



# Women's, Girls' and Family Participation in Golf: An Overview of Existing Research (2018)



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## Foreword

Each year, The R&A engages in a range of activities for the benefit of golf. At the core of many of these activities is our aim to grow and develop the sport around the world by enhancing its appeal and encouraging participation. We work with our affiliates in support of this aim by providing them with services, expertise and resources appropriate to their requirements.

A great deal of progress has been made in golf in recent times, including its successful return to the Olympic Games in 2016, but the sport undoubtedly faces some challenges which it must address to safeguard its future.

There is concern about participation levels in some parts of the world and golf faces increasing competition from other sports and demands on people's leisure time. Crucially, women and girls continue to be an under-represented group in golf and there is much that needs to be done to attract more to take it up and go on to become members of clubs.

More and more women are seeking an active lifestyle which includes fun and friendship, both for themselves and their families, and have been identified as the key decision-makers in how families spend their leisure time. That has to mean there is a tremendous opportunity for growth if golf can find the right way of appealing to women and more generally to families.

The R&A has commissioned this report to bring together the findings of existing academic and industry research with individual expert views from experienced members of the golf industry to help us identify and analyse the factors which affect whole family participation including women and girls.



The report details a number of useful practical recommendations for our affiliates to introduce in their own national development programmes and to provide to their associated golf clubs to help them encourage more women and girls to participate in golf more regularly.

It also highlights the positive impact that having women involved in the decision-making process can have for developing and offering opportunities which appeal to women, girls and families. Our recent merger with the Ladies' Golf Union brought a wealth of additional experience and insight to The R&A and has been of great benefit in this regard.

This is a well-researched and thought-provoking report. It provides actions and guidance that can lead to tangible, positive outcomes for golf and bring more women and girls into the sport.

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## Introduction and aims

There have been many great achievements in the world of golf during recent times. 2016 witnessed golf's inclusion in the Olympic Games for the first time in over 100 years, showcasing the sport on a global platform, and record spectator attendance has been seen at professional events, such as the 2017 Open Championship at Royal Birkdale, the largest ever staged in England. Golf also has become a truly global sport, with more than 30,000 facilities located in 208 of the world's 245 countries (R&A, 2017).

Despite these accomplishments, overall participation levels in golf are falling in certain areas of the world. In 2017, Sport's Marketing Surveys Inc. (SMS) revealed that globally the number of registered golfers had dropped by 2.4% since 2012. In the same period, traditional markets such as the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) have witnessed reductions of 4.3% and 7.9% respectively. A closer examination of the UK, for example, shows that 889,100 (2.18% of UK population) participated in golf at least once per week between October 2005 and October 2006, compared with 729,300 (1.64%) between October 2015 and 2016, a reduction of over 150,000 people (Sport England Active People Survey, 2016). Female and junior golfers account for just 23% of the UK and Ireland golfing population and male golfers make up the remainder.

OPPORTUNITIES
Golf in Olympic Games for the first time in over 100 years
Record spectator attendance at major golf events
33,161 golf facilities in 208 of the world's 245 countries
THREATS
Globally participation dropped 2.4% since 2012
United Kingdom (UK) dropped 4.3%
United States of America (USA) dropped 7.9%

Family golf participation, including women's and girls' involvement in particular, has been identified as an opportunity for significant growth. Globally, Syngenta (2014) revealed that women on average represent just 24% of the overall golf participation figures in eight markets they sampled, including: USA, Canada, UK & Ireland, Sweden, France, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Interestingly, research has shown that women are the key decision makers in regards to what families do with their leisure time and money (Whaley, 2016). However, year-on-year growth in the numbers of females playing sport is considerably less than their male counterparts, and so the gender gap continues to increase (see Morton, 2017). There are a variety of factors that impact on levels of golf participation, which is affected by structural issues including time, access, and cost, as well as factors such as perceptions of image, normative gender roles, and socialisation into particular tastes. It is important to address what we know about participating in sport to help secure the future of golf in challenging times.

The purpose of the Women's, Girls', and Family report is to analyse the factors that impact on whole family participation in golf, by drawing together the relevant research undertaken in the area to establish the current level of understanding. This process involved analysing:

- I. Academic research papers published on golf, and wider sports work where appropriate.
- II. Industry publications and market research produced by various golf related organisations.
- III. Interviews conducted with a range of golf industry experts.



This unique report brings together, for the first time in one place, the key academic and industry research that has been undertaken on family sports participation. It seeks to define what being "family friendly" means for golf, and offers practical action points which can help inform strategy decisions within R&A affiliates and their associated golf clubs. Some of the points raised will not be new for certain organisations, however, it is hoped there will be something, no matter how small, that can help inform organisational policies and strategies by providing this centralised evidence base.

It is also important to appreciate that golf does not exist independent of other sports, and there is much that can be learnt from research conducted in other contexts. This report will review the key research papers that exist outside of golf, where appropriate. There is not the space to detail each research article in length, so focus will be paid to points of agreement between the research, that will help contribute to the future growth of golf.

Academic research papers featuring in peer-reviewed scientific journals will form the main body text, supplemented with industry market research projects, case studies of best practice, and interview extracts from industry experts where appropriate.

Readers are encouraged to 'dip in and out' of this report by using the chapters which most centrally relate to their own circumstances regarding family golf participation – whether that be:

p6	Establishing the environment for family participation
p12	Attracting families to play golf
p22	Maintaining long term participation and avoiding drop-out
p34	Ensuring golf's traditions in harmony with future change

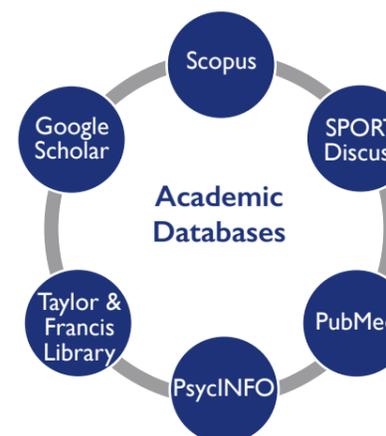
## Research methods

The research used is a case study approach involving an in depth analysis of factors which impact on women's, girls', and family golf participation. An extensive review of academic evidence was conducted via searching abstract and citation databases of peer-reviewed scientific articles, including: Scopus, SPORTDiscuss, PubMed, PsycINFO, Taylor & Francis Library, and Google Scholar. This combined strategy covers more than one million citations of academic peer-reviewed research papers. Industry publications and market research documents were either publically available or accessed via contact directly with the relevant R&A affiliate organisations.

The academic and industry literature reviews were supplemented with interviews from 17 people with experience working in senior roles within various R&A affiliate organisations. Interviews

took place via telephone, were recorded and transcribed verbatim. An interview guide was developed so all participants could elaborate without the rigidity of structured questions. The investigations drew on themes including: participation demographics, barriers, policies and strategies, the golf club environment, defining 'family friendly' golf, alternative versions of golf, and the future of the sport.

Data from the literature review and interviews were coded using thematic analysis, where reoccurring points of significance and emergent trends were identified.



 Interviews: 17 people with experience working in senior roles within various R&A affiliate organisations

The project was commissioned by the R&A and granted ethical clearance by University Centre Myerscough's Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC). Participants were given a guarantee that all data will remain confidential. Pseudonyms, in the form of randomly assigned names, have been used to protect anonymity in this report, thus improving the validity of the data.



# 1 Establishing the environment for family participation

This first section highlights considerations regarding the wider context in which golf exists, in order to help ensure an environment conducive to increasing the numbers of families playing the sport. This includes establishing the traits of the 'modern family' and assessing the impact of wider gender equality.

## 1.1 The 'modern' family

Traditionally, the 'family' has been considered a group consisting of two heterosexual parents and their biological children – commonly referred to as the 'nuclear family'. More recently, however, the term 'modern family' has been used to explain how the concept of 'family' has undergone significant transformations in terms of its structure (see Defrain & Asay, 2007; Golombok's, 2015; Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004). It is argued that societal changes have contributed to a reduction in the number of nuclear families, and modern families exist in a variety of configurations, characterised by increasing numbers of one-parent families, childless families, and quasi-family units based on non-marital cohabitation. There also appears a trend towards family sizes getting smaller as greater levels of mobility separates more families up than was previously the case.

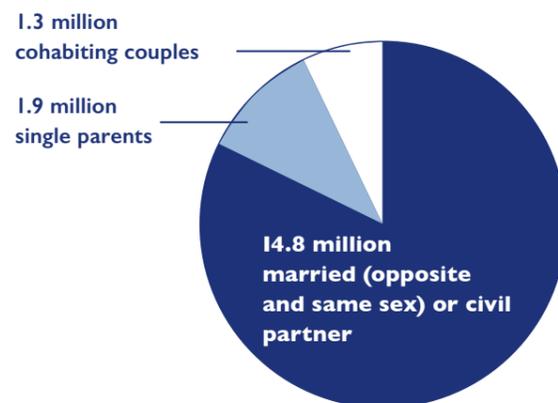
*"The family: two or more persons who share resources, share responsibility for decisions, share values and goals, and have a commitment to one another over time. The family is that climate that one comes home to and it is this network of sharing and commitments that most accurately describes the family unit, regardless of blood, legal ties, adoption, or marriage"* (Defrain & Asay, 2007, p.284)

### Industry research: The UK Modern Families Index (2017)

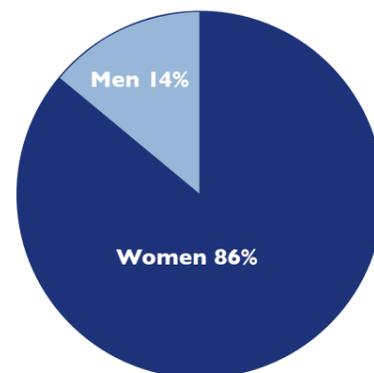
In 2016, there were 4.8 million married (opposite and same sex) or civil partner couple families with dependent children living in the UK. Additionally, there are 1.3 million cohabiting couples and 1.9 million single parent families living with dependent children. Women accounted for 86% of single parents with dependent children and men made up the remaining 14%. Of the 13.9 million dependent children living in families, the majority (63%) of live in a married couple family. The percentage of dependent children living in cohabitating families has witnessed a rise from 7% to 15% between 1996 and 2016, while the percentage of dependent children living in single parent families had little change. Married couples with dependent children have more children, on average, when compared with other family types. In 2016, 55% of single parents with dependent children had one child, whereas 39% of married couples with dependent children had one child (The Modern Families Index, 2017).

*"Family leisure is a quality that has consistently been identified as one of the most significant behavioural characteristics related to positive family outcomes"* (Zabriskie & Kay, 2013, p.81).

**Families living with dependent children (UK)**



**Single parents with dependent children**



Despite significant changes in structure, the family unit remains a key functional social institution and leisure time is a central feature. Research undertaken by Golombok (2015), for example, found that the quality of family relationships, and the directly associated impact on children's psychological development, is influenced more by social factors like leisure time than it is by issues including biological relatedness of their parents. Zabriskie and Freeman (2004) also identified a positive relationship between quality of family leisure and family functioning in their research on 197 'modern' families of various configurations. Measurements of family cohesion, family adaptability, and family functioning were all higher in families involved in leisure time together when compared with those who do not. Hodge and colleagues (2016) also found, when studying number of countries worldwide, that higher levels of family leisure involvement had a positive effect on family cohesion, adaptability, functioning, and general satisfaction with family life across all regions worldwide.

### Industry expert analysis: Daisy

"Families are very important ... it's a massive core of people who haven't really been tapped into yet. I think if you can give families the right experience at a golf club or a golf course, I think it can be a really positive thing."

### Industry expert analysis: Alan

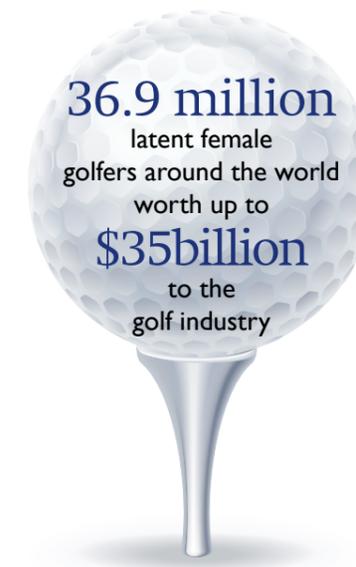
"[Families are] massive, massively important ... the family market is critical."



