

Technical Reflections

Dr Mike Canaway retires as the Chairman of the GTC Technical Committee.

In September 1999 Mike chaired the first Technical Committee meeting of the GTC.

The GTC Board felt it was time to establish a committee of technical experts to assist the two full-time staff in the GTC office as the Board were "not experts in turf maintenance". The Board representatives had direct access to the funding bodies and thought it far more acceptable to have recommendations brought forward for funding by a technical committee.



His term in office has seen much progress in the sector, with fellow committee members he has supported David Golding, the GTC's Education Director, to ensure greenkeepers and the golf club employers have a range of qualifications and training programmes, including an apprenticeship - which is the envy of many industries.

David, in thanking Mike for his support over the years, cannot speak too highly of how Mike has been an excellent ambassador for the GTC, at meetings, conferences and exhibitions throughout the country.

"I will miss Mike's encouragement, as at times when the work involves working within Government systems and departments it is easy to think we are "banging our heads against a brick wall" but Mike has always believed in what we set out to establish back in 1999," said David.

I will leave Mike to summarise his experiences with the GTC and also give his views on what the future should hold for the sector through the GTC.

Mike reflects as follows.

When I first joined the industry with STRI in 1974 the then Director, John Escritt, insisted that all new staff attended the week-long training courses that STRI held for greenkeepers and groundsmen. Shortly afterwards the new recruit, if competent, had to teach part of the course relevant to their particular expertise. In my case this was the part concerned with structure and identification of grasses, as I had originally graduated in Botany and had some years experience in agricultural grasslands and plant surveying, for the then Nature Conservancy.

I was thus introduced to greenkeepers training at an early stage. Even on the first training course I was struck by the greenkeepers' thirst for knowledge, compared with some of the other course participants who had been "sent" by their (often Local Authority) employers. Of course not all conformed to this accolade but it is still the case that some of those attendees on the early STRI training courses subsequently went on to become Head Greenkeepers at prestigious clubs and in some cases Chairmen of BIGGA.

Following the formation of BIGGA from the previous greenkeeping associations, Neil Thomas' first office was at STRI, before that space was outgrown. David Golding was the first Education Officer before the GTC was split off by the governing bodies to separate the employers' (i.e. clubs) training responsibilities from those of the employees (i.e. greenkeepers) when David Golding became the GTC's first Education Director.

Fast forwarding to when I was Chief Executive of the STRI, I received a letter from David requesting that STRI nominate a delegate to the new Technical Committee. In view of the long involvement by STRI in greenkeepers' training and my own personal - albeit limited - involvement in it, I replied that I would serve on the Committee. I was subsequently invited to act as Chairman. Early in the proceedings I advised members of the committee that we were "in it for the long haul" since previous experience suggested that the wheels of Government and governing bodies, turned slowly and indeed, this led to some frustration among members that we were not progressing quickly enough.

The purpose of the Technical Committee is to assist the Education Director in pursuing the GTC's role as the lead body for greenkeepers' training. To this end our first task was to develop a business plan for the GTC to clarify its goals and objectives, and then to implement, monitor and update the plan as events unfolded. In addition the committee was to develop ideas for special projects to be funded over and above the core operations.

So what has been achieved since 1999? I would first preface my remarks by saying that a lot of the work of the GTC goes on behind the scenes, fighting for the recognition of greenkeeping as an identifiable sector, with its own training needs. There is no doubt that were it not for the work of the GTC, in the education system, greenkeeper training would be subsumed into general amenity horticulture, with a sports turf option. Probably the most important achievement has been the progress made in

flexible learning systems and, in particular, the development of work-based training.

In the old days, knowledge was passed from experienced Head Greenkeepers to new entrants. Work-based training is merely a formalisation of this process, with the achievement of a qualification (NVQ or SVQ) at the end, to show that the trainee now has the necessary skills to work as a greenkeeper in the case of level 2, or as a supervisor in the case of level 3. One of the major projects in this area for the committee, and for me in particular as Chief Editor, was the development of standard learning materials for NVQ levels 2 and 3. Working with authors from across the industry - expert in their own fields - each level took about a year to produce, level 2 being issued in 2003 and level 3 in 2004. This meant that for the first time the Colleges, or other training providers, were all training to the same syllabus. At present, the GTC is working closely with LANTRA to use the materials to create an on-line learning platform so that greenkeepers can have access to the learning materials, regardless of location.

A further result has been the closer collaboration between the GTC and BIGGA through the Technical Committee in several areas. The committee provides informal comment and guidance on new BIGGA training initiatives where appropriate, has provided financial support to the learning experience at Harrogate Week, and jointly funded the BIGGA careers' DVD. In the other direction, the BIGGA representatives on the committee have provided valuable support and experience to the GTC.

In addition to the above, the Technical Committee has overseen the production of a Health and Safety wall chart in use at many golf clubs showing the competency of staff to use different items of equipment. It has

initiated visits to Colleges to interview, staff and student, to monitor delivery of training. It has developed the in-house publication 'On Course' which is sent to all golf clubs to promote awareness of greenkeeper training and the GTC, and it has overseen the continued development of assessor and coaching training for senior greenkeepers.

It has been a great pleasure to work with the greenkeepers and other industry representatives on the committee, in serving the needs of greenkeepers training.

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My reason for standing down is quite simply that all the organisations that make up the GTC, have mechanisms to ensure that Chairmen of committees do not go on too long and I feel that it is time to do so and I will continue with the editing and other consultancy work for the industry as required.

Present Technical Committee members include: Nick Bisset,

Educational Expert and Chairman Designate; David Leach MG, BIGGA; Tony Mears, GTC Internal Verifier and longest serving member; Dr Gordon McKillop, STRI Chief Executive; Ken Richardson, BIGGA Education Director and Deputy Chief Executive, and co-opted, Jeff Bates, NPTC External Verifier.

All of the above, as well as former members: Kerran Daly, John Davis, Paddy Holohan and Iain Ritchie, deserve my thanks for all the time and effort that they contributed during my time as Chairman. I am sure Nick Bisset will make a fine successor as Chairman and I wish him, David, the rest of the committee and the GTC, all the best for the future.



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