

# R&A

# Developing Golf.

Sharing best practice for the benefit of the sport

ISSUE  
**SIX**



**Ten million  
more adults  
are playing golf**

Since 2016, popularity is surging  
across all of The R&A's affiliated markets

“ This initiative is about taking STEM learning out of the classroom and onto golf courses and engaging students by helping them to apply their knowledge in an outdoor setting. ”

– Jenny Bledge

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# Contents.

## **04. BIGGA and GCSAA roll out First Green initiative in the UK**

New programme will see golf courses become education hubs

## **10. Research shows golf's popularity is still surging ahead**

Golf is now attracting ten million more adults than it did in 2016

## **14. Case Study: Sweden**

The Swedish Golf Federation looks at how clubs can set up courses better to improve the experience for beginners and women

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## **Annual Review 2022**

Our annual review for affiliates is now available to read – [click here](#)

### **About Developing Golf magazine**

**Developing Golf magazine** is a key element of the golf development alliance we wish to create with affiliates globally to share best practice. This alliance also includes a new R&A Portal, increased funding support and consulting with affiliates on the ground across the year to develop the strongest activation plans, supported by R&A-created global assets.

**Phil Anderton, Chief Development Officer – The R&A**





# Turning golf courses into classrooms

Golf courses across the United Kingdom are set to become education hubs for eager students as part of an exciting new programme











Jackie Davidson

### Can you summarise the fundamental concept of First Green?

**JB:** This initiative is about taking STEM learning out of the classroom and onto golf courses and engaging students by helping them to apply their knowledge in an outdoor setting.

It offers a hands-on approach to learning that provides children with the opportunity to enhance their skills and understanding of STEM, while opening a whole range of possibilities for their futures.

There is such a wide variety of career paths within STEM, and it's not just the usual ones like science or engineering, but also greenkeeping.

First Green is aimed at children aged nine and up, so we're targeting upper primary and then into secondary schools as well. When it comes to secondary students, there's more of a career focus to it and a bigger opportunity to show young people the pathways into a career within golf.

### Why did BIGGA decide to launch this initiative?

**SS:** We've taken it up for several different reasons, one of them being to promote the profession of greenkeeping.

We're very focused on highlighting greenkeeping as a career path and making sure that greenkeeping is seen by children and young people as a viable option.

It's a profession that requires a lot of skill, education and knowledge, and yet a lot of the work greenkeepers do is unseen.

We want to make it visible, to highlight the work greenkeepers do, the dedication they have

A collaboration between the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association (BIGGA) and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) will see the First Green initiative rolled out in the UK.

First Green is an innovative environmental and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) education and outreach programme that transforms golf courses into learning labs.

BIGGA's Chief Operating Officer, Sami Strutt, and the organisation's Workforce Project Manager, Jenny Bledge, sat down to discuss the huge potential of the programme.

## Snapshot: First Green

Founded in 1997, First Green is the only STEM education and environmental outreach programme in the United States, Canada and now the United Kingdom that uses golf courses as learning labs. The First Green curriculum benefits young students by helping them apply their classroom knowledge in an outdoor setting.

By understanding how STEM concepts connect, students find new inspiration in their schoolwork and the possibility of a career in golf or a STEM-related field.

and the importance of it, both in terms of the health of the sport and the wider environment.

Also, by engaging with the local schools, it brings the children into the golf club environment, which for many kids will be their first experience of that.

There can be a perception of golf clubs as being exclusive places, but this opens them up and broadens their appeal in the wider community.

### **What has the initial response been to First Green being introduced in the UK?**

**SS:** Since introducing the concept last November, we've generated a lot of interest within our membership.

Jenny's role was created to proactively address workforce challenges in the industry and First Green is central to that.

We've had a lot of enquiries from clubs up and down the country who want to deliver First Green events.

Another thing to mention is that the focus of the home nations is increasingly upon equality, diversity and inclusion – there's nothing quite as diverse as a group of schoolchildren.