**Action point:** Focus campaigns on promoting golf participation as an opportunity to have quality family time, viewing the sport as a culturally valued family leisure activity.

### Industry Research: The Global Economic Value of Increased Female Participation in Golf (Syngenta, 2016)

Syngenta conducted market research into the economic value of increasing women's participation in golf. Surveys were completed by more than 14,000 respondents, including golfers (female and male), female non-golfers, lapsed female players and women who had tried the sport. Participants represented 78% of the world's total golf course supply over eight key markets (USA, Canada, UK & Ireland, Sweden, France, South Korea, Japan and Australia). Results argue there are an estimated 36.9 million latent female golfers around the world, and that this group may be worth up to \$35 billion to the golf industry should they take up the sport more permanently. The study also revealed that women found the opportunity to be outdoors, relaxing and unwinding with friends, as the most appealing factors for playing golf. The main reasons given for non participation were cost (37%), the impact of family responsibilities (30%), and amount of time taken to play (17%).



There is, then, a solid evidence base regarding the links between increased family sport / leisure participation and improved family well-being as a whole. The remainder of this report will investigate how best to approach encouraging families to participate in golf, and how subsequently to promote long term participation.

## 1.2 The impact of gender equality

*"The golf industry is a significant employer in Great Britain and Ireland. Female presence in this sector is important, particularly if the model of 'family golf' is pursued from both tourism and participation perspectives" (Kitching et al., 2017)*

Coalter and his team (2013), working from Leeds Metropolitan University, used material from 'The Spirit Level: why equal societies almost always do better' (Wilson & Pickett, 2010) but applied in a sporting context. This research compared measures of sports participation with levels of social equality across various countries. Results showed a consistent relationship between sports participation and factors such as the distribution of wealth, income inequality, general inequality, educational access and social mobility and gender. It appears equality of sports participation is a direct reflection of wider equality.



**Action point:** Promote the message that more equal roles in the golf environment has an impact on more equal levels of golf participation.

Van Tuyckom and colleagues (2010) also looked at gender equality in sports participation, in their study of 25 European Union (EU) countries. Results found that overcoming gender inequalities in sport requires changes at cultural, political and societal levels. They also noted that EU states with the highest female participation in sport are those with long histories of social-liberal politics and strong welfare systems. For example, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland tended to have more equal measures of societal equality and also demonstrate more equal levels of sports participation. Women's social status (based on the percentage of women in legislatures; the male/female income gap; the percentage of women completing higher education) is much higher in Scandinavian countries when compared with other EU states and even further afield.

Green and Colleagues (2015), from the University of Chester, conducted a study of sports participation among Norwegian females. It was found that the comparatively high levels and marked increases in sports participation among young women is likely to have a great deal to do with their socio-economic status and, in particular, the diminishing gender gap in Norway over the past two decades. In short, it is argued that Norwegian women have taken advantage of growing up in a country where standards of living are particularly high and at a time of greater equality between the sexes in order, among other things, to exploit the sporting opportunities increasingly available to them.

### Industry expert analysis: Joanne

"Women are underrepresented in the decision-making process. And this will slow down our ability to, you know, fully develop the sport to be fully accessible to all."

### Industry expert analysis: Owen

"Committees, boards, everything should be equal ... when women are invited you find tonnes of great knowledgeable women coming in, and this is the most important part in the long term. If we have equal representation on boards it is also going to put an emphasis on all we want to fix."

Of particular importance to the golf/sport domain is the percentage of women on company boards. A Department for Business Innovation and Skills report (2011, p.24) entitled 'Women on Boards' stated that:

*"Norway has achieved 40.2% proportion of women on boards. The next cluster of European countries includes the UK ... whose percentage of women directors ranges from approximately 14% to 7%".*

Furthermore, the European Professional Women's Network (2014) reports that Finland had approximately twice the proportion of female board members than the UK, 25.9 compared to 13.5.



**Action point:** Promote women's presence in influential leadership positions, such as boards of directors and executive roles.



**Action point:** Encourage active support of gender equality by influential men in leadership positions.

### Case study

#### Vision 50/50 Policy (Swedish Golf Federation, 2017)

The Swedish Golf Federation's (SGF) vision 50/50 policy seeks to promote gender equality in golf. A key part this strategy is to increase the number of women in decision making roles in the SGF and, as a result, make golf more attractive to female players. Sweden's participation levels remain amongst some of the healthiest, with approximately 500,000 members of the SGF, more than 5% of Sweden's entire population. Women golfers account for 26% of Sweden's golfing population, with 123,427 regular players (SMS, 2017). Levels of female employment in the wider golf industry is higher than in many other countries, however, remains low in comparison to other professions in Sweden. Research shows that, in 2016, females made up 17% of club managers, 10% of chair persons, and 9% of Professional Golf Association (PGA) professionals – which has been reflected in increasing external pressures regarding gender equality creates demands from business, sponsors, media, politicians, and general public (SGF, 2017). In 2013 the SGF introduced the Vision 50/50 policy, with the aim of increasing the number of female golfers by 10,000 before the year 2020, with the longer term goal of achieving equal boards, election committees, and overall participation levels. It is hoped this will lead to a measurable improvement in women's experience of golf. The SGF have employed several tools to achieve these aims, including a positive social media campaign and introduction of a new magazine, 'Golfnyttan', targeted at female game prospective players. The SGF have also launched a digital education system to support golf clubs in improving gender equality roles. Clubs are certified through this process.

# 50♀/50♂



Research conducted MacKinnon (2013) analysing the golf industry, found that the governance, administration and service provision is largely male-dominated, and, as a result, makes it difficult for females to gain employment and forge careers. More recently, Kitching and colleagues (2017) conducted a similar project assessing the barriers and opportunities for female employment in the golf industry. Focussing on the experiences of female PGA and trainee PGA professionals, which make up less than 3% of all PGA professionals in Great Britain and Ireland, it was found that females across generations experience the golf setting as a male-dominated, and in some cases, 'sexist' environment. This impacts on both the number of women participating in golf and the likelihood that more female role models will emerge that could inspire future generations of female players. On the whole, younger professionals appeared more willing to challenge, discuss and confront the underlying attitudes – which suggests the beginning of an incremental change away from male predominance.

**Industry expert analysis: Neil**

Some interviewees highlighted the challenge of achieving gender equality in golf, and the lack of females in senior levels in some organisations. For example, Neil said: "The chief exec didn't want a 30% [female] board ... that gives you an idea of where we're at ... they don't want females in that position ... It's just frightening, in this day and age, this is the attitude we are dealing with ... the difficulty is if we're not practicing what we preach at this kind of level, and yet we're talking to golf clubs about increasing their numbers of females and their playing rights, etc., it comes from the top down."

**Industry expert analysis: Quentin**

"Those who are running the golf club are mainly men. They are in their late 50's and focus on themselves and what they like about the golf course, and not about those who are underrepresented, like female or youth."



**Action point:** Consider strategic and operational policies to promote gender equality, including education / awareness drives and use of 'change teams'.



It should be stated that, clearly, some of the factors identified here are outside the direct control of the R&A, affiliates, golf clubs, and the industry more generally. However, the important broader point is that more equal golf participation may only be achieved when key measures of equality in the golf workplace are improved. The fact that key decision makers in many sporting bodies are male, at both national and local levels, only serves to enhance gender differences. Research undertaken by Danylchuk and colleagues (2015) found that proportionally higher numbers of influential women in the golf club environment had a direct positive impact on the experiences of new female members, helping them to become more confident and encouraging longevity in participation.



**Action point:** Breaking down barriers to women's involvement on the course, and, perhaps more importantly, in the wider golf industry should be viewed as an integral goal for the R&A and affiliated organisations.



**Action point:** Consider interventions appropriate to demographics to address women's underrepresentation in governance.

Research by Adriaanse (2014) assessed the impact of 'gender quotas' introduced by Australian National Sport Organisations (NSOs) on equality of sports participation. The findings suggested that a quota of a minimum of three women was a first condition to advance gender equality in governance. It needed to operate, however, in conjunction with other gender dynamics to move toward equal participation by men and women in board decision making. These included women in influential board positions and directors' adoption of gender equality as an 'organisational value'.

It appears that the most salient lesson the golf industry can learn from this research is that society-level sport policies that address gender disparities are a pre-requisite to individually oriented approaches, when aiming to increase family sports participation.



**Action point:** Diversifying decision making boards so there is equality in representation is a pre-requisite for individually orientated policies.



## 2 Introductions to sport: Family culture, role models, and gender norms

### 2.1 Parents and family culture

*"Contact with golf from childhood facilitates participation in the game"* (Reis & Correia, 2013)

A large body of research has identified that the ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge of the family people grow up with as the chief factor underpinning their tendency to play sport – often referred to as 'family culture' (including: Atkins et al, 2015; Elliott & Drummond, 2017; Roberts, 2015, 2016; Wheeler & Green, 2014; Wheeler, 2011). Parents, for example, taxi their children to and from activities; finance participation; buy (often expensive) sporting equipment; watch their children frequently, if not all the time; and encourage ongoing participation. It has been found that parents see engaging in leisure together as a way of enhancing the family as a cohesive, communicative and bonded unit. It helps foster a 'sense of family' and 'memories of having good times together' (Elliott & Drummond, 2017).

Similarly, Kitching (2018) draws attention to a survey of 1,000 females that found 65% of respondents identified their husbands, partners, parents and other family members as the primary reasons why they took up golf, with almost 9 of every 10 golfers surveyed having another member of the household that participated.



#### Industry expert analysis: Rachael

"The role of the parent is more crucial in golf than a number of other sports. Because golf clubs don't tend to be in the city centre or urban outskirts, so you are reliant on your parents taking you there ... it's the travel, it's getting through the front door what equipment you need ... also it's about capturing the family not just for 20 minutes or mum or dad dropping them off in the [golf club] car park, it's capturing them and keeping them there."



**Action point:** Involve parents in children's golf participation where possible. Consider use of adult activities (golf practice sessions on course or parents' 'coffee' mornings) which run parallel to children's activities such as junior coaching.

It is not just parents who play a key role in sport participation, but increasingly it is grandparents too. Research by Hebblethwaite (2017) found that grandparent-grandchild connections are lasting longer than ever before as increased longevity and decreased fertility rates have changed family structure significantly over the past two decades. Grandparents today are more likely to live longer, be in better health, be more highly educated, more likely to have retired, and have fewer grandchildren. Grandparents, therefore, represent an excellent opportunity through which to promote whole family participation in golf, given the current aging demographic of golf club membership.



**Action point:** Recognise strengthening grandparent-grandchild relationships as a key way to promote whole family participation in golf.

Roberts and colleagues (2015, 2016), based at the University of Liverpool, go so far to say that attempting to increase sports participation using measures targeted at adults, often employed by sports organisations, are likely to be set up to fail. This is because differences in levels of adult sport participation are formed during childhood and post-childhood experiences play a relatively small impact. The best strategy for boosting family participation in golf then, would be to maximise participation amongst children and minimise drop-out during the next life-stage.



**Action point:** Appreciate important role children's first experiences of golf play in the likelihood of lifelong family participation.

*"The entire sample was introduced to the game [of golf] by friends or family, and this tells us social capital is also important when it comes to creating new golfers"* (Ivarsson, 2013)

There is a strong evidence base, then, that parents' beliefs and values towards sport affects children's sports participation at an early age and lasts long into adulthood. Research projects which have strived find out the motivations for people getting into golf – including Williams and colleagues (2013), Ries and Correia (2014), and Ivarsson (2013) – found that 100% of their participants said they took up the sport because of family members. The important question, then, is what are the factors that influence which sports parents 'choose' for their children to take part in?

