



## IMPORTING OR EXPORTING SKILLS?

In his latest article David Golding, the GTC's Education Director, looks at the opportunities to import and export greenkeeping skills.

Having just returned from a cross-landscaping Industry group meeting, it is clear that several land base sectors in Britain, have already recruited many workers from Europe, with an increasing number coming from Eastern Europe.

I know that several golf clubs have also recruited non-British workers and we can see this trend continuing as the European Union grows and travel between countries becomes more accessible. Skilled labour is of course any employers' priority and now we have established formal work-based training as the best way to develop and assess skills, there should be no barriers to recruitment, apart from maybe language.

Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers, especially those qualified assessors, will be able to train up all operators using the national standards as the guidance to competence. Awarding Bodies such as the National Proficiency Test Council (NPTC) and Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), are looking to develop assessment strategies for migrant workers in areas such as health and safety and the safe use of pesticides.

The GTC, as previously reported, has been involved in meetings to discuss the merits of establishing a European Greenkeeping Education Unit and this initiative transpired following a greenkeeping questionnaire which had been circulated to all the Federation Members of the European Golf Association (EGA).

One of the R&A's priorities is to help develop the sport in countries where golf is only just starting to grow and as many of the returned questionnaires sought help in greenkeeper education and training, a working group was established.

BIGGA and FEGGA, together with the GTC and college representatives from European countries, have met and proposed three sets of skills, which, following consultation, will become the foundation for the Education Unit to develop a Pan-European Certification Scheme. The development of Pan-European standards will undoubtedly be useful for the greenkeeping sector and should encourage the movement of skilled workers in our specialist sector.

In many golf developing countries owners and developers are still designing courses, building them and then as the handover day looms somebody then thinks who shall we employ to maintain the course!

If only more Architects encouraged the obvious and that is to ensure developers recruit a Course Manager before the earthmovers enter the site, future problems would be reduced greatly. The grow-in and aftercare programmes are so important to the long-term success

of the golf course, and therefore the recruitment of a qualified Course Manager is very important.

Britain has exported some great talent over the years and the experiences of these pioneers is often shared through their attendance at the BIGGA Harrogate Week, articles in this magazine or more recently on the Bulletin Board on the BIGGA website.

I am sure there will be more and more opportunities for qualified greenkeepers to ply their trade abroad as the game continues to grow across the world but we must also encourage local skills to develop in these countries.

Several British colleges are playing a major role to help establish greenkeeper education programmes in other countries and we can all learn from each other as I found out at the first meeting of the Pan - European working group meeting!

The language can be a massive obstacle and that is why it is so important, if you are looking to work abroad, you try to learn at least some of the language before heading off. Consideration for how the family might settle in should also be high on the agenda with the education of the family a priority.

I am sure many of the British qualified greenkeepers working abroad would endorse this statement and would be willing to discuss their experiences with anybody considering a move abroad.

Just thinking that the grass will be greener in another country needs careful consideration and without sounding flippant, grass comes in a variety of species and so do people!

I know of many British greenkeepers who have nothing but good to say about their life on foreign soil but there are also some horror stories.

Be prepared as the days of importing and exporting skills are clearly with us.

It is increasingly important that employers in Britain continue to invest in their staff development and the most successful golf clubs in terms of business coincidentally have a competent Course Manager at the helm.

Equally if greenkeepers do not keep themselves updated on all issues relating to MANAGING the golf course – someone else will!

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