

Following the first GTC article in last months GI, that explained the role of the GTC, David Golding the GTC's Education Director, highlights the changes that have taken place in greenkeeper education and training during recent years.

Hopefully, many readers of this magazine especially the more "mature" BIGGA members will remember my time as the Association's Education Officer from 1989 –1993. I left BIGGA in the spring of 1993 to "front" the Greenkeepers Training Committee. Many people found it difficult to understand why the two established bodies had to separate into individual organisations. Although separately managed and administered, the GTC offices have been and are still are "next door" to BIGGA at Aldwark Manor near York which allows the two organisations to work very closely together.

Why then did the separation of the GTC and BIGGA have to occur back in 1993?

The simple and quick answer is that BIGGA was established to represent greenkeepers and the GTC was funded by the golfers through the Home Golf Unions, the R&A and by the PGA European Tour, plus, in more recent years by contributions from BIGGA and from the GCSAI. Therefore, the change enabled the greenkeeping sector to have a "united" voice on greenkeeping matters, especially greenkeeper qualifications.

The R&A endorsed the work of the Home Unions and the greenkeeping associations not just through matched funding the members per-capita levies but through it's guidance and more recently requesting the support of the GTC to develop the excellent Golf Course Best Practice website www.bestcourseforgolf.org.

I explained the structure and aims and objectives of the GTC in the June edition of GI. The fact that the greenkeeping sector of our great sport first entered into formal training and qualifications back in the early 1960's admirably led by the greenkeepers themselves gave the reformed GTC a firm base to influence the Government on the vitally important area of greenkeeper education, training and qualifications.

In the early 90s the Government was encouraging all industries to adopt vocational qualifications, which had to be employer led. I was invited to Government led meetings that had to have, golf club employers represented otherwise we would have little or no chance of gaining Government approval for greenkeeping qualifications! However, professional bodies such as BIGGA and the IOG were given due recognition.

Therefore, to show that the GTC represented the employers, it had to be independent of BIGGA.

The GTC's vision that vocational training and qualifications were "here to stay" and that a substantial amount of Government funding would be made available to those industries who took ownership of their own qualifications has, I believe, proved vital in the improved quality of greenkeepers, greenkeeping and the subsequent improvement of playing surfaces.

Up until the introduction of vocational qualifications the most popular qualifications for greenkeepers were the City & Guilds awarded Phases and the Scottish National Certificate. Excellent awards but, for example as with the City & Guilds Phases, they very often included the passing (or failing) of an examination. Vocational qualifications (National in England Wales and Northern Ireland and Scottish in Scotland) require competence in 'doing the job' and underpinning knowledge. Many countries around the World are now keen to introduce vocational qualification and we the GTC believe it has got to be good for our sector.

When I joined BIGGA back in 1989 the concern among golf club employers at golf clubs that was highlighted in the R&A's visionary document The Way Forward was that "somebody" had to focus on giving Head Greenkeepers more and better management training. This was to ensure that through effective communication with employers, agronomists and staff they would whenever

possible uphold the traditional methods of maintaining golf courses to give golfers the opportunity to play golf 365 days per year. Oh what a challenge!

BIGGA introduced the first Management courses back in 1989 and I am pleased to see the likes of Frank Newberry and Brin Bendon still helping greenkeepers with communication training including presentation skills plus a wide range of other management skills.

The GTC with the help of BIGGA began to develop the "Headmen" and while management skills have now become the norm for the younger Course Managers many of the more mature Head Greenkeepers have really had to "dig deep" to become effective communicators. How do I know? I was that "soldier!"

We at the GTC fully recognised, even back in 1993 that the future for greenkeepers would be to establish an apprenticeship and also give those craft workers the opportunity to develop to be Head Greenkeepers and Course Managers. To become a reality, the sector had to introduce the appropriate structure and career path that suited both practical outdoor loving people as well as those who have the skills to maintain and manage our golf courses. I believe after a few battles here and there that the greenkeeping sector now has such a structure.

Today's modern Government approved apprenticeship scheme is virtually free to employers but the schemes incorporating the Sportsturf N/SVQ's are designed to be work-based and that in our case means the golf course.

The introduction of N/SVQ's to our sector in 1993 created major problems for training providers who had, traditionally, provided the more classroom, theory based. Now they were faced with the problems of at work assessment.

In simple terms, N/SVQ's were introduced to our industry to ensure that employers "controlled" the content of the qualifications and that staff gained the required skills to produce better golf courses. Easy!

The concept was and still is brilliant, be trained, be assessed and get the recognition for the job you do – National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications!

Much of the work of the GTC in recent years has involved us in implementing the apprenticeship scheme (soon to be funded for all ages throughout the UK) and in the introduction and monitoring of N/SVQ's.

KEY ISSUES WE HAVE TRIED TO ADDRESS INCLUDE:

1. Ensuring the content of the different levels of the Sportsturf vocational qualifications meets employer's needs.
2. Ensuring that the apprenticeship scheme for greenkeepers meets the needs of employers.
3. Ensuring that a network of GTC approved training providers (mainly land-based colleges) provide the education and training to the required standards within the range of turf qualifications.
4. Ensuring that any other qualifications that have been developed by colleges such as National Diploma's, HND's and the more recent Foundation Degree are related to the occupational standards required at craft, supervisory and management levels.
5. Engage the Head Greenkeepers, Course Managers and where relevant their Deputies in training to become qualified work-based trainers and assessors.

In the forthcoming months I will be discussing the various qualifications available in more detail, the role of the colleges in today's education environment and next month the vital role that Course Managers plays in the education and training of their staff.

If you cannot wait to discuss these matters you can contact the GTC on 01347 838640 or email David direct on david@the-gtc.co.uk