

# Three kings

The 'Golf Club Management Partnership' recently celebrated its first anniversary. Sandy Jones charts the progress made so far and looks ahead to the future

**The Golf Club Management Partnership (GCMP) has been set up by the PGA, BIGGA and the GCMA to provide a co-ordinated approach to the management of golf clubs.**

We chose a particularly appropriate time to join forces, as golf clubs feel the effects of the economic situation and adapt to changing attitudes to leisure activities.

In every golf club there are three providers of services to the golfers – the manager, professional and the course manager and his team, and it makes sense to work together and ensure that these services are provided at the highest level.

This has proved essential as golf club committees consider ways to cut costs in order to survive the recession when in fact they should be looking to add value. There is a temptation to simply chop out areas of the operation, often because committees may not fully understand how the club is run.

The difficulty is that often those people providing the services don't communicate their joint value clearly to the committees, and this can result in a contest where the professional, manager and greenkeeping department are fighting for survival.

We believe that our role is to communicate on behalf of all three parties and ensure that committees appreciate their qualities.

In the USA, the reaction to the current situation has simply been to cut staff numbers, but we have aimed to put the message across to the clubs that they should take advantage of the abilities of their team to offer better value to the members. It takes time and money to develop the skills needed to run a golf club, and this should not just be thrown away.

Of course we understand that there may need to be some reductions in staff numbers, but we hope to persuade the clubs to look at increasing efficiency first.

Now that the bodies involved in the partnership understand



each other better, we can take our message to the club owners and to amateur bodies such as the English Golf Union (EGU) over the next 12 months.

We are also aiming to create models to show how clubs can operate more efficiently, considering the whole operation rather than just staff costs. The club must engage with its manager, professional and greenkeeping team – as they

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are the first point of contact with members and visitors – to ensure that the golfers' needs are met, on the course, in the pro shop and in the clubhouse.

Our united approach is already benefiting clubs – after the severe winter we produced some recommendations to help tackle claims relating to health and safety in bad weather which has been invaluable for managers dealing with those situations.

We have also set up a network to tackle credit card scams affecting pro shops, getting the word around clubs after an incident, and this has led to the arrest of offenders.

The internet will become increasingly important in the communication process, and we are already looking at the latest technology for the delivery of education programmes.

The GCMP has also looked at ways of sharing expertise between the PGA, GCMA and BIGGA, and capitalising on common ground while accepting individual strengths. All three have comprehensive education programmes, but some subjects that have previously been taught separately to professionals,

managers and greenkeepers – such as health and safety – can easily be brought together.

This also leads to a closer understanding of each others' abilities and provides an opportunity to share ideas.

There are other opportunities too – PGA members have given lectures on BIGGA and GCMA courses, and at events such as BIGGA's Harrogate Week, many of the seminars will be applicable to all sectors.

Marketing is a further example – the professional and the course manager can contribute as much to marketing the club as the manager.

Another goal will be to communicate the significance of golf to the wider community, and to the government, to put us in a better position to lobby for support.

This is one area where the Americans are ahead of us, producing statistics on the industry and creating a website to promote golf.

We already know that golf makes an important contribution to the economy – for example the economic impact of the Ryder Cup was more than £100m.

Going forward, we are keen to foster closer relationships between golf club managers, professionals and course managers.

Managers and professionals must not see each other as rivals – it is understandable that a manager would see a professional who gains managerial skills as a threat, but they can be much more effective as allies. Clubs work best if all parties use their skills together, rather than in isolation.

The golfer and the club is the ultimate winner if we can understand each other better and appreciate how we can provide an improved service to members and guests. This economic crisis will not last forever, and this is the time to get organised and prepare for the opportunities ahead. GCM

*Sandy Jones is chief executive of the PGA. Interview conducted by Jane Carley*