

The skills agenda

Employers often see training as a nice thing to do but something that is often a victim if a budget cut is required. David Golding the GTC's Education Director explains why he believes training is critical for any business to be successful.

All too often I hear from Course Managers that "the club won't support staff training" or "due to a budget cut no staff are currently going to college".

I have to say that in answer to both of these comments often it is down to ignorance about the modern formal training system.

If I start from the parameter that all staff have to have some skills to carry out the tasks they are employed to carry out, where they have been taught their current skills is irrelevant. However employers should be looking to develop their staff to the maximum of their potential.

This has to be good practice both for staff morale and a multi-skilled operative is worth ten cheap limited skilled staff.

Training does not mean you have to send staff off to college or that it has to be expensive.

The majority of the greenkeeper skills training should be carried out at the golf course by the course manager with only specialist legislative skills requiring an external provider input.

The GTC has trained many Course Managers and several deputies to be aware of their

formal role in training and assessment but so often I hear that trainees feel they are not receiving the level of support from their boss especially when they have been registered on a vocational qualification or apprenticeship.

As an employer please be aware of the fact that for vocational qualifications to work your Course Manager or in some cases the deputy must be formally involved with the chosen Centre where the learner is registered.

Any competent Course Manager will be involved in his/her staff skills development and at the same time keeping you informed of their own continual professional development (CPD).

Sadly I am hearing stories that learners/apprentices are increasingly frustrated by not receiving the level of support and training in the workplace and employers should of course be monitoring this by holding regular appraisals with all staff.

The GTC makes no apologies in raising this problem as it has invested heavily in Course Manager training to ensure skills development can be the norm at the golf course.

The land-based colleges



A 'team' effort - employer, trainee and Course Manager working together ensuring 'on the job training and assessment' is the norm.

who have traditionally "taught" greenkeepers have in the main now accepted that the skills should be coached by the Course Manager and have designed various methods of offering the knowledge and qualifications through different delivery modes.

The knowledge required to underpin the skills is also now available in hardcopy and CD format from the GTC and there are some excellent examples of where Course Managers use every spare moment – say inclement weather – to discuss the theory with the learners.

I have also heard that some Course Managers have a designated period during a week for staff education and training which again shows them in a very professional light. This option also reduces the time when learners have to be away

from their place of work.

Our friends in the colleges do still have a major role to play, especially with the more academic courses and qualifications such as the Higher National Certificate or Foundation Degree and these awards can be studied through a variety of learning modes i.e. on-line, distance learning.

It is for employers to ensure the Course Managers manage not only the course but also the maintenance facility and greenstaff development.

As an employer please be aware that skills training is vital to the golf course and it is the Course Manager in association with you that can make your course the one that golfers want to play and the one that greenkeepers want to work at! See pages 2-3

Important notice to all qualified assessors

The GTC has evidence that some Centres are not engaging you as the primary assessor of candidates and at best are using you as an expert witness.

The GTC feels this action is totally undermining not only your D32/D33 – A1 qualification but also your professionalism as the occupationally competent person best placed to deliver the training and carry out the assessment of your trainee(s).

Work-based training has become very popular with both employers and trainees but it is up to you as an assessor to assist the GTC to maintain standards by ensuring your chosen Centre supports you and the learners in accordance with national quality assurance criteria.

One sure way of knowing if your chosen Centre is engaging you as a qualified assessor is whether or not you know who your Internal Verifier is?

The Centre's Internal Verifier should be supporting you on a regular basis by having regular contact including inviting you to standard setting meetings and if distance from the Centre is a problem at least copies of agendas and minutes to keep you fully updated on quality issues. **DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR INTERNAL VERIFIER IS?**

YOU are so important to your learners' progress and the GTC will continue to work with the Awarding Bodies NPTC & SQA to make sure the External Verifiers, when visiting Centres, are ensuring qualified assessors at golf courses are being used as the primary assessor. But we need YOU to be aware of the way some Centres prefer to use their own staff as the assessor (peripatetic) of your learners.

To carry out ongoing training and assessment of learners as trained by the GTC and Plan-It Training there is only one person best placed to carry out this to the standards and that is YOU.

