

## Case study: The Old Course Ranfurly Golf Club benefits from membership promotions

### Challenges

Clubs across Scotland are feeling the pinch from the recession and those in Renfrewshire are no exception.

Over the last three years The Old Course Ranfurly Golf Club has suffered an annual drop of around 20 members from its Ordinary category, a trend its management feared would 'accelerate' in 2009.

The Club was aware its Ordinary membership had a large hole in the 21-30 age band, an important group which it sees as the backbone of its future membership. In 2008 just seven of its Ordinary members came from this age group.

"Because of the recession things are tight and we've had our fair share of resignations this year," admits the Club's Managing Secretary, John Campbell.

In a club-rich area, it's also in direct competition with five other clubs, one literally on its doorstep, all targeting the same audience.

### Solutions

In March 2009 the Club introduced an Intermediate membership for 21-30 year olds at a rate of two thirds of the Ordinary subscription, and with no entrance fee.

This was in addition to the existing Junior/Senior membership (for 18-20 year olds) which is a third of the Ordinary subscription. The Club's Junior subscription costs a quarter of the Ordinary subscription.

To encourage the recruitment of Ordinary members the Club lowered its entrance fee for this category from £656 (the annual subscription) to £200.

For 2009 only, the Club offered those that had been Restricted members for 10 years, the option of becoming an Ordinary member for a nominal £50 entrance fee.

The Old Course Ranfurly Golf Club's subscription rates and entry fees for 2009 are as follows:

Membership Category	Subscription	Entry Fee	Entry Fee (over up to 4 years)
Ordinary Gents	£656	£200 (Reduced from £650 to £200 for Season 2009-2010 only)	1st Year £50 2nd & subsequent Years £60 (i.e. £50 plus £10 Admin Fee)
Ordinary Ladies	£660	£200	1st Year £50 2nd & subsequent Years £60 (i.e. £50 plus £10 Admin Fee)
Intermediate Gents (21-30)	£441	n/a up to 30 - then £50 on transferring to Ordinary Membership on 1st March following 30th birthday	n/a
Intermediate Ladies (21-30)	£445	n/a up to 30 - then £50 on transferring to Ordinary Membership on 1st March following 30th birthday	n/a
Junior/Senior (18-20)	£225	n/a	n/a

<b>Membership Category</b>	<b>Subscription</b>	<b>Entry Fee</b>	<b>Entry Fee (over up to 4 years)</b>
Restricted Gent*	£441	n/a	n/a
Restricted Lady*	£445	n/a	n/a
Family Membership	For 2 adults and 1 or more children	No Entrance Fee for Partner/spouse.	10% discount on total subscription amount
Corporate Membership	Contact Secretary	<a href="mailto:Secretary@oldranfurly.com">Secretary@oldranfurly.com</a>	50% discount on normal visitors fees
Juniors (10-17)	£162	n/a	n/a
Non Playing	£148 inc VAT	n/a	n/a

To give potential members the opportunity to try the course first before committing to membership, the Club offered a new incentive in 2009. Anyone interested in joining could pay the green fee and play the course. If they then submit an application for membership within a month the Club treats that green fee as a deposit against entrance fee and/or subscription.

To broaden the net for new members, the Club organised an Open Day in April and has also used local press for advertising.

Family membership was introduced whereby the entrance fee of the spouse of an existing member was waived and a 10% discount in subscriptions applied to a family of one or more children.

Corporate Membership was also introduced whereby businesses could buy packages of times for their contacts and staff in advance at significant discount to the Visitor fee.

In another example of its modern attitude, the Club relaxed its dress code this year, trialed and then introduced the wearing of denims in the club house.

## **Outcomes**

“The response this year was particularly good,” said Mr Campbell. Thirty-three new Ordinary members joined, there are now 41 men and two ladies in the Intermediate category, 36 of whom have come from outside the Club. Many are newcomers or returners to the game. Just as importantly the membership has grown this season for the first time in many years.

## **Key Learnings**

The Club believes that offering a variety of membership categories and reducing the Entrance Fee for Ordinary membership has made a significant difference and believes the same approach could work at clubs elsewhere in Scotland.

## **The future**

The Club has seen only a slight rise in its Junior/Senior membership. This age group (18-20 year olds) could be the next challenge to tackle.

## **Ends**

## **Interview with Old Course Ranfurly Golf Club Managing Secretary, John Campbell (October 2009)**

### **How has the Club fared through the recession?**

Over the last three years we had a drop of 20 a year on average in the numbers of Ordinary members and we were afraid this was going to accelerate this year.

We always have resignations just before the start of the new season. It happens for a variety of reasons, such as people going to university, moving away to other areas, or simply because they haven't used their membership enough over the last year.

The crux is that, because of the recession, it's not easy now. Finding the money for subscriptions has been difficult throughout the country and we've had our fair share of resignations this year because of this. There are many who want to play but there are those that have been affected by the recession and the rise in unemployment and short time working.