Wheeler and Green (2014), from the University of Chester, aimed to uncover the motivations for sports participation by interviewing a number of parents and their children. Their results revealed a clear set of goals, strategies and practices that parents employ when selecting what activities their children should be taking part in. Parents' choices were made depending on:

#### 1) 'Outcomes gained through sport':

These are the benefits parents believed their children would get from taking part. Enjoyment in the activity, improved levels of fitness and health, and opportunities to develop friendships were the most important reasons for taking part.



**Action point:** Focus strategies aimed at parents on the benefits participation can have their children's wellbeing, particularly around issues of enjoyment, health, and developing relationships with others.

#### 2) 'Generative parenting':

This refers to the effect that parents' sporting backgrounds influenced their motivations for their children's involvement. Interestingly, it was found that parents who were not previously involved in sports themselves wanted their children to try a range of different sports, and to have experiences their parents had not had. Whereas those parents who were sporty wanted their children to play similar sports to them and have similar experiences.



**Action point:** Appreciate the effect of parents' sporting background on their children's participation. Parents who play golf are more likely to encourage their children to also play, whereas, those parents who were not sporty are likely to want their children to experience a variety of sports.

### 3) 'Cultural':

This refers to parents' beliefs on what constitutes 'good parenting'. Results show that being involved in at least two activities outside school was something of a requirement – it was good parenting. These sport-related behaviours and beliefs were communicated through groups of families formed at school, housing estates, and clubs. The golf industry must be acutely aware of the significance of other families in shaping parenting goals, strategies, and practices regarding family golf participation. Other families are viewed as a reliable source of information regarding the sports available, where, when, and what clubs were best. They also play important roles in lift sharing, etc. Word of mouth plays an important part in family golf participation.



**Action point:** Be aware that families currently involved in golf are key gatekeepers (and influencers) to other families in their extended network. Marketing strategies could focus on encouraging friends of families already involved in golf to take part.

#### Industry expert analysis: Ben

"If the parents are brought in to a sport, they are more likely to keep their kids in a certain sport."

The health benefits associated with sport are, unsurprisingly, a key motivation for parents when deciding what sports their families should be involved in. Golf is perfectly placed to provide the wider health benefits parents crave, particularly when compared with other contact based sports. A project by Murray and colleagues (2017), published in the British Journal of Sport Medicine (BJSM), found evidence of a positive link between playing golf and improved levels of health. Via conducting a wide ranging review of health research, it was established that the moderate intensity physical activity golf provides leads to improved cardiovascular and respiratory health and wellness.

#### Industry expert analysis: Pam

"In regards to the awareness of health benefits, still we need support in making the sport more attractive to females and families."



**Action point:** Promote the evidence based physical health and mental wellbeing benefits linked with playing regular golf.

Similarly, Farahmand and colleagues (2009), featuring in the Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports, found reduced levels of mortality in their study of Swedish golfers when compared with national levels of mortality. Results showed an average of 40% lower mortality across men and women in all age groups and socioeconomic categories. Furthermore, the the lowest handicap golfers, who were said to have played golf most frequently, had the lowest mortality rates. Overall, the 40% reduction in mortality was equated to an increase in life expectancy of around 5 years.

Playing regular  
golf leads to  
a 40% reduction  
in mortality



12345

Equated to an increase in life  
expectancy of around 5 years



**Action point:** Promote the health benefits and the associated increase in life expectancy linked with regular golf participation.

A number of research projects conducted in golf have found that the low visibility of females in golf settings leads male family members (fathers, husbands and partners) to be the key influencers in women and other family members taking up the sport (Reis & Correia 2013; Shin & Nam 2004). This scenario, it is argued, can actually serve to cement the notion of male dominance in the golf environment, given that those women who do get introduced to golf are strongly influenced by male significant others. This research highlights the important role that female golfers and female family members play in promoting family golf participation.

#### Industry expert analysis: Rachael

"I got into golf because my dad plays. I literally went along one day and actually quite enjoyed myself, so it started from there."

Interestingly, research conducted outside of golf has found that in families where there are opposite sex children, fathers tended to be more involved with their sons' sport and mothers with their daughters'. The origins of this dynamic may stem from the parental gender stereotypes that fathers tend to be the 'coaches' that introduce children to a sport, whereas mothers have been viewed as the 'taxi drivers' (Wheeler, 2011, 2014). This is particularly concerning for promoting family golf participation, where there are already fewer female golf participants to encourage their daughters' participation. Perhaps even more concerning is that some studies have found that both parents, on average, tend to support and encourage their sons' sports participation more, perceive sons as more able in sport, and value sport more for their sons than their daughters (see Dixon and colleagues (2015, 2016), from The University of Texas). It is important that golf seeks to challenge these gender stereotypes and promotes golf as a whole family activity.



**Action point:** Promote the important role of current female golf participants as role models for whole family participation.



**Action point:** Seek strategies that challenge the traditional gender stereotypes that sports participation is more suitable for males.

There is also evidence that parental motivations for sports participation can differ depending on socioeconomic class. Harrington (2015), for example, interviewed 28 working- and middle-class families to reveal that families in different social classes emphasise particular values and imagined futures for their children in regards to family leisure. Results found that middle-class parents wanted to provide their children with sport activities they believed would equip them with 'lifelong skills'. These parents wanted their children to take part in activities that helped build character, develop social skills and independence, make friends outside the family, and reinforce overall healthy habits. Working-class and poor families, on the other hand, had fewer organised activities but tended to make their own pastimes inexpensive yet enjoyable for the whole family. The common aim of this group was to achieve family togetherness and bonding rather than teaching a variety of skills. It was hoped these experiences would last long into the future and help keep their children away from 'bad influences'.



**Action point:** Ensure marketing strategies encompass the class related differences in values and motivations associated with leisure participation by including reference to both lifelong skills and family togetherness which can be improved through family golf participation.

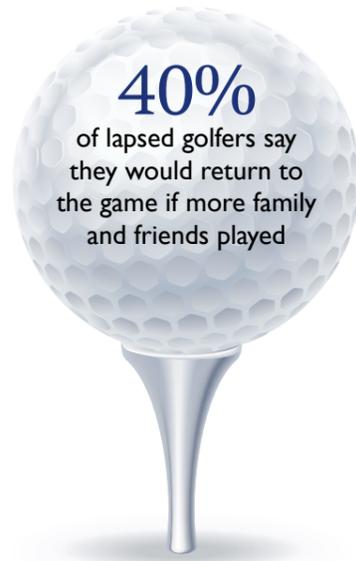
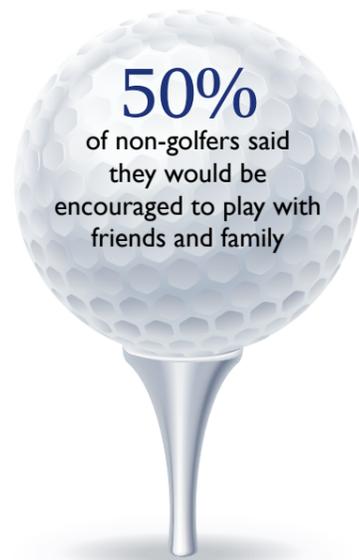
Interestingly, parents in middle class families also tended to have an increased desire to see themselves, and for others to see them, in a particular light that displayed the kind of family they are (Harrington, 2015). Taking part in certain leisure activities served to support what parents were doing was worthwhile and that is was a valued 'good' family leisure activity. In other words, middle class parents wanted to ensure that they are 'doing family' in a 'good' way. This group placed more importance on the rewards achieved for sporting achievements and were more likely to refer to their children as 'talented'.



**Action point:** Golf organisations should carefully consider the drivers of family leisure satisfaction at individual, family, and sociocultural levels.

### Family Golf Month, England Golf (2016)

England Golf named July 2016 as 'Family Golf Month' and led a drive to attract all generations of the family to take part in golf together. Golf clubs and driving ranges across the country organised open days that focussed on activities which can involve all the family. England Golf provided advice, ideas, and marketing support where required. It was found that almost 50% of non-golfers said they would be encouraged to play with friends and family; and almost 40% of lapsed golfers say they would return to the game if more family and friends played. Furthermore, 80% of men with a partner said their companion does not play golf. This participation drive was also supported by The Golf Foundation, who provided equipment to 150 HSBC Golf Roots centres to help with the fun activities for adults and juniors, golfers and non-golfers.



## 2.2 Role models

Research has shown that family and friends are not the only key role models that impact on levels of sports participation. Mutter and Pawlowski (2014), for example, found that the success and visibility of professional athletes increases levels of sports participation in their respected fields in their home country. Significantly, it was those people who would not normally be exposed to the sport, via their family and friends, who also did not play, that were most encouraged to try it for the first time.

### Industry expert analysis: Rachael

Some interviewees spoke about the importance of local 'ambassadors' acting as role models:

"It's about having someone who they [new players] can engage with. Someone who people feel able, it's not just about role models as in this person's a great player it's about having someone people can connect with and is reflective of them."

### Industry expert analysis: Ben

"I think they [role models] are really important ... if we are trying to attract a certain market there are ambassadors these girls can relate to and look up to. And see they are having an enjoyable experience then it resonates and that is what we have found."



**Action point:** Utilise 'ambassador' roles to promote golf to young people and families. This could be at a national level, such as professional golfers associated with governing organisations, or at a local level, such as county level players associated with golf clubs.

Research investigating the influx of Asian women professional golfers on the world tours has shown associated increases in female participation in their home. Shin and Nam (2004), for example, found that over the period of a decade role models, such as Se Ri Pak, elevated golf to new levels of prestige and popularity giving a goal to Korean girls and parents alike, this encouraged more women and girls to play golf and to turn professional. The success of Korean women golfers on the LPGA tour went from being unheard of to becoming the normality.

*"[Se-ri] Pak as a role model has kindled dreams of professional golf in the hearts of Korean Women"* (Shin & Nam, 2004).



### Professional golfer clinics (Ladies European Tour)

The Ladies European Tour (LET) Development department organise regular 'professional golfer clinics' where tour players share their knowledge and skills with aspiring junior golfers. At the 2017 Ricoh Women's British Open, for example, 2016 LET Order of Merit winner Beth Allen and multiple tournament champion Felicity Johnson conducted a golf skills master class session and answered a variety of questions posed by the juniors themselves. Both players also shared their pre-tournament warm-up and practise regimes, advising on the psychological skills they adopt, such as how to recover and move on from a bad shot. The juniors involved commented on how they enjoyed such an event, were inspired to follow their own golfing pathway in the future.



**Action point:** Promote success of professional golfers as ambassadors for the sport and the face of marketing campaigns.

Grix and Carmichael (2011) refer to a cyclical process whereby elite success increases grassroots participation, which, in turn, increases the available talent pool and leads to even more international success, and so on. There was also a link found between elite success and improved levels of health across the home nation given increased levels of sports participation. Correctly recognising and promoting the success of a variety of professional golfers, therefore, may have important implications on the levels of family golf participation.



**Action point:** Promote media coverage of international successes to generate greater awareness.

## 2.3 Normative gender roles and sport

### Industry expert analysis: Ben

"Perception is the biggest thing, especially for girls. I think golf is perceived as an elder man's sport, 'closed' to women. We are working quite hard to address that, some of the older female members accidentally put off younger girls."

There is a large evidence base indicating the perceived gender roles society encourages, relating to how male and females 'should' behave, impacts on levels of sports participation. For example, Chalabaev and colleagues (2013) found that the physical abilities often associated with playing sport, such as being strong and powerful, are also those society associates with being a man. Negative labels and stereotypes such as being masculine have been directed towards female sportspeople, with the result being some do not like to acknowledge themselves as taking part, or even take part at all. It has been widely established that young people can be particularly conscious about their image when taking part in activities. It is important, then, that golf seeks to challenge gender stereotypes and promote golf as a sport for all.



**Action point:** Challenge gender stereotypes traditionally associated with sports participation.

Research by Mitchell and colleagues (2016), from the University of Lincoln, found that some female golf club members report feeling their bodies are being judged whilst playing. This is compounded by gender stereotypes often born out through media coverage of sport and comments made in relation to the female athletes. This is supported by Apostolis and Giles (2011) who found golf magazines, for example, nearly almost exclusively depict dominant images of white, wealthy, heterosexual women with athletic bodies.



