

# Calling All Golf Clubs —a Letter To The Editor

by

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RETURNING, last week, from the 44th Annual Conference and Show of the American Golf Course Superintendents, in Boston, my impressions were of a highly organised Association which is out to find ways of improving golf course maintenance and their own lot by all the latest methods. The educational programme lasted four days.

Quite a few of our own Association members were invited and, for a country that invented the game of golf, we seem to have fallen a mile behind.

There are approximately 1200 golf courses in the United Kingdom which should give us 1200 head greenkeepers, plus about three other staff per club, a total of 4800 potential Association members. In actual fact, our membership is about 900, just 20% of the total work force. Relate this to the PGA membership, which is virtually 100%, and it's pathetic.

The annual subscription is a measly £2.50 per year, but I would recommend a £20 subscription to be subsidised by each head greenkeeper's particular club, and a proportion for other ground staff. In USA, this is considered general practice by clubs and I am sure it benefits them greatly for extra knowledge and skills passed on to their staff.

Golf Clubs here seem to be very inward looking; many do not even know the rate of pay for their ground staff, as this is only published in the Association monthly magazine, and communication is difficult with clubs being dotted all over the country.

At the moment, all secretarial work of the Association is done on a voluntary basis but I would like to see this changed to a full-time, paid Association Secretary who can keep members and clubs informed of all means of apprenticeship schemes, lectures and demonstrations, mainly during winter seasons. This could only be done by increased subscriptions.

I am not decrying the voluntary work, this has been marvellous, but these people have other work to do also, and I am sure they would endorse any suggestion that will further the good of our Association.

Our members are gradually having to learn about things like Triplex mowers, auto-watering systems, new fungicides and fertilizers, but it is mainly self-teaching and here is where an organised Association can step in to pass on information and encourage skills.

Clubs will have to be more selective, as will the Association in the forthcoming years, if we take our Minister of Sport's word for a need for another 500 Golf Clubs in the next few years. This will require another 1000 greenkeepers for maintenance. Somehow these people will have to be produced and taught.

Any monetary help, or time off granted, for learning by Golf Clubs' staff would be a great help, but one other thing which stood out in America was how firms supplying Golf Clubs with equipment, seed, fertilizers, etc., presented their greenkeepers' association with monetary help to improve every aspect of their job.

Another point to mention is the working relationship between Clubs and ground staff, and the number of times, in the United Kingdom, you hear ground staff being told by greens' committees how to do their job. This is having a dog and barking yourself. No one would dare tell his club professional how to play golf. In the USA, they engage a man professionally and expect him to do the job.

One fact which came out at this American trip was that most American clubs gave full expenses and time off to their staff to attend; while, for our part, nearly all had to pay for their own trip and, in some cases, were expected to deduct the time from their annual holidays. Distance was no object and some American greenkeepers travelled further than we did. Even when the Annual General Meeting was held in Blackpool, this applied.