



# INCREASING MILLENNIAL ENGAGEMENT IN GOLF CLUBS

## SUMMARY REPORT

October 2018





---

# REPORT FOREWORD

---

## **Younger golfers and Golf Clubs: The Urgent Need to Bring Them Together.**

The core Purpose of GolfWA is to create opportunities for everyone - regardless of age, gender or ability - to participate in the game of golf. This Purpose is the key to our Strategic Plan and has led to the development of a range of initiatives including the engagement of our Regional Club Support Officers and investing substantially in the development of future golfers, to name a couple.

GolfWA identified some time ago that there is a clear disconnect between emerging golfers and Golf Clubs - both public and private - whose Committees and Boards are largely made up of people of the Baby Boomer generation. As a result, GolfWA brought together the Young Members Committee. This group has been charged with putting the spotlight on the 20-39 year age group, to identify and advise the GolfWA board on the reasons for the reluctance in young people to initially take up golf and, ultimately, to join a Golf Club. With the approval of the GolfWA Board, the Young Members Committee commissioned this report which seeks to provide an appreciation of the circumstances surrounding this age group that are limiting their take-up of golf and their commitment to a Golf Club environment.

Our affiliated clubs, both public and private, must attract more younger members to their clubs, but in many cases they are struggling to find the membership offering that best suits the differing needs of this Millennial age group.

GolfWA is working to help our affiliated clubs to bridge this gap. We are already building a range of resources to this end; we are showcasing the best plans our clubs have devised to attract the millennial golfer and we provide guidance on their membership offering (such as membership options, pricing, commitment, family friendly facilities) and marketing strategies. This report has helped us to better understand the core issues and will enable us to drive these offerings further for our Members. We commend this report to you and as always, GolfWA is available to help our affiliated Clubs in any way we can.

Thank you to our Young Members Committee led by the Committee Chair, Justin Davies (GolfWA Board Member, Lakelands Golf Club Member) and comprising Mitch Bristow (Lake Karrinyup Country Club), Emma Jane Liebenau (Mt Lawley Golf Club), Damien Todorovic (General Manager, WA Golf Club), Danielle Crane (GolfWA), Neil Goddard (GolfWA), and Jeff Blunden, GBAS for your efforts in creating the report for the good of the great game of golf in Western Australia.

Happy Golfing!

Greg Higham Chairman  
GolfWA

Justin Davies  
GolfWA Board Member  
Chair, Young Members Committee

# A NUMBER OF CHALLENGES EXIST IN GETTING YOUNGER PEOPLE INTO GOLF

## 1

Time and money. Golf takes a long time to learn and play, and there is a perception that it is an expensive sport.

## 2

Unlike football, soccer, cricket, hockey and basketball, getting golf into schools is relatively more challenging. Many people discover golf later in life; yet for some (not all), it is difficult to learn. Those that do learn at a junior level are much more inclined to continue throughout their lives.

## 3

The leadership at golf clubs from committees and board members tend to be older members who have the time to make a contribution to the Club. Most do not have a pathway for engaging younger members into committees and board, leading to older generations driving the culture.

## 4

Millennials as a generation are less likely to make long term commitments to a residential location. A requirement to pay a joining fee to a Club when they may move away from a convenient location doesn't make sense.

## 5

Many millennials tend to prefer mixed gender sport, and there are significantly lower numbers of female golfers

## 6

The general rules and regulations, focus on competition golf and enforcement of dress codes is restrictive and harms participation interest.

# THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY – 12 FACTS

---

## 1

Participation in golf in Australia has been declining at an average rate of 1.9% per year since 2004.

## 2

Golf in WA has run counter to this trend, with participation increasing at an average rate of 1.1% per year since 2004.

## 3

The Millennial market currently accounts for 16% of all affiliated golfers in Western Australia, a market size approximating 5,200 golfers.

## 4

The millennial market in WA now accounts for 28% (20% in Australia) of total golfers, down from 40% (30%) ten years ago.

## 5

Approximating 760,000 residents, 30% of the state's 2.56 million people are aged 20 to 39 years.

