

ARE YOU IN CONTROL OF STAFF TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT?

Vocational qualifications for employers and greenkeepers are now recognised internationally since the GTC introduced the programmes 13 years ago.

David Golding, the GTC's Education Director, is now advising Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers that their role as work based trainers and assessors is a 12-month position and not just seasonal.

David explains: "A system supposedly driven by industry for industry has not been without its difficulties and critics, however there is no doubt that the opportunities for employers to develop staff and for greenkeepers to take up formal qualifications for the job they carry out day by day has never been better."

National Standards developed by the industry are at three levels; craft, supervisory and management are now better known as National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications at Levels 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

David continues: "As these qualifications have national accreditation they are offered through Centres, often Further Education colleges in the land-based sector, and attract funding support through various schemes including a Sports Turf route apprenticeship framework.

"So if "we" as a specialist sector have a major input to the National Standards and we have approved centres offering qualifications, how can we improve a system that still seems to leave work-based training open to criticism?

"A major part of my job is to work with the awarding bodies like the Scottish Qualifications Authority and City & Guilds/NPTC and then the centres who offer N/SVQ's in Sports Turf."

The GTC continues to promote assessor training to Course Managers/Head Greenkeepers and in some cases Deputies as it is without doubt they who are best placed and qualified to train, motivate AND assess the trainees registered on a work-based qualification. The introduction of vocational qualifications to the sector was a massive change in policy from the pass/fail examinations, but it is important to ensure the system works in accordance with both the National Standards for Sports Turf AND Assessing.

The culture of on-the-job training is not new to greenkeeping, but the training and assessment planning between the centre, the learner and the assessor at the golf course still needs to be explained and agreed at induction. The training aspects are best delivered at the golf course, the knowledge can be through part-time release to a centre or again can be gained on-the-job by using the nationally agreed learning materials or even on-line, leaving just the assessment. If a person achieved the old D32/33 assessor award they don't have to gain the new A1 qualification. All the chosen centre would need to do through the Internal Verifier is to ensure the person is up-to-date with the assessor standards and centre documentation.

David adds: "I'm assured by centres that while they have their own assessors they rely heavily on Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers to actively be part of the assessment process, however, please play your part to improve the system and if you are not yet an assessor and you have staff registered on a N/SVQ, we can train you."

Golf club employers who have a qualified assessor on site have the added advantage of not needing to release trainee greenkeepers for days of assessment away from work.

"Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers train and assess every day of their working lives and staff development benefits everybody so let us continue to develop on-the-job assessment by making sure it's a naturally occurring activity all the year round." David concludes.

46 YEARS SERVICE

Walter Cole, Head Greenkeeper at Longcliffe Golf Club, near Loughborough, has recently retired after a remarkable 46 years with the club.



Walter Cole (far right)

Walter enjoyed his time at the club and witnessed the greenkeeper's job become ever more demanding bringing with it new challenges. The course has changed its characteristics over the time I've been here and lost its heathland," said Walter at the East Midland Section event held at the course to mark his retirement.

"I arrived at Longcliffe in September 1961 and it was a beautiful heathland course then with only a few patches of thorn here and there while the only trees were the silver birches near to the 6th green and in the woods.

"I know that beauty is in the eye of the beholder but I really did prefer the open, sunlit, dry course with its fine wiry grasses and lovely swathes of heather to the dark, damp (even on sunny days) and shaded course which we have now.

"However it is still a lovely course and I shall miss it," said Walter.

Among the staff he brought through and sent on their way to Course Manager jobs are three well known BIGGA characters, East Midland Chairman and Charnwood Forest Course Manager; Gavin Robson, National Board of Management Member and Burton GC Course Manager, and Past BIGGA Chairman, Richie Barker.

"They used to play some terrible practical jokes on me," laughed Walter, of whom Gavin revealed had never used a strimmer in his life.

"That's right. By the time they'd come in I was a Head Man and it wasn't my job. I do recall Gavin moaning about always having to do the fly mowing and I hear the same moans from his guys now!" he joked.