We believe that First Green is going to help us deliver on a lot of the markers that are being led by the allied associations within the golf industry.

**JB:** We're running some pilot events this month now that children are back in schools and we'll get some valuable feedback from those.

This is a greenkeeper-led initiative for our members, so there is huge opportunity to build and strengthen connections with the community.

In establishing those links, it can help with golf courses getting their GEO certification as well.

We've been in contact with many schools and learning hubs to talk about the initiative and they've all been very keen to help us promote it, which will be really important when our members reach out to schools.

### **What costs are involved?**

**JB:** It's free as we don't charge schools for the provision of the programme. The only cost would come from, for example, having to get a bus to the course.

I know some schools will ask for voluntary donations from parents to cover the costs, others will have funds in place, but we also have plans to offer bursaries to support the hosting of field trips.

Through a Friends of First Green scheme, we're also inviting companies to support the initiative to ensure we make it accessible and inclusive to all.

**“By engaging with local schools, it brings the children into the golf club environment, which for many kids will be their first experience of that.”**





### What is the educational substance of the programme?

**JB:** We received 11 lesson plans when we bought the licence, but we obviously need to adapt them for the UK.

There are four different curricula across the UK, so we've commissioned a company called STEM Learning to help us remap those lesson plans.

This gives greenkeepers a clear understanding of what they need to do for the event and it also shows a teacher how it will tick all the boxes for what the children are currently learning and how it's relevant to the curriculum. That is exactly what the schools need in order to buy into First Green and realise the benefits it can bring.

It's an exciting opportunity to combine that STEM learning with the practical element of seeing what greenkeepers do, how they solve problems on a golf course, and the skills they employ on a day-to-day basis.

On top of that, the kids get a swag bag of things to take away with them, including things like stickers, pens and other fun items, but also information for parents telling them what their children have been doing and promoting golf courses as environmentally sustainable areas.

### Let's say I'm a student attending a First Green event – what will I actually do?

**SS:** The children will spend around 20 to 25 minutes at one of four or five stations set up on a safe area on the golf course.

The greenkeeper and school leader will have decided what's happening on those stations – whether it be soils, cool tools on the green, water conservation and so on.

The intention is that the kids will be able to get very hands-on with it – it's not a passive experience of just watching the greenkeeper do something. They'll do things like learn how to use a stimpmeter, how to use a prism or how to measure the surface area of a tee or a bunker.

In addition to that, at one station they'll actually be playing golf, so they'll learn how to putt for example.

This is where you broaden that impact by introducing kids to the game of golf. You never know, we might discover the next Rory McIlroy!

### Is it just children and young people who will stand to benefit from First Green?

**JB:** There is scope to take this further and run adult STEM field trips. Whether it's ex-military personnel or providing people a second career option – there's a really broad range of applications for this initiative.



“It's an exciting opportunity to combine that STEM learning with the practical element of seeing what greenkeepers do.”

My dream for this would be that it's a regular thing on golf courses across the country and we have local schools visiting every year.

To think that schools and golf clubs would have a First Green event on their calendars every year, for it to be part of the curriculum, is an inspiring idea. And beyond that, to deliver that same benefit to adults, maybe even the parents of these children who themselves might be learning about the possibility of careers in greenkeeping – there's lots of potential.

### What is the follow-up to ensure that those who enjoy a First Green event are given further opportunities to pursue it?

**SS:** This is where the relationship between the clubs and the schools comes in.

First Green is something that can facilitate bringing the children into the golf club, but it's





BIGGA's Karl Hansell (left) and Jenny Bledge (right), with BIGGA members Peter Pattenden and Lewis Whatsley-Parsons, who took part in a First Green-themed event on the FootJoy campsite at The Open

that relationship between the golf club and the schools that can make clubs a more community-based environment.