**Action point:** Portray family golf away from traditional stereotypical viewpoints.

Vamplew (2010) reflected on the history of women's participation in golf when researching the British Golf Club in the early 1900s. It was found that women's access to golf before 1912 was limited by club regulations, where female golfers were restricted to particular tee times, expected to give way to men on the course, and confined to separate spaces in golf. Male members, on the other hand, were given full membership and uncontested playing rights. Women were left to form ladies sections that were seen as separate from the main club.

While some aspects of golf such as equipment, technology and facilities have radically changed since the early 1900s, many golf clubs culture and practices have altered very little. More than 100 years on an informal culture still exists in some golf clubs where women are viewed as secondary to men. This manifests itself in various ways, and can both open and overt or somewhat subtle. Prevailing perceptions of female golfers often reduce them to less able and slower players. Comments made towards male golfers who fail to hit the golf ball past the ladies tees, for example, are said to reinforce notions of gender bias in the golf environment (see Heather & Hundley, 2004). Interestingly, it has been found that one of the most successful ways to overcome these types of patriarchal divides is to encourage mixed participation events, which leads a reduction in gender related stereotypes (Heather & Hundley, 2004).

*"to excel or be noticed, they [female golfers] have to try harder than men, and if they do succeed, they often have to suffer the consequences of not doing gender appropriately"* (McGinnis & Gentry, 2002, p. 7)



**Action point:** Celebrate women's, girls', and family golf participation during mixed events and social festivals.

### Case study

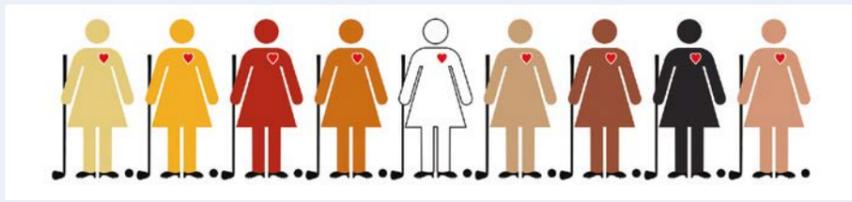
#### 'Nationell Damdag' Women's Golf Day (Swedish Golf Federation)

'Nationell Damdag' is a day of celebration for women's participation in golf. During the event, women golfers have the ability to play at any club for reduced fees. The aim is to introduce women to other golfers, both male and female, and thus help build a personal network of golfing friends. Some clubs organise open competitions for the day, which include prizes, lunch, and has a 'festival feel'. Figures from the Swedish Golf Foundation show that more than 160,000 women took part in various golf related activities during Nationell Damdag in 2017.

### Case study

#### International Women's Golf Day, June 9

Women's Golf Day (WGD) is a global golf initiative launched in 2016 to introduce women of all ages to the game and encourage existing female golfers to "tee it up" in a fun and inclusive environment. The inaugural one day, four-hour event, spanned 28 countries in 485 locations, and introduced thousands of new golfers to the sport while transcending language, culture, religion, and race to celebrate golf, women, and community. The 2017 event venues included public and private golf courses, driving ranges and retail outlets around the globe. All locations will conducted a two-hour golf clinic or offered a nine-hole round of golf, and ended this with a two-hour social affair with more than 50,000 participating women.



28 Countries



485 Locations



50,000+  
Participating Women

The male and female divide in golf can sometimes manifest itself in extreme ways. McGinnis and Gentry (2006, 2009), for example, found that all of their sample of professional and amateur female golfers had suffered some type of 'territorial discrimination' (such as being rushed to play or hit into by men) and verbal discrimination. The result is that women felt less able and confident in the golf environment. This evidence has been supported by a seminal research paper by Shotton and colleagues (1998), who observed member behaviours at a number of private golf clubs and found that although gender discrimination was often not an obvious and overt practice, it was still an ever present characteristic in the club but in more subtle ways.



**Action point:** Ensure equality legislation, policies, training are in place to support women at various levels in the golf industry.



**Action point:** Golf should be particularly wary of issues of gender discrimination that may manifest itself in somewhat subtle and informal ways.

The concept of gender discrimination is a complex one. Research undertaken by McGinnis and colleagues (2006, 2009), for example, found that some insensitivity and hostility towards female golfers actually comes from other female golfers themselves. In-depth interviews conducted with 22 women golfers found that some felt more intimidated by other female golfers than they did by males, particularly in competitive scenarios.

A piece of research by Reis and Correia (2013) reported similar conclusions, arguing that the exclusion of women in golf settings is sometimes supported by other women, who 'tacitly' accept their discrimination. There is evidence in golf that women turn against their own group or accept their isolation by adhering to stereotyping, either consciously or subconsciously, in order to protect their own interests. Rather than trying to promote change, some females comply with the status quo and refer to how older female members are happy for things to remain as they are, stating that it is the younger women who want to 'mix with the guys' (see Kitching et al., 2017; Reis & Correia 2013). The golf industry must be aware that much of the prevailing gender norms in golf are not challenged by many female participants, who continue to accept and comply with their lesser position in the golf environment, and may make it difficult to promote family golf participation.



**Action point:** Challenge gender norms within established male and female groups.

### Case study

#### Summer Swing 2017, Golf Development Wales

The 2017 Summer Swing was ran by Golf Development Wales and aimed to promote family participation in golf. The event was held at North Wales golf club, Llandudno, and attended by more than 75 people. The programme adopted a format where each person could only hit a maximum of 36 shots, and wherever the 36th shot finished they put a flag in the ground. There was a maximum of 10 shots per hole and just two attempts to hit from a bunker. Welsh professional golfer Amy Boulden was an ambassador for the event and hit everybody's first tee shot. for a nearest the pin prize. Once all players had finished their round they were welcomed to refreshments in the clubhouse before the presentation ceremony.

#### Industry Research: Evaluation of England Golf's 'Get into Golf' Initiative (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2016)

'Get into golf' is a national campaign ran by England Golf aimed at inspiring beginners to take up the sport. Sports Marketing Surveys Inc. (SMS) undertook focus groups with 32 women golfers to assess their perceptions of Get into Golf and their experience of the sport more generally. Additional focus groups were conducted with the original participants at a later date to see if they had continued participation. Results indicated a positive overall response to the Get into Golf programme, even from those who did not continue participation. The women involved particularly enjoyed the sense of achievement, mix of social opportunities, the camaraderie, and the ability to relax and exercise. Alternatively, they disliked how difficult and frustrating golf can be, the poor British weather, excessive rules and etiquette/traditions, and the cost of playing. It is recommended that this model of initial engagement could be developed to include a structured programme to support transition into long term participation, by utilising buddy systems, flexible timings for play, regular social meet ups, and tiered price membership options.

### 3 Key factors in long term family participation

A recent research paper by Kitching (2018) argues that while female participation in golf is gradually increasing, it appears that women leave golf almost as quickly as they enter. The purpose of this section, therefore, is to outline how best to promote continued family participation in golf.

#### 3.1 The 'social aspects' of golf

A project conducted at the University of Windsor, Canada, sought to analyse the motivations of regular female golf participants (see Wood & Danylchuk, 2011). Results indicate the 'social aspects' of golf to be the most important factor in long term golf participation. Playing golf was primarily used to connect with other players and help establish deeper relationships to build, which offered a key supportive role in overcoming difficult aspects of the game. The golf club allowed for a regular structured socialising event to be a firm calendar event, and it was this 'routine' that was key for long term participation.



**Action point:** Promote establishment of regular and repeated calendar of family golf events to encourage participation to become routine.

*"the social group ... played an important role in the groups continued participation in golf due to their relaxed nature, interest in playing golf in a social manner, and spending meaningful time with their circle of friends."* (Wood & Danylchuk, 2011)

It was found that these social groups helped develop a preferred way of playing the golf in regards to the rules and etiquette. Competitive elements were downplayed and instruction avoided, with the focus put on enjoyment over expertise. These casual formats made the game easier and speeded up the pace of play, having a positive effect on enjoyment levels of all involved.



**Action point:** Family golf events should be organised and promoted as enjoyable social experiences rather than a complicated rules heavy activities.

#### Industry expert analysis: Samantha

"Shared coaching, shared lessons, kid's interactive areas, and safe areas for parents – facilities that bring other parents together to share experiences are all good for the family game"

#### Case study

##### love.golf initiative

love.golf is a UK initiative aimed at increasing women's and girls' involvement in golf by focussing primarily on the social aspects of the game. Participants learn by playing the game as a group rather than hitting golf balls from the same spot on a range. The love.golf experiences are delivered in such a way to promote a sense of fun, achievement, togetherness and increased self-confidence. Sessions are hosted at venues identified to be friendly and welcoming with approved PGA Professionals. Equipment and golf balls are provided and there is no dress code, in order to help encourage an informal and relaxed atmosphere. Participants can take part in in whatever they feel comfortable in. love.golf introduces fundamental golf skills, such as the grip and stance, only when required and usually on the golf course environment, moving away from the traditional method of learning techniques and repetition. love.golf comprises a series of six weekly sessions (90 minutes each) tailored to each group of women and there are follow-on programmes so friends and family can keep golfing together.



#### Industry Research: The Opportunity to Grow Golf: Female Participation (Syngenta, 2013)

Syngenta conducted survey of 1,500 UK females (750 non-golfers and 750 lapsed players) and supplemented this with focus groups to build a picture of what affects women's and girls' golf participation. Results found that women wanted to take part in sporting activities that were seen as social, healthy, and gave them the opportunity to spend quality time with family and friends. Golf does offer families the opportunity to spend time outdoors, as well as time with friends, two important factors that strongly appeal. While at first glance golf may not seem to offer the same calorie-burning experience that other sports do, it can actually provide acute health benefits that are not widely known advertised. The golf industry should be proactive in communicating these 'alternative' benefits of golf participation to local markets. are seen as important factors for courses to consider.

Research has shown that the introduction of a 'buddy system', which is an arrangement where new members are teamed up with more established ones, has a positive effect on participation and retention levels amongst new golfers. The study by Reis and Correia (2014) also highlights the important role of social groups in women's continued participation. Interviews with 39 female golfers revealed these groups led to an increased sense of belonging and conformity which helps foster an enjoyable environment. Interestingly, this research identifies peer group development as an even greater motivator for younger single women, when compared with women with children, who do not have as much time to socialise.



**Action point:** Designated club members could be appointed to support new members via voluntary 'buddy' systems.

Downward and colleagues (2014), using data from the Eurobarometer surveys, not only found that a high proportion of females use sports participation to boost their social life, but this, in turn, also had a direct positive impact on their overall self-esteem and well-being.



**Action point:** Events such as one off 'new member' meetings and regular social gatherings can help introduce members to each other and foster a greater sense of belonging.





**Industry research: The new golfer journey, Golf Development Wales (2017)**

Golf Development Wales (GDW) conducted interviews with new and lapsed golfers taking part in the introductory 'New2Golf' and 'Back2Golf' programmes. GDW sought to find out how participants felt about their progress, what was important to them, and how they could be supported more on the golfing journey. Results found that:



- **Before they start:** participants found out about golf mainly through word of mouth, they were unsure on the dress requirements, and how to find their way around the golf club itself.
- **In coaching:** participants particularly enjoyed the social interaction (such as a coffee in the clubhouse), use of technology during lessons, and continuity in terms of coaches.
- **On the course:** participants felt nervous, would like to see quiet times where beginners have priority, would like to walk the course to learn the layout, and integrate with more experienced golfers through 'buddy' schemes and fun competition.
- **Membership:** participants would like a 'menu' of membership options, and information packs listing key advice for new members.

### 3.2 Lifestyle factors: Time and cost of golf participation

Numerous research projects have identified family and work commitments as a factor that impacts on overall levels of sports participation. For Taniguchi and his team (2012), researching from the University of Louisville, there has been a knock on effect whereby people's work day has increased, their family time has lessened, with the direct impact of leisure time being substituted to make up for this. This indicates that there is a potential market gap which provides an opportunity to combine family time and leisure. Golf is perfectly placed to take advantage of this, where the golf club and course environments have the potential for families to take part in leisure, dine, and relax together.

