

THE GMA ANNUAL REPORT



GROUNDS
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BREAKING BOUNDARIES: THE GMA ANNUAL REPORT

March 2024 – April 2025

by Geoff Webb (CEO) and David Carpenter (Chair)



**GROUNDS
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OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS, the Grounds Management Association (GMA) has experienced significant growth and success, underscoring our commitment to excellence and innovation.

We have not only expanded our membership base but also laid the groundwork for a new, user-friendly website that will enhance our digital presence and member engagement.

We have also developed a new membership offering, providing enhanced benefits and resources that cater to the evolving needs of our community.

We also enjoyed a successful industry awards hosted at AMT Headingley Stadium and SALTEX remained the industry-leading leading event after welcoming over 7,900 visitors in October 2023.

MAKING SPORT POSSIBLE



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POWERING PROGRESS:

The GMA is pleased to report significant progress in powering forward with its Five-Year Strategy, first launched in 2021. This strategy outlines six key priority areas that guide our efforts to achieve three long-term goals: attracting new talent and fostering a diverse workforce, supporting sustainable business growth while protecting sector interests, and enhancing the industry's reputation by promoting its contributions to society and the economy.

The six strategic priority areas—Workforce Development, People and Culture, Services and Support, Industry Representation, Data and Digitisation, and Funding and Investment—serve as the backbone of our initiatives.

Over the past 18 months, we have transitioned from reviewing to actively implementing this strategy. Building on solid foundations, we are committed to delivering a new offer with a fresh approach for our members. This past year has been pivotal in assembling the right people and resources, as evidenced by our strengthened Board, dedicated staff team, and the launch of our new website and membership offer. Through these efforts, the GMA is well-positioned to drive the future of grounds management, benefiting our members and the broader community.

BREAKING BOUNDARIES:

Addressing recruitment and retention issues in our sector remains a core focus. This year we have witnessed some key breakthrough moments with GMA NextGen member Meg Lay, pulling together nine female sports turf professionals to help prepare the grounds for the Women's Ashes at Edgbaston. Highlighting further strides in diversity and inclusion within the industry, the GMA supported the 'Women in Grounds' showcase event at the Emirates Stadium in partnership with the Women's Super League, Women in Football and Arsenal FC.

This landmark event saw thirteen trailblazing women from across the grounds care sector come together to highlight the contributions of women in grounds management, inspiring a new generation to join the field. The women, including three GMA NextGen ambassadors (Meg Lay, Liddy Ford and Beth Gibbs), prepared the pitch for the highly anticipated North London derby, Arsenal vs Tottenham, in front of a sell-out crowd of 60,000 fans. This was not only a great advert for women's football, but also a fantastic platform to help raise the profile of the grounds management industry and those working within it. These achievements were made possible thanks to the invaluable support of male allies who championed and facilitated these initiatives – Gary Barwell, Head of Sports Turf at Edgbaston, and Paul Ashcroft, Head of Horticulture & Playing Surface Operations, Arsenal FC.



With over 2.3 million impressions across social media, the initiative garnered national coverage with an estimated reach of over 600 million, placing the role of grounds staff right at the fore.

The GMA recognises that, while these events are excellent for raising awareness, there is still a long way to go to counter the negative viewpoints on social media especially directed at those involved. To meet the growing demand for quality playing surfaces, we must create opportunities for everyone to enter the profession, regardless of gender, race or background. Women in the 21st century should have the same opportunities as their male counterparts to progress a career in turf care. There are already, some incredible women who are breaking boundaries, however, only 2% of the current workforce is female.

An aging workforce and limited demographic highlight the urgent issues identified in the GMA's 2019 Survey, "Sports Vital Profession." We face a "ticking time bomb" as we seek solutions to fill the skills gap and address key issues affecting role uptake in our sector. The recently conducted GMA 2024 Survey will reassess previous results and the findings will be presented at SALTEx with the view of how we can continue to improve efforts moving forward.