We trust you understand why this warning has been issued and if you need to discuss any delivery issues of vocational qualifications or apprenticeship programmes please do not hesitate to contact the GTC.

David F Golding
GTC Education Director

Cutting back the year

Age is no barrier to learning and a Reaseheath College trainee has proved the point in a prestigious greenkeeping competition.

Forty-seven-year-old Dave Newton was selected from 3,000 trainee greenkeepers from throughout the country to be one of two runners-up in the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year competition.

Formerly head herdsman at a dairy farm, Dave changed careers and gained NVQ levels 2 and 3 in sports turf at Reaseheath College in Nantwich while working for Arrowe Park Golf Club in the Wirral.

"I have always been fascinated by grass and when I took up golf I used to watch the lads cutting the grass and thought I would love to do that," said Dave, who is married with a 16-year-old son. "I talked myself into a job at Arrowe Park and it's gone from there."

Being an older student was a bit daunting at first. "Initially I was very nervous and thought I would be the oldest one there but soon found that I got on really well with the others and have made some good friends," he said.

"I love learning and getting qualifications can open up all sorts of opportunities. I have no regrets and my message to others is that you are never too old. Don't think that you've had it – go

ahead and have a go!"

Senior lecturer in sports turf at Reaseheath, Gareth Phillips, recommended Dave for the award. "Dave's NVQ level 3 portfolio was the best I have ever seen. He has been a superb student and thoroughly deserves his success," he said.

"Having come into the industry fairly late, Dave has proved that age isn't a barrier and hasn't looked back," said Gareth. "I have found that mature students have a tremendous wealth of talent and experience to offer."

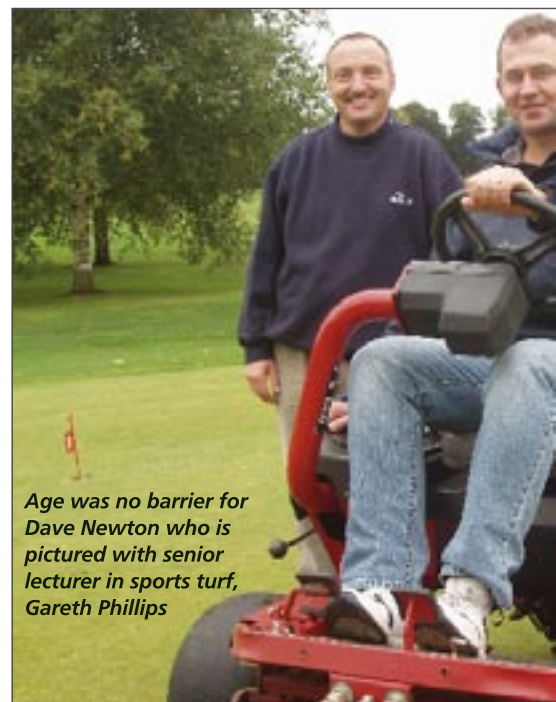
"Dave has made a huge impact on the club with this experience as well as the life and interpersonal skills he has acquired over the years - these are transferable from other industries."

"He has also made an appreciative difference to the dynamics of the group and is a really positive role model," Gareth added. "Employers do not realise what they are missing out on if they

discriminate by age."

Assistant Parks Manager for Wirral Borough Council, John Shipton, said an individual's age was not as important as their experience and interests.

"We employ the whole range of people from school leavers at 16 through to 65," he said. "We look at the person, what skills they have to offer, their qualifications and their interest in greenkeeping rather than their age."



Age was no barrier for Dave Newton who is pictured with senior lecturer in sports turf, Gareth Phillips

Getting all on board

The golf industry's acclaimed and long standing policy of substantial investment in work place training and education is being put at risk by some training providers who are reluctant to put their trust in the system, according to Huw Parry, International Training Manager for Plan-It Training.

Despite more than fourteen successful years of hard work in establishing a nation-wide golf club based training programme to help employees achieve a range of NVQ qualifications, the industry is left with a bank of qualified assessors whose skills are unused by some colleges.