This said, it is important to recognise that Buer and colleagues (2011) found increased time constraints in modern life lead many people to pursue quicker and easier access activities, such as running. It is not surprising to hear golf has been described as a 'time heavy sport', where playing a traditional eighteen-holes and commuting to and from the course can take up a large portion of the day. It appears vitally important, then, that the golf industry have a coordinated approach to addressing the time required to play, given the speeding up of daily life means time is now at the ultimate premium for families.

Traditionally, debates on improving the pace of play have centred on the conventional format of the game, rely on anecdotal solutions exist, and little research studies exist. One such exemption is a study by Tiger and Ellerbrook (2016), who analysed influencing factors of time on the green and tee box. It was found that increases in group size, playing competition, faster greens, and higher temperatures all increased time of play. Whereas age, handicap, gender, or green size were not significant in adding to the speed of play. It is clear from this study, however, that there is only a limited amount of time that can be reduced while golf exists in its traditional format, and various formats should be seriously considered if a wider demographic of family golf is going to be achieved.

Increases pace of play		Does not affect pace of play	
Larger group size		Age	
Playing competitions		Handicap	
Faster greens		Gender	
Higher temperatures		Green size	

**Industry expert analysis: Ben**

"18 holes, four or five hours, is just too long for most people, especially younger people"



**Action point:** Consider alternative formats whereby golf can be played over shorter periods.

**Case study**

**Golf Express, England Golf**

Golf Express promotes playing a 9 hole round as an experience consistent with the traditions of the full game format but over a shorter duration. This option is more convenient to fit a hectic work schedule and helps readdress the work/life balance while providing the opportunity to relax and unwind. England Golf's Impact Report (2017) found that more than 30,000 golfers had engaged in Golf Express between 2015 and 2017.





**Action point:** Encourage formats that increase the flexibility of golf in regards to reducing time, emphasising fun, in an informal social environment with relaxed rules.

*"I can't say that I have ever said to my husband, "will you stay home with the kids so I can go and play golf?" (McGinnis, 2008)*

Seminal research undertaken by McGinnis and Gentry (2005, 2006, 2009), found that domestic and childcare expectations impact more on women's ability to participate in golf, when compared to men, which is of even greater importance given the time required to play. As the cost of childcare has increased more parents have been required to spend more time attending to their children, which has impacted on amount of spare time they have and thus the ability to participate in sporting activities.

More recently, research by Morton (2017) shows that family responsibilities still impact on levels of sports participation for women. Similarly, MacKinnon (2013) found family and personal commitments, which led to unsociable working hours and the lack of schedule flexibility, were primary reasons for low numbers of women participating in golf and even working in the golf industry.

These sentiments are also supported by Reis and Correia (2014), who describe family obligations and household responsibilities as a 'major limitation' in defining women's participation in golf. Importantly, as the family grows in numbers the time constraints become more of an issue, where women are much more likely to take part in physical activity with their family rather than apart. Golf clubs which restrict the times women and girls can play, to midweek 'ladies days' for example, provides an additional constraint to family golf participation (Jamieson, 2015)



**Action point:** Golf clubs should explore how they can combine childcare and golf participation, whether that be via offering separate crèche/play facilities or junior camps in the evenings and weekends and place less restrictions on when women can play.

It has been found that work and family commitments are most significant restricting factors for families under 35 years old (Buer et al, 2011). Age is a significant determinant of family sports participation, and it is well established that participation rates decline when people get older. Research on patterns of leisure time and sports participation has found that when an people are young their sports participation is relatively high, but when they reach working age it reduces, and as they get older and retire their participation rises once more (Ruseski et al, 2011). This is supported by Roberts (2014, 2016) who shows that the decline is most marked between the ages of 16 and 23, the period during which most individuals complete full-time education and take up work. After this period, it has been found that participation rates continue to decline but at a slower pace.

**16-23**  
years old

period during which levels of sports participation decreases the most



**Action point:** Manage sports participation decline at various life stages, with particular focus on key points where participation declines more rapidly, by avoiding drop out.

The cost of playing golf is closely related to family participation. Research by Sheets and colleagues (2016) found that that a new consumer has emerged seeking a less expensive, more casual, and less challenging alternative to traditional golf, sometimes referred to as 'nomadic golfers'. Prier and colleagues (2017) assessed golf consumers' perceptions of 'junior executive memberships', which are flexible membership types with age based price incentives for young working families or couples. It was found that the families who took advantage of these memberships had higher expectations of the service quality they would get combined with lower evaluations of service they actually received. The result is a gap between the expectations of what service quality families expect and what the reality was. It is important then that marketing strategies of flexible family membership options are maintain a focus on high level customer service, and managing consumers' perceptions of this, in order to achieve the desired retention levels. Indeed, challenging perceptions of golf was a common theme raised during the interviews.



**Action point:** Ensure quality of customer service is at the centre of flexible family membership products. It is also important to manage expectations in this regard.

**Industry Expert Analysis: Ben**

"There's a perception that golf's an expensive sport but actually it's not. Your average junior membership is £100 a year. That's £2 per week, it's actually cheaper than playing football. So, I think there's work to do to challenge this perception."

**Industry Expert Analysis: Samantha**

"It can be a little bit in perception. I think if people start to look at costs they have for other activities ... it can soon be comparable, and a lot of the costs in golf tend to be a block upfront ... there's an element of cost but there's a lot of flexibility."

Similarly, in a study of various westernised countries, Hodge and colleagues (2016) found that perceived satisfaction rather than just involvement alone was strongly related to positive family outcomes. That is, in regards to family golf participation is it not the quantity of leisure experiences, i.e. how many times they come to the golf environment, which is of utmost importance, but rather the quality of product when they get there. Satisfaction levels have been found to be the most stable predictor of variance in family leisure participation.



**Action point:** Emphasis should be placed on creating satisfying family leisure experiences rather than simply high levels of family leisure involvement. Attention, therefore, should be directed away from numbers of families taking part in golf to focus on the satisfaction levels of those who do take part, in order promote continued participation.

Case study

### Family golf membership, Bolton golf club

Bolton golf club, Northwest England, have created a membership option in order to help make golf accessible for all family participation. This flexible package enables the entire family to play golf and enjoy their time at the club together. Specific benefits of the programme include:



**25%**  
off membership fees for the first year and no joining fee



Complimentary guest green fee vouchers



Up to **15%**  
discount on clubhouse food and beverage

Full access to the golf course, club and practice facilities

Complimentary golf lesson vouchers and access to weekly junior group lessons



These types of flexible family memberships are typically available for parents and/or grandparents, and offer free equipment hire for novices if required.

Case study

### Flexible Membership, Haywards Heath Golf Club

Haywards Heath Golf Club has a flexible membership package described as an "affordable membership for the modern lifestyle". The membership is designed to accommodate people whose working and family life means they have little time to play, and can therefore not justify paying the full subscription. It also aims to allow people to try golf for the first time and not have to commit to the expense of a full cost membership. This option gives golfers a range of member facilities and experiences including official handicaps, access to and the support of their Club, 10% off food and drink, and organised social events via a 'credit' system. A card is topped up with credits when the first annual payment is made, and each time they play a number of credits are deducted. The number of credits, however, varies according to the time of day and day of the week. Members running low on credits can top-up a maximum of twice and keep on playing. Haywards Heath Golf Club has experienced an increase in membership numbers, which they put down to offering a wide variety of options that suited various individual's needs. Graham White the club's secretary said:



*"We need to innovate if we are to compete against the demands on people's time and finances, with new golf membership products designed for people living a modern lifestyle."* (England Golf, 2016)

Case study

### Points based golf membership, PlayMoreGolf

PlayMoreGolf is an online membership scheme that provides members with points that they can use to play on a variety of courses at times convenient to them. The amount of points required to play (i.e. the cost) changes depending on factors associated with peak playing times, including: season, day of week, and time of day. A membership option of £325 (100 points) gives players:

**7 days a week**  
golf course access, covering 60 different locations

A handicap and ability to play in club competitions



Flexibility to use membership points to invite friends



The aim of these types of points based schemes is to provide an authentic golf membership experience that are flexible enough to be tailored towards contemporary lifestyles.



**Action point:** Golf clubs should assess their customers' needs to create membership packages suited to different target markets.



### 3.3 Avoiding 'Drop-out'

Research has shown that the satisfaction and enjoyment gained are the largest factors in commitment to long term participation in sport. Roberts (2015, 2016), for example, found that continuous sports participants became 'bound-in' by their desire to, firstly, repeat enjoyable experiences, but also to use their skills and maintain the social relationships that they had built up.



**Action point:** Retention strategies should centre on promotion of a relaxed enjoyable atmosphere at golf clubs, support the development of peoples' skill set (perhaps through structured lessons), and organise community based social events.

#### Industry research: Get into Golf Evaluation – Female Golf (Sports Marketing Surveys Inc, 2016)

Sports Marketing Surveys Inc. conducted a project exploring the views of women on a range of different clubs/programmes associated with England Golf's Get into Golf programme, in order to find out how best to encourage continued participation. Results indicate a need to support women at each stage to encourage them to continue with their golfing journey. This could include:



- **Developing a template for a welcome card/flyer for new golfers**

A simple guide, given to women when they enrol/join a club. This could help alleviate any worries/anxieties that they may have, and provide information such as: understanding the sport (a brief introduction to golf for non-golfers), benefits of golf (overview of the key messages regarding what women like about golf), discovering the club (a plan of the club and course so that women know where to go and details of any specific codes of conduct e.g. what to wear).

- **Coaching resources/approaches to teaching & engaging women**

The role of the pro/coach was identified as very important. Affiliate organisations could explore how to better support pros/coaches in delivering sessions to women and provide resources that help them to engage and retain women. This could include developing/promoting best practice examples from pros/coaches that have been successful with the Get into Golf programme as well as recommendations to clubs on how to encourage women's confidence on the course e.g. options for longer time slots, buddying etc.

- **Structured programme for intermediate learning**

Ladies identified that once they progressed from a beginner to the next level, there was not as much support to help them continue. Affiliate organisations could explore how they can better support this next level of retention. Suggestions include providing a retention toolkit to clubs including ideas on how to develop skills and build confidence and best practice case studies from clubs that have successful retention models.

#### Case study

##### TopGolf

TopGolf is as a 'virtual golf game' where players hit micro-chipped golf balls at large 'dart board' style targets in order to build up points. The closer to the centre of the target, and the further the distance, the more points are scored. This enables a level of competition and feedback is provided immediately via an interactive video screen located within the bay. A variety of different game formats can be played involving various numbers of players. TopGolf is promoted primarily as a social activity, where food and drinks are delivered to the bay while playing, and caters for a variety of events.

Wheeler and Green (2014) point out in their research that voluntary participation is more likely to lead to regular and routinised behaviour sports participation. This is supported by Dixon and colleagues (2015, 2016), who found parents that emphasised the voluntariness of their children's sport, and allowed them a level of autonomy to develop their own 'love of sport', was much more likely to lead to continuation of such attitudes into later life. Encouraging input from families and juniors themselves in the golf club environment, therefore, can help foster a sense of autonomy, 'ownership', and belonging. This sense of community will help with continued family participation.



**Action point:** Seek input from juniors/families when designing golf programmes. Evaluate the success of programmes regularly utilising feedback from participants.

#### Industry Research: The Ultimate Golf Experience for Juniors (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2016)

Sports Marketing Surveys (SMS) conducted a research project asking juniors about their thoughts on the optimum golf experience for juniors. Surveys were completed by 520 parents/guardians, 118 junior golfers, 73 club officials, and 91 golf coaches. This was supplemented with focus groups with 23 parent/guardians, 45 juniors, and 15 coaches/organisers at golf clubs.