HOW DO WE STAY RELEVANT?

How can modern-day grounds people stay relevant, and how do we attract a new generation of sports turf managers? The GMA is advancing the Grounds Management Framework (GMF), launched in March 2023 at Lords Cricket Ground. The GMF provides a tangible and measurable way to understand the necessary levels of education and experience and their impact on playing surfaces. It assesses everything from local community pitches to sports stadiums and independent schools under a common framework.

The GMF allows professionals to benchmark against a sliding scale of criteria, facilitating better understanding of their position within the framework. It also enables more informed discussions with employers about resourcing, whether human or capital. Over time, it will help address issues like hours worked and overtime. The GMA will continue to champion the framework, as we firmly believe in its potential to provide a clear and valid progression pathway for sports turf professionals and volunteers as well.

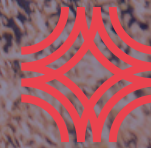
We have had real success at grassroots level with the investment made by the sports bodies via the Football Foundation which has taken the framework into its criteria for funding. Through the GMA's Pitch Advisory Service, we have assessed over 10,000 pitches, and, working with sport's governing bodies, we are converting thousands of pitches from 'poor' to 'good' and will continue to do so over the coming years. We have strong case studies and data which we have shared and encouraged the professional sports leagues to adopt as well, and this is key to enabling more informed

understanding of the skill levels required (appropriate to site) as well as the technical standards and specification required for the surface itself.

The PAS programme for our corporate members also affords the opportunity to deliver quality machinery, grass seed, line markers and supplies suitable for the club and the teams managing the facility. Now funded by the Football Foundation grant scheme it's a clear 'win win' for all parties who engage and understand better the steps needed to create a sustainable playing surface.

Full details of the Grounds Management Framework can be found in the link here:
https://issuu.com/thegma.org.uk/docs/gmf_information_sheet_a4_long_-mar2023





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CREATING POSITIVE IMPACT

Creating a positive impact is more important than ever before - #GroundsWeek has become a cornerstone event within the industry, significantly raising the sector's profile.

The GMA is committed to ensuring everyone—whether you're in the sector, a player, or a fan—takes a moment to appreciate what grounds staff and volunteers do to make sport possible. Great surfaces don't happen without them!

Our annual awards ceremony will move to coincide with #GroundsWeek in Spring 2025 at Anfield Stadium, home of Liverpool FC. Initiatives like Schools into Stadia, run by the newly rebranded GMA NextGen group, are just a few examples of our efforts to encourage uptake and recognise the vital profession of sports turf management.

NEXT GEN

NEXT GEN

“The buzz you get from a Match Day and the knowledge that all the hard work from the week before has gone towards producing a quality surface for a professional club is always hugely rewarding.”

JACK

o'neills GROUND STAFF

GROUNDS MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

A portrait of Jack, a young man with short blonde hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark brown zip-up jacket with the O'Neills logo and 'GROUND STAFF' on the chest. The background is a red and white target pattern.

NEXT GEN

“Since joining the industry at 18, I've loved working for a business that supports communities and contributes to the creation of safe spaces where children can engage in sports.”

LOUISE

GROUNDS MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

A portrait of Louise, a young woman with long brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark blue zip-up jacket with the GMA logo and a lanyard around her neck. The background is a red and white target pattern.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS:

Membership is central to everything we do. The GMA has a wide spread of members from volunteers to professionals across sport as well as tremendous support from over 200 Corporate and Corporate Plus supporters, we are determined to ‘unite the industry’ and continue to ‘power progress’ which is the strapline for this year’s SALTEX show. As ever, we would like to thank all our members for their continued support.

We have spent the last eighteen months redefining our offering and developing a membership proposition that is as compelling and supportive as it possibly can be.

