

Annual report by the Board

A year of challenge, change and opportunity

2020 will be remembered as a year like no other, as Covid-19 impacts every aspect of our working and social lives. The grounds industry and the GMA have not been immune to the effects of these unprecedented times yet, despite the many obstacles in our path, the GMA continues to evolve and progress to help make sport possible

This past year has witnessed an exciting transition for our organisation when, in April, the Board and our members agreed to our change of name. Indeed, 84% of those who voted supported the new direction and name – and we have grown from strength to strength since relaunching as Grounds Management Association (GMA). For example, we have re-invented our approach to communications, commissioning a specialist agency to initially audit our existing messaging and positioning, then to provide us with clear recommendations that would help grow our membership offering and better promote our fantastic services and products to the grounds sector and to broader consumers.

We have also commissioned an industry-wide membership survey to better understand what works for existing and potential members, to determine what the sector values from a membership organisation. This is especially important as the GMA wants to ensure that, during a time of rapid change, we continue to reflect the needs and interests of grounds staff, managers and volunteers.

The rebrand as GMA is an opportunity to re-engage, energise and strengthen our community. Importantly, we have also continued to vigorously engage with relevant outlets providing news, comments and information to ensure we represent our members and present the grounds industry in the best ways possible.

Playing a key role here was our Back to Play report (<https://bit.ly/2HrKIU8>) that not only promoted the support and investment required to maintain natural turf pitches but also raised the standing of the sector and helped get sport back up and running quickly and safely post-lockdown. As a result, we secured widespread national, regional and trade media coverage of the report (see panel, right).

The Back to Play report built on our 2019 research 'Groundsmanship – Sport's Vital Profession', that highlighted the recruitment crisis across the grounds industry, both at a professional and volunteer level.

Continuing to educate, inform and inspire

Having successfully rebranded and strengthened our communications, we are also constantly improving and adapting our educational and technical offerings.

The GMA's Pitch Grading Framework (right) is in development and allows us to better support grounds staff and volunteers across every level to improve their capabilities and to access training.

At the very foundation of this was the launch of the GMA Level 1 online learning course, priced at just £25. This course is available for both professionals and volunteers, and helps enhance practical skills with a sound understanding of turf grass basics at an introductory level. The

course – backed by The Football Association and the Football Foundation – covers the maintenance of sport surfaces and facilities at grassroots level nationwide, including cricket, football, and rugby league and union.

Each participant receives a certificate upon completion of the course and is signposted to practical videos for subsequent use. It has been great to see the wonderful feedback about the course, which includes comments shared online via social media.

We have also added GMA Level 2 online learning for Winter Pitches, just in time for the winter season.

Importantly, we have conducted surveys to better understand how we can adapt our courses in an evolving and virtual industry/communications scenario, as well as shared case studies to promote best practice. This work has been reflected by the English Football League which, as a result, has changed the rules for qualifications for its grounds staff to attain Level 3 NVQ or equivalent.

We continue to reflect and review to keep the GMA ahead of the game.

SALTEX and networking

Last year's SALTEX achieved record visitor numbers at the NEC, complemented by a sold-out IOG Industry Awards evening. Now, however, our biggest challenge is the planning and hosting of the next event. We were naturally expecting a bumper sales year on the back of SALTEX 2019, but the pandemic has severely impacted our planning and, with the virus taking hold again as we approach winter, it is clear that we must evaluate our next step.

Considering potential local lockdowns, current restrictions on mass gatherings and events, combined with the unprecedented impact on all of us from Covid-19, it makes the situation very challenging and difficult to navigate – and, as a result, we have taken the decision to move SALTEX to 3 & 4 November 2021 (see page 7).

This decision to delay SALTEX does impact directly on our cash flow but instigating good governance will protect our assets.

As well as regular Board meetings, the GMA's Strategy and Finance group looks proactively at the business and the challenges we face. The group – which includes an independent financial advisor – is able to inform and action plans to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the GMA.

Adapt and advance

This pandemic has reshaped the way every business operates and we, too, have demonstrated our ability to adapt quickly to the prevailing conditions. We have created new programmes, products and services. We have adapted and diversified to create the foundations for us to survive and grow post-pandemic.

We have had to make some tough decisions this year, with some staff being furloughed while their colleagues work hard to provide a good service to our membership. Difficult choices and decisions lay ahead of us. We will require a team effort from everyone connected with the GMA, and we really do value everyone's support and investment in the organisation during this difficult year.

Summary

It is important that we reflect on what has been achieved in the past year, despite the prevailing circumstances.

The Board and staff have shown extreme resilience and have been very proactive in developing new approaches to continue to provide products and services to our membership.

Further challenges are ahead of us, but we can assure you that the GMA Board and staff are fully committed to rising to each and every challenge which confronts us. We can, however, state that throughout this worrying time, we have sought to act responsibly and in the best interests of our members, and we thank you, our members, and our partners for your ongoing support.

by
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Chief Executive Officer

and
David Carpenter
Independent Chair