

East Devon District Council Sidmouth

If the other man's grass really is greener in East Devon, at least part of the credit for that should go to the tutors of Bicton College.

That's because the tailor-made courses they've arranged for the parks staff of East Devon District Council have helped turn them from competent gardeners into super gardeners.

For while the council's staff have to put as much dedication, skill and care into pruning shrubs as any amateur gardener does, they have to work at literally 10 times the speed!

"Bicton College created a special shrub-pruning course for us this year which was tailored to council-style work as opposed to the amateur gardener's needs," says Mark Pollard, the council's Parks Development Manager. "Most gardeners have 10 shrubs, but we have many thousands of square metres of them. That means we have to work up to 10 times faster than a private gardener would. Courses are often aimed at private individuals or head gardeners at private houses who might have significantly lower output rates than ours, but Bicton know that we have to do an awful lot in a very short time."

He praises the college for its flexibility and for its understanding of the municipal gardening world – and the fact that a number of the staff there have worked for local authorities before.

"They've modified the way they deliver the training to accommodate us," he says. "Their assessor will come to us to see students on site as well as meeting them in workplaces which can even include cemeteries! We find them very easy to deal with, and very helpful. When we ask them for something, they do something about it."

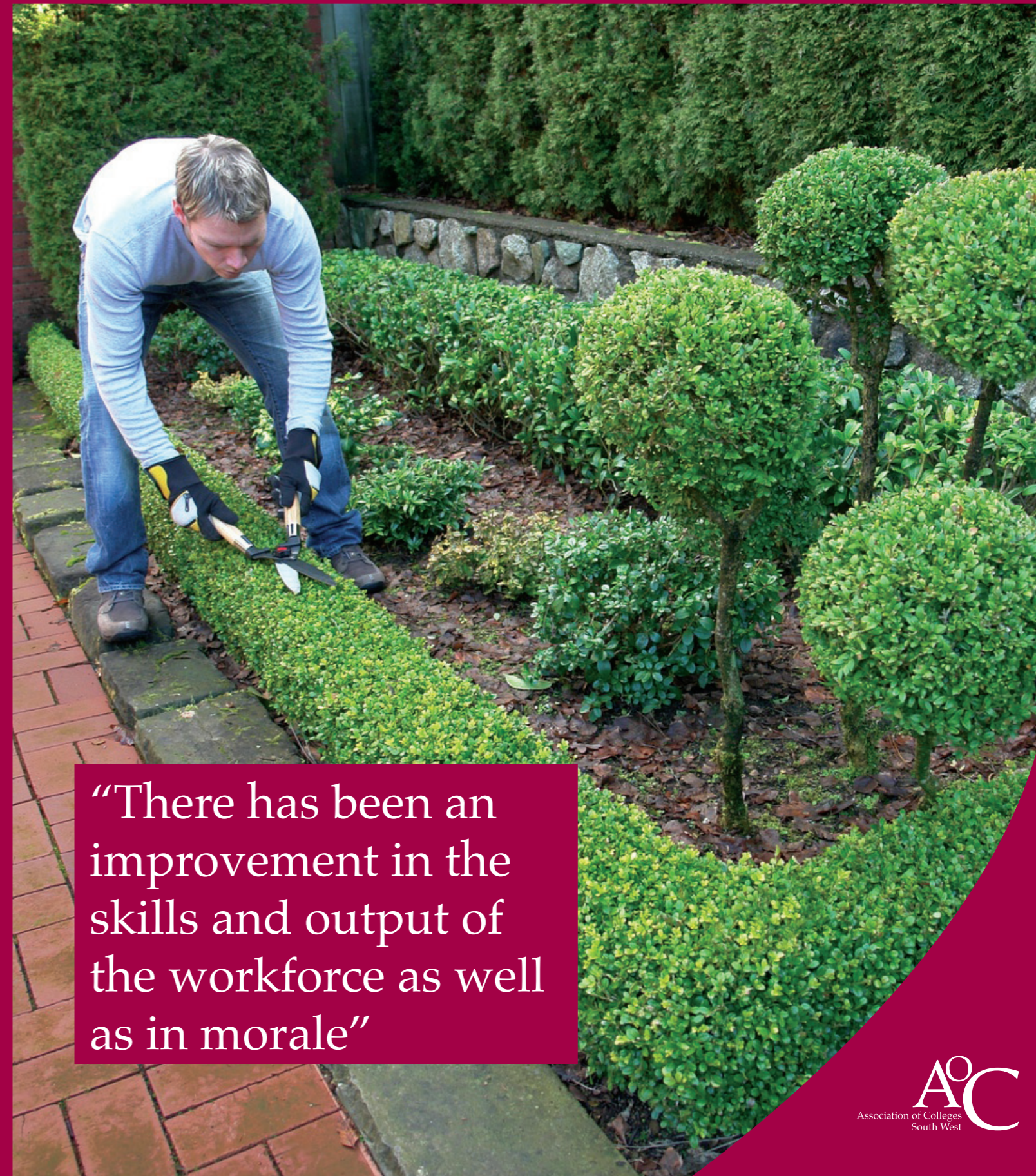
The council has six staff doing NVQs with Bicton College at the moment and uses the college extensively for short courses and proficiency tests in chainsaws, pesticides and tractor operations. One member of staff even took a Foundation degree in horticulture there. And council tax payers will be pleased to know that the training's proving worthwhile.

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"The staff feel more valued, everyone has a training plan and the option to do courses, and they're very keen to get ahead.

"We get the benefits and skills and they have the personal benefits of getting the appropriate qualifications to get on to the next step of the ladder. We've had a very positive reaction from staff. Those who went on the most recent course came back very chuffed and said what a wonderful day it was."



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