## 6

In WA, an average loss in total membership of 1.4% per year has been experienced over the past five years across metropolitan and regional clubs, this loss offset partially by average growth of 4.9% per year in public clubs.

## 7

At the national and WA state level, there is a continuing contraction in the number of participants in the age cohorts younger than 55 years and an increase in the number of participants in the age cohorts aged over 55 years.

## 8

There is an average club attraction rate in WA of 6%, averaging 12% for Millennials in metropolitan based clubs, and 9% for Millennials across the State. This attraction rate reflects approximately 400 new millennial members to WA clubs in the 2017 year.

## 9

From a playing perspective, the Millennial market is currently averaging 17 competition rounds per year, some 40% fewer than the overall average of 29 rounds per annum.

## 10

In club land, national club membership numbers have been declining by an average of 0.9% per year over the past five years.

## 11

80% of the state's residents aged between 20 and 39 years reside in the environs of metropolitan Perth. This market represents 31% of the metropolitan population base of 1.9 million, approximating 595,000 people

## 12

Ten of Perth's 30 Local Government Areas (LGA's) contain a larger concentration of millennials, mainly being inner metropolitan suburbs.

# THE MILLENNIAL AND THE FUTURE

## Introduction

As we look to the future, it's best to first understand what's being done in this space. In this section we establish the effectiveness of initiatives currently in place to enhance millennial demand, dive into the challenges they face, establish what golf is competing against in terms of millennial time, and outline the benefits millennials attach to golf.

We also look at current satisfaction, what factors drive it, along with playing patterns, preferred playing times and the type of tailored offers required.

## What are we doing for Millennials today?

### A self-assessment

As clubs determine whether (or not) they wish to grow their millennial numbers, we sought to understand from Club Administrators their own self assessed view on their readiness to deal with and accommodate this market.

Using a scale from very poor (1) to very good (5), clubs

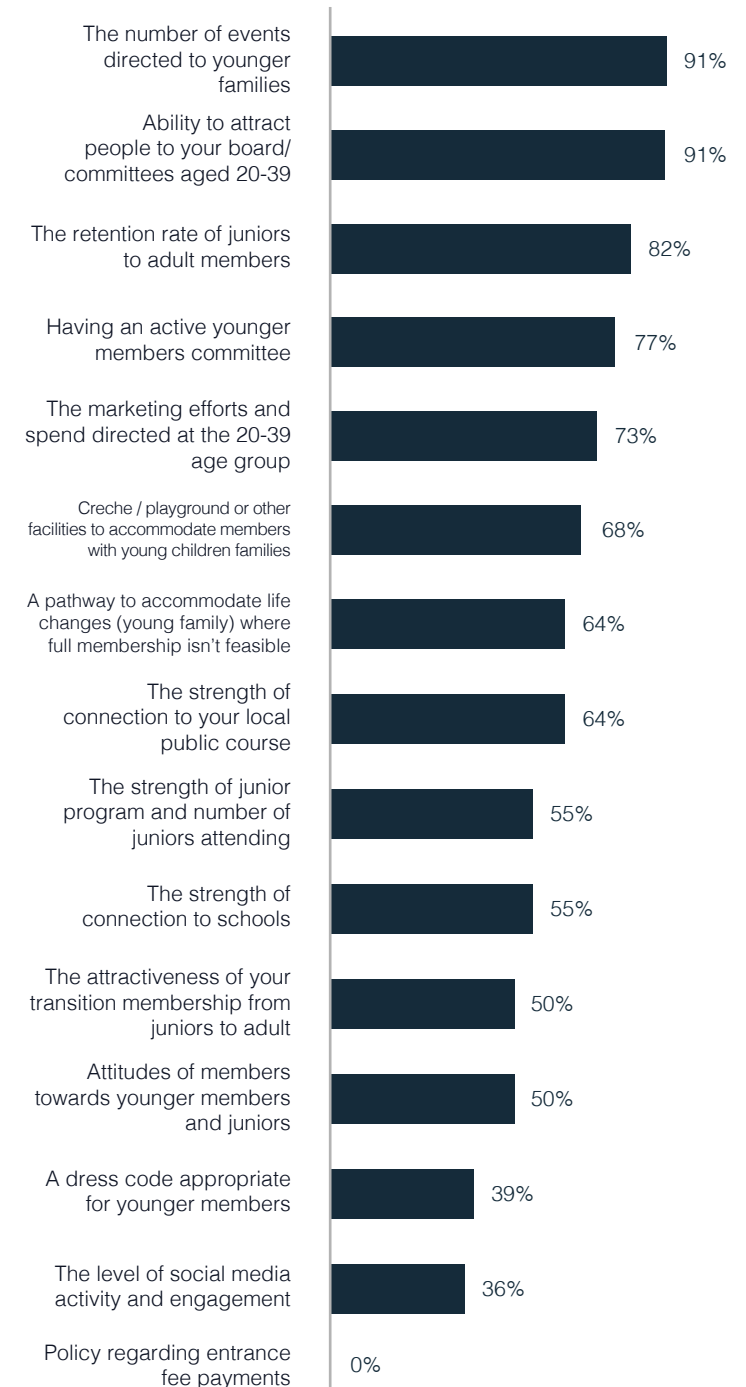
were asked to indicate how well they felt they were performing in a number of areas pertaining to the attraction and retention of younger members. With an overall average score of 2.8, clubs themselves believe (already know) that there is much they can be doing regarding the Millennial market, but are yet to do so, or are yet to do so in an effective manner.

