

A hand in a white shirt cuff holds a black graduation cap with a tassel against a solid blue background. The cap is tilted, and the tassel hangs down. The hand is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the frame.

Onwards and Upwards

The Ransomes Jacobsen Scholarship Fund has enabled a huge number of greenkeepers to further their careers. This month we look at three greenkeepers at different stages of their careers who have recently graduated thanks to the the funding they received from Ransomes Jacobsen

When I left school five years ago at the age of 16 to take a job on the grounds staff at Newquay Golf Club, never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined where this would take me - or what great opportunities would have come my way!

Firstly, I have been lucky enough to work on the Support teams at The Open Championships at Hoylake, Birkdale and Carnoustie. As if that wasn't exciting enough, I have also helped out at Loch Lomand during the Scottish Open.

Now incredibly, I have been offered a six-month internship at Augusta, Georgia - home of the Masters! Truthfully, I don't think that any of this would have happened for me if I hadn't kept moving forward with my education. The most recent amendment to my education portfolio was the completion of a foundation degree in turf science which I completed online while still in full time employment at Newquay Golf Club. This was made possible with the support of Newquay Golf Club and with a BIGGA Higher Scholarship, supported by Ransomes Jacobsen. I firmly believe that by continually developing your education it shows that you are worthy these opportunities. Ransome Jacobsen has recognised this and is investing in the future of the sportsturf industry.

I recently graduated and achieved a merit overall. It was a very strange experience going to the graduation as although I had spoken lots to the tutors and fellow students it was the first time I had ever met the majority of them, it was also the first time I had ever been to Myerscough College.

You may think that it would be difficult to do the course online; one of my main concerns was if I had difficulties understanding. Getting help with the course was never problematic; the tutors were always at hand via email or phone. Everyone also had access to bulletin boards for each subject that is similar to the BIGGA forums. I found this very helpful as more often than not you would find other students struggling with the same aspects and discussion would soon resolve any problems.

Generally I spent around 10 hours a week studying, however, this varied. You could work really hard and then allow yourself to have some time off so you could pretty much organise yourself to make the course accommodate your lifestyle. Although this was always a really good advantage of doing the course



Abi Crosswood is a prime example of what it is possible to achieve and where, even at a young age, a greenkeeping career can take you.

online it was still a big commitment and took up a lot of time, especially leading up to deadlines. It also takes good motivation, as you haven't got a fixed schedule of lectures like full time students and no one is really there to push you.

Details of assignments would be issued including briefs, guidelines and marking criteria's and then you could go and plan your assignment. Session booklets were regularly provided which gave an insight into different aspects concerning the subject, however further reading was also required.

The course itself was really relevant to today's greenkeeping it was absolutely packed full and it would be difficult to tell you about it all but a lot of the work could be implemented into running a course more efficiently. A lot of the assignments were actual documents that all golf courses should have as a formality. These included machine replace-

ment proposals, risk assessments, managements plans etc. It also made you extra attentive as to what actually happens on the different playing surfaces, as it was necessary to produce detailed observations of any changes or deteriorations. The course also helped to increase awareness to expenditure and budgets as one assignment for example involved noting all out goings from man power to running costs on one turf grass surface. I also found the ecology side very interesting and the course highlighted areas where this could be improved upon. More often than not areas, which could be made more environmentally friendly, would also prove more economic.

All in all I am pleased with my result and glad I took part in the course and now really look forward to my next experience of interning at Augusta!

Paul Woodham, Course Manager of Gayhill Golf Club, explains how it is never too late to start.

How important is education? If you had asked me the same question in the mid 80's I would definitely have dodged the topic in the same way that I dodged many of my school homework assignments and nearly all GCSE revision.

I can vividly recall the Deputy Head Teacher handing me my exam results and telling me "what a waste of time" it had all been and "how disappointed I must be in myself". But back then all I could think about was getting back up to the golf club for my next game because that's what was important to me at the time.

I could not see the value of education as I would not be going on to sixth form but would be working for my father. A whole summer of golf lay ahead of me followed by an easy route to employment. The fact that I didn't really have any love for my father's trade was unimportant at that time because I still had dreams of making a living out of golf. This of course would be playing golf but little did I know that my love of the game would lead me into the green-keeping profession. Now, nearly 25 years later I have a totally different view on the value of education both academic and vocational.

Like so many others within the greenkeeping profession, I've been fortunate enough to have been taught a vast array of skills from dedicated greenkeepers and through City and Guilds college courses and many seminars, workshops and education conferences. Many of these opportunities would not have been possible without the support structure which is offered by BIGGA and GTC. Time has moved on and the City and Guilds qualifications, which I first studied, have now been replaced with NVQ's. There are many who will argue the merits of NVQ's compared to City & Guilds but the fundamental point is that they both lay the cornerstone on which careers can be built.

Greenkeeping is a fantastic profession and one in which we never stop learning. Much of this learning is of course done on the job as we continually adapt to the changing weather, technologies, requirements and many other factors. But there is also opportunity to further ourselves academically through Higher Education learning. These

opportunities have never been easier to access thanks to distance learning and scholarship support. It is often easy to think that "I'm too busy to do that" but the truth is that distance learning is there to allow us to be flexible and achieve our ambitions while holding down a full time job.

