

Level 2 Turf Maintenance Qualification Is Designed To Meet Local Authority Needs

The development of a radical new flexible approach to the way in which an intermediate sports and amenity turf maintenance qualification is applied and assessed looks set to revolutionise uptake among the UK's grounds professionals and, in particular, become a watershed in the way local councils and their employees, as well as their contractors, progress up the skills ladder.

At the same time, the new qualification process is expected to boost employee morale, loyalty and motivation.

Designed as an alternative to N/SVQs, and developed by the Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) in collaboration with the National Proficiency Test Council (NPTC), the new Level 2 Intermediate Certificate in Sports and Amenity Turf Maintenance has been mapped to National Occupational Standards and heralds a new era in the way training at this level is both undertaken and assessed.

Crucially, the new qualification – which is destined to be implemented in September 2006 – offers an alternative to the traditional S/NVQ route in that each unit of the certificate can be undertaken and assessed separately and at a pace that suits the user.

In addition, candidates' technical knowledge will be assessed online, followed by specific practical assessment of units by an independent assessor.

Providing an alternative, more flexible route for candidates who do not have access to an N/SVQ – or cannot adapt work styles to meet the 'rigidness' of N/SVQ demands that dictate workplace assessment – the new Level 2 certificate qualification depends on candidates passing all six compulsory units plus at least one optional unit.

Each unit can be studied and assessed separately, thereby allowing individuals/local authorities to plan their own study programmes. (This aspect will also allow part-time and volunteer grounds professionals to achieve units.) And because the optional units are sport/turf activity specific, candidates need focus only on their respective fields of profession (or intended fields).

"Apart from an immediate rise in the uptake of the Level 2 qualification process, the result for local authorities in particular will be a tremendous boost in staff morale, loyalty and motivation," says David Winn, IOG Training & Education Manager.

The compulsory units are:

- Plant growth in relation to sports and amenity turf
- Principles of machinery
- Weeds, pests, diseases and disorders
- Health and safety
- Operation and maintenance of equipment
- Principles of sports and amenity turf maintenance.

The optional units are:

- Maintenance of amenity turf
- Maintenance of sports turf –cricket
- Maintenance of sports turf – bowling greens
- Maintenance of sports turf – tennis courts
- Maintenance of sports turf – Association football pitches
- Maintenance of sports turf - rugby pitches
- Maintenance of sports turf – golf facilities
- Maintenance of sports turf – horse racing facilities.

Additional optional units and elective units may also be included with the qualification or accessed via the unit route as part of a Continued Professional Development (CPD) programme – indeed, the new certificate is planned to become an essential element of the IOG's CPD scheme. The elective units are:

- Maintenance and repair of non-turf sports surfaces; and
- Amenity horticulture in the turf industry.

David Winn comments: "The IOG's work with City & Guilds/NPTC on the new Intermediate Certificate is the latest reflection of the IOG's determination to ensure that industry's delivery of training and career path progression is fine-tuned to meet user needs in terms of both skill and social demands.

"We are certain that the new certification process will help reverse the relatively low uptake of NVQs. Ensuring that appropriate skill sets are available is, of course, obligatory; but nowadays it is also essential that training provision aligns with personal demands.

"The proposed new certificate meets all those needs, and the qualification process is akin to a driving test in that the applicant is tested when it suits him/her: 'theory' is tested via a multi-choice process; and the practical is adjudged at a location and within a timeframe that suits the trainee."

City & Guilds statistics reveal that only between 65 to 100 employed grounds staff gained a Level 2 NVQ during the 2004-2005 academic year, continues David Winn.

"When that sorry state of affairs is combined with the fact that over 50 per cent of all UK sports surfaces (and 80 per cent of football pitches) are currently under the remit of local authorities, it is clear that local authorities and their contractors play a major role in the nation's quest of 'sport for all'.

"They also recognise the financial implications of maintaining sports surfaces in pristine condition – and the implications of a £20,000 surface being easily and quickly damaged beyond repair if it is not correctly maintained and managed.

"But it seems that scant regard is being paid to standards of operational skills to sustain these facilities."

He concludes: "As the leading membership organisation for grounds professionals involved in the management of sports pitches, landscape and amenity facilities, the IOG firmly believes that the new qualification meets the needs of employers and employees, and that it will end the 'Not Very Qualified' tag that training at this level seems to have attracted."

Local authority feedback is regarded as invaluable to the IOG/NPTC consultative process, and the IOG welcomes comments on the following:

- Is the qualification required?
- Is it at the appropriate level?
- Is the content appropriate?
- Would the qualification be valued?
- Are you able to estimate annual take up within your staff?
- Are there any other concerns?

Please send all responses to: David Winn by email: dwin@iog.org or by phone: 01908 312511. For details of the new Certificate, visit www.nptc.org.uk and access Latest News section.