Following research involving in-depth group and individual 1-2-1 sessions with key stakeholders across the GMA and wider industry, recommendations were gathered and used to develop a new membership proposition. These changes will benefit both existing and future members – providing added value and support and will set the GMA up for membership growth as we welcome new recruits into the profession.

Our new products also allow our members to take advantage of increased benefits including a new Membership Assistance Programme, expert legal support, specialist insurance guidance, discounts to GMA training and qualification courses and much more.

In addition, we have been upgrading our customer relations management system and our learning portal as we expand our range of online courses.

We have also invested time developing a new fresh website which creates a much easier interaction and navigation through the site. Ultimately, we recognise the need to make our membership offer relevant and compelling and this has been at the forefront of our refined categories of membership and the associated benefits. These developments highlight our dedication to providing exceptional service and support to our members, setting a strong foundation for continued progress and success.

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DIGITAL EVOLUTION:

The GMA is embracing digital evolution to enhance its services and member engagement. By integrating advanced digital tools and platforms, the GMA is streamlining operations, improving communication, and providing members with easier access to resources and training. This shift towards digitalisation includes the launch of the new website, online learning modules, and webinars and events, all designed to support the professional growth of grounds management professionals and volunteers. The GMA's commitment to digital innovation ensures that it remains at the forefront of industry advancements, fostering a more connected and informed community.

The new website plans are an exciting development for the Grounds Management Association.

Here are some key highlights which our members can expect to see following its launch in late September 2024:

- **User-Friendly Design:** The new website will feature an intuitive and modern design, making it easier for members to navigate and find the information they need quickly.
- **Enhanced Member Portal:** A dedicated member portal will provide personalised access to resources, event registrations, and exclusive content, enhancing the overall member experience.
- **Interactive Features:** The website will include interactive features such as forums, live chat support, and virtual event hosting capabilities, fostering greater community engagement and collaboration.
- **Mobile Optimisation:** Recognising the importance of mobile access, the new website will be fully optimised for smartphones and tablets, ensuring members can stay connected on the go.
- **Resource Library:** We are improving our digital resource library to include a wider range of articles, guides, and best practices in grounds management, accessible to all members.
- **SEO and Analytics:** Improved search engine optimization (SEO) and integrated analytics will help us better understand member needs and continuously improve our online offerings.

These enhancements are designed to provide a more seamless and enriching experience for our members, supporting their professional growth and engagement with the association.



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PITCH ADVISORY SERVICE 2023-2024:

This year, the GMA proudly marks ten years of grassroots pitch improvement through the **Pitch Advisory Service (PAS)**.

Over the past decade, our dedicated team of GMA regional pitch advisors have partnered with grassroots sports clubs to improve the quality of playing surfaces, up-skill and train volunteers. In that time, nearly 50,000 pitches across grassroots football, cricket, rugby league, and rugby union have been improved. The programme has worked with more than 12,500 clubs and 14,500 volunteers.

Launched in 2014 as the Grounds and Natural Turf Improvement Programme, the Pitch Advisory Service is funded by Sport England and the Football Foundation, in collaboration with the Football Association (FA), England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), the Rugby Football League (RFL), and the Rugby Football Union (RFU). The service aims to elevate the standards of sports surfaces and deepen the understanding of sports turf management practices among grassroots clubs across England. Originally relying on manual pitch assessments, the service has transitioned to using digital pitch assessments through the PitchPower app in recent seasons.

The PAS programme is a brilliant example of sporting bodies working together to raise the standards of sports surfaces as well as the understanding of sports turf management practices among grassroots sports clubs across England, providing vital information, advice and guidance. There has never been more pressure on playing surfaces. Whether that's the effect of more extreme weather caused by climate change, or more demand as a greater and more diverse range of people want to play sport.

We all want more people playing – it brings so many health and wellbeing benefits. To enable that, we need to make sure our grassroots pitches are properly maintained – grounds are literally the foundation of sport. We need to recognise that, value grounds teams, and invest in them.

