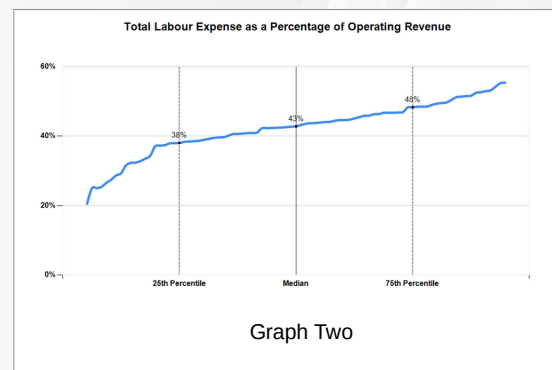
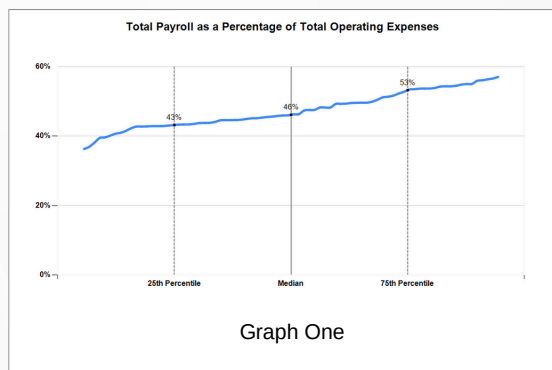


From Data to Decisions: Helping GMs Navigate Labour Costs with Confidence

At Club Benchmarking EMEA, we work closely with clubs across the UK and Ireland, and one issue keeps coming up—labour costs. It's a huge challenge on a daily basis to navigate, and our data shows just how significant it is.

Right now, the median club spends 46% of its total expenses on labour. That's nearly half of all outgoings just to keep the team in place. And it varies: clubs in the 25th percentile spend 43%, while those in the 75th percentile spend 53%. (See Graph 1)



When we look at labour cost as a percentage of total revenue, the median is 43%, with the 25th percentile at 38% and the 75th percentile at 48%. (See Graph 2 above)

Understanding labour cost ratios is about more than just tracking spend—it's about making smarter, more informed decisions. These benchmarks help clubs see where they stand in relation to others, whether they're operating lean or investing heavily in staffing. That insight is crucial when evaluating service levels, member expectations, and financial sustainability.

For General Managers, these ratios provide a clear framework to guide conversations with boards, justify operational decisions, and align staffing strategies with the club's long-term goals. It's not just about numbers—it's about using those numbers to support the experience members expect and the standards clubs aim to deliver.

Long-Serving Staff: Valuable but Tricky

Many clubs have staff who've been with them for years. These people are part of the club's identity—members know them, trust them, and rely on them. But long tenure can also bring challenges. Pay structures may be outdated, and performance reviews are often informal or infrequent. This can lead to frustration. Staff may feel stuck, especially when newer team members come in on better pay. And in member-owned clubs, there's often a reluctance to tackle these issues head-on. The culture hasn't always supported regular reviews or open conversations about pay, and that can affect morale and service quality.

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Members and the Subscription Sensitivity

One of the biggest hurdles clubs face is the reaction from members when subs need to go up. Understandably, members want value for money—but many don't realise just how much of their subscription goes toward staffing. When clubs propose increases to cover rising wages or to hire more staff, it's often met with resistance. There's a perception that subscriptions should stay flat, even as costs rise. But with nearly half of club expenses tied to labour, something has to give. Clubs are stuck between wanting to improve service and needing to keep members happy. It's a tough balancing act.

Post-COVID Staffing Struggles

COVID changed the game. The hospitality sector was hit hard, and golf clubs are still feeling the effects. Food and beverage teams are especially difficult to recruit and retain. Many left the industry during the pandemic and haven't come back. The hours are long, the pay isn't always competitive, and other industries are offering better deals.

Greenkeeping is another area where clubs are struggling. It's skilled, physical work, and not always seen as an attractive career path. Yet it's absolutely vital to the member experience. A well maintained course doesn't happen by accident—it takes a dedicated team, and clubs are finding it harder to build and keep those teams.

We Understand the Challenge First-Hand

One thing that sets us apart at Club Benchmarking EMEA is that we've been in your shoes. We have real General Manager experience, so we understand the day-to-day pressures, the boardroom conversations, and the balancing act between operational needs and member expectations.

We know how hard it is to make the case for change—especially when it involves money. That's why our data is designed to help GMs lead with confidence.

How Our Data Helps GMs Lead the Conversation

Our benchmarking gives GMs the clarity and confidence to present facts, not just feelings. You can show how your club compares to others, justify decisions like pay reviews or staffing changes, and explain why certain investments are necessary to protect the member experience.

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Tips for GMs Presenting Data to Boards

Here are a few practical tips for General Managers when using benchmarking data in board meetings:

- Start with context - Explain why labour costs matter and how they impact the member experience. Link it to real-world outcomes—course quality, service levels, staff retention.
- Use comparisons - Show how your club stacks up against similar clubs. Use medians and percentiles to highlight whether your costs are typical or outliers.
- Keep it visual - Use charts and graphs like the ones above to make the data easy to digest. A simple visual can be more powerful than a spreadsheet.
- Connect data to decisions - Don't just present numbers—link them to actions. For example: "We are below the median in greenkeeping spend, and it's affecting course standards. Here's what we recommend."
- Anticipate concerns - Be ready for questions about subscriptions, member experience, and financial sustainability. Use the data to show how investing in staff supports long-term club health and success.
- Tell a story - Frame the data within the club's journey. "Here's where we were, here's where we are, and here's where we need to go."

Final Thoughts

Labour costs aren't going away. If anything, they're becoming central to how clubs operate and deliver a compelling member experience. At Club Benchmarking EMEA, we're here to help clubs understand the numbers, have the right conversations, and make informed decisions.

Because at the end of the day, it's the people—on the course, in the clubhouse, behind the scenes—who contribute greatly to make the club what it is.