### **Are there many clubs in your area potentially competing over the same market?**

We are in a very competitive situation. There are numerous clubs in Renfrewshire within a radius of 10 miles or so.

### **How did you begin tackling these challenges?**

We put together a working group, including the Captain, Vice Captain, the Directors of Finance, House, Greens and myself. I had written a paper about the possible impact of the recession and how we needed to rethink the way we operated to attract members with what we had on offer. We realized an excellent golf course with good drainage to cope with our worsening climate and maintained in excellent condition was not sufficient. We had to come up with some new ideas.

### **What did you identify as the key areas needing change?**

In the 21-30 age group we only had 7 Ordinary members. We realized this was an age group where potential members were just starting out in business, had big commitments with new houses and possibly young families. This group and the juniors are going to be the backbone of the future membership so it was important to make it easier for people in this group to play and to join.

Our major change to the membership, which we introduced at the start of the 2009 after it was approved at the AGM in February, was the creation of a new Intermediate category for 21-30 year olds.

### **What are the benefits of the Intermediate membership and other new categories?**

As an Intermediate member you pay two thirds of the Ordinary subscription and you don't pay an entrance fee. On reaching 30 there is a nominal joining fee of £50 to become an Ordinary member with full voting rights.

The previous season we reduced our Junior/Senior membership, for 18-21 year olds, to one third of the Ordinary subscription. The Junior subscription remains at one-quarter of the Ordinary subscription. This has meant there's not a major hike when members move from one category to the next.

### **Who is your typical Intermediate member?**

Most are fairly new to the game. They have either dabbled at municipal golf courses or they have been junior members at this club or others, and left golf at the age of 18 to do other things or possibly have returned to the area after being away to college or University.

We have also admitted as members players who are new to the game, haven't had a handicap and play socially either at municipal courses and/or on holiday and now see the benefits in joining a club. Many however, are returners to the game who have been junior members at this and other clubs.

Some have come from other clubs. Maybe the condition of the other course has not quite been what they're looking for and they've seen our course having played here with friends. We are fortunate in that we have very good turf and drainage and have a good record as far as staying open is concerned when there are periods of heavy rain.

### **How successful has the Intermediate membership been?**

The response this year was particularly good. In the Intermediate membership we have 41 men and two ladies. Seven of the 43 Intermediate members are existing members. The others have joined after seeing the

category in our advertising and website or on the recommendation of friends who are members. We believe they have a very good deal for a club that has a pretty good reputation.

**Have you made any changes to your Ordinary membership?**

We were one of the clubs that had an entrance fee for Ordinary membership equal to the annual subscription (this year's Ordinary subscription is £656). So for this year only we decided to lower the entrance fee to £200. That has proved quite attractive and we are considering extending it to next year.

Also, we allow applicants to pay their entrance fee in instalments. This will probably be in two instalments next year.

**Has your Ordinary membership grown?**

Yes, it has. We've gained more members than we have lost.

**How did you promote the new membership and the Club in general?**

We advertised in the local community magazines and local papers. We also had an Open Day in April and we signed up a good number of members which was certainly worthwhile.

**Have you made any other changes to your membership this year?**

Yes, we made a change in our Restricted membership category. We offered those that had been Restricted members for 10 years the option of becoming an Ordinary member for a nominal £50 entrance fee.

**How do your existing members feel about the new tiered membership format?**

We've had no complaints. Everyone realizes it's in the interest of members to maintain our membership levels.

**Your website states that you have a 'relaxed dress code' in the Club. Has this been popular?**

We introduced the wearing of jeans in the Club over the summer on a trial basis for six months. One or two clubs around here have done it also. We did a survey of members and the majority view was to continue.

**What is your policy for visitors?**

We welcome societies although this is not a major part of our income. Visitors can also play but not at the weekend at £30 in summer and £20 in winter. We do have a lot of members' guests playing. We charge £7 a round for a member to bring a guest. An Ordinary member can bring 20 guests a year. A Restricted member can bring 10 and any one person can play up to six times a year. We obviously hope guests will come and play the course, enjoy it and apply for membership.

**Have you introduced anything else this year?**

Yes, if someone is interested in joining but hasn't played the course they can pay the green fee and play the course. If they then submit an application for membership within a month we will treat that green fee as a deposit against entrance fee and/or subscription. This has again proved a successful innovation.

This has not been a critical factor in finding members because many applicants have already played the course at some time but some new to the area or to golf have joined as a result of our making this offer.

**In summary how has the 2009 season been and what are the existing challenges?**

The Intermediate membership, the reduced Entrance Fee and the offer to Restricted members to come into Ordinary membership have all been successful.

We actively encourage juniors to join the club and progress through the Junior/Senior and Intermediate categories.

"At this age they might be playing football instead on a Saturday or have gone away to university or started an apprenticeship. That's improved a little bit. We have clubgolf coaching with four members qualified to coach, so that's helping the beginners".

For more information about the Old Course Ranfurly Golf Club visit: [www.olderanfurly.com](http://www.olderanfurly.com)