

Scholarships

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WHY AN MSc?



Ian Somerville, Course Manager at Heaton Moor Golf Club, talks about his decision to undertake an MSc in Sports Surface Technology.

I have thought for many years about how to improve my knowledge and my career while staying in full time employment.

It was not until January 2002 while attending BTME in Harrogate that I was intrigued to find out more about possible courses available. I decided to attend one of the seminars with Alex Vickers, of Cranfield University, as the speaker. I listened intently with great interest about the MSc in Sports Surface Technology. After the seminar I came out thinking to myself this is just what I and the industry of sports management/maintenance has needed for many years.

A Masters Course designed for the sports industry that is flexible enough to either complete as a full time course in one year, or fit in as a part time course over a number of years – up to five years. I hope to complete the course in three years. The next step was to find out how to apply for a place on the course, as I had made up my mind that this was the course for me.

I contacted Alex Vickers who arranged for me to visit Cranfield University, Silsoe. Alex, kindly showed me around the campus, which I must add, was absolutely fascinating and second to none. He then looked through my portfolio and discussed the course over coffee.

I was over the first step, what now? Do I tell my employers at Heaton Moor Golf Club of my intention to attend university or wait until I find out if I have obtained a place on the course? I decided to wait. The letter

arrived informing me that a place was available for me at Cranfield, along with the tuition fee costs for the course. Do I tell my employers now? No - I decided to wait, as I now had to find a way of funding the course. I did not want to build my hopes up until I had been able to raise the funds for the first year, at least.

I decided to write to the R&A, BIGGA and the IOG to see if any funding was available through them. The R&A were unable to help me but Ken Richardson at BIGGA informed me that there was a possibility of funding from monies donated by Ransomes Jacobsen to help in the further training and education of its members. I was overjoyed when the news came from Ken that David Withers of Ransomes Jacobsen had been in touch and a part sponsorship was to be awarded to me from Textron. Along with this I was able to obtain a part bursary from Cranfield for my first year. I am

currently waiting to hear whether or not I have been successful in obtaining some funding from the IOG 2000 fund towards my second year fees. Also, any companies wishing to help fund my course further – would be greatly appreciated. Details available from Ken Richardson.

Without the help of funding, it would have been impossible to take up my place at Cranfield - so many thanks for the financial help so far. I would like to think that other companies might look into the possibility of sponsorship schemes in the way Ransomes Jacobsen have.

Funding has in the past been directed at the under 18's, so this is a great step forward for any mature student. The industry needs to be recognised as having highly qualified and educated managers just like any other industry, and not just referred to as (grass cutters).

Once I had received confirmation of the part funding for my first year it was time to sit down with my Greens Chairman and explain my intention to undertake my MSc. I told him that I had obtained a place at Cranfield University to undertake an MSc in Sports Surface Technology along with part funding. However, I now needed the time required to attend University. The Chairman's response was very positive and he agreed to put it before the general committee at their next meeting. The morning after the meeting I received a phone call from the Captain, who then informed me that the committee was unanimous in their decision to allow me the 20 weeks over three years, with pay to undertake my MSc. I was so pleased that I could now accept my place and the proposed funding offers.

The course consists of two-week modules that run concurrently starting in October through to March each year. I was able to choose the modules that fitted in with my winter work programme at Heaton Moor Golf Club. The modules cover everything from irrigation and drainage to soil/plant/water relationships.

The course is very interesting, but intense, and at times mind boggling. It is the first time since leaving school that I have used π^2 (pi squared). I found that the course was beneficial due to the fact that the students are of all ages and many different backgrounds within the sports industry from Course managers/Grounds managers through to top dressing manufacturers, all of whom are able to give their own first hand experiences of different situations within their specialist areas. This also gives the class an insight into how others deal with similar problems, thus broadening their knowledge, not just from the lectures but the other students as well.

I hope that anyone reading this will look closely at the possibility of applying to do their MSc at Cranfield. The more students that enrol on the courses will enable it to go from strength to strength, and the more professional the respect for the sports industry will become as more and more students qualify at MSc level.

My first year is now over and the results of this year's case studies are awaited with baited breath. I have learnt a lot over this first term, not only from the course but also about being a student on campus living on pot noodles and cuppa soups and the odd beer. It only remains for me to thank Alex Vickers, Cranfield University, for his support and enthusiasm; Ken Richardson, BIGGA, for the help in obtaining funding; David Withers, Ransomes Jacobsen for the sponsorship provided; To Heaton Moor Golf Club for the full support, backing, forward thinking and the time to attend the University along with my staff for keeping up with the work on the golf course in my absence.

I would just like to take this opportunity to thank: Derek Green, Links Manager, Royal Liverpool Golf Club. Bob Goodwin, Course Manager, Ashridge Golf Club - retired. Bill Lawson, Course Manager, Heswall Golf Club - retired.

It was a great privilege to work for the afore-mentioned, where I gained a great deal from their knowledge and expertise, leading to me obtaining a place at University – many thanks.

I would like to add my congratulations to Derek Green and his staff at Royal Liverpool Golf Club for securing the 2006 Open Championship – well done and good luck.

