



Introduction

We have researched new golfers involved in beginner programmes over the past few years, to find out how they felt about their progress, what was important to them and how clubs could best support them in their golfing journey.

From this evidence, we have put together some guidance from clubs which we hope will be helpful in the planning of your own club's Get into Golf programme...



WORD OF MOUTH: The majority of participants actually heard about their programme through word of mouth, so encourage your members to spread the word! Print some flyers for them to hand out to friends and colleagues and encourage them to share your Get into Golf Facebook posts. Ensure members are updated with what's happening with your club's beginners' programmes, through your e-newsletters and social media.



CONCERNS: New participants weren't sure what to wear at first and had assumed there would be a dress code. Use photos of previous Get into Golf groups on your marketing materials to show what people actually wear. Lack of equipment also came up, so ensure your marketing makes it clear that equipment will be provided. And finally, make sure you have clear signposting or instructions for your new participants. Don't assume they will know where or what everything is!



COACHING: Your PGA professional and volunteer coaches need to be patient, positive and encouraging. Aim to have continuity of coaches each week and incorporate technology into your coaching – video analysis or e-mailing of lessons/YouTube drills enables keen beginners to practice at home. Participants weren't keen on mixed groups (beginners and improvers, or adults and children), so consider the make-up of your groups.



ON THE COURSE: Going onto the course to practice outside of a lesson can be daunting, nerve-wracking and intimidating. Beginners talked about lack of knowledge on rules and etiquette, people playing through and being afraid of upsetting members. So, make sure you help diminish these feelings. Set aside tee-times when beginners have priority on the course; walk participants round the course so they know the layout – ideally with your 'Buddy' system; advise beginners of the normal 'quiet' times so they know when is more suitable to play without being intimidated, and start off with fun competitions, again alongside a buddy.



MEMBERSHIP: Rather than pushing beginners straight into a full membership after their initial coaching sessions, provide a structured pathway, including continued coaching, from introductory or trial to full membership. Give your new members a comprehensive information pack on membership options, including benefits, contacts, etiquette guide, competitions and events, as well as instructions on booking tee-times.



INTEGRATION WITH EXISTING MEMBERS: The majority of beginners don't just want to learn to play golf, they want to be part of the club. But getting to know existing members can be difficult! New golfers appreciated the efforts to include them in club activities and introduce them to other members, including: a beginners' welcome evening, a buddy system, social events with other previous Get into Golf participants; encouraging your members to talk to new members and make them aware of the beginners programme; fun competitions; encouraging your members to bring old clubs to sell or giveaway.



COMMUNICATION: Ensure regular communication from the club and/or the beginners coaching group, such as a Get into Golf e-newsletter, WhatsApp group or closed Facebook group. Give them incentives within your communication to progress through the structure, such as membership offers, guidance and support in obtaining a handicap and hints and tips from the pro.



GETTING A HANDICAP: In year one, most new golfers weren't interested in getting a handicap. They just wanted to play socially. But in year two, most were on their way towards getting one or considering playing for one. So, what motivated them? Going on a golfing weekend with someone who played; going on a golf holiday with a group; being able to play in club competitions; being able to play at other courses and being able to play competitively among their own social golf group.



PROGRESSION: How fast new golfers climbed the progression ladder depended on their reasons for playing, confidence, ambitions and time available. Some simply wanted to master basic golfing skills, with the next steps being the ability to play the course competently, and onto having the confidence to play with family and friends. At the top of the confidence level were those who wanted to play golf anywhere and with anyone.



PEOPLE: Who are the key people at your club? Those that the new participants appreciated most of all were: The PGA professional – available to give additional lessons and advice on equipment and clothing; Committed Organisers – those who continually engaged with the new golfers, such as the Captain or Get into Golf coordinator; Mentors or Buddies – those who volunteered to play with the new golfers and helped out with advice and confidence; and Encouragers and 'Welcomers' – those other members who interacted with them socially, encouraged their progress, offered to play with them, invited them to an away day or team match.



GOLF IN A WORD: New golfers described golf as **Addictive, Enjoyable, Fun, Sociable...and Frustrating!** Consider using these words in your marketing materials, to attract new golfers, or invite previous participants/new members to provide their reasons why they joined your club. This could be done using written testimonials, or better still, video interviews to use on your website and social media channels to bring it to life.



TAKE A LONG-TERM VIEW: It may take time to convert new golfers into members, and our feedback encourages clubs to take a long-term view and they will join when the time is right. Consider offering them social membership, invite them to the next group coaching sessions, keep in touch with them even if they don't join straight away and provide offers to play and play. The average conversion rate is around 50%.



OTHER ADVICE: here are a few more things that new golfers asked for or suggested. Your club may be doing them already, but worth having a check list and making sure you are considering these ideas...

- More dialogue between PGA pros/volunteer coaches and the club management/committee so that they are aware of the different needs of new golfers.
- Starter sets of equipment to hire or buy.
- Weekend course time available for new golfers – for many, the weekend might be the only time they can play.
- More consistent communications channels – emails, text, WhatsApp or Facebook – whichever works best, ask the group.
- More advice on equipment and clothing; more availability of ladies' equipment/clothing in the pro shop.
- More information on how to obtain a handicap, including 9-hole options (e.g. 6 x 9-hole cards).
- Reciprocal arrangements with other clubs for new golfers to play at a preferential rate.