We'll build a database of schools and clubs that have engaged with the initiative. From there we can work with associations, like the home nations and their development officers, on ways to establish a range of environments where we can welcome kids in to nurture that interest in greenkeeping and golf.

Our initial aim is to get this off the ground and then see what we can do next, but we've certainly got lots of ideas in the pipeline.

We hope that we can encourage interest in the industry as a whole, not just greenkeeping. ●

To find out more click [HERE](#)

## Six benefits of First Green

# ONE

### Applying lessons

Learning labs bring the classroom to life on the golf course.

# TWO

### Inspiring students

Sparking students' interest in STEM through hands-on experiences.

# THREE

### Building community

Raising awareness for conservation brings people together for a common cause.

# FOUR

### Strengthening futures

More interest in STEM advances our youth, the economy and society at large.

# FIVE

### Advancing golf

The future of the game depends on sustainability.

# SIX

### Having fun

Field trips to a golf course bring school lessons to life in new and engaging ways.



# Global participation: Golf attracts 10m more adults since 2016

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Research across all of The R&A's affiliated markets shows the popularity of the game has surged before, during and now after the pandemic





**“We are working closely with our affiliated national federations and stakeholders within golf to sustain this momentum. We thank them for their efforts as we aim to ensure that golf is thriving for years to come.”**

**Phil Anderton,  
Chief Development Officer  
at The R&A**

**New** global participation figures show an additional ten million adult golfers are playing the sport worldwide since 2016.

According to research undertaken by the governing body, there are now 39.6 million on-course golfers (9 and 18-hole) in The R&A's affiliated markets of Asia, Africa, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Europe, the Middle East and Oceania.

The growth trend began before the onset of Covid-19 and continued during the pandemic – up 34% from 29.6 million on-course golfers in 2016.

The sport has since continued to increase in popularity post-pandemic – participation is up 15% from 34.5 million on-course players in 2020.

The report also highlights that 61.2 million adults (outside the USA and Mexico) engage with the sport in some format, which is the first time an estimate has been made beyond on-course activity to include alternative-only formats, such as par-3 golf, indoor simulator golf and driving range use.

Phil Anderton, Chief Development Officer at The R&A, said, “Golf’s popularity has surged in recent years, which is reflected in a significant increase in the number of people playing the sport in both traditional on-course and alternative formats.

“It is notable that ten million more golfers are playing on the course since 2016, but it is also important that millions of others are engaged in golf through many other alternative formats, such as driving ranges, which are so vital to the growth of the sport.

“It also underlines why effective and impactful participation programmes are important for encouraging more people into the sport and retaining them in greater numbers.

“We are working closely with our affiliated national federations and stakeholders within golf to sustain this momentum.

“We thank them for their efforts as we aim to ensure that golf is thriving for years to come.”

The R&A is continuing to honour its commitment to invest £200 million over ten years in developing golf, including sustained work to encourage participation by promoting the health benefits of the sport through a global campaign. ●



Golfers on the rise

61.2m

Adults (outside USA  
and Mexico) who  
engage with the sport  
in some format

25%

Women now make  
up almost a quarter  
of adult registered  
golfers in R&A  
affiliated markets  
worldwide

39.6m

On-course golfers in  
Asia, Africa, Canada,  
the Caribbean,  
Central and South  
America, Europe,  
the Middle East and  
Oceania

15%

The increase, from  
34.5 million, since  
2020







## The biggest on-course adult golfer markets

### By Country

- 1 Japan 8.1m
- 2 Canada 5.6m
- 3 Republic of Korea 5.4m
- 4 England 3.4m
- 5 Germany 2.1m

### By Continent

- 1 Asia 22.5m
- 2 Europe 21.1m

• The R&A's affiliated markets only.



### Data source

The Global Golf Participation Report was produced for The R&A by Sporting Insights. [View the report here](#)



# Setting courses up better for beginners and women.

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The Swedish Golf Federation has been looking at how clubs can set up courses to improve the experience for more players





**The** issue of golf course set-up is firmly on the radar in Sweden, where measures are being implemented to make the game more accessible to all.



