

# Advancing Women in Golf through the Charter.

## CASE STUDY: ACUSHNET

Acushnet, the parent company of golf brands Titleist and FootJoy, has been a pioneer in implementing The R&A's Women in Golf Charter within the manufacturing sector.

This case study report provides a detailed examination of Acushnet's implementation journey, exploring the motivations, strategic initiatives and outcomes of their diversity and inclusion efforts.

The case highlights how Acushnet has addressed industry-specific barriers, such as gender imbalances in recruitment and golf's historical image, while aligning these efforts with global corporate values. Their experience offers actionable insights for other organisations in sport and beyond.

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

### Company Overview

Acushnet is a global leader in golf equipment and apparel, employing over 400 people in the UK alone. Despite its reputation as a top-tier golf brand, Acushnet historically reflected the wider industry's gender imbalance, with low female representation both in its workforce and in golf participation generally.



### Engagement with the Women in Golf Charter

In late 2020/early 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Acushnet signed The R&A's Women in Golf Charter. The move was driven by:

- Persistent recruitment challenges, especially in attracting women to roles such as sales and club fitting.
- Leadership alignment with the Charter's values.
- The Charter's compatibility with Acushnet's culture and its potential to demonstrate authentic commitment to inclusion.

The Acushnet team was motivated by a desire to make golf careers welcoming to women and to align with company culture rather than impose quotas.

### Introduction and interview July 2025

In July 2025 Helen Platt (Swedish Golf Federation) and Carol Lourens (FLOOD Golf, South Africa) interviewed Matthew Johnson, Sue Petterson, Fiona Hood and Herbie Johnson on Acushnet's best-practice implementation journey of their Women in Golf charter pledges. This case study covers five main areas of interest:

- LEADERSHIP & OWNERSHIP
- STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION
- CULTURAL IMPACT
- BROADER INCLUSION & INDUSTRY IMPACT
- REFLECTIONS & NEXT STEPS



## LEADERSHIP & OWNERSHIP

Matthew Johnson played a leading role, ensuring strong backing from senior leadership with initiatives signed off globally from Acushnet's CEO and Chief People Officer to ensure cultural alignment.

Due to sign-off at global level, it was easy to implement charter pledges by embedding work into existing roles, without the need for a standalone team or dedicated budget. Initiatives have been integrated into current operations and driven by HR and management.

Company-wide awareness of the Charter: The Charter is mentioned in job adverts as well as during internal onboarding of new employees.

We don't want to be seen as box-ticking. This has to fit our culture, which is why we took this to our CEO and Chief People Officer to make sure it was signed off globally.

MATTHEW JOHNSON,  
GENERAL MANAGER,  
ACUSHNET EUROPE

## STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

### Development of Pledges

Acushnet crafted five pledges emphasising authenticity, global applicability and cultural alignment, focusing on:

- Attracting and retaining women across business functions.
- Promoting female participation in golf.
- Enhancing policies and workplace culture to support women's career progression.

### Metrics and Benchmarking

Acushnet has recognised the importance of formalising metrics and benchmarking to track progress in advancing women in golf and fostering diversity and inclusion. While current efforts focus on organic growth and recruitment quality, leadership has discussed and is considering future metrics to ensure accountability and visibility of progress.

#### Current Approach

- Recruitment advertising has been revised to highlight Charter membership and encourage female applicants
- No formal quotas or KPIs are currently in place, as leadership emphasises hiring based on merit while appealing to a wider talent pool.
- Progress is measured qualitatively through increased female recruitment volumes, internal participation in golf, and positive employee feedback.

#### Future Considerations

Leadership has discussed implementing benchmarks such as:

- Balanced shortlists in recruitment (eg ensuring gender representation in final interview stages).
- Tracking year-on-year female application and hiring trends.
- Monitoring participation rates in internal golf and inclusion events.

These measures would complement ongoing initiatives while preserving a focus on selecting the best candidate regardless of gender.

#### Long-Term Perspective

Acushnet views metrics and benchmarking as part of a multi-year cultural shift. By increasing awareness of golf as a viable career pathway and attracting a broader applicant pool, gender ratios are expected to improve organically without compromising on talent quality.

Both HR and senior leadership acknowledge that formal metrics will become increasingly important to demonstrate impact to stakeholders, aligning with best practices across industries and supporting sustained progress.

## STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

### Challenges faced while implementing their Charter pledges

#### 1 Low female participation in golf overall

- In the UK, only about 15% of golfers are women, compared to higher rates (40–45%) in some European countries.
- This limited pool of women familiar with the golf industry affects the number of female applicants for roles.

#### 2 Recruiting women into traditionally male-dominated roles

- Roles like sales managers and fitters attracted almost no female applicants initially.
- Even after efforts to promote inclusivity, growth in female applicants was slow – a “long-term project rather than a quick fix.”

