



WORKING IN GROUNDS MANAGEMENT: SECURING THE FUTURE OF THE PROFESSION



INSIGHTS AND ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN SKILLS, CAREERS AND WORKFORCE RESILIENCE

Grounds management is the backbone of sport, education and community recreation across the UK.

This resource summarises key findings from the GMA Workforce Insight Report 2026 and sets out the realities, challenges and opportunities facing today's workforce. It highlights practical, evidence-based actions that both employers and employees can take to help build a fairer, more sustainable and professionally recognised sector.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS ABOUT WORKING IN THE SECTOR

The research reveals a committed and highly skilled workforce with a deep sense of pride in the role it plays. Most grounds staff report strong overall job satisfaction, driven by the joy of working outdoors, applying specialist technical expertise, and contributing directly to the quality of sport, and community settings.

However, the evidence also points to consistent pressure points across the sector:

- Pay and benefits satisfaction is lower than overall job satisfaction
- Workload and work-life balance are a concern for many, with long hours and overtime common
- Recruitment and retention difficulties mean teams are often stretched
- An ageing workforce is accelerating the loss of valuable experience faster than it can be replaced.

These challenges do not stem from individual organisations alone. They reflect broader economic pressures, rising operational costs and long-standing structural issues that affect grounds management in every setting. Addressing them will require collective effort — but the potential rewards for the sector, its workforce and the communities it serves are significant.



PAY, PROGRESSION AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES:

Pay, progression and professional roles

HOW PAY WORKS IN GROUNDS MANAGEMENT:

Pay in the sector is determined in different ways depending on employer type and setting. Most pay awards are set at organisational level, while some roles rely on individual negotiation. For employers, these trends pose a strategic challenge: how to maintain fair, competitive and motivating pay structures in a context of rising costs and growing expectations. They also present an opportunity to strengthen transparency, reward progression more clearly, and build an employment offer that reflects the technical, safety-critical and increasingly professional nature of modern grounds management.

Recent increases in the National Living Wage have helped improve baseline pay for lower-paid roles, but they have also contributed to pay compression — reducing the gap between new starters and experienced staff, and making it harder to recognise advanced technical skill and long service.

The cost-of-living crisis has had a significant impact on real wages across the UK. Even where employers have followed recommended uplifts, many grounds staff will still feel financial pressure due to higher living costs.

Pay, progression and professional roles

GMA RECOMMENDED MINIMUM SALARIES:

The GMA's recommended minimum salary benchmarks are designed to promote greater transparency and consistency across the sector. These benchmarks are not pay caps; rather, they set out the baseline level at which skills, experience and responsibility should be properly recognised.

The figures refer to basic salary only. Overtime, allowances, on-call payments, accommodation and other benefits sit outside these benchmarks and should be discussed and agreed separately. Employers are encouraged to manage overtime fairly and ensure that working hours support healthy work–life balance, operational reliability and long-term workforce sustainability.

In 2025 the GMA recommended a 4.7% uprating, aligned with inflation, wage growth, and pay award forecasts.

Minimum recommended basic salaries
(April 2025, based on a 40-hour week):

Grounds Manager:	£45,430 – £70,378
Head Groundsperson:	£38,746 – £53,179
Deputy Head / Sole Charge:	£31,699 – £40,458
Groundsperson (Skilled):	£29,645 – £37,818
Groundsperson:	£23,750 – £30,298
Junior Groundsperson (17):	£20,193
Junior Groundsperson (16):	£16,770

Provisional figures for April 2026 indicate an expected uplift of around 3.2%, subject to economic conditions.

Pay, progression and professional roles

USING THE RECOMMENDED MINIMUM SALARIES GUIDANCE

This salary information is intended to support:

- Understanding of role levels and progression
- Preparation for pay or development discussions
- Benchmarking across the sector
- Recognition of grounds management as a skilled, technical profession

It is designed to inform conversations, not replace them. The GMA provides its members with a suite of advice and guidance services that can support collaborative working on constructive workforce recruitment and retention plans.



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LOOKING AHEAD:

Looking ahead:

IMPROVING FAIR, SUSTAINABLE WORK ACROSS THE SECTOR

The challenges identified in this research are not the result of individual failings by employers or staff. They reflect long-term sector-wide pressures — including rising costs, constrained budgets, an ageing workforce and ongoing difficulties attracting new entrants into the profession.

In response, the Grounds Management Association is developing the **GMA Fair Work Strategy** for the sector. Its aim is not to replace employer decision-making or introduce collective bargaining. Instead, it is designed to set clear, professional expectations and provide a framework that supports fair, sustainable workforce practices across a diverse range of organisations.

This strategy builds on the progress already made. Over the past two years, the GMA has invested in strengthening skills pathways, developing new entry routes, increasing professional recognition, expanding wellbeing support and raising professional standards. The Fair Work Strategy brings these elements together — creating a coordinated, long-term approach that supports employers, empowers staff and strengthens the resilience of the sector as a whole.

