

# ON COURSE

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## Staying ahead

**Kevin Weir, The Scottish Golf Union's Golf Services Manager, comments on the importance of presenting high quality playing surfaces for golf clubs, members and visitors alike and the vital role that the golf course plays in sustaining a golf clubs operations.**

'Nomadic golfers' are today widely recognised as a growing breed, utilising a myriad of discounted green fee offerings to access golf courses throughout the UK. Perhaps more concerning are the initial signs of a growing number of nomadic golf club members – members seeking to play on golf courses in pristine condition as near to 12 months a year as possible, getting full value for their annual membership subscriptions.

The advent in many golf clubs of reducing waiting lists, removal of entry fees and marketeers actively promoting new member packages, inadvertently offers the nomadic golf club member the ideal opportunity to satisfy his needs and to move between golf clubs at will.

But let us consider the fundamental reason why golfers join golf clubs.

Many reasons are obvious – location, cost, length of waiting list, ease of access to the course(s), practice facilities, condition of the course, club competition structures, visitor introduction policy, family orientation, the winter golf policy – in particular whether course protection measures are adopted by a club over the Winter months and the longevity of these (e.g. use of astroturf mats,

use of winter or temporary tees and greens, lifting from the fairway to the semi-rough), the club's catering reputation and the social activity calendar of the club. However, fundamentally golfers simply join clubs to play golf.

Golfers will therefore seek a course that is presented in the best possible playing conditions at all times for as near to 12 months of the year as possible, having had their expectations significantly fuelled by current TV and golfing

media coverage. Augusta and the Masters inevitably kick start this in early Spring every year.

These expectations will apply whether playing in a club championship, an Open competition, a monthly medal, a bounce game with friends or a few holes on a summer's

evening – the player will always want to enjoy the best possible course conditions at all times.

Golf clubs will therefore have to identify and implement those course management practices appropriate for their courses that will best deliver high quality playing surfaces for their members and visitors alike – greens need to be firm, smooth and true, perhaps requiring an intensive

thatch removal and top dressing programme, greens may need to be re-constructed, drainage systems may require improvement and thatch may need to be removed from other playing areas – e.g. tees / landing zones.

Activity of this nature requires significant planning by golf clubs which should be formalised into a long term Course Management Policy document. This policy document should lay out the commitment of the golf club to support and fund an agreed maintenance and development plan for the golf course and also double up as a performance plan for the course manager and his staff to work towards.

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**Kevin Weir,  
Golf Services  
Manager**

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## Staying ahead

The policy document should be openly shared and communicated to the golf club membership, allowing them to understand the agreed long term plans for the golf course, some elements of which they will have voted for. The policy is a living document and should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, supplemented by regular course inspections to monitor progress and results against the plan.

To support the policy, informative reports clearly displayed within the clubhouse or starters box will help golfers, both members and visitors alike, understand what to expect when they are out on the golf course and to understand any work that may be in progress whilst they are playing.

The impact of the condition that a golf course is presented in cannot therefore be underestimated. It's fundamental to the success and viability of the golf club that a well presented golf course with a reputation for high quality playing surfaces can reap huge rewards for a club and also significantly enhance the reputation of its green staff – retaining existing members (discouraging the nomadic golf club member), attracting new members, establishing the club as an attractive venue for visiting parties, individual visiting golfers and corporate events, and attracting external sponsorship. Most importantly golfers will achieve their requisite value for money, have access to the quality of golf course they desire, becoming extremely satisfied customers!

# Great commu

## Ian Church, Secretary/ Manager and Huw Morgan, Course Manager at Ashburnham Golf Club explain the need for communication in a team and how respect for each others role works well.

Communication through team work is often hard to put into practice at golf clubs. At Ashburnham Golf Club a new partnership has reaped success and shown the need to communicate within a team.

Secretary/Manager, Ian Church, and Course Manager, Huw Morgan, are joining forces to take Ashburnham's fine reputation to even greater heights. By bringing their expertise together in their fields, they see their success can be greater than the sum of what they bring separately to Ashburnham.

