

Park Managers' Certificate goes from Strength to Strength

From small pilot beginnings in 2002, the last two years have seen an increasing uptake in the industry's own Management Certificate. More and more park owners and managers are seeing a value in holding tangible evidence that they know their way around the legislation that governs their working lives. And more are finding the Certificate study pack as a ready made source of easy-to-understand essential information.

A total of five exam sessions have been held, and there are now 163 Certificate holders. 352 candidates have been registered onto the programme, and many of those not yet completed have already booked to sit exams in November this year, or in next March at the end of the quiet season.

A number of issues bring particular encouragement to those involved in the updating and delivery of the Certificate.

Firstly, training can be seen as a mark of quality, not an inconvenient duty. Because the Certificate is studied in the flexibility of the candidate's own time, it does not interfere with day-to-day plans. Yes, it does require some discipline, but if turning up was all that was required to pass, perhaps there wouldn't be the same sense of achievement.

At least one major park group now makes the Certificate a mandatory aim for existing and new employees, and others have enrolled significant numbers amongst their staff.

Secondly, the Certificate is a route to other training, particularly towards more generic management qualifications. A pilot group in Yorkshire will be trying out a 36 hour Certificate from the Leadership and Management Institute over the next few months, and this is a possible progression route for the many Certificate holders who are eagerly awaiting the next stage.

Thirdly, CITO has been impressed by the breadth of use to which the Certificate is being put. Developed exclusively to provide and test the knowledge

needed for safe, legal and ethical park management practice, it has also been taken by:

- BH&HPA staff, so as to give them a better understanding of their membership
- Employees in banks' commercial departments, so as to give them a better understanding of their customers
- Potential employees looking to enter the industry for the first time.

Like any qualification, there is a constant need to update, to review, and to improve. Those candidates who have been enrolled for some time, but not yet completed, will have recently received a letter from CITO to try and establish if additional support or a different approach would make the qualification more achievable. There is always room for improvement and the training material itself must be developed on an ongoing basis to reflect legislative changes as they occur.

The final and most important outcome of the Certificate is the positive feedback from candidates. Both experienced owner managers and new recruits can learn from the material. Twenty years in the industry doesn't always mean complete awareness of regulations and good practice, because there is a vastly increased burden of legislation compared with twenty years ago. When goalposts get moved (as happens from time to time) clear, concise, practical information is invaluable. And the experience of studying has been enjoyed, too, particularly where two or more studying on the same park have been able to enjoy some mutual support during their learning.

When people are pleased with something they have done, they want to tell others about it. What better advertisement than the following two articles from Tracey Carter, representing the holiday parks sector, and Michael Woolfson, representing the residential parks sector.

CITO's Battle of the Disdainful



By Tracy Carter

Just recently I was privileged to sit the National Certificate in Park Management examination which has been set up by CITO in conjunction with BH&HPA and the NCC.

Another North West member, Mike Ward, and I were asked to take the exam last September at the Hull show by the impressive Sue Fagg. With an air of acceptance disguised as arrogance, we both signed up for the study papers and our exam date was set for March 2004.

My study papers arrived along with my assigned student number and like any good scholar I found every excuse under the sun not to swot up on what I thought I knew anyway. I was always too busy, away on business, or too stressed to begin revising a subject I knew everything about. Besides, I have been in the industry all my life, so it should be a doddle anyway shouldn't it? I mean, I run a recognised and well-known park, I know everything there is to know about caravan parks - so why should I have to prove to anyone that I know what I am doing?

Those were some of the reasons I made to myself for leaving the study manual on the desk for so long. I realised later on how foolish I was to think that way.

So eventually and reluctantly, I picked the training manual up off the desk, blew the dust off began to read and was hooked. I still am enthusiastic after the event, because although I have taken the exam, I am still referring back to the manual for answers and information.

Like most works that are published for our industry from within, the manual is put together well. It is concise, easy to understand and user friendly. It covers all sides of the industry (touring, holiday,

residential and letting) and you need only concern yourself with whatever side of the industry you are involved in.

Sections on Employment Law, Consumer Law, Environmental Issues, Codes of Practice, Health & Safety, Planning and Licensing Issues and Residential Park Legislation give a broad spectrum to the content contained therein.

