



**THE NEW
GOLFER JOURNEY**
**THE FIRST
THREE YEARS**



NEW2GOLF
BACK2GOLF

THE NEW GOLFER JOURNEY

The Development Team at Wales Golf has been talking to new and lapsed golfers taking part in New2Golf and other beginner coaching programmes in 9 of our clubs over the period 2016 - 2019, 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 participants' responses, we've put together some guidance which we hope all clubs will find helpful.



BEFORE THEY START ...

The majority of participants heard about the programme through word of mouth -

so encourage your club members to spread the word! Print some flyers for them to give to family, friends, work colleagues, fellow gym members, local coffee shops



SOME BIG CONCERNS THAT CLUBS CAN ADDRESS WERE;

What to wear

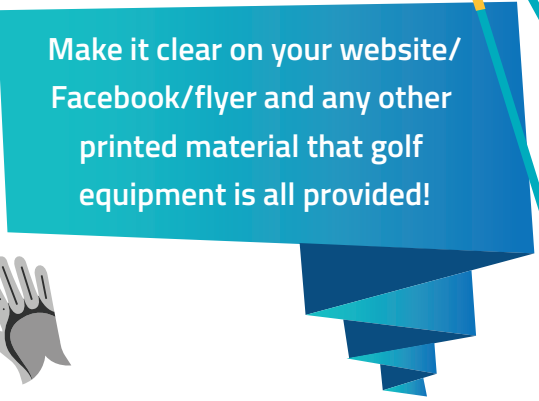
(even if assured there was no dress code for beginners, they didn't want to look inappropriately dressed).

How about putting some photos of previous N2G groups on your website or flyer to show what people wear?



Equipment

Make it clear on your website/ Facebook/flyer and any other printed material that golf equipment is all provided!



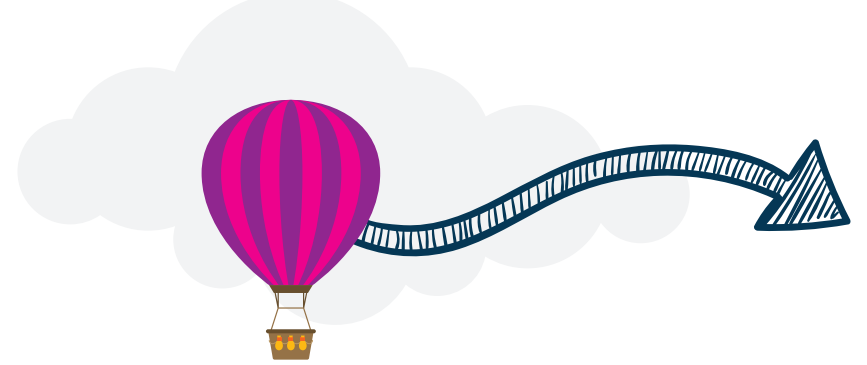
Clear signposting is a must!
A new golfer may not even know what a driving range looks like.



IN COACHING . . .

Of course your PGA Professional/Coach will be patient, positive and encouraging!

Here are some other things beginners liked:



Social interaction, e.g. having coffee together in clubhouse after lesson

Continuity of coaching – same coach each week

Use of technology – video analysis, e-mailing lessons so they could practise at home

Integration of the 'science' and 'theory' of golf with the coaching and practice of the skills



However the participants weren't so keen on mixed groups (beginners and improvers, or adults and children) – so consider the make-up of the group carefully.

ON THE COURSE

Your PGA Professional's approach and the nature of your course and facilities may determine when beginners first go on the course during a lesson. But going on the course to practise outside of lesson times is totally different – beginners talk about feeling 'intimidated', 'daunted', 'nervous' of upsetting others, and their lack of knowledge on rules and etiquette such as letting people play through. Some even practised elsewhere due to apprehension about going out on the club course!

SO WHAT HELPS DIMINISH THESE FEELINGS?



MEMBERSHIP

HOW CAN CLUBS MAKE IT MORE LIKELY THAT THE BEGINNER WILL CONTINUE IN MEMBERSHIP?