It was found that the 'ultimate junior facility' would be a safe and positive environment that offers variety, opportunity, progression, integration / support, affordability and enjoyment for all. This could include:

Varied events and competitions 	Team events 	Family events and competitions 
 Progression pathways	 Trips to see big golf events	A varied 18 hole course 
Comfort stations and halfway huts on course 	Range of practice areas with modern technology 	Other activities (such as mini golf) 
A 'chill' zone 	Website / app facilities aimed at juniors 	Equipment exchange / hire 

Promoting voluntary participation and a sense of community will help avoid 'drop-out' in golf. At the same time, it is important to appreciate that doing 'too much' sport can lead to burnout, and as a result drop-out among young people (Chalip, 2017). The golf industry must be acutely aware of the concept of 'trophy kids' – where parents put pressure on their children to achieve sporting success. A balanced strategy which promotes fun and enjoyment over competition and success has been found more likely to promote long term participation, as well as in fact increasing the likelihood of sporting success in the future (Chalip, 2017).



**Action point:** Promote a balanced strategy in regards to amount of sports participation, focussing on the fun and enjoyment of the activities.

*"The 'recipe' ... for transmitting sporting cultures appears to be to introduce children to several different sports at a young age ... to keep participation voluntary, and to ensure children are not doing too much. ... teaching and coaching to a minimum (except, perhaps, when in relation to general sporting skills), and [parents should] refrain from providing rewards other than verbal praise. These strategies and practices are likely to enhance children's sporting capital, motivation, and enjoyment, which, in turn, are likely to influence their long-term propensity to participate in sport" (Wheeler, 2012, p. 247).*

### 3.4 Differentiating children and adults

There is much evidence that children are commonly treated in the same way as adults in the sport environment (see Brian et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2017). For example, traditionally, golf coaching sessions have been rarely differentiated in regards to the age of the participant, and tend to focus on teaching discrete technical elements of the swing (such as grip, posture, and alignment) in an artificial environment away from the actual golf course. It is important to appreciate, however, that children are not just 'little adults'. Research in golf conducted by Hayman and colleagues (2014) highlights concerns that children are often asked to perform skills for which they have not yet developed the necessary physical and/or cognitive capabilities. Family golf coaching should be based around having fun with lots of free time for play and self discovery of skills, rather than specialising early in teaching specific techniques in an artificial environment. When coaching becomes too complicated too early it has the effect of taking the fun out of golf and, as a result, can discourage continued participation.

**When golf coaching becomes too complicated too early it has the effect of taking the fun out of the game and can discourage participation.**

**Action point:** build family coaching sessions around self discovery of skills, rather than teaching highly specific techniques, particularly at an early age.

*"Sport training should mature as the kids do. It can become specialised and serious when they become teens. But first, they need time to try things so they can develop skills and find what they like"* (Chalip, 2017)

There is a large evidence base highlighting the importance of developing 'physical literacy' first if long term sports participation is going to be achieved (Lloyd et al., 2015; Samuel, 2014). Physical literacy refers to the development of fundamental skills, such as running, jumping, balancing, throwing and climbing. Physical literacy is seen as a key feature of children's coaching sessions in order for long-term participation in sport to be achieved.



**Action point:** Encourage golf coaching sessions that teach 'physical literacy' skills first, and increases in complexity introducing golf specific technical skill development as children mature and develop.

Research by MacKinnon (2011) concludes that golf coaches should modify their traditional instructional techniques that were developed by men for men, to acknowledge the differences in certain groups to encourage family golf participation. Changing the culture of coaching, however, is not without its difficulties. Golf clubs and their professionals are small businesses and the market perception of how a 'traditional golf lesson' should look remains strong. It is vitally important, therefore, to manage parents' perceptions of what a junior golf coaching session should look like, in order to provide the optimum environment for both skill development and long term participation.

**Action point:** Manage parents' perceptions of how golf coaching sessions should be delivered.

Chalip and colleagues (2017) also highlight that parents tend to evaluate coaching sessions on the basis of short-term competitive successes, rather than the fun those programmes brought about or the requirements for long-term development and participation. Parents have good intentions, but often make poor decisions because they lack perspective and judge immediate successes and disappointments without understanding what is best over the long-term. Pressure to perform can make children not want to participate.

**Action point:** Look to promote culture change in regards to traditional formats of golf coaching, amongst coaches, parents, and wider public.

#### Case study

##### Performance Golf by Tom Davies



My approach to junior golf coaching has always been first and foremost to make each coaching session fun, if children are having fun and making new friends they will want to come back. If parents see their children enjoying your coaching sessions they will tell other parents at school, word of mouth is so powerful there really is no better recruitment tool. It is, however, important to remember that 'fun' does not simply mean playing games/competitions in each coaching session. Junior coaching curriculums need to be designed to ensure that children still learn golf through progressive, targeted activities. I have seen too many junior coaching programmes where there is no clear progression from session to session and no clear goals for children to work towards, consequently coaching sessions become repetitive and children get bored. Using a system such as the Junior Golf Passport gives direction to coaching sessions and motivates the juniors taking part. One particular challenge I have faced in implementing my method of junior coaching is the perceptions of what a golf lesson should look like from parents. Indeed, traditional models of coaching have had a heavy focus on learning technique and this can influence what parents consider a coaching session should look like. In order to address this I make it very clear from the start what my philosophy and approach is to junior coaching, this is written down and displayed predominantly on the junior notice board. Then as a coach my role is to fully live up to that philosophy in every coaching session, and not simply pay lip service to it.



## 4 The next steps for golf: Tradition in harmony with change

### 4.1 The need to evolve

Golf is a game steeped in traditions that, in many ways, makes the sport what many people know and love. However, the industry has the difficult task in maintaining this heritage while evolving to ensure it is well placed to meet the demands of a rapidly changing contemporary society. Research by Girginov (2017), based at Brunel University London, argues that adapting to change is a central requirement of national organisations and integral to future security of sport. If the golf industry is to remain a popular mainstream leisure activity then it must embrace change while in keeping with its traditional values.

Adapting to change is integral to the future security of sport.

It is important to recognise that innovations in golf are not new. The sport's history is littered with major changes, much of which has been subject to significant resistance. For example, Research by Kirsch (2002) reveals how the introduction of a new liquid-centred, rubber-cored ball by the American Goodrich Rubber Company revolutionised the game during the early 1900s. This ball increased the distance of shots and contributed to the lengthening and redesign of many courses. There was, however, stiff opposition to this introduction, with the public sentiment summed up by British Amateur and Open Champion Harold Hilton, who said the ball:

*"enabled the rough and tumble golfer of hard hitting propensities to range himself against the player who really knows the game, which he could never do with the old guttie [early version of a golf ball]"* (Kirsch, 2002)

This section outlines the research relating to key areas of change the golf industry should consider in order to promote the long term sustainability of families in the game.

### 4.2 The image of golf

Traditionally, the perception of a 'stereotypical' golfer is an older middle class male. Historical research by George (2010), from the University of Stirling, reveals that during the late 1900s golf clubs only accepted male members and had complex, expensive, and exclusive joining 'rituals' that aimed to discourage membership. The golf environment today is much different to that of the past, however, there is some evidence that certain aspects of this legacy of division still exists

#### Industry expert analysis: Ben

"Perception is the biggest thing, especially for girls. I think golf is perceived as an elder man's sport, 'closed' to women."

#### Industry expert analysis: Henry

"What people see in golf is a challenge. The perception is, it's elitist and private club orientated ... [top established golf clubs] come into view and have negative media coverage, and it's a missed opportunity ... if that is the 'noise' people hear, that is going to enforce the image of golf being for old elitist men."

#### Industry research: The Opportunity to Grow Golf: Youth Participation (Syngenta, 2014)

Syngenta (2014) conducted four two-hour focus groups, comprising six or seven respondents in the 14-15 and 17-18 age groups, in order to determine factors that affect junior golf participation.

The results indicated that it was not easy for young people to access golf, even despite also showing that there was an interest in the sport. There was a perception among young people that they do not belong in the golf club environment – it is seen as something for mature men. The juniors commented that they behave in a particular way, felt they did not fit in, and could not act in the way they felt comfortable with. Not being able to express themselves naturally at a golf club took the fun out of the participating. The golf industry can reach out to younger players, help them promote a sense of belonging by honing their skills, having fun, and develop their performance. Young people were particularly enthused to take up Top Golf, they spoke about it regularly and it fitted what they wanted. They could stay for just an hour, compete and spend time with friends, all in a safe and fun environment. The less competent golfers knew they would not look out of place there, which is important because they want to project a positive image.

Research by Kitching (2018) found that the availability and marketing presentation of merchandise and products is normally male orientated. In regards to dress code, for example, a project by Chae and Evenson (2014) found golf attire was not appropriate for the average family golfer. Focus groups conducted with female golfers revealed feelings that clothing tended to be designed for young professionals with athletic bodies. For the average female golfer, however, this was viewed as being tight fitting and uncomfortable to wear – thus not practically functional for golf. They concluded that there is a market for colourful clothing that is also practical for the turning and twisting movements characteristic to golf, that would help attract more women and girls to the sport. **Research by MacKinnon (2011) also found that there is often a prioritisation of male customers in terms of marketing practices and strategies, the presentation of merchandise, and lack of gender specific equipment and products.**

*"Thoughtful combination of functional and aesthetic needs effectively generated successful garment attributes, which met the wearer's expressive needs"* (Chae & Evenson, 2014)

#### Industry expert analysis: Eric

"One of the biggest problems with juniors is the dress code ... all the established clubs there's so many rules that juniors have to adhere to, and they are quite outdated, and it's similar with the women."



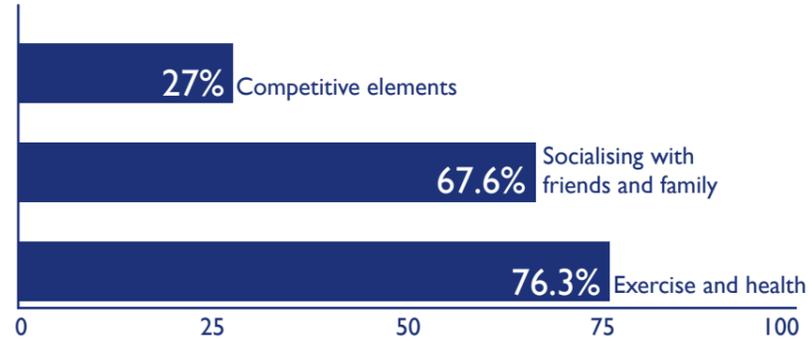
**Action point:** Consider clothing options that are appropriately functional and aesthetic for female, junior, and family golfers.

Case study

“Golfnyttan” campaign (Swedish Golf Federation, 2010)

The Swedish Golf Federation's (SGF) "Golfnyttan" campaign aimed to challenge the perceptions and stereotypes traditionally associated with golf. A survey conducted by the SGF in 2010 indicated that "exercise and health" (76.3%) and "socialising with friends and family" (67.6%) were the main reasons cited for participation in golf. 27% claimed that the "competitive element" of the sport was a key driver in their continued participation. These results corroborates with the theme that promoting the social aspects of golf should be a central feature to any campaign, if the traditional image of golf is to be changed and more families attracted to the game. This has been reflected in the SGF's "Golfnyttan" campaign, which translates as the "usefulness of golf". Their strategy highlights the benefits golf can bring to society, which has seen a change of focus from the competitive elements of the sport to the 'wellness' that may be achieved via regular golf participation. A key element of this is promoting the notion that golf can be "natural and easy" while highlighting what golf "can bring to society". It is argued that golf contributes to society via: lowering health care costs for all ages; benefiting the economy through golf tourism; improving environmental sustainability; and promoting inclusion through initiative such as Handigolf for people with disabilities (SGF, 2017).

Main reason for families playing golf



**Action point:** Promote the benefits golf can bring to individuals involved, and society more generally.



4.3 Alternative versions of golf

Research by Arthur and Colleagues (2009) looked at people's perceptions women's and girls' golfing abilities in the USA. It was found that the spatial layout of golf courses 'trivialises' women by categorising tees that associate gender with skill level – such as champion, regular, or women's (i.e. women effectively labelled 'irregular'). Strikingly, they also found distances between female tees and greens differed depending on what US state it was located in, with those in republican or conservative states women's tees significantly closer to the greens than courses in democratic states.