"The problem we have is that a number of providers are refusing to fully participate in

the spirit of the initiative in that they are ignoring the skills of the bank of assessors we have now established," said Huw.

"Some colleges, it seems, are still not ready to trust the credibility of the fully trained assessors we have. Some still insist on using their own assessors for training programmes despite there being a qualified work-based

*Huw Parry
International
Training Manager*



STRI Green Construction Guidelines

Book review

Dr Mike Canaway, the GTC Technical Committee Chairman reviews the STRI Green Construction Guidelines which employers and Course Managers will find very useful when considering major construction work.



He said municipal golf courses had an important role to play and well qualified staff were key to giving members of the public the high standards of course and facilities they expect.

"It is important for everyone to have the opportunity to use a golf course," said John. "It gives young people something to do, helps them to develop an interest and brings more people into the game."



Since 1960 golf clubs in the USA, along with architects, constructors and others have had the benefit of the USGA "Specifications for a method of putting green construction", later referred to as "Recommendations for a method on putting green construction" as the benchmark for high quality green construction.

The strength of the USGA Recommendations was always that they were based on research, scientifically validated and have undergone a number of revisions as knowledge has grown. For many years the lack of similar scientifically-based recommendations in the UK and Europe has led to reliance on the USGA recommendations here also. However because of the wide

variety of climatic conditions encountered in the USA, the USGA Recommendations had to be broadly drafted and are not necessarily the most appropriate for UK conditions.

During the 1980s the R & A began to fund constructional research at the STRI, culminating in a large and relatively long-lasting trial on the prevalent golf green constructional methods. Consequently the STRI has accumulated a significant amount of scientific data, together with its long experience of advising clubs on new developments and reconstruction projects, to support modifications of the USGA Recommendations.

The STRI Guidelines for Golf Green Construction in the United Kingdom have been many years in gestation and will provide golf clubs,

golf architects, agronomists and constructors with the basis for best-practice green construction in the UK. It will also be a valuable resource for course managers involved in constructional projects as well as students studying turfgrass science at an HND/Foundation Degree or higher level. The A4 size, 20 page booklet gives information on construction, drainage, the rootzone mixture, grass establishment and gives grading curves for all the relevant materials as well as references to the test methods used. The booklet is illustrated with colour photographs. It is available from the STRI bookshop (contact Linda Gallagher on 01274 518908) or at www.stri.co.uk for online ordering. The price is £14.95 plus postage and packing. Please mention the GTC when ordering.

■ The thoughts and opinions of some of golf's most prestigious devotees have been captured in a new book compiled by Malcolm Peake. The approach advocated in "A Natural Course for Golf" is in tune with society's demand for more ecological management of natural resources, and is also far more economical. The

book really proves how money can be saved when managing a golf course responsibly. "I hope the book will help the golfer understand, and to be more tolerant and realistic of the professionals who work with nature, and maintain our golf courses," said Malcolm, who is also known for his work at Temple Golf Club (see page 4)

and his book "Confessions of a Chairman of Green." "But particularly I hope they will appreciate the true Royal and Ancient game of golf played on sustainable natural golf courses." The book is available from the STRI bookshop, 01274 565131 or on-line at www.stri.co.uk/bookshop priced £19.50 plus post and packing.

assessor available at the golf club and that casts doubt on the credibility of the valuable resource of industry assessors who have come through the GTC and Plan-It training programme at golf clubs around the country. That sort of credibility gap could undermine the on-site training within the industry as a whole."

College based assessors (peripatetic) should only be used when the workplace does not have a qualified assessor on-site. However this method of assessment is a poor substitute for not having a qualified assessor at the golf

course working "alongside" the trainee(s) day in day out.

Ongoing training and assessment is by far the most productive method rather than the peripatetic assessment option currently used by some colleges.

Golf clubs still have the opportunity to have their Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper trained to become a qualified assessor through the GTC.

This training is funded either by a European Social Fund (ESF) programme or the GTC.

Huw, who is rolling out Plan-It Training's golf industry

expertise around the world, including the United States, said he is concerned that the leading edge training culture that had been established by the GTC and Plan-It Training is being put at risk by a lack of support from some providers.

