

<p>Institution: University of Lincoln</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 26 – Sport and Exercise Science, Leisure and Tourism</p>
<p>Title of case study: Widening national participation in golf</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Comprehensive recommendations from research into barriers to participation in golf were adopted by a National Governing Body (NGB) of sport, England Golf, to inform their Whole Sport Plan (2013-17). In particular, the research focused on England Golf’s GolfMark scheme: the national initiative used to widen participation. Substantial changes to the GolfMark scheme were made based upon the findings of the research. For example, the awareness that the barriers to engaging in GolfMark included a club’s perceived inability to change and individuals’ lack of knowledge, led to the development of an online signposting and resource system to guide and support clubs in achieving GolfMark status. The intended consequent outcome of increasing and widening participation in golf also contributes to many of the objectives of Sport England, the government body providing funding underpinning the existence of England Golf.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Golf participation is in decline in England, with the numbers engaged (more than once a week) falling significantly from a high of 948,300 (2008) to 772,800 (2013) (Sport England, 2013). In addition to this trend, a skewed participation demographic pattern towards older, white males in higher socio-economic groups continues to exist, despite evidence revealing that more young people and those from lower socio-economic groups are becoming involved in golf (Sport England, 2011).</p> <p>The demographic make-up of golf is effectively exclusionary, contravening Sport England’s terms of reference regarding ‘creating sporting opportunities in every community’. The decline in participation also impacts on Sport England’s aims of having ‘25% fewer 16-18 year olds dropping out of five sports’, and has implications for wider government physical activity for health initiatives. Addressing this exclusionary demographic and increasing participation rates therefore assists not only England Golf, but also contributes to wider government Health of the Nation objectives.</p> <p>Research</p> <p>England Golf’s response to addressing these specific problems is GolfMark, an innovative scheme aimed at rewarding clubs for promoting beginner- and junior-friendly environments through coaching provision and the implementation of child protection and equality policies. Prior to this research, no evidence existed on the impact of such a scheme on the culture of clubs, or the extent to which they facilitate changes to the breadth and quality of participation.</p> <p>Framed around the goal of understanding and evaluating golf participation in the England, the research was focused on three main questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What are the historical-cultural forces that have led to low participation in golf among women, young people, minority ethnic groups and working classes? 2) What impact was GolfMark having in terms of widening participation in golf clubs? 3) What barriers remained to the successful implementation of GolfMark? <p>Question 1 sought to provide new insights by conducting a systematic review of barriers to participation in, and social exclusions from, sport (especially golf) [3a,c]. Question 2 was addressed through a survey of 24 club representatives, 134 members and 92 nomadic/non-members across England [3a-d]. Part of the analysis included a two-step cluster analysis, from</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

which three types of clubs emerged, categorised broadly as 'exclusive-family', 'typical' and 'cheap-male' types [3a]. Question 3 was addressed through in-depth case studies at three clubs, each representative of the three types identified, and these were located in order to take into consideration geographical influences [3a,c,e].

The key research report underpinning this case study is the Technical Report [3a], which provided an extensive and comprehensive report of the research into the historical-cultural, GolfMark, and other barriers affecting the widening of participation in golf in England. This research has also led to the development of additional research outputs on this topic [3c-e], and further research on verifying and understanding the causes of changes in participation arising from the impact of this research will be conducted.

Key findings

With respect to the three main questions, the outcomes were that:

- 1) The most important determinant of participation was socio-economic status, as traditionally powerful groups (i.e., white, middle-class men) maintain 'class homogeneity', especially through decision-making positions such as club secretary.
- 2) Club secretaries and managers agreed that GolfMark had its greatest impact on them in relation to 'gaining funding' and 'creating links with schools'. Only 30.6% of members were aware of GolfMark, and 76.1% did not know whether their club had GolfMark. Most believed that issues addressed by GolfMark were important, especially in the creation of junior- and beginner-friendly environments.
- 3) Clubs that maintain traditional structures reinforce socially exclusive cultural conventions, employ key positional personnel who actively resist change, and are less likely to progress with GolfMark. Rich, exclusive clubs are insulated from economic forces that are driving change in smaller clubs, which must adapt or perish.

Who and when conducted

The research was conducted from February 2010 to July 2011. The lead researcher was Dr David Piggott, and the co-researchers were Gary Leslie and Greg Poller (both MSc by Research students).

3. References to the research**Technical report**

[3a] Piggott, D., Leslie, G. and Poller, G. (2011). *Widening Participation in Golf: Barriers to Participation and GolfMark*. Lincoln: University of Lincoln.

Grant

[3b] Smith, M.F. and Piggott, D. (2010). *Widening Participation in Golf: Barriers to Participation and GolfMark*, Feb 2010 to Jul 2012. Funded by English Golf Union (now England Golf): £10,000.

International conference presentation

[3c] Piggott, D., Leslie, G. and Poller, G. (2012). Widening participation in English golf clubs: barriers to participation and Golfmark. Paper presented at the International Sociology of Sport Association World Congress, Glasgow, 16-18 July.