Offer a menu of membership options.

Your new golfers could;

Be Retired

Be working full time

Be working shifts

only be able to play in school hours

need the flexibility of a points membership

How can you provide good value membership for each?

By providing a 2 to 3 year structured pathway, including continued coaching, from trial to full membership

By giving new golfers an informative membership pack - info on membership options, weekly club programme, club contacts, golfing etiquette, etc.



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 if clubs don't help! New golfers appreciate all efforts made by clubs to include them in activities and introduce them to others. Some suggestions:

A beginners' welcome evening

A member (or rota of members) helping with beginner coaching

Organising tea/coffee with members after lessons

Buddying/mentoring from club members, including previous New2Golf participants who may understand best how a beginner feels

Fun competitions where groups comprise of at least one member and at least one beginner (adapt rules/scoring to ensure beginner plays a part in the team)

Encouraging members to take the initiative to talk to new golfers in the clubhouse – without being too pushy about joining, handicaps, etc.

Encouraging members to consider new golfers if they have second-hand clubs to sell/give away



MEMBER INSIGHTS - YEAR 2

So your new golfers have taken up the next stage, e.g. the first tier of membership. What will keep them progressing and in membership?

Some suggestions from our Year 2 groups:

Keep reviewing your memberships options.
Are there good value options to suit all circumstances?

Ensure regular club communications, even if not yet full members - so they feel like club members rather than the 'New2Golf' group. They can see what to aspire to in the future.

Give them incentives to progress through the structure - some events may be open to all while others (and not just the serious competitions) are only open to those with a handicap.

Encourage newer golfers to play with other members rather than staying in their 'comfort zone' of playing with their own cohort.

Are they integrating with existing members?
Is there more you could do?
eg. social events, fun events.

HANDICAPS

In year 1 of the focus groups, so many new golfers told us they weren't interested in getting a handicap ... they just wanted to play socially, with family and friends. GUESS WHAT.. by Year 2, most of them had handicaps or were well on their way towards getting one.

SO WHAT MOTIVATED THEM?



MEMBER INSIGHTS - YEAR 3

'PLAYING GOLF IN ALL ITS DIFFERENT WAYS'

In Year 3, we found that most of our golfers had a handicap and were full club members. But not all of them! Remember, every golfer is an individual ... and that's OK!

So by Year 3 your new golfers could ...



Be already playing for the club in matches.



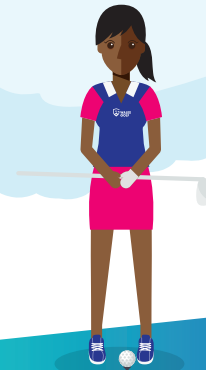
Be taking part in regular weekly club competition.



Be taking part in the less serious competitions only.



Have decided to return to Back2Golf for some more lessons.



Have decided just to play social golf.

THE IMPORTANT THING IS ... THEY'RE AT YOUR CLUB AND ENJOYING THEIR GOLF!

ENCOURAGEMENT V PRESSURE - A FINE BALANCE

Our new golfers appreciated that to progress, they would have to move out of their comfort zone ...
whether that meant playing with new people, entering their first competition, or whatever else they found a bit scary!



They appreciated:

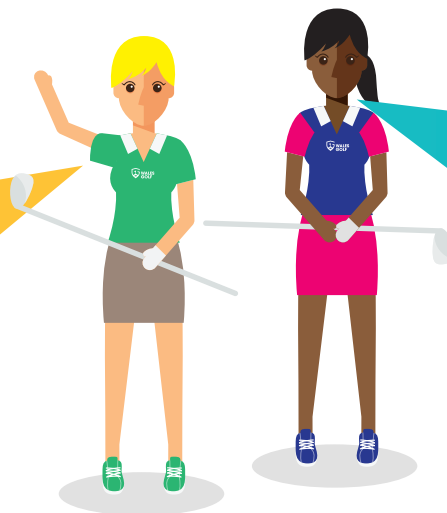
- Encouragement and support
- Other people taking that step along with them
- Occasional 'tough love' e.g. a mentor insisting that they should play with someone new!
- A gradual introduction to competitions - more fun competitions in addition to more serious ones



They didn't appreciate:

- Being pressurised into competition before they felt ready

"Great, got my " handicap at last!
Can't wait to play
in the Diddley"!