#### 3 Perception barriers about working in golf

- Many people see jobs in golf as golf-specific rather than business roles, deterring talented non-golfers (including women) from applying.
- Job advert wording that implied candidates “must be golfers” unintentionally excluded non-golfers.

#### 4 Industry-wide challenge rather than just Acushnet’s

- Matthew Johnson noted this is not only an Acushnet issue but an industry-wide problem.
- Attracting women to golf careers requires collaboration between companies, governing bodies, and federations, which can be difficult to coordinate.

#### 5 Need for cultural change, not just targets

- They deliberately avoided quotas or fixed gender targets, aiming instead for organic growth by attracting talent.
- This means progress takes time, requiring patience and resilience.

#### 6 Misconceptions about authenticity of diversity efforts

- Matthew stressed that diversity initiatives can be seen as “box-ticking” if not done authentically.
- Ensuring changes align with company values was essential but required extra work to gain leadership buy-in globally.

## STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

### Impactful employee events and initiatives

Acushnet has implemented a variety of events and initiatives aimed at engaging employees, fostering inclusion, and promoting women's participation in golf. These initiatives support both internal cultural development and external industry engagement.

#### Golf Participation Initiatives for Employees

- **Beginner Golf Lessons:** Structured sessions led by Fiona and Jo, as well as ambassadors (eg, Sophie Walker) introduced employees – especially women – to golf, providing access to equipment and peer support.
- **Employee Golf Scrambles & Tournaments:** Annual events promoted camaraderie, easing beginners into play.
- **Improver Golf Community:** Informal groups for practice encouraged ongoing engagement beyond lessons.

#### Internal Cultural and Inclusion Activities

- **International Women's Day Campaigns:** Profiled female employees' journeys across internal and external platforms.
- **Employee Recognition Awards:** Annual ceremonies aligned with company values celebrated contributions to inclusion.
- **Mission, Vision and Values:** Reinforced inclusive culture through integrated recognition programs.

#### Golf-Specific External Engagement

- **Team Titleist Ladies Days:** Exclusive events at venues like Sunningdale Heath grew networks and female participation.
- **Sponsorship of Women in Golf Awards:** Financial and branding support amplified Acushnet's commitment to inclusion.
- **Ambassador Engagement:** Contracted professionals (eg Lottie Woad, Sophie Walker) featured in campaigns and events, inspiring employees and fans.

#### Diversity and Inclusion Infrastructure

- **Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DIB) Council:** Oversaw global expansion of inclusion programs.
- **Associate Resource Groups (ARGs):** Regional ARGs, including Women in Golf, offered localised forums for inclusion efforts.



When the colleague who ran the beginner sessions left, Jo and I picked it up. We've tried to build a community for improver golfers.

FIONA HOOD,  
GRAPHIC DESIGNER,  
ACUSHNET EUROPE

Pictured above: Beginner golf lessons

## STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

### Recruitment and Development Engagement

- **Female-Only Job Boards & Inclusive Ads:** Recruitment explicitly referenced Charter membership and inclusivity.
- **University Outreach:** Partnerships with Birmingham and Loughborough universities targeted young female talent.
- **Leadership Development:** Participation in Women in Golf Leadership/ Foundation Programmes built skills and inspired peers.

### HR Policy Reforms

Key reforms included enhanced maternity and adoption policies, alongside holistic benefits reviews to improve support structures.

### Recruitment Strategies

Acushnet improved recruitment via female-only job boards, gender-inclusive language, explicit Charter promotion, and partnerships with advocates to broaden reach, resulting in milestones like hiring its first female fitter in 2023.

### Marketing and Brand Initiatives

Through sponsorships (eg LPGA, LET) and community-building efforts such as 'Team Titleist Ladies Days,' Acushnet showcased female role models and fostered inclusive engagement, with their event growing in participation.



## CULTURAL IMPACT

### Organisational and Cultural Change

Internal engagement included the creation of a Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DIB) Council, International Women's Day campaigns, and beginner golf sessions. Leadership's visible sponsorship reinforced commitment, while resources were reallocated to fund initiatives.



Talent will shine through... appealing to more people will naturally improve ratios.

SUE PETERSSON,  
TALENT ACQUISITION  
BUSINESS PARTNER

Pictured above: Team Titleist Ladies Day

## CULTURAL IMPACT

### Internal Cultural and Inclusion Activities

- **International Women's Day Campaigns:**
  - Featured profiles of female employees across departments on internal platforms (SharePoint) and LinkedIn.
  - Showcased diverse career paths (eg HR, operations, finance) and highlighted their personal stories.
- **Employee Recognition Awards:**
  - Introduced during the pandemic, evolving into annual award ceremonies aligned with company values.
  - Recognised contributions such as recruitment innovation (e.g., Sue Pettersson's award for promoting female hiring).
- **Mission, Vision, Values Integration:**
  - Corporate values reinforced through cultural initiatives and recognition, supporting inclusivity and collaboration.