"Of course the situation is not all negative in relation to work-based assessments – there are some excellent providers who really have embraced the spirit of the GTC's vision. There are colleges who whole-heartedly support the industry's training policies and who regularly use the skills of our bank of assessors," Huw added.

He said the GTC had led the way in building a training infrastructure which would encourage the on-going training and development of staff at all levels within the industry and deserved continued support from all areas.

"British golf now has a training initiative that is the envy of the world," Huw added. "We need everybody within this industry, including all the colleges and providers, to demonstrate a total faith in that initiative if our training philosophy is to remain the best in the world and VQs are to work for our industry."

Hopefully most serious golfers appreciate the fact that at any golf club, the golf course is by far and away the biggest and most important single asset and that it therefore makes sound business sense for the management to allocate the highest proportion of its resources for the course, writes past Chairman of Green, Temple Golf Club, Malcom Peake.

Given this assumption, it should therefore logically follow that serious golfers should understand the requirement for routine and non-routine, disruptive and non-disruptive maintenance but unfortunately this is often not the case. We have all been faced with the perennial question "why have the greens been tined just when they have reached their peak?" Of course, trying to explain that one of the major reasons the putting surfaces are so good is because they have been regularly aerated is one of those areas that all Chairmen of Green, Course Managers and Secretaries are frequently faced with and this is where presenting a united front, singing from the same hymn sheet, backed up by an understanding and supportive Board or General Committee is vitally important. In fact this united front is becoming even more important by the day as the impact of restrictive legislation, health and safety, increasingly likely water shortages and other factors beyond the control of the management will

undoubtedly have serious and ongoing ramifications to golf courses and clubs.

In terms of modern golf course management, the triumvirate of Chairman of Green, Course Manager and Secretary is as important to the future of golf as the Great Triumvirate of James Braid, J H Taylor and Harry Vardon was to the development of golf. The modern day triumvirate must work in close harmony and be able to communicate constantly changing and evolving course management policies to members. Hopefully all clubs have a Course Management Policy Document in place and these hugely important documents are based on one common key underlying theme, that the golf course in question is managed and maintained in keeping with its location and indigenous natural environment with the aim of ensuring that the course is maintained and presented in as good condition as possible and for as long a period as possible subject to local climate and weather conditions. The R & A and other golfing bodies have the same job to perform in terms of educating golfers in general.

Communication is the key, and with the ability to reach most members quickly by e-mail, this objective should be easier to achieve. At Temple we keep members as well informed as possible about what is happening on and around the golf course in a host of different ways. We hold biannual members' informal green liaison meetings at which a



Good communication with members is vital when maintenance operations away from the norm are being carried out

panel comprising the Chairman of Green, Course Manager, Secretary, and occasionally an agronomist, or ecologist invites and answers questions from the floor. These meetings are organised on varying days and times so as to appeal to different groups of members; we organised one immediately prior to a social event which worked well. The Chairman of Green writes a short one page monthly Course Bulletin which is posted on the noticeboard and e-mailed to members, along with the Monthly Diary Sheet. In addition weekly competition results e-mails also include a note about the golf course. This may be an impassioned plea about repairing pitchmarks, raking bunkers or adhering to winter course traffic control or a one-line reference warning of possible water shortages due to the exceptionally dry winter and the likely effect upon the golf course and members' gardens. These weekly communications are extremely useful, firstly because they are reaching those who play most and secondly because critical

information can be regularly drip-fed and reinforced. We also enlist the help of experienced members in helping to educate the less experienced. Utilising a "please help to put back in some of what you have taken out" philosophy, biannual divotting evenings followed by an informal BBQ have proved successful not only in improving the fairways but also in fostering relations between members and greenkeeping staff.

Modern day life is such that we all have increasingly limited time and demanding expectations. This is no different at golf clubs where the average golfer expects millionaires' golf at rock bottom prices. With the supply of golf clubs and courses now outstripping demand and financial resources at golf clubs under huge pressure, the role of the modern day triumvirate and the requirement for good communication of policy is critical if this great game, and the camaraderie and friendships associated with it, is to survive.

The modern day triumvirate

Good evidence is required when making a case for capital expenditure to committee