

Key Skills corner

Reply to Daniel Lightfoot's letter in May's magazine

I am sorry that the Key Skills Corner has caused you embarrassment. Key Skills are an essential part of N/SVQ Level 2 for people under 25 years of age and include Communications, Calculations and IT. Greenkeeper International is meant to be informative and educational for all members at all levels and information on written English may or may not be of use some of our members. Finally, the English Language continues to develop and rules that may have been extant 10 or 20 years ago may have changed eg. all abbreviations used to have full stops between each letter eg. B.I.G.G.A. whereas it is now acceptable to write BIGGA.

Reply to Colin Mumford's letter in May's magazine

As Vocational Qualifications are worked based and show what the holder can do under work conditions, they tend to be the preferred qualification in most industries. Greenkeeping is no exception and, out of a total of 2817 greenkeepers currently in training, 2157 are working towards N/SVQ qualifications. I agree that NC,ND, HNC, HND and degree qualifications have a relevance to greenkeepers and I also agree that they may be equivalent to Vocational Qualifications if they are coupled with relevant experience. You may have formed the opinion that my article placed less importance on NC, HNC, HND and degree qualifications but that was not my intention. Greenkeepers and the greenkeeping industry are well served by a wide range of relevant qualifications, but, as my article tried to make clear, it is up to head greenkeepers and course managers to decide which course or courses is most relevant for themselves and their staff. Finally, I was a little baffled about your comment about attending courses on a part time basis as all VQ courses are attended part time as assessment must be 'at work on a number of occasions'.

Ken Richardson, Education and Training Manager, BIGGA

Note: Due to problems outwith BIGGA's control the email system hasn't been working properly intermittently over the last month. Apologies if your letter hasn't appeared as we may not have received it at this end. I would be delighted if you would resend any letters which you had expected to appear this month and apologies for the inconvenience. **Editor**

In defence of the Higher National Diploma

With reference to the April issue of the magazine, I was pleased to read the letter written by Ian Chenery. I fully endorse Ian's comments and wish to portray my experience in trying to fulfil an ambition of making my passion of golf into a career.

At the age of 18 and on completion of my A-levels I attended a full-time Higher National Diploma course in Golf Course Management at Cannington College. The three-year course consisted of six monthly study periods followed by six months working on a Golf course to gain valuable practical experience. In reading Ian's letter it is disappointing to learn that BIGGA were not aware that HNC/HND courses also provide those, like myself who wish eventually to aspire to managing golf courses, the opportunity of gaining practical experience. Perhaps this lack of recognition is a contributory factor to

Vandalism – What can you do?

The day after Easter Monday Jon Selwood, Course Manager at Abridge Golf Club in Essex, returned to work after his Easter break. It started off as a normal day but during the afternoon Jon walking past the 13th green, the nearest to his sheds, noticed a zigzag strip of discoloured grass right through the heart of the green and from one end to the other. A closer inspection made it obvious that the green had been sprayed with an unknown chemical which turned out to be paraquat. Jon hoped that as the green was quite close to a country lane with easy access to the course that the 13th was the sole victim of the attack.

Jon and his Deputy, Geoff Smith, did a tour of the course and the full extent of the attack was slowly revealed - 11 greens, seven tees and three approaches plus various other areas of fine turf on the golf course had been attacked by a person or persons unknown using a knapsack sprayer full of paraquat. Generally all of the spraying had been done in a zigzag although some across tees were in a broad straight line.

Who was responsible for this attack? The fact that whoever did it was well equipped and not without some knowledge of the equipment and the chemical he was using probably rules out "spur of the moment" vandals finishing up a good night out on the beer. But, of course, the deeper that you look the more sinister it becomes.

Abridge Golf Club is a Jewish Club just outside Epping Forest set in very attractive countryside. They have hosted BIGGA events and are great supporters of the Association. With all of the troubles in the world at present the fact that the club has strong Jewish connections might be relevant.

But there is more! The Club is about to undergo considerable changes which have been widely reported in the local press. A deal has been struck with

Tottenham Hotspur Football Club whereby Spurs will be entitled to 55 Corporate Members. Spurs have bought land adjoining the Golf Club and are planning to build new training grounds, soccer academy and other facilities there. The name of the Golf Club is to be changed to Tottenham and Abridge Golf Club and the Club will receive a substantial amount of money. These changes alone provide a motive for another several thousand rival football fans!

There are also other possibilities. The list goes on and on. Not knowing the source of this attack on his course is one of the most worrying to the Course Manager. Will they strike again? When will they strike again? Where will they strike next time? It is impossible to know the answers and almost impossible to guard against any future attack. As all connected with golf realise a golf course in a rural area is an extremely vulnerable target in the dead of night.