"Great, she's got her
handicap at last!
One more for our
ladies' team in the
Cup this year"!

TOP TIP

Don't pressurise – if your new golfers do agree to play in a comp, they may be slower .. probably be nervous .. and may make mistakes. Make allowances for these.

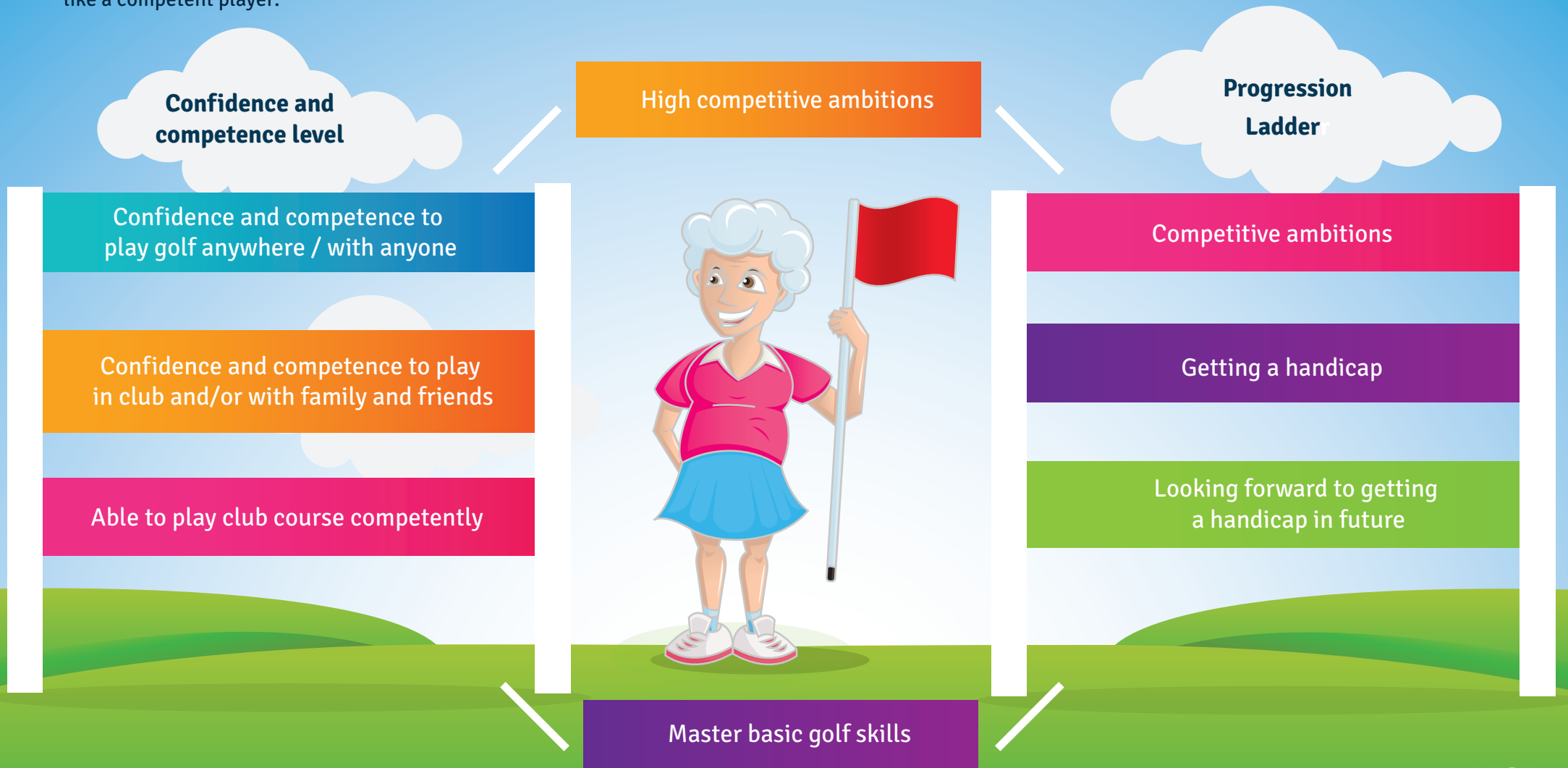
Be kind .. be courteous .. be encouraging ..
and they'll be better and more confident next time!