In the last twelve months, the PAS continues to build upon the solid foundations laid during the first two years of the programme. During 2023/24, the multisport element (Cricket, Rugby League and Rugby Union) of the programme focused on maximising the benchmarking data and planning carried out during the first year (2021/22). PitchPower has continued to be developed across all sports - the football team has continued to build on the success of the PitchPower app and the Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund.

**PITCH
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PITCH ADVISORY SERVICE 2023-2024:

- **England and Wales Cricket Board:** Cricket Pitch Advisor (CPA) Network increased with 30 new CPAs. Since 2021 the CPA network has a net increase of 65% (start of PAS phase 1) and practical workshops were up by 29% on last year.
- **Football Foundation/Football Association:** Have exceeded all KPI targets for this year and continue to support the Football Foundation with the development of PitchPower.
- **Rugby Football League:** 143 face-to-face visits were carried out, an increase of 43% on this year's target and a 150% increase on year one's achievement.
- **Rugby Football Union:** 243 face-to-face site visits (386% increase on target).

PITCH
ADVISORY
SERVICE





PITCH ADVISORY SERVICE 2023-2024:

Other key focuses:

- Continued development of PitchPower.
- Rugby League and Rugby Union collaborated on multisport site visits.
- Further development of the GMA Toolkit sport specific pages and content.
- Increased support network.
- Commencement of revisits for rugby union sites.
- Further engagement with local communities.
- Further engagement with Local Authorities via pilots.
- Continued programme wide workshops and events carried out.

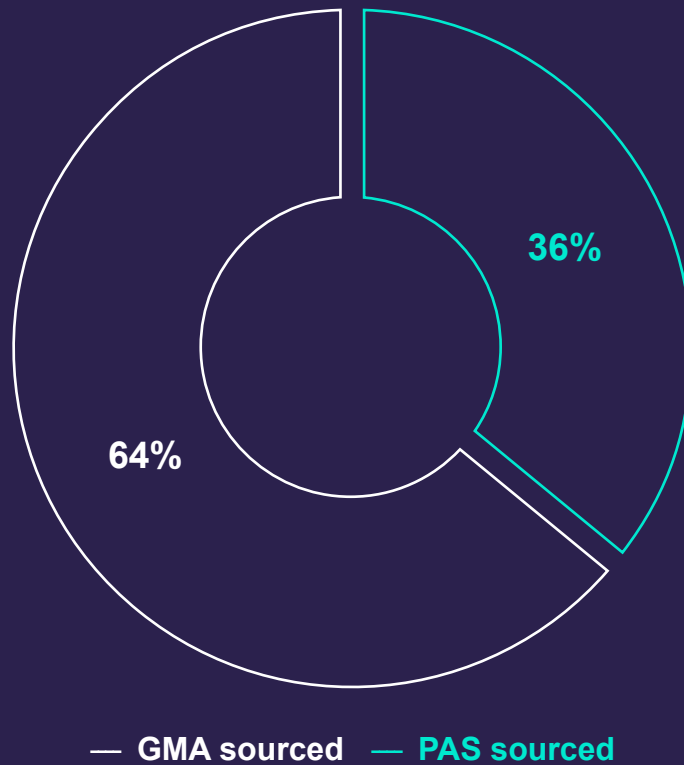
Achievements have been seen this year in areas such as continued community engagement for the programme support networks. This vital progress will allow the PAS to continue to provide a consistent and quality approach, tailored to the needs of each National Governing Body (NGB). Successful community engagement encourages the use of PitchPower, uptake of formal and informal training and attendance at local events.

The great work delivered by the GMA's PAS department has resulted in a new PAS contract with the Football Foundation via a tender process from April 2024 to 2028. This allows the GMA to further develop the approaches and success achieved over the last 10 years.