Looking ahead:

THE FAIR WORK STRATEGY FOCUSES ON FIVE BROAD AIMS:

- **Supporting fair and transparent pay structures** — promoting clarity around roles, responsibilities and minimum recommended pay, so that experience and progression are properly recognised.
- **Strengthening professional recognition** — reinforcing grounds management as a skilled, technical profession where qualifications and experience matter.
- **Improving workload sustainability and wellbeing** — encouraging realistic approaches to hours, overtime and staffing, alongside better awareness of wellbeing support.
- **Supporting skills, training and progression** — helping employers and individuals make effective use of training, apprenticeships and the Grounds Management Framework.
- **Sharing good practice across the sector** — highlighting examples of employers who are investing in their workforce and demonstrating sustainable approaches in practice.

The GMA Fair Work Strategy is being developed with employers, practitioners and partners, recognising the diversity of organisations and financial contexts across the sector. Its role is to support improvement, not impose a single model, and to help secure a resilient, professional workforce for the future.





EMPLOYER SUPPLEMENTAL

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS

The GMA Workforce Insight Report highlights trends that affect employers across the grounds management sector, regardless of size, sport or setting. While pressures vary, the underlying message is consistent: workforce capability, skills and sustainability are now central to quality, resilience and value.





RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ARE NOW SKILLS RISKS, NOT JUST STAFFING GAPS

An ageing workforce, combined with recruitment difficulties, means many employers face the loss of highly experienced, technically skilled staff over the next few years.

Grounds management roles increasingly require specialist knowledge of turf science, machinery, surface performance, drainage, health and safety and environmental management.

Losing this expertise without a clear succession pipeline presents real operational risk.

Employer consideration:

How resilient would your operation be if you lost key technical expertise, not just headcount, in the next three years?



PAY AND PROGRESSION SHOULD REFLECT SKILLS, QUALIFICATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITY

Grounds management is a technical profession, not an entry-level role that peaks early. However, increases in the National Living Wage are compressing pay differentials between new starters and experienced, qualified staff.

Without progression pathways that clearly link pay to technical competence, qualifications and responsibility, employers risk undervaluing expertise and weakening incentives for development and retention.

The evidence shows relatively low uptake of higher-level industry qualifications, often because training and progression are not consistently recognised or rewarded within pay structures. This can undermine both motivation and the business case for investing in skills.

Employer consideration:

Do your pay and progression arrangements clearly recognise technical competence, qualifications and increasing responsibility over time?



WORKLOAD, WELLBEING AND PERFORMANCE ARE CLOSELY LINKED

High levels of overtime, long hours and seasonal peaks remain common. While commitment to the role is strong, sustained pressure increases the risk of burnout, sickness absence and staff turnover, particularly where technical roles are under-resourced or under-valued.

Supporting workload planning, fair overtime arrangements and wellbeing is not separate from performance.

Skilled grounds work requires focus, judgement and consistency, all of which are undermined by chronic fatigue and stress.

Employer consideration:

Are workloads and support arrangements enabling staff to perform skilled work safely and consistently across the season?

4

TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS NEED TO BE ACTIVELY SUPPORTED AND PLANNED

The Grounds Management Framework (GMF) provides a clear, structured approach to identifying skills needs, planning training and supporting progression across different levels of responsibility and pitch quality. However, evidence suggests it is not yet widely used by employers to inform workforce planning.

Employers who actively use frameworks like the GMF are better placed to align training with operational needs, justify investment in CPD, and develop future supervisors and managers from within their teams.

Employer consideration:

Are you using structured tools such as the GMF to plan training, progression and succession within your workforce?

[ACCESS THE GROUNDS MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK HERE](#)



WORKFORCE CAPABILITY UNDERPINS QUALITY, VALUE AND REPUTATION

Investment in skills, qualifications and professional development supports higher pitch quality, safer surfaces, reduced reactive maintenance and stronger long-term value for money.

It also strengthens the reputation of facilities and organisations as professional, well-run and attractive places to work.

Seeing grounds staff as skilled practitioners rather than manual labourers is not just a cultural shift. It is a practical one, with clear implications for quality, risk management and sustainability.

Employer consideration:

Does your employment offer reflect the technical skill and professional standards you expect from your facilities?

[VIEW THE GMA'S FULL RANGE OF COURSES AND QUALIFICATIONS HERE](#)

WORKING WITH THE GMA

The GMA's Fair Work Strategy will support employers to strengthen pay, progression, training and wellbeing in ways that are fair, practical and sustainable. The Grounds Management Framework will play a key role in helping employers link skills, qualifications and professional development to workforce planning and long-term resilience.

The challenge is shared. The skills are real. The response can be collective.





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GMA MEMBERSHIP**

FIND OUT MORE



**EXPLORE THE GMA'S
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
OPPORTUNITIES**

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**MAP YOUR PITCH QUALITY AND
SKILL SET WITH THE GROUNDS
MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**