PROGRESSION

How fast new golfers climb the progression ladder will depend on their reasons for playing, confidence, ambitions and the time they have available.

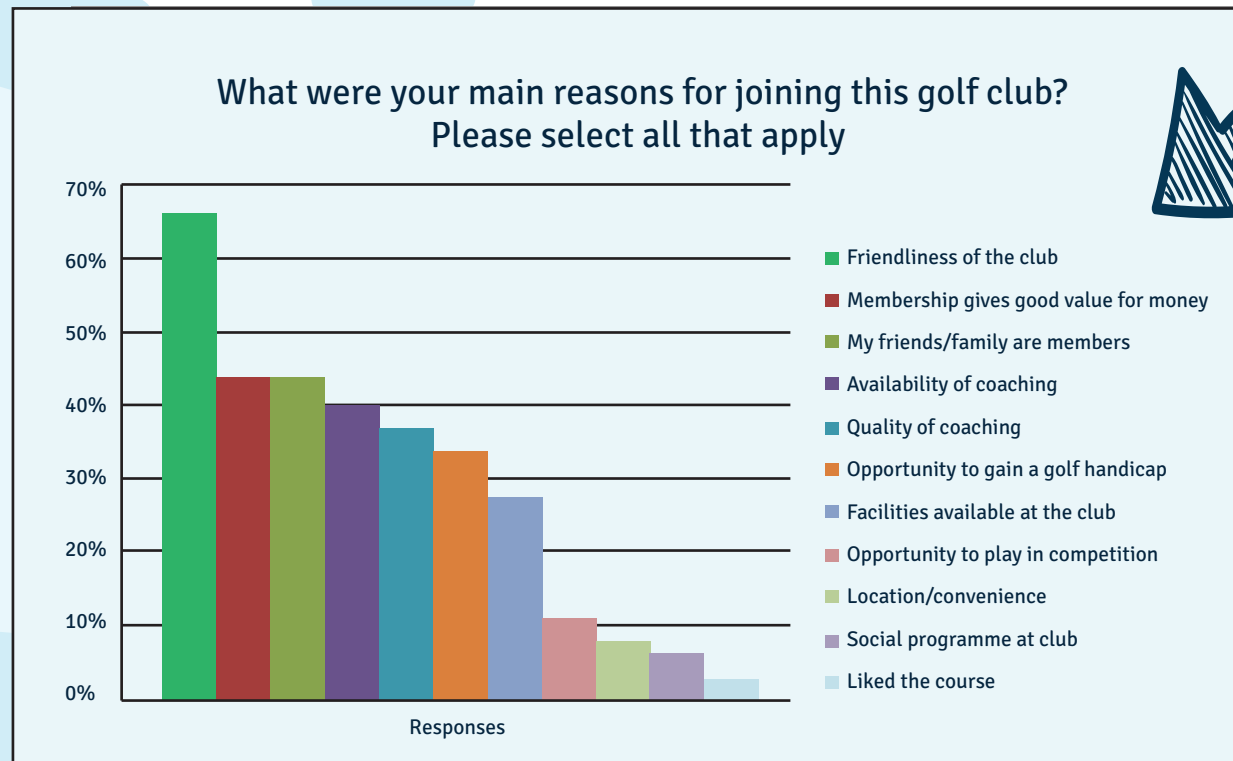
There were vast differences in rates of progress, from those who had little time to practice and were slowly progressing toward putting in their first card, to those who in year 2 were already playing competitively for their club. There are two ladders, one based on competence and confidence and other based on progression.