Ian Church states quite simply: "Consider us as a pair of Siamese twins, but joined at the legs, heart and brain. If you try and surgically separate us, you'd end up killing us both. In a golf course management sense, I don't see how I can achieve my goals without Huw doing his job. I know he is one of the best there is and that means I can give him free reign to achieve the goals that we want. We both agree on what needs to be achieved, but never the way in which it is to be done to get there."

Similarly, Huw Morgan realises the importance of Ian's job: "Ian brings in the money to help finance the tools, materials and resources needed to execute the work on the course. We have many areas where

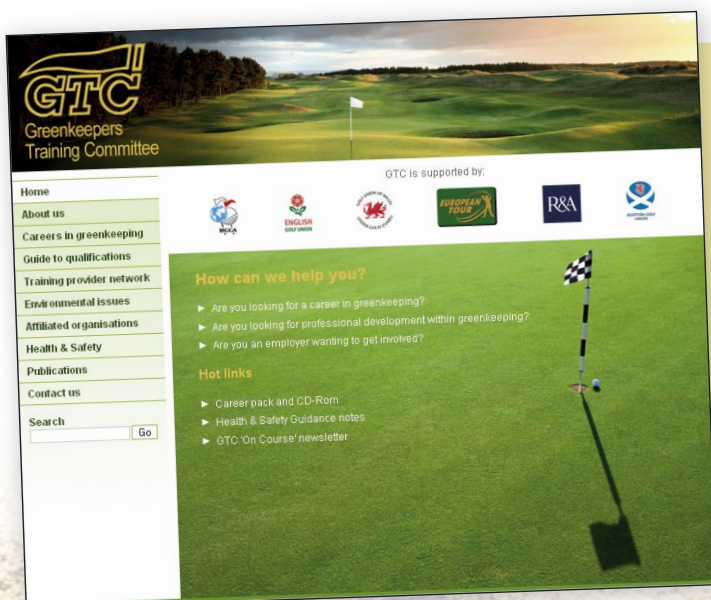
Huw and Ian



large sums of money need to be spent and this will have to come through visitor greenfee income. Thankfully Ian is an expert in this.

"A good relationship is vital to the success here at Ashburnham. I have worked for some great secretaries who have trusted me and wanted to work **with** me. I have also worked with people who wanted to control my job as well as trying to do their job. One job is hard enough, no-one will benefit if we interfere in each other's work." Huw continues.

"Ian is a link for me to the main committee



### News in Brief

## New look website

The GTC is happy to announce the launch of its brand new website. The new look site offers up-to-date features, such as an innovative navigation system and a completely new structure.

Employers and employees can also access all the latest guidance available from the new Health and Safety booklet on the site. To view the latest news log onto [www.the-gtc.co.uk](http://www.the-gtc.co.uk).

# Communications

– we work together for the greater good of the club. There is often a problem with individuals being jealous of the success people have achieved. Secretary/Managers and Course Managers should mutually respect each other in terms of the qualifications and knowledge they both have and work together at all times” Huw said.

Ian goes further: “When we were in the process of offering Huw the position of Course Manager, I insisted that the Directors consider paying him a salary equal in amount to my own. In employment terms he still reports to me, but I’m firmly of the belief that what a top class Course Manager can bring to the team is of equal value to any good Secretary/Manager. We get paid exactly the same amount. I’m sure that some managers may be very surprised to learn that, but it works and it’s fair.”

Morgan and Church both understand that without each other being on the top of their game, the golf course will suffer. The fall out then goes on to adversely affect club members and other staff.

Planning has already started at Ashburnham for future tournaments, including the Home Internationals in 2010. Ian and Huw are vital cogs in that process. They meet or speak daily to communicate what is going on in both departments. Head of Department meetings usually take place on

Tuesday mornings at 10.30 for 30 minutes. During this meeting the week ahead is discussed and any problems ironed out.

