



# Greenkeepers Training Committee

In a new series, the GTC has invited representatives from its Quality Assured Centres and Training Providers to discuss their particular specialism within the sports turf sector

For this month's GTC Quality Assured feature David Golding, GTC's Education Director invited GOSTA's Managing Director Lesley Lowrie to give a background to her company and as the only non-college GTC QA Centre, explain the various programmes they offer



**David remembers Lesley saying "We are here to stay!" when he first visited her on an approval visit to GOSTA some 22 years ago, and so it has proved! She takes up the story...**

From 1982 until 2011 GOSTA Training delivered education to golf clubs in Ayrshire, Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, Forth Valley, Glasgow and Lanarkshire. In 2011 the company commenced delivery of training in the Edinburgh and Lothian areas also.

The opportunity to expand the business was met with both excitement and trepidation but three years on, the number of students has continued to increase each year.

The support and encouragement received from golf clubs in the Edinburgh and Lothian areas has been amazing and very much appreciated. The success has been aided by one of the most respected sports turf lecturers, Steve Miller, whose great reputation with many employers has spanned forty years.

A bit about our journey over 32 years...GOSTA Training started as a Training Provider to Golf Club Employers in October 1982 and for the first ten years delivered training to greenkeepers with the support of the local college. In 1993 there were many changes to education with the introduction of Vocational Qualifications and new Quality Systems, not forgetting a new government agency involved in the funding of the Scottish Vocational Qualifications. At the same time I took over as Managing Director and was charged with looking at the way forward for the company.

Challenges came with the territory. The main challenge was finding an effective delivery model which would take account of all the partners involved and ensure the Modern Apprenticeship Programme was effective. We needed to look at the best time of year and best location for the day release classes, and we also looked at what type of courses we would run to enhance the skills of the apprentices.

Feedback from those meetings

highlighted that employers preferred training to take place in the winter months. So in order to minimise down time for the employers, the 'off-the-job' education to gain the required knowledge and understanding would be best delivered from October to March.

This decision has stood the test of time and still exists today. It means the employee is away for day release when it tends to be (dare I say it!) a little quieter on the golf course. The benefit of apprentices meeting up in class is evident as they are not only learning from their lecturer but from their peers. I also know of many working relationships within the industry which have been created and will last a lifetime.

The training and practical skills are assessed at work, which is what you would expect. Where better than the realistic environment of a busy golf course?

The involvement of the Assessors/Supervisors in the workplace is of paramount importance and many of the Head Greenkeepers or Course Managers have been trained

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as assessors by the GTC. The practical evidence the apprentice brings forward for their qualification will be naturally occurring and realistic and will be countersigned by the appropriate person at work.

In order to compliment the training at the workplace, the day release education is delivered by the best and most appropriate people. Currently the company has three lecturers who teach classes every week and involve the students with classroom assessments. Between them, they have over a hundred years of sports turf experience and knowledge which they bring to our apprentices.

In Glasgow we have John Robertson, and Ronnie Bunting joined the team this year. Both John and Ronnie have been Course Managers so are fully aware of what will be required of apprentices in the industry. They are two of the most supportive people you could imagine, spending many hours sharing their knowledge and giving any additional guidance where required. Steve Miller, equally

knowledgeable and committed, looks after the students from Edinburgh and Lothian areas.

However, it is not about a disjointed approach to training with the employer doing practical skills and GOSTA the teaching. The company works tirelessly to build relationships at the highest level with our employers, apprentices and other partners and it is imperative that we constantly keep up to date with their requirements. To that end apprentices and their assessor/supervisor are visited at work every 12 weeks to document progress.

The lecturers or myself will then visit each employer in the summer to ensure that information is gained with regard to our delivery of the qualification and update the golf club on any grants, wage subsidies or current initiatives. Over the years feedback from these meetings has proved to be invaluable.

Often Skills Development Scotland will have funding available to support short courses which will mean the difference of training staff

or not. At the moment, with many golf club budgets being reduced, these initiatives are very well received. It also allows a refresher for the assessors to ensure that they are keeping their skills up to date.

So where are we now? GOSTA Training, as one of the main providers of the Modern Apprenticeship programme in Scotland and with an extensive portfolio of short industry related courses, will continue to listen to employers and students.

Hopefully, the successes and lessons learned in the past 32 years (as a private company) will enable us to go from strength to strength and continue to forge great relationships within the industry. In turn this will enable us to provide the type of training the industry needs to have a highly skilled workforce to take it forward.

In summary, GOSTA Training respects the work of organisations within golf including The GTC, BIGGA, SGU and The R&A and we are proud to be part of such a great industry.



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