the Club Secretary has absolutely nothing to do with the running of the golf course and I answer directly to the Board of Management.

I would like to make Richard Penley-Martin aware that after years of ex RAF employees taking on the Secretary's role at golf clubs it would appear that at forward thinking clubs experienced Course Managers who have also gained management skills through education courses put on by BIGGA are now taking over the running of golf clubs as General Managers which can only be good for the future of any golf club having an expert in golf course management communicating to members on a daily basis.

Finally, I have to thank the Happy Head Greenkeeper, Leslie Howkins of Cleethorpes Golf Club, for his let-

ter. I am sorry to hear that the attitude of people like myself and Duncan McGilvary bring on problems ourselves because we stand up for what we believe in and what is in the best interest of our profession. I am afraid that I must be working in a different profession to Leslie. If you go back to Duncan's original letter he talks about, "Don't rock the boat" and "Take the salary and do as you are told" and here is a greenkeeper who readily accepts these statements and says he is happy.

Remember that we are custodians of our golf courses for only a short space of time and it is our duty to manage and leave that golf course in the best possible condition for the next generation of golfers and also the next Head Greenkeeper. But who would like to take over after Leslie?

"If they want slow, bumpy greens that they can stop the ball on with a driver and don't aerate them as it makes them miss so many putts who are we to argue."

Leslie goes on to tell us that this is where all his skill, knowledge and experience is used and then tells us that he accepts that the course is not aesthetically pleasing or that he is not producing a good golf course and we are accused of bringing problems on ourselves!

Here is the perfect example of one man being led and not leading.

Ian C Tomlinson, Course Manager,
 Rungsted Golf Club, Denmark

Ian gives thanks for Stateside trip

I would like to thank Bernhard & Company and BIGGA for allowing me to be part of the team of delegates that visited Orlando this February. The trip was a great success, it was an experience not to be missed and very educational, it was fascinating to compare golf course in America with those in Britain. I had the pleasure of speaking to many Golf

Superintendents from all over the US and it was nice to hear that they hold such high regard for the courses in Great Britain. I have already spoken to a lot of greenkeepers throughout my section telling them of the visit and how beneficial it was.

I have planned some talks at our golf meetings this year and I will be talking to various Course Managers

when I go to assess their lads involved in their NVQ's.

Please also pass on my thanks to all the team for the co-operation that went on behind the scenes between Bernhards and BIGGA.

Well done everyone.

Ian Willett, Course Manager,
 Thorpeness GC

Playing with others' lives

I read with interest the letter by Barney Wright in the March issue re. "Respect". Greenkeepers have always had to put up with members knowing better than them, but I have found over the last decade or so that it has become worse.

Our profession must be one of the few which is criticised by everybody. You can go into any clubhouse and there will be a set of members who

know just how the course should be run. These members hold court and people tend to listen to them.

Greenstaff take more flack than other golf club staff. You cannot educate these people. If you put on an open night and ask the club agronomist to talk they stay away, but the next day they are back holding court. These people are playing with others' lives.

The job is hard enough without

sniping from your own lines. More and more good greenkeepers are leaving the trade every year taking with them years of knowledge but as has been said in the bar many times, "anyone can cut grass".

There are more good members than bad ones, it's just the good ones say nothing.

K. Heslop, Head Greenkeeper,
 Brancepeth GC, Durham

Legislation is the key

Re Richard Penley-Martin's letter in February's issue. Just a few observations. You are a manager and you understand that your Head Greenkeeper is as well. Good, that's the way it should be. I have been in greenkeeping for nearly 30 years, 23 at my present club Denbigh. In the past, and this is tongue in cheek, a Secretary had to have the right accent, drink the right whisky and carry out the wishes of the committee unconditionally. That is not now the case. In the time I have been in my present job I have seen a dozen Secretary/Managers come

and go they have all been good men and I have had a good working relationship with all of them. They have all made it their business to understand the greenkeeping side of things. They have left because they weren't allowed to manage. Secretary/Managers and Head Greenkeepers do have good relationships because our associations keep us informed of all legislation etc.

Gone are the days when old Tom can climb a ladder to clean the gutters of the clubhouse and golf clubs now need truly professional people to run their affairs

both on the course and in clubhouse who should be paid accordingly.

Which brings me back to my original letter. It will be legislation that forces the way the average members' club is run, this is why I feel there aren't as many volunteers as before, they are starting to realise where there's blame there's a claim and who in their right mind wants to take up a position with out pay that could end up with them on the wrong side of a court case.

P.S My dad was in the RAF.

Dave Goodridge, Denbigh Golf Club

Sharing the knowledge

I have been reading the letter from Mr T. A. Smith in this month's magazine 'In defence of NVQs' and I feel it deserves some sort of response.

I could not believe the comments Mr Smith made about keeping information from the club members on how we maintain the golf course and mocking record keeping and report writing, indicating for those greenkeepers to get out on the course and do some work, then finishing the statement with the comment 'if they don't ask then don't tell them'.

Is this the year 2002 or is it 1802? These comments and attitudes are out dated, untrue and have to change or greenkeeping as a professional industry will never be taken seriously. Science and industries can only progress with the sharing and understanding of knowledge. I feel it is our duty to share the knowledge we have with not just people in our industry but also the people who keep our industry alive - the paying customer.