### Recruitment-Focused Engagement

- **Female-Only Job Boards & Inclusive Ads:**
  - Recruitment campaigns explicitly stated Acushnet's Charter commitment and encouraged women to apply.
  - Adoption of inclusive language to reduce gender bias in job descriptions.
- **University Outreach:**
  - Partnerships with institutions like Birmingham and Loughborough to attract young female talent.
  - Focused on career paths both within and adjacent to golf.

### Diversity and Inclusion Infrastructure

- **Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (DIB) Council:**
  - Foundational governance group overseeing initiatives, including the Women in Golf Charter implementation.
  - Expanded globally, with regional Associate Resource Groups (eg Women in Golf ARG in Sweden led by Kajsa Pahlman).
- **Leadership Development Programmes:**
  - Participation in the Women in Golf Leadership and Foundation Programmes to upskill female employees.
  - Graduates often shared their experiences internally, inspiring colleagues.

### Outcomes and Impact

- Increased female hires in the Branding team from one to seven people over the past two and a half years.
  - Hiring women is now part of company mentality rather than a forced exercise.
  - More inclusive onboarding for women joining the business.
- Growth in female applicant numbers for traditionally male roles.
- Cultural shift reflected in employee engagement and participation in internal golf activities.
- Elevated industry influence through British Golf Industry Association (BGIA) leadership and visible role modelling.

When Laura joined Customer Services, we encouraged her to have a go at golf. It's not about being good at it, it's about being part of the culture

FIONA HOOD,  
GRAPHIC DESIGNER,  
ACUSHNET EUROPE

## BROADER INCLUSION & INDUSTRY IMPACT

Attracting women to golf careers requires collaboration between companies, governing bodies, and federations, which can be difficult to coordinate.

Individual company efforts alone can't shift perceptions fast enough.

### Golf-Specific External Engagement

- **Team Titleist Ladies Day Events:**
  - Organised at premier venues (eg Sunningdale Heath), attracting growing attendance (from ~10 to 20+ over three years).
  - Fostered female golf networks among employees, brand fans, and customers, resulting in WhatsApp groups and continued peer play.
- **Sponsorship of Women in Golf Awards:**
  - Acushnet contributed funding and sponsored an award, further signalling commitment to women in the sport.
- **Ambassador Engagement:**
  - Professional golfers (eg Lottie Woad) contracted by Acushnet participated in marketing campaigns and events, inspiring employees and external audiences alike.

The challenge is getting women into the industry, not just into Acushnet. It's not just our issue – it's an industry-wide problem.

MATTHEW JOHNSON,  
GENERAL MANAGER,  
ACUSHNET EUROPE



At our first all-ladies Team Titleist event we had low double digits, but now we're up to about 20. The women who've attended have even started their own WhatsApp group to stay connected

HERBIE JOHNSON,  
MARKETING &  
COMMUNICATIONS



Pictured above: Women in Golf Awards; Lottie Woad

## REFLECTION & NEXT STEPS

### Broader reflections on industry perception

- Pointed out that golf can feel intimidating for beginners, regardless of gender.
- Reinforced that creating welcoming spaces and peer groups (rather than just formal training) helps sustain participation.

### Lessons and Best Practices

Key lessons include the importance of authenticity, policy reform, visible success stories, long-term commitment, and collaborative, industry-wide action.

#### Advice to others starting out:

- Be authentic. Embed diversity work into company culture — don't treat it as a quota exercise.
- Ensure leadership endorsement to avoid "box-ticking."
- Change takes time, implementation might benefit from earlier pipeline-building and stakeholder management efforts.

### Proudest moments

- Hiring the first female fitter.
- Seeing female headcount rise naturally without quotas.
- Building genuine community events for women golfers.

### Future Directions

Acushnet plans to benchmark gender representation, strengthen partnerships with universities and federations, expand global resource groups, and sponsor external inclusion initiatives.

- Continue organic growth of female workforce.
- Build on beginner/improver golf programmes.

## Conclusion

**Acushnet's integration of diversity, inclusion and belonging into recruitment, branding, and culture showcases a replicable model for transforming gender representation in golf and beyond. By aligning authenticity, long-term vision, and collaboration, Acushnet is driving both internal transformation and broader industry change.**

For more information on Acushnet's Women in Golf Charter journey, email [herbie\\_johnson@acushnetgolf.com](mailto:herbie_johnson@acushnetgolf.com)  
For more information on The R&A Women in Golf Charter, visit [www.randa.org](http://www.randa.org)