Standards required at golf clubs have risen to unprecedented levels in the last 10 years. All staff must be trained to be able to cope with these demands. Golfers demand high standards on the course, in the clubhouse, proshop and administration office. Golf clubs have to employ professional people with the correct skills, experience and customer service to manage their departments and produce the standards required.

The relationship must be down to trust, respect and shared positive experience. At Ashburnham, Ian and Huw trust each other to do their jobs professionally, respect each other for the areas that they bring to the team and which invariably allows them to focus on their own areas of expertise. The shared positive experiences are that Ian delivers what Huw needs (money to pay for the materials and tools Huw and his team use to get the course to the required standard) and Huw delivers what Ian needs (a golf course that exceeds expectations and acts as a springboard for Ian to use to generate further business). Call it the chicken and the egg!

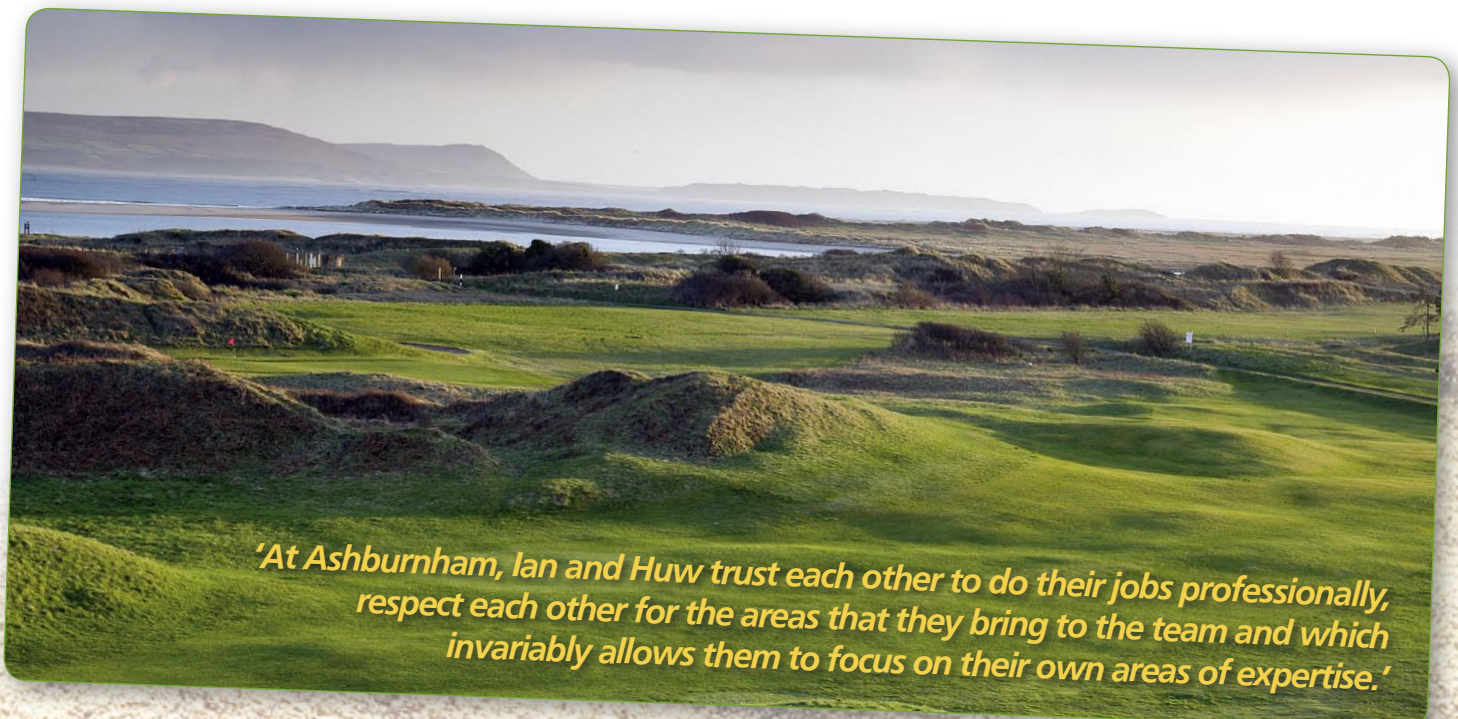
In 2007, greenfee income more than doubled in comparison to the previous year, and it’s anticipated that it will be approximately