I was glad to find out that over 350 park operators and managers have now been involved in the certificate and the number is growing daily.

So why am I writing this article in the first place? Two reasons.

I believe in this industry and the need for self-regulation. I also believe we need 'fit and proper' people to operate parks and in parallel with all other industries, we need to show a capable and knowledgeable background in our industry to justify that pretext. The Certificate in Park Management is just one way of showing responsibility to the industry as a whole as well as to other operators and clients.

The second reason is that it is frustrating having mentioned the course to some park operators that Mike and I have been greeted with:

"You won't get me doing that" - an obvious defence response mechanism which in reality actually means "I think I know it all but my ego is stopping me from finding out just how much - in case I embarrass myself..."

"What do you want to do that for?" - this is the classic patronising comment designed to dismiss the concept as beneath whoever makes it. "I've been running parks since before you were born..." springs to mind.

"Is it worth it?" - this comment has come from operators who seem interested in the welfare of their business and industry and would be more likely to take the course if

it benefited them instantly and financially. This is called 'being short-sighted' and they are best referred to their local optician.

It is so easy to be critical and dismiss new ideas in an industry that is changing every day and the amount of regulations imposed on what is still a relatively small industry is daunting. But by bringing an examination standard proving a level of knowledge into the industry, benchmarks anything we do for the future. It has to be the way to go and I suggest that anyone who has not taken the course or dismissed it out of hand should seriously think again.

Ask yourself if you would employ an electrician who wasn't qualified, or a plumber, a mechanic or in fact any tradesman who couldn't prove

a level of competence necessary to do the job. Would you employ an accountant, architect, lawyer or even a chef if they hadn't the qualifications to back up their position?

If not, then why should you be able to run a park without being qualified to do so?

The examination isn't rocket science and a good park operator will know most of it anyway. However I suspect those who are not adept at running a park would shy away from sitting the exam because 'they know it all already'. If that was the case, surely they would pass anyway?

I've taken my risk of failure, done my study, and come through with a sense of achievement (and some relief!). I look forward to more of my colleagues joining me.

Certificate in Park Management: Reflections

By Michael Woolfson

We were delighted to see the development of this training course. Our company owns four residential home parks and we have considerable responsibility for the physical conditions in which our residents live. Presently the only requirement in respect of managing parks is the ability to raise the necessary finance to purchase. It is our view that the government will eventually introduce legislation to require that those who manage parks can demonstrate competency. We saw this certificate as being voluntary today, but compulsory at some time in the future. We very much wanted to be "ahead of the game".

Our entrants for the certificate were Russ Hammond, our newly appointed Trainee Parks Manager and Michael Woolfson, our Managing Director, who has been running residential home parks for 25 years. Much of the material was known to Michael, but by no means all. It was interesting to see how much there was still to learn!

Our first step was to organise a timetable of study

so that, at a fixed date, each module would be completed. We met and reviewed the module material. Initially these discussion sessions were used to review the facts contained in the module. Later on, they became much more a consideration of points that needed clarification, interpretation of the legislation and mutual support.

The sessions were particularly helpful since they led to a review of some of our existing policies. Some aspects led to research of material outside the certificate syllabus.

We are sure that for those working on their own, some system of candidate mutual support would be useful. We would have appreciated some past papers.

We did find we needed to ask some questions of CITO. We found their response to our enquiries extremely helpful and forthcoming.

We found the course material easy to study, once we made the effort to open the manual! The course material focuses on the legal framework one needs to know to manage parks. What it really does do



▲ Jeanette Wilson (BH&HPA Policy Director, Scotland) and Martin Cox (BH&HPA National Chairman) both recent graduates of the Park Managers' Certificate



very well is to set the scene for park owner/managers' responsibilities.

CITO are to be congratulated on developing this educational material specific to the industry. Whether you are new to parks or an "old hand" you will find it of benefit. Possession of the national Certificate in Park Management must be a first step in demonstrating to the outside world that you are professional in your approach. We were both delighted to learn that we had passed the exam.

We are really looking forward to hearing more about CITO's ongoing management development programme which we understand will lead to the next level - a General Management Diploma - with specific case studies based on the parks industry.

If you have any questions, or if you would like a leaflet with application form for the National Certificate in Park Management, ring CITO on 01252 796085. You can also download the leaflet from www.cito.org.uk.

