

Haddington Golf Club: Flexible Membership

Haddington Golf Club is a long established Scottish parkland course incorporated within the boundaries of a former country estate in East Lothian. It has a reputation for providing visitors with a warm welcome and an impressive course. However, in recent years, falling membership and poor weather has put the Club under severe financial pressure.

The Issue:

Haddington Golf Club had been faced with a falling membership for a number of years. This, along with the wet weather of 2012, put the Club under a lot of financial pressure.

The Solution:

The majority of departing members gave their reason for non-renewal as insufficient playing time to justify the payment of an annual membership.

A flexible membership had been considered by previous management committees but had never been implemented: the Club had feared that many members would downgrade leading to a large loss of income. At this stage, however, the Club had nothing to lose: it needed to generate a large amount of income and therefore decided to introduce a flexible membership in June 2013.

Implementation:

The Club's primary concern was that many members would move from an annual to a flexible membership. This problem was avoided by introducing the flexible membership scheme mid-way through the year. Additionally, the flexible membership was priced to be attractive to new golfers while ensuring that if a member played more than once a week an annual membership would remain more economical. For the majority of members this was the case and the annual membership remained the cheaper option.

The Club was also concerned about the administration and policing of the flexible membership, but this did not prove to be an issue: most golfers are honest! The penalty for anyone

At a Glance ...

- Haddington had been experiencing falling membership for several years and was under increasingly severe financial pressures.
- In June 2013 the Club introduced a flexible membership scheme, favourably priced to attract members who play once a week or less.
- The scheme had a rapid positive impact on membership levels, and attracted some past members back to the Club.
- Haddington is now promoting flexible membership to women and younger golfers as a more affordable and convenient option.

“ Don't shy away from new initiatives, it is important to attract new golfers to your club and the game. ”



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caught not paying is the withdrawal of their membership and playing rights.

The increased membership has resulted in more members' guests coming to the Club and its bar, and the facilities are increasingly being used for private functions: unexpected spin-off benefits!

Impacts:

Within weeks there was a significant increase in membership, and the Club admitted more than one hundred flexible members in the first three months following the launch of the scheme. Only eighteen full members moved to flexible membership but, conversely, twelve converted from a flexible

“ We see the flexible membership as giving us something different compared to other clubs in the area, it allows us to offer new golfers a route into golf without the burden of joining fees and annual membership, it retains members we would otherwise have lost and keeps their affiliation with the golf club and it gives members of other golf clubs a cheaper option for membership of a second club. ”

to full membership in 2014. Twenty-one past members have now returned to the Club as flexible members.

Without the boost in income from flexible membership it would have been difficult for the Club to have survived. The flexible memberships, along with good visitor income over the summer, gave the Club sufficient income to survive until annual subscriptions were paid.

Next Steps:

Haddington Golf Club continues to offer flexible membership throughout the year and is developing other initiatives to attract new golfers to the Club.

The Club is currently going through the Scottish Golf Union (SGU) business planning process with an important area of focus being membership. Flexible membership is expected to remain key with the intention of attracting as wide a range of golfers as possible, and making golf more affordable.

The Club plans in particular to promote flexible membership within the demographic groups for which a full membership might be less economical. For example female

“ It is essential that existing members see the benefit to change: more members mean lower fees. ”

members are currently under-represented at Haddington. The Club believes that flexible membership fits in well with the lifestyle of many women and offers them the opportunity to play golf at a favourable price. Similarly, it is envisaged that flexible membership might be more appealing to younger golfers aged between 21 and 40 years, if offered as an alternative to the existing Young Adults Membership (21 to 30 years).

Tips and Advice:

The Club advises: “Don't shy away from new initiatives, it is important to attract new golfers to your club and the game. It is also important to keep current members informed of the plans and the reasons behind them so that you have their support.”

A final word from Haddington Golf Club:

A spokesman for the Club has described the experience as follows: “I would say it has been positive, we are still learning and adapting the flexible membership, it has also helped focus the Club on membership, communication and retention policies.”

Based on surveys and follow up interviews, the UK and Ireland's Golf Home Unions have identified and showcased examples of “what works” in golf club management in a series of case studies. The focus has been on clubs that have been successful in achieving more players, more members and stronger clubs. The intention is to share information and guidance on effective practices in business planning, customer service, membership, and women's and girls' golf. For further information about this and other case studies and for further support, please go to www.golfcasestudies.businesscatalyst.com.