We illustrate right the results, presenting the percentage of clubs who scored themselves from very poor to average across 15 key measures.

On the positive, more than 60% of surveyed clubs believe they presently have an above average approach to social media activity and dress code (eg less than 40% not rating themselves as at least average). Half of the surveyed clubs also believe there is appropriate attitudes between younger and older members with appropriate transition structures from junior to younger adult membership also in place.

Key areas of self-assessed deficiency include direct focus of younger members via specifically themed targeted events and representation of the Millennial cohort within the club decision making hierarchy.

% of Clubs scoring Very Poor/Poor/Average



## Millennial Initiative Effectiveness

Overall Total Self Assessed Score Category	Club Count	% share of membership aged 20 to 39 years
<30	2	9%
31-35	3	9%
36-40	4	10%
41-45	5	9%
46-50	6	11%
50+	2	14%

### As relevant activity grows, so does share of membership....

Almost as proof of the above actions being effective, whilst there are other factors that determine interest in a club, those clubs that returned a higher self-assessed score also have a higher share of members who are Millennials.

### Millennials – their challenges, competing interests and identified benefits. Just what is the issue?...

Sourced from our survey of Millennial club golfers, we illustrate the stated challenges Millennials face when they seek to engage with golf. The dominant challenges are clear to see – Time and Cost.

Whilst simple statements, they have many implications for the sport. Participation in a sport in one's leisure time is a discretionary, personal choice. When that sport however is a comparably heavier consumer of time than alternatives or other leisure activities, the sport becomes vulnerable to these other choices and/or declining levels of time deemed leisure.



How one purchases the activity is also well documented with far greater understanding of the need for perceived value. To the extent that the sport can, and to the extent that the facilities can develop, fund and execute, many initiatives are underway designed to better address these challenges. These initiatives are presenting a new model for golf, this in itself a challenge to accept for traditional thinkers.

### ...I'm not just a golfer....

With time flagged as a challenge, the insights from survey responses indicate that it is other sporting activities that are as much the competing need as no-leisure time commitments, with millennial golfers are still at an age where they are also participating in other sports.



It is these activities, as much as other social activities which golf is competing against. Given these other interests, seeking to increase the outright frequency of golf play by the millennial may be a fruitless pursuit. A better strategy may be to ensure value is available in the opportunity being presented.

### ...What's in it for me?...Plenty...

Reflecting a now recognisable trait of the millennial, that being an increasingly social mindset, the desired experience from golf or the perceived benefits from participation highlight one of the key strengths of the sport and its makeup.

