News from the Chief Executive

The suggestion by the Board that Full Membership should be opened up to Sports Turf Groundsmen seems to have sparked off a very mixed debate, but that should come as no surprise to anyone! There does however appear to be some confusion over the Association’s motives for making such proposals and I will try to explain the rationale behind the move:

1. The discussions between BIGGA and the IOG during 2007 (ultimately terminated by the IOG) identified a great synergy between greenkeepers and groundsmen. Today greenkeepers can join the IOG as Full members why should BIGGA not afford the same privilege to suitably qualified groundsmen?

2. BIGGA will be putting a recruitment campaign into place to try to enrol further greenkeeper members but why should it not also market its services and the benefits of membership to groundsmen?

3. BIGGA is not setting out to ‘wage war’ on the IOG it is merely hoping to increase the available choice of professional representative bodies for sports turf employees. There are a great number of such employees who do not belong to either organisation - because they see no value in membership or because they are currently not entitled to join.

4. BIGGA has had a positive influence on the development and accreditation of the greenkeeping modules of sports turf qualifications through its active membership of the GTC. This has been achieved thanks to the close working relationship that exists between employer and employee, resulting in successful consultation with the awarding bodies. A process that is ongoing.

5. A great deal of the success in greenkeeper training is transferable directly into the rest of the sports turf industry. Why should BIGGA, and the GTC, not try to capitalise on this?

6. BIGGA, like so many other businesses, is suffering from the current downturn in the economic climate but it is not in financial trouble and it did make a surplus in the last financial year. If really necessary savings could be made but this would inevitably lead to a reduction in standards. A greater number of members would help improve financial stability, create better buying power, should attract better trade support and could help the Association win more official grant aid.

7. The sports turf industry is fragmented and BIGGA, working with the GTC framework, the awarding bodies and the training providers is in pole position to develop a National Centre for Sports Turf at Aldwark.

8. Courtesy golf is a privilege extended to BIGGA members so that they may improve their greenkeeping experience by playing other courses. It is not a right of membership, although I will be asking clubs to look more favourably at this through my connections within the GCMA and the Home Unions. The inclusion of groundsmen within BIGGA membership should not jeopardise these relationships and clubs will have the option to refuse groundsmen the same privilege. Membership cards will clearly distinguish greenkeepers from groundsmen by virtue of their job title and employer details.

My space is limited but I would like to clarify one point that seems to be misunderstood. BIGGA is governed by a Board that is made up of greenkeepers, with one exception (Mark Dobell – Guardian and the Finance Director of the R&A). The Board sets the policy that is administered by the Staff, headed up by myself, all of whom are accountable for their actions. I, in turn, am accountable to the Board. Contrary to popular belief the Association is therefore run by greenkeepers for the benefit of its members and not by the staff for their own ends!

The draft proposals for a change to the Constitution have been circulated for the purpose of consultation and will not be implemented without the overwhelming consent of members.