**PITCH
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SERVICE**

PAS Impact on Turfcare Advisory:

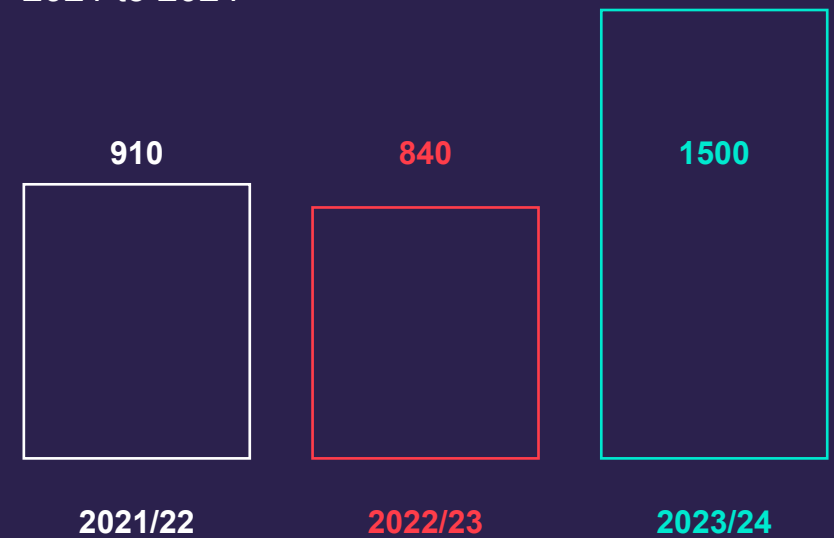
TCA Enquiry Source %
2021 to 2024



PAS Impact of online learning course numbers

The PAS continues to positively impact the numbers of people undertaking level 1 online training courses as shown in the graphics below.

L1 Online Course Comparisons
2021 to 2024





ELEVATING SKILLS WITH GMA'S TRAINING & LEARNING PROGRAMS:

2023 to 2024 has been a positive year for the Technical and Learning Department at the GMA. We have continued to promote online training courses, re-establish the appetite for face-to-face training courses and continue to update the GMA qualifications learning content.

