



David Golding emphasises both the role and importance of the employer in greenkeeper training.

The 'employer' at golf clubs has been the topic of many a conversation during my years involved in the sector.

The Home Unions have continually tried to engage employers by hosting seminars and workshops during recent years that have included a wide range of subjects all aimed at ensuring the most up to date information is available to the affiliated clubs they represent. The GTC has the English, Scottish and Welsh Golf Unions' representatives as Board Members and I am aware of their frustrations when delegate numbers for many of their events have been disappointing.

In Britain we are fortunate that the Unions do play an active role in terms of supporting greenkeeper education through their funding support to the GTC and their pro-active Golf Course Committees or Services Committee. I know it is a responsibility the Home Unions take very seriously and they are always looking for new ideas on how to ensure the employer is supported in all the key matters relating to the management of the golf club and course.

The Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, the major funding body of the GTC, has also been very active in its efforts to support golf clubs by establishing a Golf Course Committee with a full time Secretary, Steve Isaac, continually trying to share good practice with golf clubs. The uptake on registrations on the www.bestcourseforgolf.org website is very encouraging and I am sure, once a club has registered, many of the checklists will need the Course Manager's input successfully to complete many of the categories. Please check if your club has registered and, if they have, who is responsible for updating the progress. I urge all Course Managers to become involved in the R&A initiative to assist clubs in accessing best practice and principles for golf course maintenance and management.

One major problem we seem to have is in identifying the 'employer' at the majority of our clubs. I believe this accounts for much of the frustration from Course Managers, who often feel they cannot maximise their own knowledge and experience due to the fact that they are not able to liaise directly with the employer.

Often a club will give the Secretary/Manager overall responsibility for the day to day administrative running of the club including the golf course but, while there has to be someone identified as the overall Manager, they too are an employee and I believe there should be a mutual respect between the Secretary and the Course Manager for each other's responsibilities. The Course Manager's position can often be a lonely one but hopefully through training and experience they can also educate the club to be active in their support for staff development as well as supplying adequate resources to implement agreed policies.

The policies now include matters such as Health & Safety, the environment and course maintenance principles. These should all be embraced by a club policy document, which must be approved by the membership. The membership must have the confidence to allow the Course Manager to manage the course and this is why management training is made available to give greenkeepers the confidence and competence to add to their greenkeeping skills and knowledge.

At the proprietary clubs it is obviously the owner who is responsible for all

the issues and decisions to be made to ensure the desired standards both on and off the course are maintained. However at resort type courses it is often the General Manager and the Course Manager who liaise on behalf of the owners, whoever they might be, working together to an agreed budget which is often a recipe for a business like approach to producing an all round product which customers require.

Is this then the way forward for our traditional golf clubs? Do we need to keep talking about the missing 'employer' or should Course Managers be allowed to manage the course in line with the agreed policies liaising with the Manager as and when necessary?

It has to be said that some clubs do have excellent Chair of Green/Green Convenor and those who have been sufficiently interested in remaining in the post more than a year or so often prove to be ideal employers. I think Mr J. H. Arthur B.Sc. may well have got it right with his quote: "The best committees consist of an uneven number, and three is too many." While those of us continue to promote this ideal let us try to encourage that one person, hopefully strong in character, to take on the responsibility of the employer.

In the past I have heard from Course Managers who feel that their Chair of Green should not be encouraged to educate themselves in turf maintenance. We

all know the dangers of the 'surrogate Course Manager' role but somebody has to be identified as the employer. We all know the problems associated with the ever changing Chair of Green/Green Convenor at some clubs, but maybe if when appointed they were registered onto the first available STRI short course specifically designed to give an overview of best principles for

maintaining a golf course, this might encourage more to enjoy their position and to be more understanding of the work of his/her Golf Course Manager.

It is also so important that Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers take every opportunity to keep their own professional development updated so they can manage the golf course and not have to rely on someone else to carry out that role. The excellent management training courses organised by BIGGA all address the key areas of effective communication and tutors are appointed because of not only their credentials as trainers in management skills but also their empathy for the role of the Golf Course Manager.

The numbers of people who I would describe as typically knowledgeable, experienced Head Greenkeepers who have attended a short management course and returned for more sessions because they got so much out of the course are countless. Do you take advantage of these courses? If not, if you see your role as a Manager please consider this option for your personal development as they can be both enjoyable but also inspirational.

It seems that the debate will go on, with most traditional clubs still preferring the committee rule structure, but one very pleasing aspect of my work for the GTC is that all bodies involved in golf have never worked closer together in an attempt to provide information to clubs.