This is because even though some players were progressing to a handicap and going into competitions, they still lacked confidence and only sometimes felt like a competent player.



IT'S NOT JUST THE GOLF.. IT'S THE PEOPLE

Why starters will decide to play at YOUR club –



The main reason

**FRIENDLINESS
OF CLUB**

THE PEOPLE OUR PARTICIPANTS APPRECIATED...



COMMITTED ORGANISERS

People who continually engaged with the new golfer cohort (e.g captains).
The pro can't do it all – they've got next year's new golfers to coach as well!

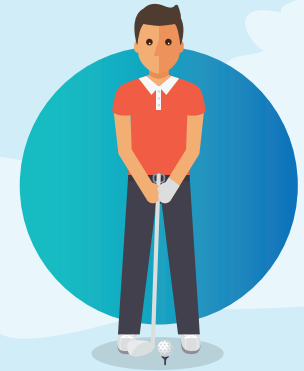


ENCOURAGERS AND WELCOMERS

Any other members who interacted with them socially, encouraged their progress and enjoyment of golf, suggested meeting up for a game, offered to come along with them to their first club competition, invited them to an awayday or other event, etc.

PGA PROFESSIONAL

Available to give ad hoc lessons, advice on equipment and clothing.
Women appreciated professionals who stocked the shop with a range of female items.



MENTORS

Existing members who volunteered to play the course with new golfers, helping with course management, rules and etiquette, confidence boosting. Less formal mentoring arrangements worked better e.g mentors volunteering when it suited them and paired with different new golfers each time.



'New2Golf works best when all these people get involved .. having a N2G team ensures you'll still be looking after your new golfers well even if your professional moves on, your captain is ill or your organiser is on holiday!'

ANYTHING ELSE?

Here are a few more things new golfers asked for; your club is probably doing some of them already, but there may be others you could consider:

More dialogue between PGA professional/coaching staff and club management so management have a better idea of new golfers' needs.

'Starter sets' of golf clubs available to buy.

Reciprocal arrangements with other clubs for New2Golf participants to play at a reduced rate.

Weekend course time available for new golfers.

More consistent communication channels - e-mail, text, Facebook or WhatsApp, whichever works best – ask the group!

More advice on equipment/clothing, more availability of ladies' equipment/clothing in the pro shop – otherwise, discount arrangements with local stockists.

Monthly socials for all new golfers.

More information on handicaps (including 9 hole options).



SOME OF OUR YEAR 3 GOLFERS ASKED FOR

Make it easier to find playing partners –
WhatsApp group, Facebook group, Noticeboard?

More information on club procedures, like
competition formats, entries, how handicaps work, etc.

More fun/social competitions.

More ladies' Away days and club weekends.

WE'VE DONE ALL THIS AND STILL THEY WON'T JOIN!!

PEOPLE WHO WERE NO LONGER ENGAGED REPORTED:

- Lack of time to improve e.g. working full time, child care responsibilities
- Membership options were not value for money, often due to lack of time
- Joined a different club, often because of family connections
- Preferred to pay and play



TAKE A LONG TERM VIEW

If your club has given these new golfers a great golfing experience and a warm welcome, when the time is right you want YOUR club to be their first choice. So..

- Invite them to become a social member
- Keep in touch with them once or twice a year
- Invite them to future New2Golf lessons
- Offer a discounted pay and play rate for previous New2Golf participants

AND IN THE SHORT TERM . . .

The average conversion rate to trial membership is 57% in Wales. If your conversion rate is below this even though you've followed our advice, look at who you're targeting for New2Golf, perhaps target other markets where people are more likely to have the time and motivation to engage more regularly with golf. Ask your Development Officer to help you as they have access to the latest research on target markets for golf!

FINALLY....

The new golfers we spoke to described golf as ...

ADDICTIVE

ENJOYABLE

FRUSTRATING

FUN!

SOCIABLE

They want to continue playing and progressing – your club is an important part of their golfing journey!