

GTC News

David Golding, the GTC's Education Director, explains the GTC's role in maintaining an approved network of greenkeeper training providers.

As we take an in depth look at the GTC's role in ensuring the turf sector has an appropriate range of qualifications we must not forget that it is necessary to 'sell' the need for greenkeeper training to employers.

We must always be mindful of the employer's needs when developing and reviewing qualifications. The GTC believes that, first and foremost, employers want a **skilled** workforce. This is now paramount as more and more golfers are seeking out the best maintained and managed courses.

It is all about standards and the GTC has invested heavily in COURSE MANAGER training and this certainly will continue as more and more employers see the benefit of investing in a competent and preferably qualified course manager.

It is very rewarding to see that the majority of job advertisements in Greenkeeper International request formal qualifications and more often than not the workbased National / Scottish Vocational Qualifications (N/SVQ's) are seen as the benchmark for recruitment.

In simple terms the N/SVQs are the qualifications that show competency at the various levels i.e. Level 2 craft, Level 3 technical / supervisory and Level 4 Management. The benefit to employers is that on request they can see the list of skills that a candidate has gained when completing a particular level of an N/SVQ.

Additionally, there is a range of education courses and qualifications, that allow trainees to gain the necessary knowledge, which they can then use to enhance their actual practical skill on the golf course.

These types of qualification are known as work-related and the most popular are the Higher National Certificate (HNC), Higher National Diploma (HND) or Foundation Degree and the City & Guilds Advanced National Certificate. The work-related qualifications are often college-based, however at least one of the GTC Approved Training Providers offers the HNC through a distance learning option.

The GTC continues to try and keep employers and employees up to speed on the Government's thinking in terms of qualifications, and learning programmes. For example, the current introduction of a foundation degree will result in the eventual phasing out of the HNC & D in England and Wales.

The GTC works closely with the Government to ensure that all of the approved qualifications are linked to employment requirements through the occupational standards agreed for each greenkeeping job role.

Once a range of qualifications have been developed for the sector, they are then approved through Government bodies and handed to the Awarding Bodies such as City & Guilds, Ed excel and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). It is the Awarding Bodies responsibility to ensure that the qualifications are offered only by Training Providers - mainly colleges - in the turf sector that can prove that their resources will result in quality provision.

I will explain, in a future article, how the GTC liaises with the different bodies to show how we endeavour to monitor the quality of education provision offered through our network of Approved Training Providers.

Let us now take a look at the role of the Approved Training Providers who serve our sector. The landbased colleges who have served our sector so well over the years have had a very difficult time in the past years, due largely through the various problems agriculture has faced over the last decade or so.

Colleges were encouraged to diversify and many turned to horticulture as the obvious 'complementary' sector to agriculture. However, who was it that said, "The simple answer to maintaining and managing golf courses is to ask a farmer what to do and then do the exact opposite!"

That statement possibly sums up the difficulty the GTC has had to ensure that any provider wishing to join the GTC's approved list fully understands that we may not be a huge sector when it comes to employer or employee numbers but we are organised through the representation on the GTC Board of Management.

The GTC often receives criticism for the number of approved providers it has on its list but it has not been an issue of numbers of providers so much as the **quality** of the provision.

As an example the GTC featured an approved provider in the last On Course newsletter that offers quality education provision in the West of Scotland and, whilst the trainee numbers may be relatively small compared to other providers, the golf clubs and course managers in the area cannot speak highly enough of the centre staff - one man!

It is the GTC's role to work continually with its network of providers to ensure the various qualifications are offered in a variety of methods so that the employer and trainee can choose the most appropriate training course for their needs.

A classic example of the way the GTC has developed the provider partnership is to take forward an initiative to develop a standard set of learning materials, which the providers would use with the trainees on N/SVQ Levels 2 and 3 training courses. This major initiative has received the full support of all members of the GTC, the training providers and the leading industry specialists.

There had been some concerns that the colleges would resist the industry body laying down 'what' they required trainees to be taught but in reality the project received the college's turf representatives' full support.

The GTC's Technical Committee, working with the industry subject matter specialists, produced the Level 2 materials during 2003 and these are not only in use throughout the provider network but also available to purchase in CD-ROM or hardcopy format direct from the GTC. The Level 3 materials will be available shortly. The more enlightened course managers, often those who have achieved their trainer and assessor qualifications, are now taking up the opportunity to train staff in the workplace using the learning materials available. The employers, through their course manager, then choose a provider who will register and support the trainees to gain the relevant N/SVQ or Apprenticeship qualification.

With 94% of greenkeepers in formal training registered on a vocational qualification course it has been vitally important that the GTC has advised its provider network to adjust its delivery of education more towards the workplace and several providers. I am pleased to say we have done just that.

There will be a period of change whilst more golf clubs fully understand the benefits, and system, of work-based training however at least we at the GTC can now support those enlightened employers and course managers by putting them in touch with the most flexible and progressive providers.

There will always be a role for those colleges who do want to work with the GTC, but sadly we cannot see many of the more traditional agricultural colleges surviving if they do

not work closer with the industry.

There are some quality independent training providers now looking to provide the turf sector with the service that the GTC has identified and whether it be short courses in management skills, health & safety or practical skills the GTC will continue to promote those providers who can prove that their programmes match the standards laid down in the qualifications.

In summary please be reassured that the GTC is monitoring continually its approved training provider network and our key objective is to ensure that quality education and training is available through a range of both work-based and work-related qualifications.

Hopefully, our network of providers will offer flexibility in the provision of courses and the employers. Through their course managers, they will be able to choose the most suitable option for their course and trainee. Moreover, continually monitoring the progress of trainees will lead to standards being maintained.

For more information on the GTC Approved Training Provider network, the new N/SVQ Learning materials and greenkeeping qualifications visit the GTC website www.the-gtc.co.uk or contact David on david@the-gtc.co.uk, Tel 01347 838640