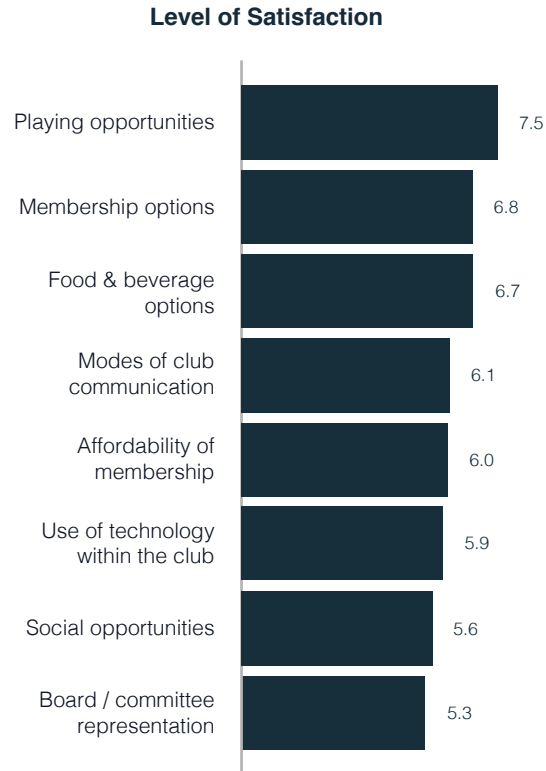


This strength is the ability to combine the social experience with other desired benefits such as exercise, being outdoors, competing, and mental stimulation.

This remains key messaging for the millennial golfer.

## Expectations of the millennial golfer

Knowing their challenges, knowing what is already being done to engage with the cohort, how satisfied are they? what are the drivers of satisfaction? what are they seeking? ...



Note: Scale of 1 to 10 used where 1 equals extremely low and 10 equals extremely high

### Current satisfaction

Whilst new member demand (of all ages) is important, so too is existing member satisfaction. In prior club research undertaken by GBAS, in over 90% of survey projects it has been found that younger members (less than 45 years of

age) are generally less satisfied than the balance of the club membership.

Seeking to better understand where millennial satisfaction in WA clubs currently sits, via our project survey using a scale of 1 to 10, millennial members were asked how satisfied they were with how their current golf club caters for the needs and preferences of younger golfers.

Answers provided give insight into areas of club operations where lower levels of satisfaction exist, highlighting the opportunities that would deliver better engagement with this market. Key areas of opportunity identified are better representation through boards and committees (5.3 satisfaction) increased social opportunities (5.6), heightened use of technology (5.9), packaging of suitable membership options (6.8) and modes of communication used (6.1).

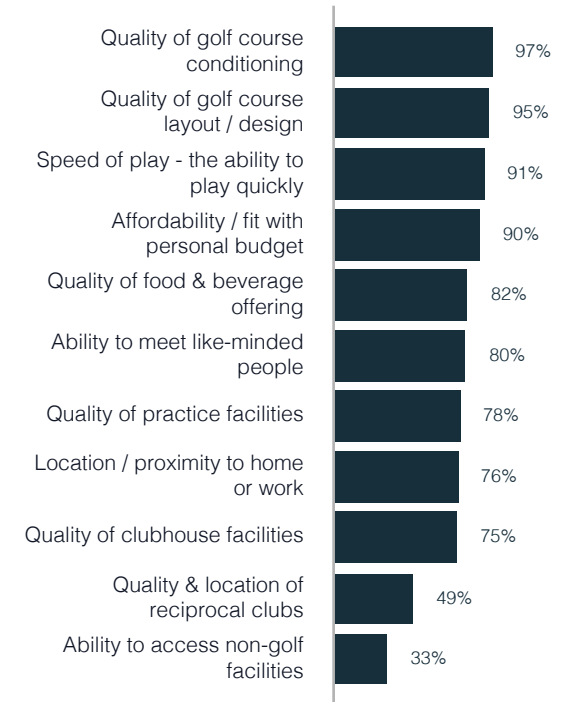
Importantly, it is the playing opportunities available where the highest level of satisfaction exists (7.5), and this was found to be the most important factor driving satisfaction.