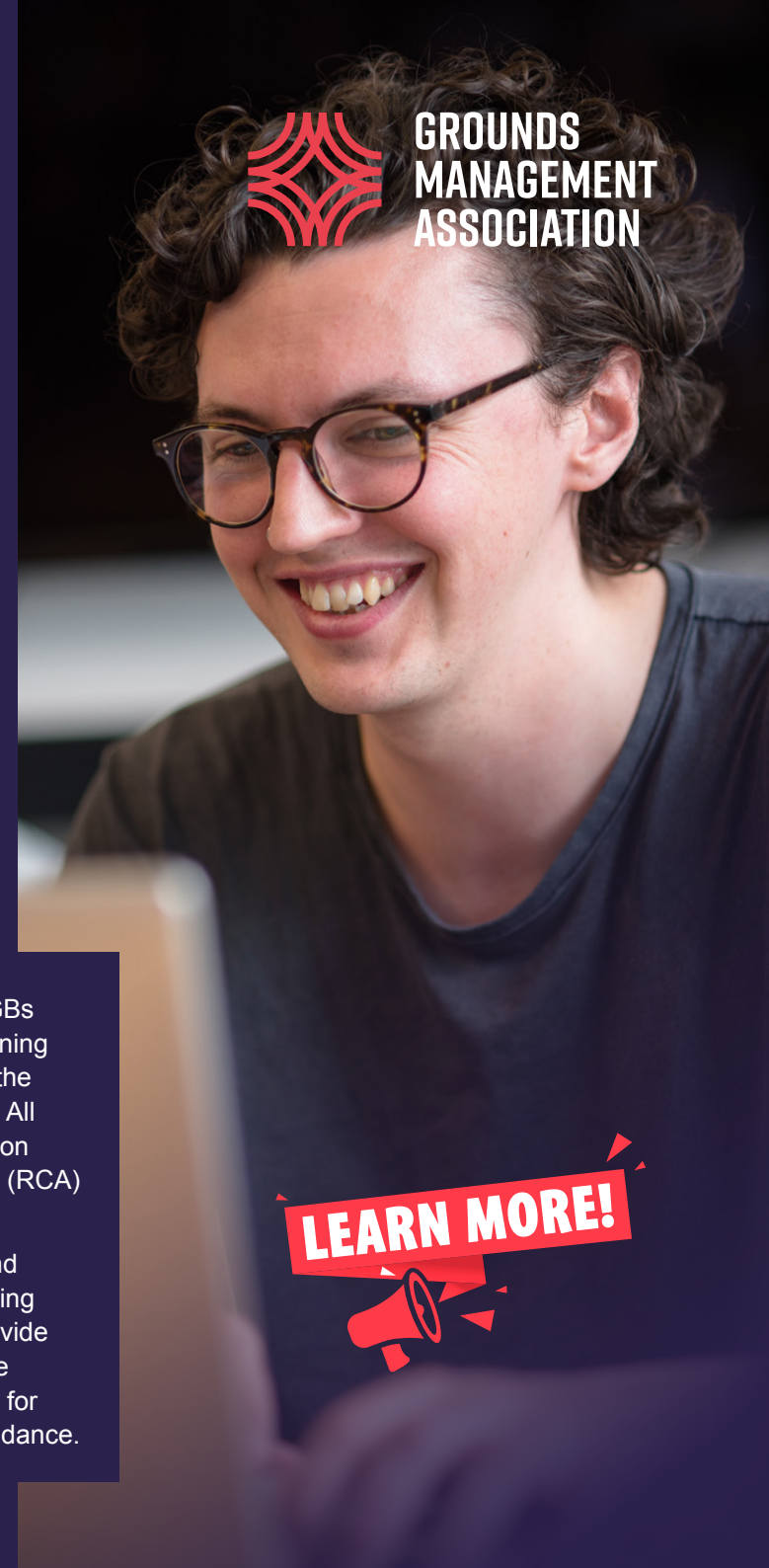
To put that into context, within our portfolio, we now have:

- 11 online training courses (one of which is in another language)
- 20 face-to-face training courses (many of which are now once again being taken up post-Covid)
- 17 qualifications

As well as 'off the shelf' provision, GMA has also forged links with various NGBs and sporting bodies such as the ECB and Premiership Rugby Ltd (PRL) meaning that some circa 2,000+ people in total have been educated / trained through the GMA each year. Other relationships and projects have also been formed with All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (AELTC)/ The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), Bowls England and a more direct link with the Racecourse Association (RCA) and British Horseracing Authority (BHA).

The GMA continues to provide unrivalled independent information, advice, and guidance. All the products and services managed by the Technical and Learning department carry member discounts and pricing has now been aligned to provide a circa 30% discount from non-member to member rate. GMA continues to be accredited by the matrix Standard – the Department for Education's standard for ensuring the GMA's delivery of high-quality learning, impartial advice, and guidance.

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PROFILE RAISING EVENTS: SALTEX



As a not-for-profit, everything we earn gets ploughed back into the industry through investment in valuable resources and initiatives that benefit the grounds care sector. SALTEX plays a crucial role in our ability to help raise the profile of our sector, both those working in it and those supplying goods and services to it.

The GMA has continually re-invested revenue generated from its annual exhibition back into the grounds management industry since its inauguration in 1938. Naturally, due to the success of the show year on year, that contribution continues to grow, further demonstrating how SALTEX continues to power progress in the industry.

Thanks to the success of SALTEX 2023, the GMA has been able to subsidise approximately 67% of its membership base, providing essential support to those at the heart of grounds management. With community and student memberships benefiting the most, this underscores the GMA's commitment to nurturing talent and ensuring that the highest standards of grounds care are upheld across the industry.

