



The ISRM is set to launch a major new qualification for health and fitness club managers this month. *Martin Steer reports*



ISRM raises the bar in health club management

THIS ISRM Conference at Bournemouth will see the launch of an all-new award for aspiring professionals who are new to the challenge of managing health and fitness facilities in the UK and abroad.

Developed in consultation with health club operators and local authority leisure providers, the Fitness Management Certificate (FMC) is viewed as long overdue in meeting a training need for an industry where high staff turnover and under-investment in appropriate management training has become a hot issue.

The FMC is designed principally to bridge the training gap for fitness instructors and personal trainers who are looking to make the step up to duty manager or club manager, while remaining

within the fitness facility environment.

Pitched at level 3 ('A' level standard), the FMC will run alongside the ISRM's highly-successful and well-established Supervisory Management Certificate (SMC), but it will focus on the operational aspects that are specifically relevant to the health club sector.

Materials have been developed to be candidate-friendly in study packs that provide a balance of operational and theoretical aspects of the work of duty/club managers. Wherever appropriate, the latest reports and research relating to the fitness industry have been used.

For example, candidates who enrol on this course can expect to study the issues around recruitment and retention of members and staff

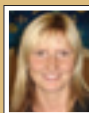
(and how to address these), and cost-effective ways of marketing their services. Much attention is also paid to dealing with operational concerns such as equipment selection and maintenance, the responsibilities of operators under health and safety legislation and how to avoid claims for negligence.

Regarding the way the course is delivered, much debate has taken place in ISRM circles about this and it was felt that a fresh approach should be considered. In recognition that employers are not always able to release their staff to attend day-release courses, the new FMC will be delivered by a system of 'blended learning'. This means there will be a combination of distance learning and some face-to-face delivery at study seminars. ▶

'Candidates... can expect to study the issues around recruitment and retention of members and staff'



CASE STUDY



Janet Chadfield, fitness manager for High Peak District Council, is one of the tutors for the FMC course. She graduated with a first-class honours degree in Sports Studies and has worked her way up through the fitness industry starting, just like most fitness managers do, as a fitness instructor.

Janet is delighted that the course has been developed. 'The career path I took really highlighted the lack of a suitable course that could provide the facility-management skills that are required to move from an instructor to manager – until now, that is!

'I am very excited to be able to share my

knowledge and experience gained over the past six years to help bridge this gap and help not only other aspiring managers out there who face a similar career decision as I did, but also facility managers who will be able to understand the different operational issues specific to gyms and health clubs.'



BRIDGING THE GAP: WHAT THE COURSE INVOLVES

Course outline

The Fitness Management Certificate aims to bridge the gap in the training of both fitness suite staff – whose background is usually associated with training in the field of exercise science and fitness – and leisure centre and Health Club managers/duty managers, who have a background in general facility management.

This course will enable them to develop the knowledge and understanding of the operational and management requirements of modern health and fitness facilities and to help them gain promotion within their organisations (in both the private and public sectors).

Alternatively, it could provide the gateway to positions within the health and fitness sector for the first time for those who have a relevant professional background and/or qualifications (such as PE teachers, PTIs from the uniformed services, graduates of sports studies/science and related subjects).

The course provides an overview of how a health and fitness facility is managed, including the design and technical considerations, operations and management, marketing and member retention. The course programme has been designed, written, and will be delivered by managers who have worked or are currently working in the health and fitness sector.

Although there are necessarily some elements of theory (such as motivation theory) that underpins the practice, the course is essentially a vocational qualification. This means it relates to the actual work environment. In this regard, a candidate's experience is as important as his or her academic ability.

As an ISRM level 3 award, the FMC provides an opportunity for successful candidates to gain



associate membership of the ISRM and use of the designatory letters A. Inst SRM.

The award will help prepare candidates for higher level courses and, in particular, the Level 4 qualification of the ISRM/City & Guilds Higher Professional Diploma in Sport and Recreation Management. This, in turn, can lead to full membership of the ISRM and use of the designatory letters M. Inst SRM.

Level

It is equivalent to level 3 of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and designed to be a recognised qualification within the Health & Fitness industry for staff at first management level.

Prerequisites

All candidates must be aged 18 years or over and should have current industry experience (at least 12 months) in the role as a duty supervisor/fitness instructor in a health club/leisure centre or similar establishment.

In addition, they should hold at least one relevant level 2 qualification, although a level 3 qualification would be preferable. These include NVQ, GCSE, AVCE, BTEC National Diploma, Modern Apprenticeship in Sport and Recreation.

Consideration will be given to mature candidates who do not have the prerequisite qualifications where they have considerable experience and an in-depth knowledge of the work in the health and fitness sector.

Mode of delivery

The certificate can be delivered directly (on site) over a period of 120 guided learning hours (GLH). Each of the three sections could be delivered over 40 hours directly (face to face), although candidates enrolling on this course should expect to spend twice this amount of time in total (i.e. 80 hours per module) researching and reading around the subject.