### Factors driving satisfaction

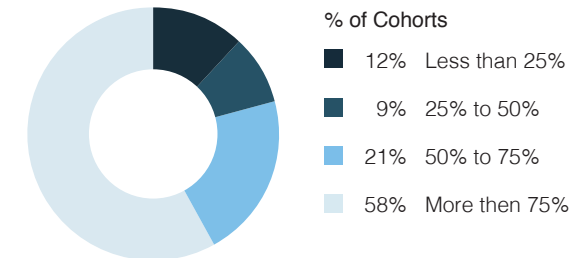
Results from the project survey identify the key factors that are currently driving Millennial club satisfaction. Whilst a number of areas have been identified for improved satisfaction, above all other factors, the golf playing experience and the quality of course conditioning is the key factor to for the millennial golfer.

For the overall golf experience to be fully enjoyed however the project survey has found that the golf experience must fit within the personal budget and (with somewhere else always to go), must be able to be played in an efficient

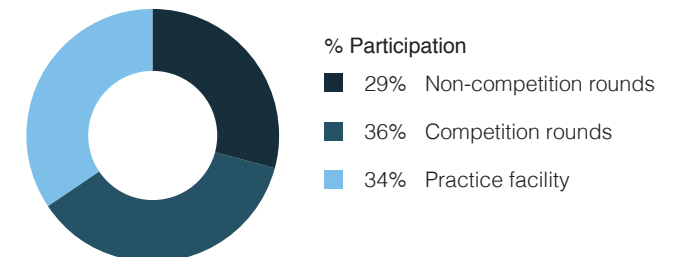
### Factors driving Satisfaction



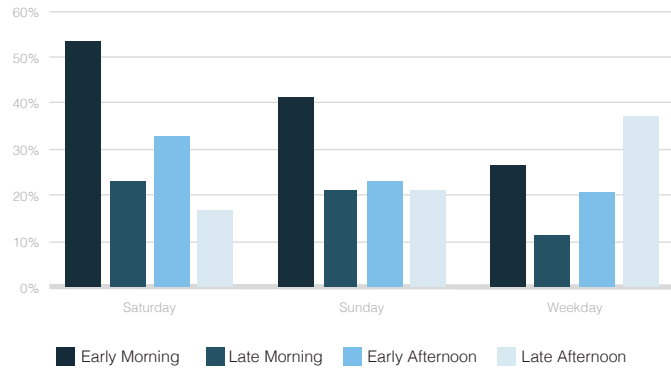
### % of rounds played at home club



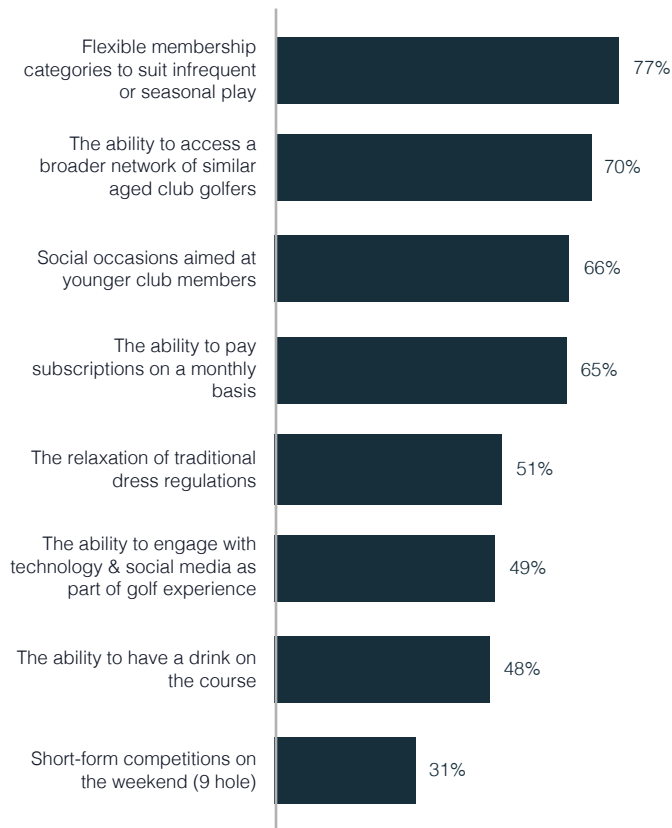
### Type of Participation



### Preferred Playing Times



### Importance to Satisfaction



amount of time. Less important but still key components of satisfaction are the ancillary amenities, location (convenience) and other like-minded people to develop relationships with.