In addition to supporting membership, the revenue from SALTEX 2023 has helped to subsidise 1,900 GMA training courses for grounds professionals, both in person and online. The GMA's unique suite of training courses and qualifications are instrumental in advancing the knowledge and skills of grounds professionals, fostering a culture of excellence within the industry. Not only does the GMA provide training and education to the industry, but it also provides independent information, advice, and guidance to those wishing to develop their knowledge. This is recognised by the fact that the GMA is the only industry association to be accredited by the Department of Education's matrix Standard.

Since 2009, revenue generated from SALTEX has consistently supported the GMA's annual Industry Awards, which recognises excellence in grounds care across the professional and voluntary sectors. The event brings together many of the UK and Europe's leading practitioners and suppliers to pay tribute to the very best in the industry. Previous winners have gone on to climb the career ladder, with many benefitting by the GMA's training and qualifications.

We would like to offer a huge thank you to everyone who attended the 2023 show—exhibitors, visitors, Learning LIVE presenters, panel members, and the GMA staff—for making it a fantastic event. We're committed to continually improving SALTEX, and with our new in-house team, we're excited for future editions of the show. We are, of course, equally aware of opinion and choice and that is the new reality as new exhibitions are launched. Regardless, we at the GMA remain focused on what we deliver and our heritage and the benefits investing in SALTEX creates for those working in sports turf.

Speaking of heritage, it would be remiss not to mention 'Mr SALTEX', Derek Walder, a former Head Groundsman of the Crazy Gang of Wimbledon and former GMA Board Member. Derek steps down after 42 editions of SALTEX and it is credit to him and his team who built up SALTEX in its various forms over the years. It's an incredible record within the events sector and something unique.

 **SALTEX**

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PROFILE RASING EVENTS: THE GMA AWARDS



The **GMA Industry Awards** are on the move! We've decided to take the event around the country, choosing locations with a strong connection to sport. The 2023 Industry awards were held at the ATM Headingley Stadium, home to Leeds Rhinos and Yorkshire Cricket, and was a fantastic success. A huge thank you to all our corporate sponsors for their support in recognising the invaluable contributions of professionals and volunteers in the grounds care industry.

Looking ahead, we're excited to host the 2024 finalists at Anfield Stadium in Spring 2025, coinciding with #Groundsweek. This change is a crucial step in our mission to promote our sector to a wider audience and elevate its profile.



PROFILE RASING EVENTS: #GROUNDSWEEK



GroundsWeek is the GMA's annual awareness campaign that celebrates the incredible work that volunteers and professionals undertake to make sport possible. The 2024 campaign took a digitally focused approach, primarily over social media, with the GMA providing the assets needed for individuals, businesses and clubs to support the week through their own activity. This year the campaign amassed an online reach of 18 million, with over 2,500 pieces of online content being produced by over 1,000 unique authors. We saw grounds support from grounds staff from all spectrums of the industry, governing bodies, members associations, players and many more got involved in the campaign.

Support and social features included:

- Sports clubs such as Wimbledon, Wetherby Races, Chester Races, Leeds Rhinos, Castleford Tigers
- County FAs, cricket boards, the RCA etc.
- Educational Institutions and independent schools across the globe

Once again, demonstrating that the GMA continues to unite the industry, driving recognition of the valuable work that grounds staff do to help make sport possible.

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AGM NOTICE

The GMA's Annual General Meeting (AGM) will, once again, be a virtual meeting. It will take place on Wednesday 20 November 2024.

More details about the AGM and eligibility to vote is available on our website (thegma.org.uk/agm). A reminder that only Full Individual Members and Organisation Members are entitled to vote. Information and updates will also be available via the GMA's social media pages.

* Please visit the members area of thegma.org.uk website for a reminder of GMA member benefits and how you can access them.

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If you are interested in supporting the GMA and the wider grounds management industry, please contact:
Sarah Cunningham, Director of Commercial and Events
(scunningham@thegma.org.uk) for commercial and sponsorship opportunities.