We deserve a fair wage

As a qualified greenkeeper and a BIGGA member I feel I must express my concern over the wage scales that a lot of golf clubs are applying in Scotland.

The fact that many clubs won’t even look at the BIGGA recommendations, let alone consider them, sums up the situation perfectly. Throughout my nine years as a greenkeeper I have yet to be given a straight answer to the question, why?

Surely in this day and age when the role of the greenkeeper has come a long way from the ‘old farm worker’ or the ‘glorified grass cutter’, golf clubs could listen and appreciate how much more complicated the job has become.

I feel that communications between the club house and the greenkeepers’ shed could be greatly improved by not only involving the ‘committees’ but also the ordinary members. This can easily be achieved by holding regular open nights, where the members would be invited to put any questions to the greenkeepers regarding the course. This would not only improve relationships, the image of the greenkeeper, but also supply the answers that golfers frequently require after many a good or bad round.

Only when more people are aware of the job of the greenkeeper will they realise that we do deserve a fair wage and that we could possibly catch up with other skilled tradesmen.

Name withheld

It’s all about teamwork

To the Executive Director

Further to the topic of your welcome article on communication, I’d like to contribute a viewpoint, extend the debate a little further, and possibly assist those seeking improved communication channels. The ability to project a professional image, in our industry as in any other, relies highly upon effective communication.

As your rightly observe “communication, to a greater or lesser degree is a problem in all large organisations” (and, sadly in a great many small ones). But the criticism “poor communication” is in itself a negative critique, and all too easily aimed.

So, how effective are we all at our respective methods of communication? This is addressed not only to fellow Head Greenkeepers/Course Managers, but also to Golf Club Managers, Secretaries and committees.

The stress occasioned by “poor communication” is largely brought about by ambiguity – direction is unclear, the message or information to be conveyed is unclear, and often the messenger is even more unclear.

I doubt I’m alone in believing that the most effective communication method is still the spoken word followed by a written factual account of discussion and events. Yes, the perennial, much maligned and misunderstood communication medium – the staff meeting. Be it weekly, bi-weekly or monthly it is a system I have long adhered to.

For the formulation and acceptance of course maintenance and development programmes; the introduction of quality initiatives, and determining clear collective goals and objectives, this “getting the team together” format is paramount in achieving success.

We begin with an agenda, all staff attend and the meeting is controlled and managed within two hours, each item or job is given a completion date and we all assign ourselves to the appropriate tasks. Next month we follow up, monitor progress, celebrate success (!!) and set further milestones to reach, and new objectives to accomplish together!

This instrument of communication, involving all, builds team spirit, motivates, measures progress, shows tangible results and finds solutions ahead of problems. This also demonstrates a level of professionalism both in attitude to ones role as a manager – to colleagues and superiors – but also as an effective communicator.

The format will vary according to the priority of the agenda, i.e. short, medium and long term objectives. The ultimate aim being that of involving all, in following a clear direction – by the same route. Thus avoiding our old enemy, ambiguity.

However, this process has not always been met with approval. One prospective employer listened to my rationale and agreed the principal but suggested that any such meeting including greenstaff should take place when it rained – because (obviously…) we’d have nothing better to do!

This of course was only one misguided opinion, and as we all know, opinions are like poa annua – we’ve all got some!

Anthony Black,

Golf Course Manager
(Formerly Golf Euro-Disney)

Not all and sundry

During the Christmas break I have had time to catch up with my workload, reading nominated publications advised by my tutors at Myerscough College where I am studying for a National Diploma in turf science. I have been a member of BIGGA since leaving school and starting in the industry in 1989.

One of the books I have read is ‘The Way Forward’. Considerable space has been given to greenkeepers and the BIGGA organisation has been awarded both bouquets and barbed wire. One of the points that I would like to raise and feel quite strongly about is the morale of trainee greenkeepers.

Throughout my time at work and latterly at college it has always been instilled to us the importance of our professional nature, how we must strive to become the best. To quote the editorial: how ‘There is now great opportunity for greenkeepers to make a concerted effort to project ourselves as technically competent, qualified individuals in a skilled profession.’ To feel part of this profession we are encouraged to join BIGGA and feel part of the team.

Now I find all sorts applying to join. Get in favour with a greenkeeper and he will give you an application form, once you are a member you can play most courses in the country for free.

Please can we stop this practice before it takes too tight a hold. By all means encourage membership but be sure we have members who have the profession at heart, those who are willing to help us establish our professional status and are willing to work for that end. Not golf club members who are in the right place at the right time wanting to take advantage of one of the only ‘perks’ of our trade.

You are doing a grand job. BIGGA is killing off the peak cap and string belt greenkeeper and the new image is gradually coming to the fore. Our profession knows BIGGA is there, we must now get the message across to clubs and golfers that we know what we are doing.

Tom Smith,

Myerscough College, Preston

Editor’s note: "All sorts" can’t join. Each application is vetted at national and local level. And at least two applications have been turned down since November because the applicants didn’t work where they said they did.