### Loyalty, playing patterns and preferred playing times

...So golf's important - where, what type and when does it happen?...

Approximately 60% of millennial members report playing more than 75% of their rounds at their home club, with a further 20% playing more than half at the home facility. Project research indicates that the secret to a high level of home course play is linked to distance travelled.

Facilities within a 30-minute drive time will capture a higher degree of all rounds played than those who have millennial members who reside beyond this drive time. Location and access defines rounds loyalty.

It's not all about competitions! ....

For Millennials, our research has found there is an equal interest or level of participation in competition golf, non-competition golf and golf practice, all near equally shared.

This interest highlights the need for casual game opportunities within the weekly calendar. With time at a premium, practice is also a key component within overall participation and thus is another feature/benefit some clubs can highlight to assist broaden the wider membership offer.

...When can I play?...

In a perfect world clubs would operate with consistent levels of demand, spread evenly across the 7-day week. Unfortunately we do not live in such a world!

Given the structure of the typical working week, whilst changing, weekends remain the premium times for golf participation and the preferred times for millennial members. With a preference noted for early morning over any other weekend period, the focus shifts to afternoons during the week, rounding out the working day.

### Tailored Offerings

...What else can we do?...

Previously published reports concerning millennials from other international markets identified a number of offerings as being of particular importance to younger golfers. Seeking to link this research to the Australian market, these offerings were tested asking how significant each were and would likely contribute to satisfaction as a club member.

Illustrated left, key offerings (those rated as quite to extremely significant) to millennial members in Australia are membership access options that suit flexibility, and opportunities to play with 'like aged' golfers. Social events aimed at a younger demographic and payment options that suit monthly cashflows are the next two most important offers that clubs could be making to better attract millennial members.



---

# HOW MILLENNIAL FRIENDLY ARE YOU?

---

All of the key content, findings, recommendations, strategies and ideas contained in this report have been extracted and are listed in the following below. Whilst each facility will have their own unique circumstances and needs, and whilst there is also no limit to new ideas, we encourage you to consult this checklist as you measure how millennial friendly you are and develop your future strategies to engage with this market.

- > Ensure you have a transition program that appropriately moves juniors through the early millennial years and the early family years.
- > Don't forget that golf is a fun, social and experiential activity. It should be conveyed as such in your promotional material.
- > Do you have a suitable pay-as-you-go membership offer? Can it bundle something not related to golf?
- > Can your membership payment options be structured on a monthly basis?
- > For Millennials there is an equal interest or level of participation in competition golf, non-competition golf and golf practice. Are you promoting times of the week suitable for social play?
- > Practice also matters — what time does your range or practice area close? Could it be later, with some lights added?
- > Assess your dress code, considering how appropriate it is for younger members.
- > Ensure your social media initiatives have some specific

goals re millennial engagement.

- > Continue to develop harmonious relationships between the young and the less young.
- > Consider what you can do for members with young children. Can your amenities accommodate a playground?
- > Ensure marketing initiatives speak the language of millennials. Don't be afraid to ask them how to speak to them.
- > Communicate through social media — seek a conversation and engage. Likes and recommendations matter, so do online reviews.
- > Is your web site mobile friendly? Chances are the full version will never be visited.
- > Review your food menus for some more modern options. Whilst thinking F&B, can your beer options include / rotate through some craft beers?
- > Consider if specifically themed targeted events can be created — guest speaker with relevance to their life stage, in a convenient location with like-minded people.
- > Determine how some Millennial representation can be included within the club decision making hierarchy.
- > Accept that millennials are still at an age where they are also participating in other sports. Focus on the value of the offer made, not an outright increase in rounds.
- > Ensure your messaging promotes the intangible

benefits of golf — socialisation, combined with exercise, being outdoors, the mental stimulation from the game.