This kind of 'typecasting' was also found by McGinnis and Gentry (2006), who found that female golfers face stereotypical attitudes relating to their supposed ability and lack of golf knowledge, which affects their continued participation. Their research also found many female recreational golfers had felt ignored, overlooked or unimportant in golf settings.

Research by Sheets and colleagues (2016) has shown that around half of women are unable to research the green in regulation to the amount of shots required in relation to par. The key distinction, however, is that the remaining half of women can. This phenomenon is known as 'statistical discrimination', where an individual stereotype becomes misapplied to the group, and individuals in that group are treated as if they possess those qualities and characteristics regardless of their individual abilities. Adopting tee placement positions appropriate for the playing standard of the golfer, rather than based on gender, for example, can help reduce difficulties and frustrations improving overall experiences for all golfers in the family.

**Action point:** Tee box positions should be based on playing ability rather than gender or age.

Case study

Longleaf Tee System: Moving the game forward for all players

This scheme designated which tees players should use depending on how far they hit the golf ball, calculated by their swing speed. Results indicate that pace of play improved leading to higher overall enjoyment levels, particularly amongst women, junior, and senior players.

Industry expert analysis: Alan

"Ability based tees not only give more social opportunities but it also begins to break down some of the stereotypes around ability within the club environment."

A research project by Forbes (2014) goes even further to argue that the design of a golf course has a direct impact on membership retention. It was found that the majority of golfers are at a novice or intermediate skill level, but most golf courses are designed for experts. Through interviewing a number of golf course architects, their results show that too many forced carries and difficult water-hazards can deter golfers from the game, adding that most courses are too long, have deep bunkers, and greens surrounded by rough.

Course features that can deter family golfers



**Action point:** A golf course with an interesting and variable layout accommodating all skill levels is more likely to promote whole family participation than one of high difficulty and increased length.

#### Industry expert analysis: Martha

"We have several golf courses which run like Frisbee, Footgolf and Swingolf as a side programme to bring the public to the course. Then let them look over the fence to the real championship course ... it will become more and more relevant in the future."

#### Case study

### Glendale Golf family facilities



Glendale Golf, which operates several centres around the UK, have aimed to get more families playing golf by introducing activities all generations can enjoy together, alongside their traditional golf provision. They offering beginner coaching and relaxed dress codes, but also have double tees, giant holes, lots of games, easy-to-use equipment. There is no inclusion of a scoring systems with the entire focus is on providing fun and friendly golf which attracts beginners and families with children. Glendale Golf managing director Tom Brooke explains: "Golf needs to be made far easier for children and beginners and it also needs much more of a fun element if we really are to break down the barriers to entry."

Furthermore, Glendale Golf has worked with England Golf to create a Family Fun Zone with colourful targets and a points-scoring system at one of their venues. Food and drinks are served directly in the bays, which are of larger size to enable safe dining while playing golf. Golf balls are free and unlimited, families pay for the time they spend in the bay. Glendale has also renamed the par 3 courses at its venues as 'Fun courses'. The par number has been removed from scorecards and each hole now has two tees and two holes – an 8in cup on the green and a FootGolf hole beside the putting surface. Players choose their experience to suit their skill level. There are also giant versions of games such as Snakes and Ladders and Connect 4, a sandpit complete with pirate ship, and a family orienteering course to provide opportunities to spend time together. All activities are offered alongside traditional 18-hole golf courses.



**Action point:** Consider the potential to offer alternative family golf orientated facilities alongside traditional provision.

## 4.4 The challenge of organisational change

It is likely some of the issues included in this report are subject to resistance in the golf club environment. Research by Ivarsson (2013) has shown some golf clubs to be tentative about introducing changes, such as new policies and membership options, due to pressure from longer term members. These more established members are said to form groups within the golf club which tend to offer resistance to change. It was also found such groups tend not to mix with newer members that can contribute to an unwelcoming environment which, as has become clear in this report, is detrimental to long term family participation. There is a balance, therefore, to be achieved between providing an offer for both the established members, that have been loyal to the club over multiple years, and new family members that are likely to be more fluid and move from club to club. Alternatively, it may be the case that golf clubs are required to identify their target market and ensure their golf offer accurately reflects this.

#### Industry Research: England Golf Market Segmentation (JIGSAW Research, 2015)

JIGSAW research created a segmentation of people who currently play golf, people who used to play golf and people who have an interest in playing golf. The aim was to help enable England Golf to tailor initiatives and communications activities to specific target areas, in order to increase the volume and frequency. Nine different market segments were identified, that should form the focus of targeted marketing strategies:

Club	
Casual / relaxed members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Play regularly all year round</li><li>• Social side is key; opportunities to make and develop friendships</li><li>• Love the game but less competitive than other segments</li><li>• Higher than average proportion of women</li></ul> <p>Participation could be increased through initiatives that combine social interaction with playing/improving/competing, but less open to playing more than other Club segments</p>
Older traditionalists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Love golf – important part of their lives</li><li>• Play regularly all year round</li><li>• Love all aspects:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Improving own game</li><li>– Competing</li><li>– Social side</li><li>– Health benefits</li></ul></li></ul> <p>Participation could be increased through initiatives to improve their own game and opportunities to compete</p>
Young family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Serious golfers</li><li>• Similar to older traditionalists except:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Younger</li><li>– More female</li><li>– Play at peak times</li><li>– More likely to play with business colleagues</li></ul></li><li>• Like OTs love all aspects of the game</li></ul> <p>Participation could be increased through golf related social events, competitions and novelty/fun initiatives</p>

Younger fanatics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take golf very seriously</li> <li>• Compete and perform to higher level</li> <li>• Committed to improving own game</li> <li>• All weather golfers</li> <li>• More affluent than other segments</li> </ul> <p>Participation could be increased through almost any golf related initiative from the serious through to the fun/novelty</p>
<b>Independent</b>	
Young actives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Busy people for whom golf is just one of many activities</li> <li>• Enjoy golf but not specially committed to it</li> <li>• Time and cost barriers prohibit fuller commitment</li> <li>• Also lack of groups of peers to play with</li> </ul> <p>Some might be encouraged by promotion of shorter forms of the game, introduction of Golf Academies and/or reduced rate trial membership.</p>
Late enthusiasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to Young Actives but: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Slightly older</li> <li>– More likely to be male</li> <li>– Really want to play more and looking for shorter quicker options than 18 holes</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Participation could possibly be increased through promotion of shorter forms of the game, as well as initiatives designed to reduce cost barriers to joining club, e.g. reduced rate trial membership, promotion of off peak rates etc.</p>
Occasionals / time pressured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not play often or regularly</li> <li>• One of the least enthusiastic segments about the game</li> <li>• When play tends to be for social and health reasons not for love of golf</li> <li>• Tend to feel golf clubs are exclusive and not for them</li> </ul> <p>Expense a key barrier. Little opportunity to increase participation in traditional clubs.</p>
Social couples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Segment with highest proportion of women</li> <li>• See golf as a good way to spend time with partner/family</li> <li>• Enjoy golf but play relatively infrequently</li> <li>• Would like to play more</li> </ul> <p>Participation could possibly be increased through promotion of shorter forms of the game, as well as initiatives designed to reduce cost barriers to joining club, e.g. reduced rate trial membership, promotion of off peak rates etc.</p>

Casual fun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tend not to play full rounds</li> <li>• Driving range</li> <li>• Mini golf</li> <li>• Pitch &amp; Putt</li> <li>• Golf is a fun, occasional activity with friends/family</li> <li>• Put off by image of golf as exclusive, expensive, old fashioned and snooty</li> </ul> <p>Casual Fun; Almost no opportunity to increase participation in traditional clubs.</p>
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**Action point:** Golf clubs should look to assess individual types of golfer and target marketing campaigns appropriately.

#### Industry expert analysis: Henry

"I think knowing the golf market and looking at the stats, there has been a fairly drastic drop in golf club membership since 2003, and that is the biggest thing that has affected us. The industry needs to take change seriously. Obviously, if there is a drop off in membership then investment drops off, and then it becomes challenging growing the game with limited investment."

#### Case study

##### GolfMark Accreditation (England Golf)

GolfMark is an accreditation programme designed to support golf clubs to achieve operating standards in: recruitment and retention; management and sustainability; coaching and competitions; and, safeguarding. A key focus of GolfMark is to increase engagement with school children, particularly those in inner-city locations. Participants showing particular interest and promise are to take part in other golf activities and offered further subsidised lessons during school holidays. Results indicate that around 50 % of participants have taken up the offer of additional golf.



**Action point:** Consider development of an accreditation/recognition scheme for 'family friendly' golf clubs, that could be implemented out nationally.

## 4.5 The rise of the 'experience economy'

Recent research has found the 'Experience Economy' has begun to replace the traditional 'Service Economy' (Gibson, 2017; Masayuki, 2017; Morton, 2017). That is, businesses are increasingly required to offer 'memorable events' for their customers, and that memory itself, or the 'experience', becomes the product. There is an increased desire for more meaningful economic offerings. Consumers wear experiences as 'badges of honour', indicating that there is greater value in what one can achieve, as opposed to what one can possess. Consumers have begun to replace the trend of 'collecting items' and now aim to 'fill boxes' with memories, stories and worthwhile experiences (Morton, 2017). In golf, therefore, the value added above the actual playing of the game is becoming of increasing importance. Families taking part in golf are less likely to do so just to 'play the game', but rather is the journey/transformation the golf experience offers, that is key.



**Action point:** Golf should consider the 'value added' to the customer experience on and above playing the game itself. Strategies should be focussed on providing meaningful and transformative experiences.



**Action point:** Golf clubs are encouraged to consider their 'story', based on, for example, the history and traditions on the club or the local area.



## Conclusions

This project has outlined the key academic and industry research projects conducted around family participation in sport/golf. The purpose of this section is to summarise the sensitising points of this research, and outline potential implications for the R&A, affiliated organisations, and their associated golf clubs. We also seek to set out a definition of 'family friendly golf' and provide ideas to what a 'family friendly club' may look like.

### 5.1 Women's, girls', and family participation in golf: What does the research say?

The research presented in this report is summarised here, organised by each chapter:

#### Establishing the environment for family participation

##### 1.1 The 'modern' family (p.6):

The traditional family unit has changed significantly over time, with the 'modern' family comprised of a variety of configurations. Quality of family leisure, however, remains to have a direct positive impact on family functioning and overall well being. Golf is perfectly placed to benefit from increasing demand for family leisure.

##### 1.2 The impact of gender equality (p.8):

There is a positive relationship between wider measures of gender equality and levels of sports participation. Golf should look to challenge core constituents regarding increased acceptance of the effect of gender equality, and thus promoting more equal presence in leadership positions. Individually oriented policies aimed at increasing family golf participation may be constrained unless wider equality in the golf industry are improved first.

#### Attracting families to play golf

##### 2.1 Parents and family culture (p.12):

Parents are the chief factor underpinning families likelihood to play golf. A clear set of family motivations impact on what sports parents and their children take part in. Participation decisions are based on:

- 1) perceived outcomes gained through taking part (such as enjoyment, improved fitness and health, and development of social skills),
- 2) parents' previous sporting backgrounds (those who had not previously played sport wanted their children to try a range of activities, whereas those who had wanted them to play the same sport), and
- 3) what constitutes 'good parenting' (their beliefs that sport can teach their children a variety of useful 'life' skills). There was little motivation for competitive elements of sport to be included.

##### 2.2 Role models (p.17):

The success and visibility of role models (such as professional golfers) impacts on motivations for young people and families to take part, particularly those who have never played golf before. Ambassadorial roles are useful to promote golf to those who ordinarily would not be exposed to the sport, via their family and friends, for example.

##### 2.3 Normative gender roles and sport (p.19):

Societal perceptions on how different genders should act impacts on levels of women's and girls' sports participation. Females, for example, are more likely to be adversely affected by negative images of their participation in sport. Strategies should be aimed at challenging/changing perceptions of gender behaviour to encourage whole family participation. Some female members can actually contribute to the current golf club status quo, thus discouraging other females to take part.

