

# Master Greenkeeper unmasked

## MASTER GREENKEEPER CERTIFICATE

What is the BIGGA Master Greenkeeper Award, how do you achieve it and why should I apply for it? All these questions and more answered

**The Master Greenkeeper process was started by BIGGA in 1990, and a total of 63 greenkeepers have been successful so far. It's rightly considered to be one of the highest accolades in the history.**

Master Greenkeeper is achieved via a three stage process - education, training and experience, assessment of golf course operation and a case study and technical examination.

The certificate is open to all full BIGGA members, regardless of age and whether working at a large club or a smaller club.

But don't just take our word for it. We asked some of BIGGA's Master Greenkeepers to give you more of an insight into what the process involves, how it can reward you personally and professionally, and explode some of the myths surrounding it.

### CASE STUDY ONE

**Alan Pierce MG (main photo)  
Course Manager, Ham Manor  
Golf Club**

Alan began studying for his Master Greenkeeper certificate in 2010 to push himself and benefit his club and their members. It took him just a year to complete the process.

He said: "During the process, the greenkeepers who were already MGs were extremely helpful and supportive. The main challenges for me were finding out what the course inspection required and also fully understanding the exam questions.

"I had enough CPD credits to

progress to the course inspection stage relatively quickly. My team and I put a great deal of preparation into ensuring that our normal high standards were not just met but exceeded throughout. I studied hard for the exams and was fortunate to pass the inspection and exams on my first attempt.

"The award has many benefits. My employer is very happy with what I've achieved and it has encouraged me by pushing me to maintain the high standards expected of a Master Greenkeeper on a daily basis. It shows real commitment to your profession.

"I know there are rumours the MGs are a bit of an elite club but nothing could be further from the truth. Every single MG I've met has been very friendly and approachable. They're all from different backgrounds and different clubs - some have very limited budgets and resources while others have excellent budgets and resources. Some have three members in their team and some 30 - but all share the determination to achieve."

### CASE STUDY TWO

**Colin Parish MG (shown inset)  
Course Manager, Morecambe  
Golf Club**

Colin passed his Stage One and Stage Two in Master Greenkeeping while at Ulverston Golf Club in 1999, then moved to Morecambe Golf Club where he passed his final exams in 2005.

He commented: "I wanted to be able to manage at a high standard and have an understanding of what's needed in every aspect of greenkeeping. I had a HND and lots

of experience which helped me pass Stage One. I then gained a few years' experience as a manager before taking Stage Two. I did not pass the exams at my first attempt so left it a year before having another go. The exams were a real challenge and in the end it took me several attempts to pass them.

"Achieving MG has improved my confidence and self-esteem at work and in my personal life. I've earned real respect from my employer and they benefit from having a golf course that operates at a consistent standard at all times even when operating to certain budgets. I meet so many greenkeepers who are incredibly passionate about their job and undertaking your MG goes in tandem with this.

"My advice to anyone considering going for Master Greenkeeper would be to go for it and don't give up. Don't fear failure. It took me five years to complete it. There's supposedly a stigma around MG status but it's not like that, all the MGs I met are all down to earth and hard working. I don't manage a high end course, it's a normal members club, you can achieve it."



**CASE STUDY THREE**  
**Les Howkins MG (inset)**  
**Course Manager, The Richmond Golf Club**

Les Howkins completed his MG in 2004 while at Cleethorpes Golf Club. He is now Course Manager at The Richmond Golf Club.

He said: "I got fed up with people moaning about the MGs and how it was only in place for greenkeepers at big clubs, so I decided to give it a go and if they were right, at least I would have the evidence to prove it."

"My team and I worked incredibly hard to pass the course inspection and that was with a team of four and an annual budget of around £25,000.

"The process pushed my standards up and will continue to do so. It strengthens best practice and sets a benchmark for what can be achieved.

"It opens doors to other jobs as it

really stands out on a CV. I would like to see it as the norm and the goal of every greenkeeper moving up the ladder. It's not for the elite or the privileged few – it should be for the masses. Greenkeeper education has improved in so many areas and there is no reason more can't make the grade – if I can do it anyone can."

For even more on Master Greenkeeper, visit the Education section of the BIGGA website and click on the 'Master Greenkeeper' tab. If you're a member you can download the Golf Course Inspection form and past examination papers from the MG Section in the members' area. You can also contact the BIGGA L&D team at BIGGA House for more info.