The opportunity to embark upon a higher education qualification arose following the award of a BIGGA Higher Education Scholarship, supported by Ransomes Jacobsen. Myerscough College offered the best option for me to study thanks to the distance learning option and on-line delivery of a Foundation Degree in Sportsturf. The course comprised of three years part-time study with both assignments and on-line examinations. I won't kid anyone and say that it has been an easy ride and you will only get out what you are prepared to put in. From the onset the college learning materials have been first class and these are sure to come in useful for many years to come. The tutor support has also been excellent with Andy Owen and his team easy to access over the phone or via email. Three years hard work has now paid off with the award being a Foundation Degree in Sportsturf with a distinction. Yes I see this as a personal achievement and one which my parents are immensely proud of even though my academic achievements have perhaps been 20 years a bit late. For me though, the introduction to HE study has taught me a whole new set of skills which can be applied in many situations whether it's research, report writing or just a better understanding of our complex job. The golf club for which I am Course Manager can also be safe in the knowledge that they too will reap the benefits of the study. Many of the assignments were based upon real working scenarios with the setting up of an Environmental Policy being just one example of time well spent. The experience has encouraged me not to stop there but to press on and progress to a two year BSc (hons) top-up.

If you are considering undertaking HE study I can only offer these few thoughts from experience.

- Commit yourself to at least 8 hours study per week (even more when working on assignments) and



stick to it! There is never a 'right time' to undertake higher education. Just do it, but get the support of your family first!

- Research and enjoy the assignments. There is a world of fascinating books out there many of which are available from the Bigga lending library.

- Ask for help when needed and network with other students. They will often be as confused as you but a problem shared....

- Print off and keep the learning materials. You will probably get through half a rain forest but they become the most informative set of folders you will ever own.

- Is it worth it? Most definitely yes!

Finally, I would like to congratulate the other graduates with whom I have shared the experience and special thanks to fellow students Andrew, Abi and Ed. There were times when we all wondered what the heck was going on but we did it!

Education and training are issues that BIGGA are constantly promoting and encouraging our membership to undertake from both a national and regional level.

Regional seminars covering all manner of turf related and administrative subjects are run by your regional representatives supported in part by funding from headquarters. On a national level BIGGA Education organises a comprehensive programme of training sessions and information seminars as part of BTME week in Harrogate each year and promotes ongoing training and development through the CPD scheme.

In addition to these direct actions BIGGA runs two programmes promoting greenkeepers to pursue their own education, training and personnel development through independent colleges and universities. The first is the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award which has run for over 20 years while the second significant programme that BIGGA uses to promote education among greenkeepers is the Ransomes Jacobsen Higher Education Scholarship, a programme providing support towards the cost of college and university fees for BIGGA members studying turf management and greenkeeping. Support from this scheme can be a huge help for what can be a tough slog when you are balancing full time work with assignments, exams and portfolios.

So, if training for and gaining a qualification, no matter which level it may be, is such a tough slog how will gaining a qualification benefit you?

Everyday we make decisions about our facility, our golf course and our team members and by understanding why we do what we do; we can make more informed decisions that may help us to get better results. Education and training has given me the opportunity to get down to the nitty-gritty and understand fundamental turf management operations and help me make informed decisions on a daily basis.

Simple operations that we take for granted like aeration, fertilising, irrigation and installing drainage can all have varying levels of success that will depend on making the right decisions about how we undertake these operations.

Why do we aerate? We aerate to maintain soil conditions that will give turf the best possible growing environment. By understanding how different soils perform in differ-



Jaey Goodchild asks the question: "Qualifications and training ...What's in it for me?"

ent conditions we can choose when the best time to aerate is and work towards getting the most out of our sometimes very limited resources. There's more to it than basic N-P-K when choosing a fertiliser. Understanding the components of a fertiliser and their role in plant nutrition, for example what role nitrates, ammonium compounds and urea compounds play in the nitrogen cycle, we can choose the fertiliser that will give us the results and performance we are looking for.

Learning the 'why', in many cases, gives us the key to understanding another related issue. Understanding how a USGA green actually functions as a perched water table system can help us to understand soil-water relationships and assist us in choosing materials and construction methods for installing drainage.

Along the way to getting to the nitty-gritty, colleges and universities give us the opportunity to open

up a whole world of resources where we can access information quickly and easily. Extensive book libraries, access to online databases from around the world and a strong network of established professionals are all fantastic sources of information that will give us, as greenkeepers, the chance to build or understanding of why we do what we do. Presenting assignments and essays, compiling portfolios and making presentations as part of our training will all develop skills that we can use regularly when communicating with our colleagues, our managers and our members. Being part of the education system is as much about developing our own skills as it is about gaining knowledge.

If nothing else, studying to gain formal qualifications of all levels in turfgrass management, gives us the skills and opportunities to find and interpret information that we can use to get the most from the resources available.

**RANSOMES
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Ransomes Jacobsen Graduates 2009

Lee Baddeley
- Myerscough College
Foundation Degree

Abi Crosswood
- Myerscough College
*Online Foundation Degree
in Sportsturf*

Jaey Goodchild
- Cranfield Uni
MSc Sports Surface Tech

Edward Stant
- Myerscough College
*On-line Foundation
Degree in SC Sportsturf*

Paul Woodham
- Myerscough College
*Foundation Degree in
Sportsturf*

Dan Lightfoot
- Cranfield University
MSc Sports Turf Science