

Institute Of Groundsmanship Launches Six-Year Strategy To 'Challenge Perceptions'

The Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG), the leading membership organisation for grounds professionals involved in the management of sports pitches, landscape and amenity facilities, has announced a major ten-point strategic 'Challenging Perceptions' development plan that will carry both the IOG and the grounds care profession it represents forward in unprecedented style for the next six years.

With 'quality surfaces supported by quality services' as the central thread, the strategic areas highlighted by the IOG for development also include:

- Leadership
- Working partnerships
- Professional services, membership and communications
- Training & education
- Health & safety
- Research & development
- Natural environment
- Events & exhibitions
- 2012 opportunities.

Unveiled at IOG SALTEX by IOG chief executive, Geoff Webb, Challenging Perceptions is the result of an intense seven-month review of IOG activities, and is the first policy document of its kind focusing on the role of the IOG and the grounds care industry as a whole.

Geoff Webb comments: "The Challenging Perceptions strategy lays the foundations for a new era of the IOG as the Institute and its members continue to establish wider awareness of their role as the preparations for the Olympic Games gather pace.

"At a time when many eyes will be focused on the skills and aptitude of grounds professionals, the IOG is positively looking to improve and promote the overall professionalism of the industry with Olympic organisations and in the wider public community as well.

"This, indeed, is a core attribute of Challenging Perceptions – it's about gaining recognition for an industry that has held its light under a bushel for too long!"

Characterised by "modern and forward thinking", the groundbreaking strategic signposts in Challenging Perceptions have received industry-wide applaud, with organisations such as the Central Council of Physical Recreation, Lawn Tennis Association, Skills Active, Sport England, The Football Association and the Waste and Resources Action Programme all endorsing the planned developments.

Indeed, says Minister for Sport Richard Caborn: "IOG members provide an important service to sport...delivering high quality playing surfaces...The recommendations outlined provide a firm foundation for success and I welcome them."

The IOG has highlighted a number of factors for immediate action within the 10 strategic themes of Challenging Perceptions, and these include:

Improved leadership and good governance – continue the review of IOG internal processes and systems to ensure best practice, efficiency and effectiveness; and complete the appointment of a dedicated executive team to deliver the strategy.

Improved working partnerships – engage and work closely/better with: Government departments such as the Department for Media, Culture and Sport, the Department for Education and Skills, and the Department for Trade and Industry; sector training and skills councils including LANTRA and Skills Active; other industry professional organisations such as API, BALI, BIGGA, GTC, LDCA, NPFA and SAPCA, as well as the newly-established Institute of Sport, Parks and Leisure (ISPAL); plus local government and organisations that employ grounds and amenity professionals.

There is also a need to build on the already important relationships with the National Governing Bodies of Sport for bowls, cricket, football, horse racing, rugby league and rugby union.

Quality surfaces supported by quality services – in the build up to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the IOG is determined to work tirelessly to raise the profile of 'quality surfaces supported by quality services'.

The IOG will also work with industry partners to raise the profile of correct technical standards and construction methods, as well as campaign to ensure

that the correct maintenance and remedial regimes are applied to existing facilities.

Also on the agenda is the development of a comprehensive network of expert quality advisors.

Professional services, membership and communications – a continuous programme of improving the image and value of the grounds professional; and by early 2007, the IOG will be setting further targets to support its successful drive to continue to raise the IOG's core membership, particularly with regard to new and younger entrants to the profession.

Improve communication with both the IOG membership and the wider industry – the latter, for instance, by highlighting industry issues in an imaginative and innovative way to national and regional media.

Training and education – the new Level 2 National Certificate in Sports and Amenity Turf Maintenance, due to be introduced by the end of 2006, will be complemented by a new Advanced National Certificate in 2007.

Further exploration of the opportunities for the delivery of IOG-endorsed courses through online learning and visual learning packs; investigate opportunities available to reach volunteer grounds professionals; and, by autumn 2007, the instigation of a new network of courses that reflect customer demand geographically.

In addition, active participation in the relevant sector Skills Councils will ensure that grounds management is recognised as a skilled and supported profession.

Health and safety – adopt a best practice stance on health and safety by strengthening the current services provided by the IOG health and safety advisor; by making health and safety and risk assessment a key feature of training and education; and by disseminating practical information in an easy-to-understand way.

Also, the IOG will work with partners to bring expert influence to bear on proposed standards.

Research and development - using the IOG 2000 Fund as the benchmark for pioneering research, the new '2012 Research and Development Fund' will be targeted at projects that have the potential to benefit individual grounds managers, the wider industry and lead to better quality playing surfaces.

With partners, the aim is to invest at least £500,000 over the period 2007-2012, including partner contributions.

Continuing the work of the IOG 2000 Fund - which was originally established as a Millennium Programme to make grants available to individuals and organisations for education, research and benevolent purposes into the development and provision of quality surfaces – the 2012 Research and Development Fund will have a wider remit and include:

- A proactive approach in identifying and determining key industry research areas
- Extending the range of involved partners
- Improving the explanation of the research as it is undertaken (interim reports) and practical outcomes.

Natural environment - adopt best practice on all issues relating to the natural environment, by engaging more proactively with environmental agencies and organisations, and focusing on, for example, legislative compliance, water, recycling and disposal of waste products, and the use of and disposal of chemicals. Also, improve the dissemination of that information via the IOG website, publications, courses, events and exhibitions.

Events and exhibitions – the IOG is committed to an energetic programme of events and exhibitions; both IOG SALTEX and IOG Scotsturf will continue as annual events; and the IOG will develop a considered strategy of regional events that will continue the Challenging Perceptions' ten strategic themes.

2012 opportunities – the IOG will actively seek to engage with the Olympic and Paralympic organising authorities to develop opportunities that arise as the UK approaches 2012, and where possible will take the lead in specifying, advising on and monitoring the technical standards required, using these facilities as showcases for best practice groundsmanship. In addition, the IOG will campaign to ensure that the post-Games natural turf and synthetic turf legacy is delivered on a sustainable basis.

Geoff Webb concludes: "In addition to also instigating the industry's first ever accurate survey of the actual size of the UK's grounds care industry, the strategy highlights the areas where the IOG feels that it both should and could make the most impact over the coming years.

"It will not be easy, but we believe that progress can be achieved with unified effort, hard work and a practical approach.

"When the Olympic flame is lit," he says, "the IOG wants to look back on several years of hard work and achievement, and an increasingly valued profession and the improving quality of playing surfaces."

- Visit www.iog.org for a full copy of the Institute of Groundsmanship's 'Challenging Perceptions' strategy.