



SETTING THE STANDARD

In this article David Golding, GTC's Education Director, explains the ongoing work with its Training Providers to ensure greenkeeping courses are to the required standards and available through various delivery options.

Whether you are a student or an employer, the GTC is constantly working with the official authorities, Inspectorates and Awarding Bodies whose job it is to formally police the quality of Government funded training programmes through colleges and Centres.

The programmes include all the popular vocational qualifications, the apprenticeship scheme, Higher Education courses such as the HNC/D and the Foundation Degree.

Inspectors and External Verifiers visit provider establishments to meet with staff and students and to check the human and physical resources available to deliver the various programmes.

What is increasingly important to the providers is the demands put on them to ensure the national targets set by the Government are met.

As a result we are now hearing that centres are having funding withdrawn when success rates are not met.

We can view this news as a positive indication that the funding bodies are only looking to fund those centres that are meeting the targets. However, we must also be aware of the centres drive to ensure students do "pass" and therefore meet the targets.

Quality must never be compromised just to meet targets and I know that there has always been the "bums on seats" issue when colleges have been accused of "passing" every student!

It is a very bold statement and one we all need to consider very carefully especially as so many centres are looking to recruit qualified from within the turf industry and this has to be encouraged.

If anybody should know about quality and standards and the importance of maintaining quality it is these sector competent personnel.

I have to admit we do receive calls and emails from staff within centres frustrated about the system and procedures they have been asked to deliver, knowing these will result in poor delivery and more importantly incompetent students!

We obviously respect the confidentiality of this information but we act on this immediately through the most effective route possible.

I do not wish to portray a picture of doom, but the reality is that there is an increasing amount of pressure being put on all providers to ensure learners achieve and the GTC will continue its partnership approach with its provider network to ensure we are all working together to produce knowledgeable, competent greenkeepers.

One again a reminder that with all vocational qualifications and apprenticeship schemes centres must have the support of the employer and senior greenkeeping staff for the system to work.

Enough said on this matter for this month you will be pleased to hear but these work-based awards must be a strong centre staff - golf course staff partnership.

The more academic qualifications HNC/D, Foundation Degree, B.Sc and M.Sc can now be assessed part and full time and with the increasing demands on Course Managers and Deputies, I am pleased that several providers have introduced more flexible delivery routes to gain these very prestigious awards.

Distance learning has been popular and the part-time often-called twilight shift has been offered at several centres.

By far the most popular route of late has become the on-line learning route, which despite teething problems must be here to stay.

All of the above options do require students to be dedicated to the course, not the golf course on this occasion, that is taken as read, but the training programme as set out by the college.

The on-line learning route has for obvious reasons become popular with international greenkeeping students from countries where no education system for turf students is available.

As an aside, by way of an update, the working group established to develop pan-European standards met during the Harrogate Week. An agreed set of skills (standards) at three levels has been developed and will soon be circulated, as part of a consultation process and more news on this initiative will follow shortly.

If you have concerns about the training programmes you or your staff are registered on, especially when you feel quality is an issue please contact me immediately and we will give it our immediate attention.

The GTC has invited all of its approved training providers to its headquarters in late June when Awarding Body representatives will be present to discuss all issues relating to greenkeeper programmes.

In addition to Awarding Body issues, providers will be invited to debate all current issues facing turf maintenance, as it is important that the GTC ensures that the provider network is relaying the best principles and practices to all turf students.

Much to do but please feel free to contribute if you feel the GTC can assist you whether you are an employer, greenkeeper, turf lecturer et al.

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