## Maintaining long term participation and avoiding drop-out

### 3.1 The social aspects of golf (p.22):

The formation of friendship groups is vital to continued family golf participation, which encourages deeper relationships to build and offers a key supportive roles. They also helped develop preferred ways of playing in regards to rules and etiquette, downplaying competition, avoiding instruction, and focus on enjoyment over expertise. These casual formats have been found to make the game easier and speed up pace of play, having a positive effect on overall enjoyment levels. Buddy schemes can help new participants integrate into these friendship groups.

### 3.2 Lifestyle factors: Time and cost (p.25):

Increased time constraints in modern life lead many families to pursue shorter duration and easier access leisure activities. Domestic and childcare expectations impact more on women's ability to participate in golf, when compared to men, which is even more of a factor given the time required to play traditional formats of golf. Age is another significant determinant of family sports participation, and it is well established that participation rates decline with increasing age. The modern family consumer demands a more casual, less challenging, less expensive alternative to traditional golf.

### 3.3 Avoiding 'drop-out' (p.30):

Continuous sports participants become 'bound-in' by their desire to repeat enjoyable experiences, to use their skills, and to maintain the friendship relationships that have developed. Voluntary participation was also more likely to lead to routine participation, which encourages autonomy to develop individuals' own 'love of sport', and promoted continuation of such attitudes into later life. Encouraging input from families and juniors themselves in the development of strategies will help to foster the sense of autonomy and 'ownership' required for long term golfing commitment.

### 3.4 Differentiating children and adults (p.32):

Children in the golf environment are often asked to perform skills for which they have not yet developed the necessary physical and/or cognitive capabilities. Family coaching sessions, for example, should be fun based and involve lots of free time for play and self discovery of skills, rather than focussing on complex technical aspects in an artificial environment. It is important to manage parent's perceptions in regards to traditional golf coaching.

## Ensuring golf's traditions in harmony with change

### 4.1 The need to evolve (p.34):

The golf industry has the difficult task of maintaining its heritage while evolving to ensure it is well placed to meet the demands of contemporary society. It is also important to recognise that innovations and developments to golf are not new, and, in fact, have been subject to resistance throughout the sport's entire history. There is now a demand for different 'types' of golf clubs, who must have greater awareness of their target market whether that be traditional or family golfer demographics.

### 4.2 The image of golf (p.35):

A legacy of traditional perceptions of a 'stereotypical' golfer still exists – typically older middle class white males. The golf industry should look challenge these perceptions through developments, such as flexibility in dress codes and by offering a range of activities for family golfers.

### 4.3 Alternative versions of golf (p.37):

The spatial layout of golf courses can impact on enjoyment levels amongst beginner golfers. Many women and juniors experience 'statistical discrimination', where an individual stereotype becomes misapplied to the group, and they are treated as if they possess those qualities and characteristics, regardless of their individual abilities. Adopting course types and set ups appropriate for the playing standard of the golfer can help reduce difficulties and frustrations for family participation.

### 4.4 The challenge of organisational change (p.39):

Changes in the golf industry are often subject to resistance from various groups, which may be detrimental to long term participation. There is a balance to be achieved between providing for the established members, that have been loyal to the club over multiple years, and new members who may be more fluid and move from club to club. Greater awareness and focus on a club's target market is important in this regard.

### 4.5 Rise of the 'experience economy' (p.42):

Golf should look to encourage memorable events for their customers, as that memory itself, or the 'experience', is starting to become the product. Consumers are now more likely to wear experiences as 'badges of honour', indicating that there is greater value in what one can achieve, as opposed to what one can possess. Golf clubs are advised to consider their unique story based around their history and traditions.



## 5.2 'Defining' family golf

Research on family leisure tends to be dominated by the views of the participants themselves, however, Lamb (2016) studied the issue from the perspective of leisure facility managers. Interviews with leisure managers revealed a number of recommendations to enhance leisure provision for families. These include priority parking for families, provision of an affordable and available crèche to encourage families with younger children, 'play areas' within the facility and enabling children to engage in informal play within sight of their parents. Additionally, 'alternative' leisure programmes aimed at engaging families could include activities for parents and guardians, family-based classes and/tuition, family open days, and reductions on fees / subsidised passes for families. Furthermore, Sheets and colleagues (2016) found that a greater importance placed on quality of facilities, such as on course toilets and drinking water.

### Leisure activities aimed at engaging families

	Family based classes and/tuition
	Family open days
	Subsidised passes for families
	Improved quality of facilities, such as on course toilets and drinking water



**Action point:** Golf clubs should consider their provision of 'family' facilities and activities, such as priority parking, crèche / play areas, on course toilets, and regularly organised family based golf sessions.

#### Industry expert analysis: Henry

"Most clubs have you know locked doors, secure entry. You go in to ask about membership and you are told to come back because there's no one there to talk you through it ... you end up talking to someone behind a bar who tells you to come back, which you probably wouldn't do."

#### Industry expert analysis: Neil

"We went to a local club ... they said I could join but I would have to have an interview, bearing in mind I was 11 at the time. My dad came in, and they asked me questions about my ability and if I would hold up other players. The impression we got was that they didn't really want junior golfers."



**Action point:** Golf clubs are encouraged to promote more accessible and open environments, particular for first time participants.



**Action point:** Consider the use of member recruitment strategies employed by mainstream leisure organisations. Gym and leisure facilities, for example, typically include a tour of facilities, free guest passes, and a chat through membership options over refreshments for prospective members.

Research by Lamb (2016) also found that the information provided on the scope and variety of leisure activities available to families was limited, and viewed this as a key constraint for many families. This could be rectified by creating resources such as information packs and publicity leaflets specifically targeted at families who are interested in taking part in golf, and be made available in both hard copy and soft copy electronic files.



**Action point:** Provide families with important information specific to their leisure needs, tailored to groups such as young, single parent, and working families.



**Action point:** Club managers should take opportunities to effect change, by trying out new initiatives and schemes aimed at 'modern' family golf participation. This requires imaginative and creative strategies that give families greater choice in activities offered, and accompanied with an engaging marketing campaign promoting what is on offer.

#### Industry Research: Attracting Women to Golf (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2015)

Sports Marketing Surveys (SMS) conducted a project to find reasons why sportswomen choose to play golf or alternative sports. Focus groups were undertaken with male and female golfers and non-golfers of various ages. Results indicate the recommendation of a 'Give Golf a Go' taster session that:

	Gives chance to try golf without too much financial commitment until they decide if they like it or not
	Starts with gentler, easier, fun forms of the game, with women of similar experience – a 'safe' environment with other 'beginners'
	Takes place on the course rather than exclusively driving range

These types of 'have a go at golf' days should be publicised to women in environments which they attend with friends, such as sports clubs, gyms, colleges of higher education, and the workplace. It is also acknowledged that a key challenge facing the game of golf is broadening its appeal without alienating those for whom the current marketplace works as it is. This said, the data indicates that the numbers of people in the traditional golf marketplace is declining, and as a result clubs are much more likely to be required to broaden their appeal.



**Action point:** Support clubs in carefully considering the increased budget requirements of investing in alternative family facilities.

Research by Lamb (2016) found that it is important to clearly show the value of the 'family leisure' market as a profitable avenue for commercial sector organisations, such as private golf clubs. At the same time, it is important to appreciate that families can be relatively hard to reach and likely to cost more in the short in terms of investment in facilities. It is important then that golf clubs are supported with this transition, in regards to budgetary targets, etc. It is also very important that golf clubs to assess their place in the wider market and do not attempt to be a club that 'does everything'.

#### Industry expert analysis: Neil

"I don't think family golf is for every club. I think it's a case of identifying what a club's market is. Some places are more suited to family golf, if you have 36 holes, par 3 course, [and] places with a 'health club' attitude. Those are the places that lend themselves to family golf."

#### Industry expert analysis: Joanne

"I don't think its feasible for one golf club to be everything to everyone. I just don't think it's feasible at all. And that's one of the benefits of the sport, we have a rich mix of facilities and so it doesn't make sense for a venue like Wentworth to run the same community programmes as, for example, a council owned facility might do in Sheffield."

#### Industry expert analysis: Carly

"Clubs try to be everything to everyone rather than just deciding we are this kind of club. You know, we are a family club or a junior club or a real competitive club ... I think trying to be everything to everyone puts them [clubs] in an awkward position."



**Action point:** Encourage clubs to assess their internal (facilities) and external market factors (demographics), and tailor club offerings appropriately.

## 5.3 Future research

This project has demonstrated the depth of research which exists on factors around family sport participation. It has also become clear, though, that certain areas require further academic enquiry in order to build a full picture of the issue at hand. Future research could include:



**Gender equality in positions of influence in golf:** This research would build on projects conducted outside of golf, to analyse the percentage of women in positions of influence in the golf industry. In doing so, it would also address how potential barriers are broken down, both on and off the golf course. This could include a benchmarking activity to assess progress made, and case studies of National Governing Body's and local club structures.

### Industry expert analysis: Joanne

"A gender equality in golf project will be a really valuable piece of work, so we can then see what the scene looks like ... I think it would reveal that committees are male dominated. We put an emphasis on growing family and female golf yet we still have male committees making male centred decisions and views. I think we'd find male centred committees trying to second guess what females want, which seems odd to me. Women are underrepresented in the decision-making process, and this will slow down our ability to, you know, fully develop the sport to be fully accessible ... Research shows that business is more likely to be profitable in a mixed gendered boards rather than men only boards and yet that message hasn't got through to golf I don't think, and yet golf clubs are businesses."



**Organisational change:** There is an opportunity to know more about how to affect change in the golf industry. There is a clear academic base for what is required to increase family golf participation, however, it is less easier to see what process should be implemented to make this happen. Previous research has shown there is often an uncoordinated approach to implementing change in sport. There tends to be many different groups aiming to achieve the same target, but going about it in a number of different ways. Golf unions and bodies often run programmes with similar goals but slightly different names and practices, which can cause confusion. The result is information is spread out in various places, rather than coordinated with expertise from one single institution. The R&A, for example, could be the leaders in coordinating a common goal of increasing family participation in golf, by drawing on their established resources and connections to establish cross body programmes. Research can help define the best way to approach projects that encompass organisational change across various golf organisations.

### Industry expert analysis: Rachael

"The one thing that is lacking is leadership in golf, and it's great conversations like this are happening ... we are starting to talk more coherently with 'one voice' ... it's about one team growing the game of golf together ... that is where we need to go and we need that consistency of message ... particularly around women and girls, is having clarity about a purpose that suits what we all need but drives the direction of the game forward."



**Golf club identity programme:** The majority of interviewees argued that that golf clubs cannot be everything to everyone, and instead should create their own identity based on their internal facilities and external market demographics. Research into the how clubs assess their strategies in regards to local markets, amongst other things, would be a particularly fruitful line of enquiry. Potential golfers could be signposted to the most appropriate club venue to their needs, thus increasing the likelihood of repeat custom.

### Industry expert analysis: Joanne

"There's nothing wrong in my mind with golf clubs being higher end, middle range, or lower end. It's a bit like cars. As long as there are established practices and principals that are common, in terms of keeping everyone happy ... when you think of the wants and need of a 16-year-old male and the wants and needs of a 62-year-old female, they are very different."

The authors would like to thank all participants who gave their time to be involved in this study. We hope the presented here will help inform debates regarding the future direction of golf.

# Appendix A

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Notes

Notes

## Notes

Based in St Andrews, The R&A runs The Open, elite amateur events, international matches and rankings. Together The R&A and the USGA govern the sport of golf worldwide, operating in separate jurisdictions but sharing a commitment to a single code for the Rules of Golf, Rules of Amateur Status and Equipment Standards. The R&A, through R&A Rules Ltd, governs the sport worldwide, outside of the United States and Mexico, on behalf of over 36 million golfers in 140 countries and with the consent of 152 organisations from amateur and professional golf.

The R&A is committed to working for golf, supporting the growth of the sport internationally and the development and management of sustainable golf facilities.



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