Jon has been Course Manager at Abridge for five years. Each year the standard of the golf course has improved and it would be fair to say that it was following a Tottenham Hotspurs FC Golf Day at the club a year or so ago that the Football Club including the Manager, Glen Hoddle, were so impressed with the course that negotiations were started culminating in the current deal between the two clubs.

Technically Jon is qualified and experienced enough to get his course back in to pristine condition as quickly as possible. If he doesn't know the answers he knows how to get them and I am sure that any forum started within these pages would provide a mountain of sound advice. He has done his "cress tests" to indicate when the soil has recovered sufficiently to work on but his main problem is allowing the new seed to establish while cutting heights are reduced for summer play. With zigzag lines through the centre of the green it

is almost impossible to protect these very vulnerable seedlings.

As nearly all Greenkeepers have to work within their budgeted resources the time spent by Jon and his staff on this calamity has meant that his normal spring programme of work has been even more frantic. The Club, of course, is sympathetic to his problems, but I am reminded of the story told by a Surrey greenkeeper last July when he went to his Club Managers to report that the fairways were growing at three inches per week and his rough at inches and inches a week and due to an epidemic of staff sickness, staff on holiday, a 'Work Experience' lad who took up a lot of his time, he was down to himself only and couldn't cope. The Club replied that they understood, he was doing his best and as long as everything was all right for the Captain's Day on Saturday don't worry about it!

I'm sure that Abridge will be more supportive than that but Club golfers can be a funny lot and I am sure that they will soon start to notice if things fall behind in his spring work programme. Club golfers will cope with the tees and approaches looking unsightly but they can be very unforgiving if they can't putt! Perhaps the introduction of a local rule similar to standing water on a green would help.

The one hope of Jon and his staff is that the sad person who was responsible for this criminal act has wreaked sufficient vengeance from the Golf Club and does not strike again. Even better would be that he is apprehended and punished by the justice system. In the meantime let us all hope that the weather conditions that have been so extreme and unpredictable in recent years relent and give a perfect spring and early summer to get everything back to normal as quickly as possible.

Derek Farrington

the fact that only 20% of those, who completed their HND in my year, are still in the Industry. BIGGA should be encouraging Greenkeepers and Course Managers to improve their knowledge and experience. I have been very fortunate as I received continued support from all the staff on the courses I have worked on during my training period and, more recently, from the respective managers at Minchinhampton and Cirencester Golf Clubs. I have also had the opportunity to obtain my spraying certificates and participated in NVQ2 qualifications 10 supplement my HND.

This leads me to the next point of NVQ versus HND/HNC/Degree qualifications. I have been a member of BIGGA for five years and enjoy reading the magazine and, like most ambitious people, keep an eye on the job page!

I have noted that NVQ 2 is used in most adverts as the "desired qualification" even for Supervisory/ Management posts. Ian mentioned in his letter that NVQs are "the flavour of the month". NVQs are a competence based assessment and, provided

people are assessed and Approved by qualified Trainers (e.g. D32), I have no problem with this approach as an Industry competence based qualification.

I have recently compared BIGGA job adverts with other professional/technical magazines and noted that for Supervisory/ Management posts the norm is to request the highest appropriate Industry recognised qualification followed by a lower level qualification plus practical experience as an alternative. Why does this not happen within the Greenkeeping Industry? I believe that, until those in responsible positions within the UK Golf Industry stop looking to pay the minimum wage for "grass cutters" the Greenkeeping profession will not attract the young people who could help it flourish and receive its due recognition.

A casing point was in the same edition of the magazine where one of the UK's most prestigious courses advertised for Greenkeeping staff, "with no experience necessary"!

If the prestigious courses do not ask for qualified staff / qualifications what direction is the profession going?

This sort of statement also totally disillusioned those of us who would love to work at such a golf course and apply their theoretical knowledge and training to ensure an environment where presentation and quality of work is a primary objective.

My final point concerns the UK Greenkeeping Industry as a whole. Generally, Greenkeepers have little status or receive any recognition for the work they do from the users of their product, ie. the Club Members. I believe it's time we took a leaf out of, dare I say it, the Golf Industry in the USA and Canada where the efforts are more rewarding and recognition forthcoming.

I feel strongly about the present and future of the UK Greenkeeping Industry as I wish to return to the industry when I complete my degree course at Plymouth University. I hope my letter if published as I believe if Greenkeeping continues to be seen as unattractive to the young generation, the industry is in for a rude awakening in the not so distant future.

Graeme Percival, Plymouth University