The comment stating that a little information in the wrong hands can be dangerous is perfectly true. However, it is our responsibility to educate the uneducated in such a way that they understand what the hell it is we are talking about. At the golf course I work on we have an information board (The greenkeeping board) in the clubhouse right outside the pro-shop. It was put in this location to encourage everyone who comes into the building to read it. On this board we have such information as a weather forecast for the week ahead (taken from the met office website), rainfall records from the past two years in bar chart form for easy comparison, the Course Manager's report for the month ahead stating what work is likely to be carried out on the golf course. There is a photograph of every greenkeeper who works on the course with their title underneath so everyone actually knows who we are. There is a section headed 'Green keeping methods and techniques in which every month I write a short report on an aspect of greenkeeping, such as Hollow Coring,

explaining in layman's terms the reasons for the operation. In the past there has been headings such as 'The top 10 questions asked to green staff by golfers' and 'Aeration - what it is and why we do it' to name but a few. This sharing of information has been nothing but a great success with golfers and visiting guests alike show their appreciation for the work we do.

It is not dangerous to share knowledge if it is shared correctly. I agree with Mr Smith with his comments that people do not want to know the exact science behind an operation; this is why you must explain in a language the non professional can understand and appreciate. This sharing of knowledge has given the members and guests to the golf course an insight into the skilled profession of greenkeeping and the comments such as 'why do you always have to do that now' are vanishing. The feedback we have received at committee meetings has been remarkable and very positive. The age old impressions of the greenkeeper as the man who just cuts the grass is disappearing and we are being looked upon as qualified professional people which surely can only benefit this profession.

Knowledge and education is the key for any type of progression in this industry and it is extremely important that we all understand that the NVQs are not the only way forward. It is clear by reading the magazine month after month that the NVQs are the flavour of the month where further education is concerned. It was quite disheartening to read the comments on the very next page stating that the Higher National Diplomas and Higher National Certificates can breed people who know how to do the job on paper but might not be able to do it in reality.

This may be true to some extent, but I have worked with people with NVQs who also can't do the job very well. This may be down to poor training and just getting bums on seats at colleges, 'get them in, get their money, and pass them. I have worked with people in the past who's NVQ level 2 training

on weed identification consisted of a quick walk around the golf course with the lecturer pointing at the weeds and telling 25 students what it was - and that was it... or the level 4 which consists of one visit a year from your tutor to see how you're getting on, where's the training? This letter is not about putting down the NVQs or any other type of training but I would like to state that they are not the be all and end all of further education and that for an organisation such as BIGGA to point out that the HNC student may not be able to do the job is an unfair statement. This is also unfair to the student who has undoubtedly studied hard for the course.

I have completed NVQ training and I have also completed the HNC and found both of them to be extremely worth while courses. At this moment in time I am one year into my MSc in Sports Surface Technology at Cranfield University. I decided to go for the MSc rather than the other courses on offer because of the high level of teaching and the fact that it is recognised world wide as a top qualification.

The fact that this high standard of qualification even exists in our industry is a huge step in the right direction for our industry.

This profession is moving forward, lets all start singing from the same hymn sheet and recognise that all the different qualifications on offer to the greenkeeper have their benefits and this industry does not revolve around just one. There is a qualification out there to suite each individuals' career aspirations be it NVQ, HND, HNC or MSc, all of which have their own merits and all will undoubtedly increase one's knowledge and understanding of the job to what ever level you feel you can handle. Gaining knowledge and sharing knowledge surely can only be a positive way forward for us.

If we do what we've always done we will get what we always get - lack of respect. Let's move on.

Ian Chenery, Assistant Course Manager, Woodbury Park Hotel G&CC

Huge thanks to well wishers

At 9am on the 22nd January this year I had two appointments, one with a surgeon's scalpel, and the other with the opening of the BTME. It seemed ironic that both should be exactly the same day and the same time as each other. I had always said that I would never miss a BTME, but on this occasion I had little choice. However, as days went by I became very much aware of another aspect of BIGGA membership, that of camaraderie, and the bond that runs through greenkeeping and our Association. I received so many cards, letters and phone calls from members and staff wishing me well, that I lost count, but I can assure you that every one was very much appreciated, as was the rum from Devon and Cornwall Section, and the box of fruit from the South West & South Wales Region. I wonder how they knew what to send.

I would like to thank every one of you for the kindness shown, you will never know how much it meant to me and Marion to know how many of you took the time and trouble to send your best wishes. I am getting fitter by the day and will soon be back among you all. Thanks again.

Gordon Child, Churston, South Devon

Textron thanks

On behalf of myself and all the others who attended the GCSAA Show in Orlando Florida this year, I would like to extend a big thank you to Textron. The show was very enlightening especially for those of us who have never had this opportunity in the past. The hospitality, accommodation and indeed everything else during our stay was second to none. The group focus meetings were interesting and helpful to both Textron and their customers and I am sure will go a long way to ensuring more improvements and innovations in the future.

Ross Wilson, Course Manager, Parasampia Golf & Country Club

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