four times the 2006 level in 2008. “Some people have suggested that going from £28,000 to £65,000 in a year is easy to do. But for the last 20 years, our greenfee has been at about the same level. If it was so easy to do, why didn’t the team at Ashburnham figure it out sooner? In my view, it all comes down to two basic principles: work hard, and work smart. Huw and I do both in copious amounts and the benefits will lead us to achieve £200,000 in 2010. Once you strip away our incremental wages and material costs, can you imagine what we are going to be able to do with an extra £100,000 every year?” Church asks rhetorically.

After only nine months working together, great progress has been made with increased visitors giving positive views of the course improvements. The GUW has bestowed its approval by naming the club to host the 2009 Welsh Amateur Strokeplay Championship and the 2010 Home Internationals. Morgan goes on to say “[The GUW] is not only saying it approves of the path we are laying down, but this is its vote of confidence in the ability of Ian and I to achieve the required standards.”

“We are both reaping the rewards of each other’s hard work and the future looks very bright for the members of Ashburnham.”

*“Watch this space...”*



*‘At Ashburnham, Ian and Huw trust each other to do their jobs professionally, respect each other for the areas that they bring to the team and which invariably allows them to focus on their own areas of expertise.’*

# Are you in control of staff training and assessment?

*Flexible learning*

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

It's now some 13 years since "we" the GTC embarked on promoting formal skills and focused qualifications to employers and greenkeepers.

Since their introduction Vocational Qualifications have truly become recognised internationally.

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.

As a quick refresher, to most readers these standards are regularly reviewed and both employers and greenkeepers are involved. Widespread consultation occurs before accreditation by the Government Approved Bodies.

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's without doubt they who are best placed and qualified to train, motivate AND assess the trainees registered on a work-based qualification.

Why is it that many Centre staff contact me stating that on-the-job assessors are not seeing it as their role to assess staff or only look to assess

when their workload eases.

The assessor may think it's a time consuming task and always involves standing with a clipboard observing the trainee?

This is not the case as the introduction of vocational qualifications to the sector was a massive change in policy from the pass/fail examinations. We must still accept our responsibilities to ensure the system works in accordance with both the National Standards for Sports Turf AND Assessing.

I often hear that centres are using their own assessors, bypassing the A1-D32/33 qualified assessors and this is not best use of resources by the centre or indeed in the best interest of the learner.

An excellent example of how and when the system worked well is the BIGGA-TORO Student of the Year. This is due to the feedback I receive annually, that when a student has received support from his/her boss on the job they have progressed at a greater pace than those who have had to rely totally on the provider/centre staff to support them.

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. In other words who is doing what?

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 you achieved the old D32/33 assessor award you don't have to gain the new A1 qualification. All your chosen centre would need to do through the Internal Verifier is to ensure you are up-to-date with the assessor standards and centre documentation, so don't worry if you have not assessed a candidate for some time!

I'm assured by centres that whilst they have their own assessors they rely heavily on Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers to actively be part of the assessment process, however, please



**David Golding,  
GTC Education  
Director**

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 requiring to release trainee greenkeepers for days of assessment away from work.

**In summary:** 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.

## News in Brief

### GTC exhibit at Harrogate Week

**From the 22-24 January, the GTC will be attending the BTME exhibition at the Harrogate International Centre along with 200 other exhibitors.**

Come and see us on stand Q59, where GTC staff and representatives from organisations within the GTC will be on hand to offer independent advice. You will also be able to purchase the training manual as well as other learning materials which are used by the GTC's Approved Training Providers.

**Hope to see you there!**