**Gunnar Hakansson** is General Secretary at the Swedish Golf Federation, which – in partnership with the PGA of Sweden, golf course architects, club managers and the Swedish Greenkeepers Association – is placing a focus on how best to lay out courses to cater to beginners and women golfers.

He explains the importance of the initiative, its potential impacts, and the steps golf clubs can take to improve the playing experience for groups of people who are sometimes overlooked.

### **Why is golf course set-up an important issue?**

In Sweden, women account for around 25% of golfers, but they are playing on courses predominantly designed by men, for men. It means you have course set-ups that are only truly accessible for skilled and experienced golfers. The length of courses and the hazards they present are barriers for many people – whether it's beginners, children or women – and this can take away the sense of enjoyment.

Golf should be a game for all, so that is why it is important to look at this issue of how courses are set up and see what can be done.

All the while, we are making sure none of the changes have a negative impact on the playing experience for others.

### Case Study

“Golf should be a game for all, so that is why it is important to look at this issue of how courses are set up.”





## Goals

- Clubs involved in the programme should produce a development plan for their course.
- The plan should be based on knowledge about the player's skills, course architecture and maintenance of the course.
- Depending on ambition and budget, a golf course architect should be involved.

“ We believe it's common sense that making courses more accessible will encourage more people to play. ”

### **How did it come to light that this was something that needed to be looked at?**

We spent many hours studying statistics on how people are playing – on swing speed, on how a ball carries, how far it rolls.

With this kind of understanding, you can see how some courses are not set up to be accessible for some people.

It even comes down to the surfaces and what the conditions are at different times of the year.

In Sweden, for instance, we have a lot of clay courses and at some times of the year, the ball will roll less on those surfaces. That punishes less skilled people, who benefit more from courses where the ball can roll further.

### **What is being done to address this in Sweden?**

The idea is to have a golf club development programme, where golf clubs can look at their course and say, 'Okay, let's see what the issues are and what can be done about it'.

Of course, how far you go with this can depend on your budget; if you have a lot to spend, you can bring experts in, like golf course architects, and you can invest a lot.

But even on a low budget, there are a lot of smaller, less expensive changes you can make that will create a positive change.

