



REFLECTING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

"It was 20 years ago to-day" as the famous Beatles song goes but it truly was when BIGGA was born and David Golding, GTC Education Director takes time out to reflect on the momentous day and how greenkeeping, and in particular how greenkeeper education, has changed

1st August 1987, the day BIGGA commenced with full time staff (2), a landmark day and one that many people should be proud of. Too many to mention by name and sadly some no longer with us to celebrate the progress the association has made.

Progress was rapid in the early years, mainly due to the support from the Home Unions, the R&A with funding, but also a number of dedicated greenkeepers.

From 1912 there have been greenkeeping associations striving to gain credibility with employers and from the 111 members who formed the Golf Greenkeepers Association (GGA) to the approximate 5,500 greenkeeping members of BIGGA today, we must never lose sight of what brought those 111 together back in 1912 - education!

The Scottish Golf Greenkeepers Association, later to be renamed Scottish & International Golf Greenkeepers Association (SIGGA), the British Golf Greenkeepers Association (BGGA) and the English & International Golf Greenkeepers Association (EIGGA), all played an incredible role in the education of greenkeepers. Then many of the movers and shakers for the sector got together in the mid-80s and the formation of BIGGA came about in 1987.

The first formal greenkeeping course was offered by Langside College only because members of SIGGA persisted in wanting a specific sports turf course and qualification. This doesn't seem all that long ago and when I read that there are too many qualifications in sports turf I reflect on the battles we have had to gain national recognition for our specialist sector! A certain GTC was also plugging away in the background with the Home Unions and other bodies meeting to discuss golf course development including greenkeeper training.

On the appointment of Neil Thomas, the GTC also started to develop into an employer led body, and more importantly a voice at national meetings where the content and structure of greenkeeping qualifications were being discussed and developed. The influence of the media and the demand for quality playing surfaces has certainly helped the development of the sport.

So what has really changed since the formation of BIGGA and the reformed GTC in 1993?

Communication: The R&A document circulated in 1998 to all Golf Clubs identified communication as a priority area for the GTC and BIGGA to address and I have seen huge improvement. Specialist courses organised by BIGGA and the GTC approved training providers has seen competent greenkeepers being transformed into excellent professional communicators. Our colleges were very good at delivering the turf theory however, it was only when HG's started to demand better communication training that things started to improve. In fact many Head Greenkeepers then became involved in the training sessions themselves.

Employer body support: I am possibly best placed to comment on this area having worked for BIGGA from 1989-1993 and with the reformed GTC administrating a Board and technical committee funded by golfers through a per-capita levy, currently 11.15p.

The R&A have been great supporters of the work of BIGGA and the GTC but a recent decision stopped their match funding of the per-capita levy, preferring to consider special projects, has focused the remaining funding bodies on the aims and objectives of the GTC.

The fact that the English, Scottish and Welsh golf Unions collect the levy from the golfers and BIGGA contributes the same from its members, shows a commitment from both the employers and employees at golf clubs.

In simple terms, the Government want industries to take the lead on qualifications content and structure, health & safety guidance, apprenticeship frameworks and the GTC does all of these and more!

This work is carried out much in the same way as it has since 1912 with specialists and representatives giving their time working to ensure quality standards, information and the sharing of best practices are available to both employers and employees. The government challenge the education and training providers to meet industry requirements and provide courses to suit learner and employer needs.

The GTC has tried to promote a partnership approach with Awarding Bodies and its Approved Training Provider network and this continues to be a great strength for our sector. The sector has a small range of sports turf qualifications ranging from vocational (work based) to a Degree and a respected apprenticeship scheme. All of these formal qualifications are supported by short courses, certificates of competence, workshops and seminars.

The suppliers: If you want to aerate deeper, faster and with no disturbance to the surface, the machine is on the market and this analogy is true in so many areas of turf maintenance. Credit to the companies who have courted the views of the operators. True, we have seen some gimmicks along the way but in the main the equipment, machinery and suppliers of turf care products have really come up with the goods.

In summary, I truly believe greenkeeping and golf has come an incredibly long way in a relatively short space of time and the GTC, including BIGGA, must look forward to the challenges ahead just as those 111 members back in 1912 must have done.

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