

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

## Summary document

R&A



## The presenting problem

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 many areas of the world. In 2017, Sport's Marketing Surveys (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.

Family golf participation, including women's and girls' involvement in particular, has been identified as an opportunity for significant growth. 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).

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.



Academic Research Papers



Industry Publications & Market Research



Interviews with Golf Industry Experts

## 1 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 is improved first.



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



**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 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.

## 3 Key factors in long term family participation



**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 key supportive roles. They also helped develop preferred ways of playing in regards to rules and etiquette, downplaying competition, avoiding instruction, and focusing 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 and 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.

## 4 The next steps for golf: Tradition 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 to 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 up 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 The 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.



**4.6 'Defining' family golf (p.46):** Research indicates that family friendly leisure facilities should include priority parking, provision of an affordable and available crèche to encourage families with younger children, 'play areas' within the facility enabling children to engage in informal play within sight of their parents. 'Alternative' leisure programmes aimed at engaging families could also include activities for parents and guardians, family-based classes and/tuition, family open days, and reductions on fees / subsidised passes for families. Research has also shown importance placed on the quality of facilities, such as on course toilets and drinking water.