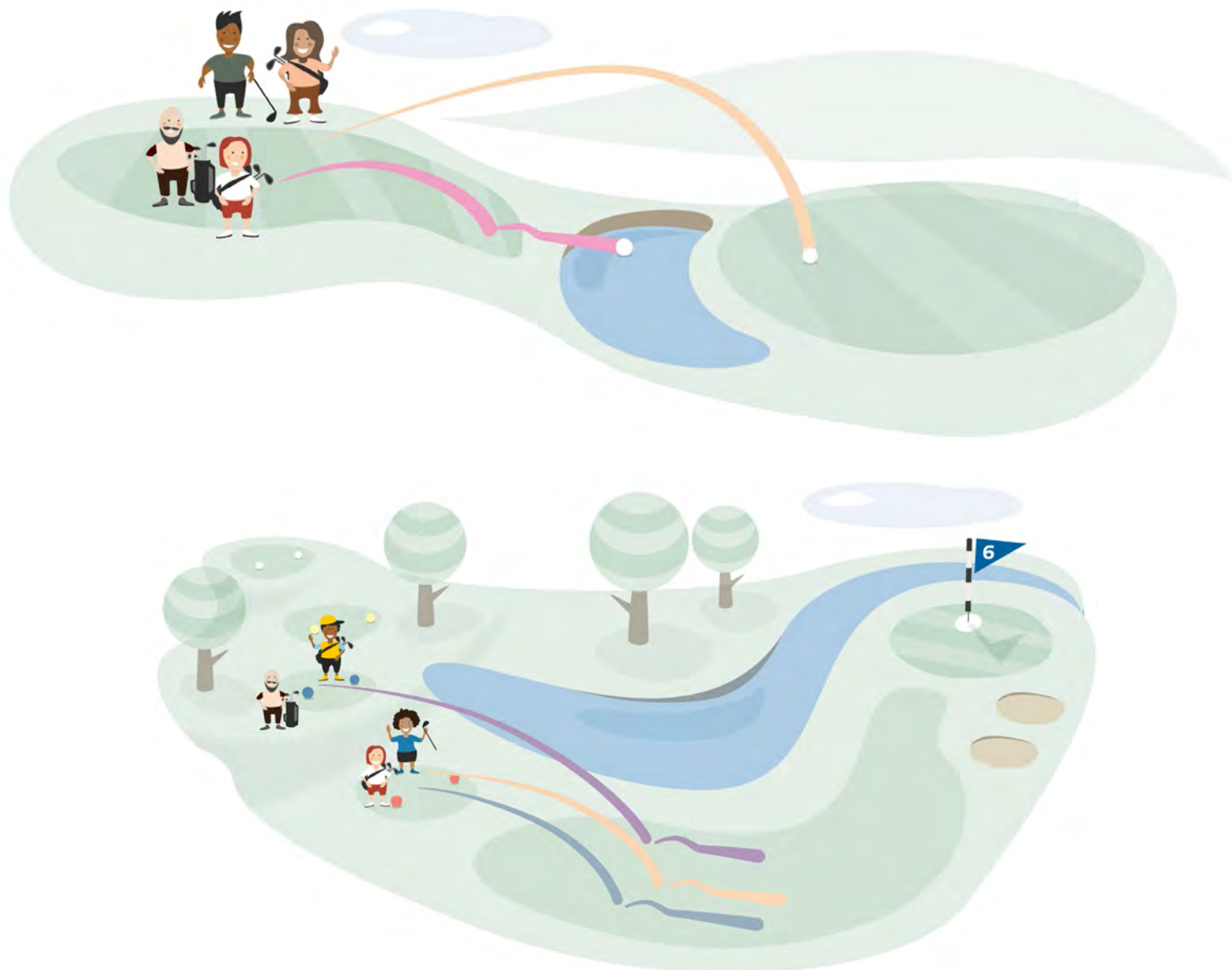
### **Are many golf clubs in Sweden on board with this initiative?**

Of course, we cannot do all the clubs at the same time, but we had a pilot going in 2022 involving about ten clubs and it was a success.

This year, we are supporting 20 or more clubs to undertake a programme, which involves educating them on the importance of golf course set-up and looking at an action plan to put into place.

That plan could take anything from a few weeks to a few years. It varies depending on the course and how big the changes are that need to be made.





Our estimation is that around half of the clubs will do this, so in five to ten years, perhaps 250 clubs will have done this programme.

### **Are there other things golf clubs could be doing beyond making material changes to the course?**

One aspect of this is about educating staff at golf clubs so they can help people better understand the course they are playing.

If staff can appreciate the skill level of a player and how far they can hit the ball, they can advise them on how the playing experience will be for them.

It may not be suitable for someone to play from the back tees, so you can make the experience less daunting and more fun by providing the appropriate advice to people on where to play from and a little bit on how to play the course.

**Do you believe that a keener focus on golf**

### **course set-up will grow the game in Sweden?**

We can't prove it yet, but we believe it's common sense that making courses more accessible will encourage more people to play.

There are many courses that, if they were built today, would not look like they do now. We have more knowledge and more experience to have a better understanding of what is required.

This is not about a reset, there is no threat to anything or a challenge to traditions – it's just making adjustments and listening to people who have not been listened to before. ●

## **Purpose**

**Increasing knowledge and understanding in golf clubs for how different players' physical skills influence the playing experience.**

# R&A



Contents 