This course is designed also to be delivered in a flexible way to include a mixture of 'blended' learning options including:

- Some face-to-face direct delivery (contact time) on site;
- Distance learning – candidates provided with a study manual, references, learning resources (usually in hard copy format);
- Web-based information resources; and
- Internet-based interactive resources (e.g. Blackboard).

Course aims:

The course aims to enable the candidate to:

- Develop an understanding of the layout, design, construction, environmental factors and building services of health and fitness facilities to enable informed decision-making in all technical aspects of the operational management and maintenance of facilities;
- Explore the financial operations and information management within health and fitness facilities that inform management decisions about improving performance and highlight the potential for other income-generating opportunities;
- Develop an understanding of the health and fitness market, including current and future trends, and promotional techniques to capture, keep and care for potential clients across all sectors;
- Develop a basic understanding of how to discharge the general management responsibilities under health and safety legislation, including techniques of effective risk-assessment within health and fitness facilities specifically; and
- Develop a basic understanding of staff recruitment and training, team dynamics, employee motivation, performance management and managerial effectiveness.

► All candidates will have access to their own personal tutor who will be able to guide them through the course and advise them on issues relating to their work-based assignments (they will also assess their work). In this way, candidates will be able to study at their own pace in a flexible way and over a period of time that best suits their particular needs.

Initially, candidate materials will be provided in hard copy but it is our intention that other options (including internet-based training and CD Roms) will be available within a couple of years.

The course content has been written by a team of well-qualified professionals, all of whom have considerable experience of managing health and fitness facilities in both the private and public sectors.

Chief executive's view

Ralph Riley, chief executive of ISRM, highlights why the launch is so important. 'ISRM is renowned for providing qualifications and training that have real relevance to practitioners and make a real difference to sport and recreation services. That's why we developed the Fitness Management Certificate (FMC).

'Our members and a number of surveys found that, while many health and fitness operators were providing staff with qualifications to deliver fitness programmes, the services were being let down. This was because they failed to provide fundamental organisational and managerial



components that are essential to the success of any business.

'That's what this new qualification from ISRM is all about. It follows a format that is well proven in terms of managing sports operations. But this time the whole emphasis is on what matters in health and fitness suite operation. In increasingly demanding circumstances – where operators must satisfy health, business and customer expectations outcomes – the FMC is set to be THE fitness management qualification benchmark for the industry.'

To register your interest in undertaking this course, please provide your contact details to trish@isrm.co.uk

WHAT THE COURSE WILL DELIVER

Upon successful completion of the course, the candidate will be able to:

Design and technical

- Explain the basic technical requirements associated with facility design, construction and operation of all areas of health and fitness facilities;
- Describe the various factors involved in the selection and maintenance of surfaces and equipment used in health and fitness facilities; and
- Explain the general management responsibilities required under health and safety legislation, including techniques of effective risk assessment.

Operations and management

- Evaluate the internal and external influences on the current and future market position of the UK's health and fitness sector;
- Apply effective marketing techniques to develop services and programming opportunities to niche markets; and
- Explain the principles of financial management and their application to budget planning, preparation and performance.

Management of systems, staff and customers

- Identify the processes for effective customer recruitment and retention and their importance in maximising income generation within health & fitness facilities;
- Apply the principles of motivation theory to effective management of individuals and the teams; and
- Evaluate procedures and systems to ensure the effective and efficient use of resources to achieve consistent service delivery.

Assessment

The certificate will be assessed after completion of each of the course modules by THREE work-based projects/assignments of between 2,000 and 2,500 words in length. ONE work-based project/assignment is to be completed for each of the sections to satisfy the learning outcomes for each. The work must be in word-processed format and submitted within the deadline date set by the tutor.

CASE STUDY



Aidan Hall, national tutor for the FMC and its principal

architect – who boasts a first-class honours degree in leisure management – brings 18 years of experience in the industry to the table. He explained why he felt the course was so relevant.

'The idea for the course occurred to me while interviewing for a new health and fitness facility manager/co-coordinator. We attracted some very good candidates, but all of them were trained from a technical perspective. They knew everything about exercise and physiology, but next to nothing about 'managing' a facility. This

included dealing with staff, choosing and maintaining equipment, marketing, finance, technical information on facilities and aspects of the current and future market.

'In addition, I also considered my own experiences as a manager of a leisure facility when we built a new fitness facility as part of the centre. As a facility manager, I was just expected to 'get on with it' and make it a success. I expect this sounds familiar to many readers!). We were fortunate that we didn't have any real competition in this area or otherwise we would have struggled. Having a

specific fitness management certificate for both my management team and myself would have proved invaluable.

'Having first considered the course, my initial thought was to find out if anyone else was offering anything similar. It soon became apparent that there was a definite training gap in the market.

'This is one that will, I believe, only widen as the health and fitness market expands. The feedback I've had from colleagues, universities and contacts in both the private and public sectors – along with the main equipment suppliers – has been overwhelmingly positive.'