Journal publication

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[3d] Piggott, D., Leslie, G. and Poller, G. (in preparation) Capital and distinction in English golf clubs: the possibility of widening participation. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.

MSc by Research dissertation

[3e] Poller, G. (2012). *An Examination of the Barriers to Participation and Mechanisms of Social Exclusion in Golf*. MSc by Research thesis. Lincoln: University of Lincoln.

4. Details of the impact

An agreed outcome of this England Golf-funded research [3b] was the production of a technical report [3a] that was provided to key decision- and policy-makers within the organisation. The technical report's findings and recommendations were discussed in significant depth within England Golf, including at the top level at senior executive meetings. This led, in the final quarter of 2011, to dissemination down through the organisation via discussions with the regional development officers and the county development officer network. To address and impart the research findings within and throughout practice and policy, at the end of 2011 a working group was set up by England Golf to revise the GolfMark scheme. This research was highly influential in leading and shaping the revisions made to the existing GolfMark scheme [5b].

With respect to the widening participation and improving GolfMark research, recommendations made to England Golf that were adopted are grouped under membership and GolfMark, as follows [see Whole Sport Plan 2013-2107: 5c]:

Membership recommendations adopted

- 1) Offer greater range of memberships facilitating more short-term, student, junior and part-time engagement.
- 2) Promote female-friendly environments.
- 3) Appoint individuals from minority groups to prominent decision-making positions.
- 4) Re-evaluate membership selection processes and dress codes.

GolfMark recommendations adopted

- 5) Highlight long-term economic impact of GolfMark among clubs.
- 6) Reduce the complexity of the application process.
- 7) Require clubs to provide more effective infrastructures for the provision of coaching among target groups.

The revised GolfMark scheme was piloted in fourteen clubs across the country during 2012, and the success of this has led to GolfMark having a much greater focus upon clubs' overall business in relation to aspects including operations, development and marketing. The new GolfMark was then re-launched nationally in 2013, and is an integral aspect linked to one of four key performance indicators within England Golf's proposed Whole Sport Plan for the period 2013-2017 [5b-c].

One specific example of the impact derives from the finding from the research that the barriers to engaging in GolfMark included some clubs' inability to embrace and modernise in accordance with the scheme's objectives. To educate and guide clubs and individuals, in addition to the processes of accreditation and maintenance of good effective practice, the revised GolfMark now supports them through an online signposting and resource system, assisting them to both achieve and then maintain GolfMark status [5d].

There are a number of direct beneficiaries from the impact of and changes derived from this research, including:

- 1) The national governing body, England Golf, has implemented change based on recommendations to reduce the decline in participation rates and to widen participation. This has broader implications for addressing participation rate objectives regarding the whole community, and young people specifically, as set by Sport England. A potentially even wider benefit is that this may contribute to Department of Health objectives related to increasing physical activity participation amongst the national population. Hence, the beneficiaries are not only England Golf, but also other bodies including Sport England and the Department of Health.
- 2) The increased and wider participation addresses inequality issues, and the increased activity and income will provide clubs with greater power to direct their future development. Hence, direct beneficiaries include clubs throughout England and their members, particularly those that embrace, implement and attempt to gain from the revised GolfMark scheme.

It is considered by England Golf [5a-b] that the impact and value of this research has improved the GolfMark scheme, and will consequently benefit government, and many stakeholders of golf, including golf's governing bodies, clubs, members, and professional coaches, as well as wider communities, such as children/young people. It is anticipated that the recent changes in policy and strategies implemented based on this research will lead to increased and wider participation in golf, and over the next few years data will become available to demonstrate the effectiveness of these changes. These data will be tracked and analysed to further assess the long term impact of the research findings.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

England Golf Revised Policy Document

[5a] GolfMark Proposed Scheme, Development Team, England Golf (this is an internal policy document that will be provided on request). Document, and accompanying email, provides an overview of how the revised GolfMark scheme is incorporated into the Whole Sport Plan for golf 2013-17.

England Golf Communication

[5b] National Development Department, England Golf (this email correspondence and the Department Manager contact details will be provided on request). Communication details how the research informed discussions and working groups at England Golf, especially in the final quarter of 2011 that led to specific policy changes.

England Golf Partnership: Whole Sport Plan Overview (2013-17)

[5c] Overview of the Whole Sport Plan [Available at: [www.englandgolf.org/library-media%5Cdocuments%5CEGP%20WSP%20III%20CGP%20Conference%20Presentation%20V1%20RM%20-%2007.02.13\(2\).pdf](http://www.englandgolf.org/library-media%5Cdocuments%5CEGP%20WSP%20III%20CGP%20Conference%20Presentation%20V1%20RM%20-%2007.02.13(2).pdf)]; accessed on 19th July 2013. Document incorporates recommendations from the research.

England Golf Partnership: GolfMark Website

[5d] Online Support and Resources: GolfMark website – available to all UK golf clubs [Available at: www.golfmark.org/page.asp?section=00012004 – Accessed on 19th July 2013]. Website incorporates recommendations from the research.