The relationship between BIGGA and the Greenkeepers Training Committee (the GTC) is often misunderstood. The GTC was established in the late 1980’s to develop, monitor and maintain a set of national standards, vocational qualifications and associated learning material for greenkeeping, working within a Government approved structure. It is governed by a committee comprised of representation from the English Golf Union, the Scottish Golf Union, the Welsh Golf Union and BIGGA.

Until recently the R&A were also included. From the outset it was funded by way of a levy of 2p per male golfer who was a registered member of a club. The home Unions collected the fee and passed it on to the GTC while the European Tour and BIGGA made a contribution, the R&A then match funded the total sum collected. In 1989 the R&A published a discussion document of British golf course management entitled “The Way Forward” in which it is quoted, “It goes without saying that the 2p levy, while a start, is a totally inadequate contribution from golf clubs in terms of a really meaningful impact being made on greenkeeper education. There must be a continuous effort to raise this levy to a realistic figure with perhaps 50p a first target, increasing to £1.”

Where is the GTC 20 years further on? The levy has increased, despite a certain amount of resistance from the Home Unions over the years, to an astounding 11.5p! The R&A will after this year cease to make a financial contribution, instead diverting its attention and resources to developing the game of golf overseas. Let’s make no mistake that funding over the years has been significant and has helped the GTC to develop greenkeeper education to a point where it leads the way with vocational qualifications and associated learning material for greenkeeping.

The GTC in its current format is no longer a financially viable operation and attempts to increase the levy on the golfer, and/or perhaps include female golfers, have been unsuccessful. With a steady drifting away from club membership the Unions are finding themselves under pressure to maintain status quo let alone consider an increase. As the number of members starts to decline so does the income for the GTC.

One of the main questions that no one has yet managed to answer is “How do we get the casual golfer to contribute towards greenkeeper training?” The simple answer would be to apply a small levy to the green fee with perhaps 50p a first target, increasing to £1.”

Unless a solution is found to the funding gap of the GTC then it may need to be wound up. Its role could then be taken over by either the EGU, the SGU or the WGU or perhaps somehow incorporated into BIGGA’s Learning and Development Department. As a director of the GTC and as Chief Executive of BIGGA I have more than a passing interest in the future of the GTC and will continue to work with the Home Unions and David Golding (Director of Education, GTC) to try to find a workable solution.