



David Golding, GTC Education Director, reassures that the GTC has the sector well represented to ensure employers and student greenkeepers have a range of appropriate courses and qualifications to choose from.

There has been much discussion in the national press regarding skill shortages in occupational areas such as plumbing and joinery. Thankfully for once when education and training is on the political agenda Golf Course Management has not figured in the debate.

For many years now the greenkeeping sector, through the GTC, has worked within the Government of the day's policy for education and training. In previous articles I have tried to show how the GTC works with the approved Government body, the Lantra Sector Skills Council (SSC), to ensure the content of the qualifications suit the requirements of both the golf club employers and greenkeepers. However, politicians have been critical of 'Mickey Mouse Degrees' such as Golf Course Management. How dare they?

I cannot think why this qualification always seems to be selected by people, who should do their research before choosing a highly rated qualification endorsed by the industry. I have read and heard college lecturers, agronomists and students having to jump to the defence of this award when it has clearly been accredited through the correct Governmental procedures. The meetings I have attended at Lantra, on behalf of the sector, to review the academic awards always include: "Is there a need for this type of award within the sector." To date the general opinion from our advisory network is yes.

We do however have to show how such qualifications such as the Higher National Certificate or the more recently accredited Foundation Degree fits into the wider occupational standards of turf management. There was much criticism of the number of Higher National Diplomas on offer by the colleges in England and the way they were developed and accredited by the establishments, often with very little consultation with the industry. The GTC agreed with the concern raised by the Awarding Body and now, through Lantra, we are finally starting to control the number of colleges and universities accredited to offer these awards and also through Lantra just what is being included in the proposed qualification.

The old HND in England has now been superseded by the Foundation Degree and with an excellent balance between theory and practical is proving a very popular qualification for the sector. The GTC has to concede to Lantra and the Providers that as a specialist sector we cannot guarantee large numbers of students but with the advent of online learning the FD is accessible via the part-time route as well as full-time. The MSc in Sports Turf Surfaces offered by Cranfield University is again proving increasingly popular and, albeit only a limited number register each year, the GTC believes these Higher education qualifications

attract many young people into the profession when choosing their career options.

So, the message is clear to the politicians, leave the sector to tell you what qualifications we want through the framework of development, review and accreditation you, the Government, have established.

Back to the skills or lack of skills debate for a moment. The greenkeeper, as viewed by many golfers and outsiders at best, are skilled workers who cut the grass. Sorry guys and gals but that perception is still a problem and it is organisations such as the representatives on the GTC, including BIGGA, who must all work hard to dispel this myth. How are we going to do this as quickly as possible?

The GTC believes that greenkeepers themselves can continue to take up every opportunity to gain training on subjects such as image, including presentation skills, which has proved a very successful route for many Head Greenkeepers who, following training, truly operate as Golf Course Managers. It is when these new found skills are put into practice that the employer and the golfers really start to acknowledge the skills of their staff. I know this is a subject all of its own but following a recent training session and feedback from the learners and the tutors we at the GTC know that this is the best route to raise the profile of the greenkeeper.

One common issue soon came out of the first training session and that was how under confident all the group were when it came to communication with their employers, but this was addressed through the trainers and by the end of the course the learners had changed their views on their role and in turn their profile at their clubs has risen dramatically. If you don't believe me, the learners have indicated they will tell anyone just how their lives have changed following the GTC-ESF funded training courses - names and telephone numbers are available.

Hopefully, more courses will be available in the autumn and I know that BIGGA are arranging similar events, so watch this space. One of the great changes over the last decade has been the dress code of greenkeepers at events such as BTME and this must be maintained if we are to raise the image of this

great profession. First impressions at interviews are oh so important and while most of the greenkeepers skills are linked to maintaining the golf course increasingly the off course skills, say in the committee room, are also vital.

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