- > Do you have a technology strategy? Are you optimising its use?
- > Know that the golf playing experience and the quality of course conditioning is the key factor to for the millennial golfer. Make it a focus of your communications.
- > Know also that pace of play matters — promote it, seek a commitment.
- > Distance to be travelled matters. Know the distance as you engage with potential new members, working out what is right for them. You'll get more loyalty from those within a 30-minute drive time.
- > Can you create some aged based events — Millennials v Boomers as opposed to Captains v Presidents event?
- > Are there some team event options that you can include in your syllabus?
- > As you seek to build your knowledge, can you incentivise the sharing of personal information? Millennials are known for sharing if they get something in return.
- > Can your product (occasionally) be given the + treatment? Music on golf carts, a day with golf boards and golf bikes, show that you can see the future.

---

# THE MILLENNIAL SPEAKS

---

Advice Offered by Millennials to Club Administrators... Want to listen?...

Our survey of millennial club golfers provided the opportunity to solicit free-form advice via the question “If you could give any advice to golf clubs on how they can better meet the needs of younger golfers, what advice would you give?”

Outlined below are some of the statements provided.

“...Think to the future of the club and not the status quo as they are fast becoming a dying breed. The world has changed. Provide an atmosphere for a whole, young family starting out in the world...”

“...Lifestyle membership options that allow to effectively pay per play. Private clubs are of much better quality, but you do feel you subsidise those that can play more often...”

“...It is more attractive to pay small amounts more often, rather than large up-front costs. The flexibility to also cancel is huge, rather than being locked in for a year. Why not give an option for that, and if someone chooses to cancel, just need to pay for the next month and that’s it. If you give these options to younger people who are considering getting involved in golf it will help break down the barriers and perception that getting involved in golf is hard...”

“...Boards and committees are typically full of old, typically male, and often not very good golfers. They are often oblivious to the world outside their sphere, and have little interest in hearing other views, especially from younger members. Representation from younger members in such committees would be a start...”

“...It’s 2018! Relax on the out-dated etiquette snobbery.

As long as shirts are tucked in and socks are white, the dress standard is fine. Clubs will only continue to scare potential young members away otherwise....”

“...Although I am very happy with the way clubs operate (it suits me), I feel greater reach to younger generations for golf would need far better use of social media and more relevant social media posts that will engage younger users...”

“...Club traditions can still be respected whilst taking on a more forward thinking/modern approach to the game...”

“...I believe golf clubs have a tricky task of holding onto history and traditions which taught me a lot growing up and which I am very appreciative of. At the same time they need to stay relevant for income...”

“...Clubs need to change with the times. If a clean tucked in t-shirt in the club house isn’t good enough what is? Do we need to cover our ankles when wearing socks? If we spent more time selling the club to new members instead of looking at our own dress standards maybe we could increase membership?...”

“...Flexible membership options for young professionals and allow the golf club board representation to have at least one millennial on the board to contribute on strategic vision and governance, to break the political/hierarchal

old school mindset. Need to revolutionise the perception of golf in community, to engage young people...”

“...Social competitions later in the afternoon like social sports run comps on weekdays. Have team events where you create a small team and you play matches every week at a course...”

“...The older generations still rule the golf course with their traditions and mentality. Although it is important to always be respectful to the elders and have golf etiquette, it can be intimidating and a turn off from playing golf around these groups of people that take an element of enjoyment and relaxation from a round...”

“...It is a tough issue, long term older members have built up significant equity in their membership. Younger members don’t/can’t want to pony up that equity up front. Both the generations need to understand the others perspective...”

“...Because we are so time poor these days, where we spend what little leisure time we have available to us is a simple equation - what will be the most enjoyable use of my time? How golf clubs in WA respond to that question will determine whether young members are interested in taking up the great game of golf...”

