

## SCOTTISH GOLF CLUB SURVEY 2007/08

### Responses

A total of 217 clubs responded. 84.7% of these were Private Members Clubs, 8.4% were municipal and 6.1% Proprietary.

### Golf Course

Almost half of clubs had found it necessary to adopt new course management practices to combat climate change. Whilst greens were the main focus with 79% taking action to reduce thatch levels in greens and 76% introducing significant increase in top dressing application, 74% had introduced extensive drainage enhancement, 39% sought to reduce thatch in fairways and 24% applied significant top dressing to fairways.

During winter months, fairway mats are the most commonly used method of course protection, used by 40% of clubs responding. 34% lift from fairway to semi-rough. 72% operate preferred lies.

33% of clubs use an agronomist on an annual basis, 28% never use one and 26% use one when problems arise. 72% of clubs were aware of the R&A's 'Course Management – Best Practice Guidelines' web site and 44% had registered with it.

### Membership

To join a club, 77% of clubs require adults and 63% of clubs require juniors to be proposed by an existing member. However, 46% for adults and 35% for juniors also allow written applications suggesting that proposal by an existing member is not a prerequisite at these clubs.

### Junior Membership

51% of clubs have a minimum age for junior membership and 59% had a transitional category of membership for ages 18-21. 20% charge juniors a joining fee when progressing from junior membership.

73% of clubs allow juniors to use the practice facilities without restriction with only 8% placing any restriction, the remainder of clubs responding did not have practice facilities.

### Junior Competitions

Only 8% of clubs allow junior boys to compete in men's competitions without restriction, 40% on attaining a maximum handicap. 27% of clubs allow boys to compete at the discretion of the committee and 13% allow boys to play but are excluded from winning prizes.

22% of clubs allow junior girls to compete in ladies' competitions without restriction, 27% on attaining a maximum handicap. 18% of clubs allow girls to compete at the discretion of the committee and 4% allow girls to play but are excluded from winning prizes.

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It is interesting to note the apparent differences in attitude towards juniors competing in adult competition between men's and ladies' sections.

90% of clubs organise competitions for juniors, 86% have a junior convenor and 13% have a separate junior convenor for boys and girls. 24% of clubs have a junior constitution.

### **Clubgolf**

Of those clubs that responded, 33% were or had delivered clubgolf, 12% were in discussion about delivering and 50% were not involved. Of those clubs not involved, the following leading reasons were given:

- Already involved in junior coaching programme other than clubgolf (34%)
- Wouldn't be able to find enough adult volunteers to commit to being trained and then delivering clubgolf (25%)
- Already at capacity in terms of number of junior members/players (21.5%)

### **Competitions**

43% of clubs run mixed gender competitions in which players play for the same prizes. This is a remarkably high proportion and may be skewed by some clubs considering mixed foursomes/four ball competitions to fall into this category.

Only 18% of clubs operate a joint handicap committee which is disappointing considering that the Unified Handicapping System has been in place for four years. This surely provides an opportunity for clubs to streamline the demands placed on volunteer handicap administrators at clubs. In somewhat of a contrast, 77% of clubs indicated that they use the same computer and software for the administration of men's and ladies' handicaps which further supports the case for joint Handicap Committees.

### **Equality**

63% of clubs indicated that male and female members pay the same annual subscriptions, 77% provide equal access to tee times, 88% to use of clubhouse, 76% provide equal opportunity for male and female members to stand for offices of the club, 75% to be elected to committee/board and 78% a vote at an AGM.

Of course, these statistics must be taken in context. Equality means different things to different people and has been driven in many cases by the local requirements of Licensing Boards and also by the desire of clubs to gain Rates Relief. For example, what does equality of access to tee times mean? Does this mean 50% of times are allocated to each gender or does it mean times are allocated on a proportional basis? Alternatively, does it mean, for example, men get to play Saturday and Sunday mornings and Ladies' get to play Tuesdays and Friday's? Impending legislation is likely to require greater clarity in these areas.

### **Club Management**

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32% of clubs have a part-time Hon Secretary, 17% a part-time Secretary and 24% a full-time Secretary. 5% have a part-time Manager and 18% a full-time Manager. 20% have a part-time Admin Assistant, 14% a full-time assistant, 16% a part-time book keeper and 4 % a full-time book keeper.

At 88% of clubs, policy is determined by a Club Committee and 11% by a Board of Directors.

Clubs were asked whether they had written policies for the following areas (percentage answering Yes in brackets):

Clubhouse & Operations (47%)  
Golf Course Maintenance and Development (44%)  
Sales & Marketing (10%)  
Environmental management plan (24%)  
Staff/HR (58%)

It is interesting to note that Staff/HR gained the strongest response and that Sales & Marketing the lowest.

These areas were covered as part of an overall business plan at 29% of clubs.

Only 13% of clubs have altered their management structure in the last 5 years which is interesting when considered in light of responses to questions on equality.

### **Volunteering**

73% of clubs have difficulty getting members to accept nominations for club Committee/Board positions and 44% have difficulty getting a member to accept the position of Captain.

When asked which of a list of reasons prevented members from volunteering, time was the most quoted reason (62%) followed by lack of interest (57%) and lack of understanding of what is involved (39%). Recognition and Reward attracted relatively low responses (5% and 8% respectively).

### **Marketing**

28% of clubs have a Committee or Board member responsible for marketing and 32% have a marketing budget.

79% of clubs have their own web site and 75% have access to broadband (99% of these clubs with access utilise this access).

When provided with a list of ways in which clubs could advertise to visitors and members, the most popular methods were as follows:

- Club web site (75%)
- SGU Golf Central (52%)
- Other web sites (40%)
- Local Newspapers (40%)
- Scottish Club Golfer (26%)

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- Member Referral Scheme (14%)

18% of clubs indicated that they do not advertise.

With regard to 2 for 1 schemes, 21% of clubs accept the vouchers at any time, 24% at specified times only, 39% not at all and 8% used to but do not accept any longer. This is very interesting as 2 for 1 schemes are often blamed for the relative demise of club membership. The message seems to be that the scheme can have merits but only if availability is restricted to off-peak times.

37% of clubs have formed an agreement with local clubs to allow members reciprocal discounted green fees.

### **Tee Time Booking**

22% of clubs do not have a booking system for tee times, 17% use a paper based system for visitors only and 38% a paper based system for members and visitors. 13% use a computerised diary operated by club personnel and 3% have a computerised diary available on line.

Of those not using a computerised system, 36% could envisage utilising one in the future.

22% of clubs capture data regarding the number of rounds played on their course. This is very low considering that all pricing and availability decisions (Yield Management) should be based on this basic level of data.

### **Finance**

31% of clubs do not allow members to pay subs by direct debit. 25% allow them to do so over 12 months and 26% do so over 10 months. A further 15% do so over various time scales. Therefore, a total of 66% of clubs do allow payment by direct debit. This would appear to be one way in which clubs can soften the blow of annual renewal for its members and maximise the likelihood of retaining existing members.

### **Big Issues**

Clubs were asked to identify the 3 most pressing issues facing their club. The most popular and unsolicited responses were as follows:

1. Maintaining membership (this topic attracted more than twice as many 'hits' as the next most commonly mentioned issue).
2. Increasing costs
3. Lack of / growing the number of visitors
4. Cost of course maintenance and improvement
5. Ageing membership

Worthy of note is that the following 'issues' were barely mentioned (i.e. less than 2 clubs mentioned these issues):

- Increasing Ladies' membership

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- Slow Play
- Licensing (Scotland) Act
- Equality
- Health & Safety
- Lack of practice facilities
- VAT

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