

# THE GOLF CLUB SECRETARY

*Briefing and practical advice for golf club administrators*

## The 3 biggest considerations for your members' club app in 2025

*Does your club app make life easier for golfers and staff, or is it holding you and them back? Here, we investigate the key needs with the help of industry experts, Golf Genius.*

**F**or golf clubs in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, the mobile club app has become the digital heartbeat delivering member services. It's the place they go to book tee times, enter competitions, check their handicaps or simply stay connected with club life.

But their digital expectations are now higher than ever and continue to rise. Golfers are comparing your app not only with other clubs' apps but also with the digital experiences they get from other sectors such as airlines, banks and streaming services.

From the 2025 Software Report produced by Golf Genius and Players 1st, which surveyed 134 golf clubs managers and secretaries, clubs expressed a keen interest to have a mobile club app that integrated well, was highly customisable, and allowed members to be more autonomous through their interactions with the club. To ensure your mobile club solution is fit for the future, we review these three important considerations and how they could be used at your golf club to improve both the member experience and the overall efficiency of your operation.

### 1. Your mobile club app must integrate

The days of one-size-fits-all are over. According to the 2025 Golf Club Software Report, club managers want flexibility to work with the suppliers they want and trust. Members want seamless journeys without juggling multiple logins.

That's why integration is now the number one priority for your mobile club app as it creates a digital hub that brings everything together.

This is why Golf Genius' new club app allows clubs to customise burger menus with direct links to their preferred tee sheets, website, club diaries and more. It has also built Single Sign-On (SSO) solutions with leading partners such as BRS Golf, and now integrates other major providers such as Lightspeed, Stripe, and Golf Manager into its software.

The benefit for clubs? You can get the best of the best and provide members with a frictionless, modern digital experience.

### 2. Your mobile club app should empower members, not hinder them

Your app should function like a front desk in your members' pockets and allow them to book, pay and interact seamlessly. If it doesn't, golfers aren't getting the convenience they expect, they're constantly asking for help and your staff are wasting time helping them.

*Quote*  
OF THE MONTH

*"The golf swing is like a suitcase into which we are trying to pack one too many things"*

**JOHN UDIKE**

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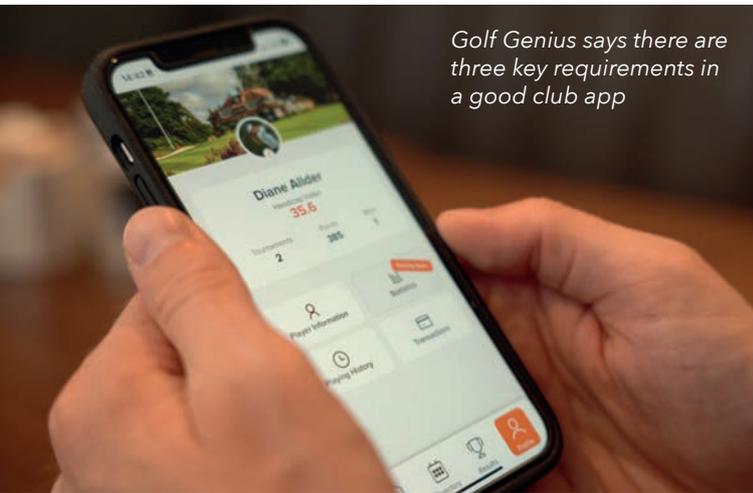
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Golf Genius says there are three key requirements in a good club app

- **Tee bookings** in real time avoid double bookings and speed up the member booking process.
- **Mobile payments** make it easy to pay competition fees and subscriptions, or even order food and drink at the turn.
- **Push notifications** and automated emails/texts replace the old-fashioned noticeboard with instant updates and communications.

Make your club app easier for your members to use, and you make it easier for your golf club to operate more efficiently.

### 3. Your mobile club app should be highly customisable

Customisable software is a really key factor for golf clubs now, as it helps them to inspire member pride and loyalty to the club. With the right provider in place, clubs are now able to make their club app feel like 'their own app'...

Golf Genius has flipped the script. Clubs can now make their club app feel like 'their own app' with their branding, colours and crest front and centre. They're able to customise menus

and in-app content and allow golfers to build personal profiles, making the app feel alive and community-driven.

This transforms your app from a generic tool into a digital extension of your clubhouse.

### Bringing it all together

The golf club app of 2025 isn't just a system with a defined set of outcomes. It is:

- a hub for integrated, seamless digital journeys,
- a tool for efficient bookings, payments and communications, and
- a branded experience that makes your members proud.

As the software and technology bar continues to be raised by specialist providers, the big question for managers is: 'Does our app make life easier for golfers and staff, or is it holding us back?'

### Golf Genius unveils new mobile club app

Golf Genius has launched a completely redesigned mobile club app to deliver a faster, modern experience for golfers and provide golf clubs with greater control over how they engage their golfers. It offers:

- a beautiful new design and slick user navigation.
- a new app dashboard for admins to build and control in-app content.
- customisability with club/venue branding and content.
- faster check-in and entry to competitions, event and leagues.
- player profile with handicap index, playing history and other information.

This mobile club app provides clubs of all shapes and sizes with flexible, fit-for-purpose technology that meets their needs today and evolves with them for tomorrow.

To find out more, contact [international@golfgenius.com](mailto:international@golfgenius.com)

## The tension between the scale of investment and likely pay-off from course or facility improvements

Golf course architect, **Jonathan Gaunt**, discusses the recent proliferation of short-game areas and other additional golf course facilities, looking at cost-effective ways to cover the substantial outlay required and other considerations to factor in to ensure that the level of investment is prudent and can be justified.

There are a lot of new practice facilities being built at golf clubs near you, right now: mostly short-game areas, that is, but also three-, six- or nine-hole short courses, all designed to a high standard to attract new members or to retain members who might be thinking about moving somewhere else.

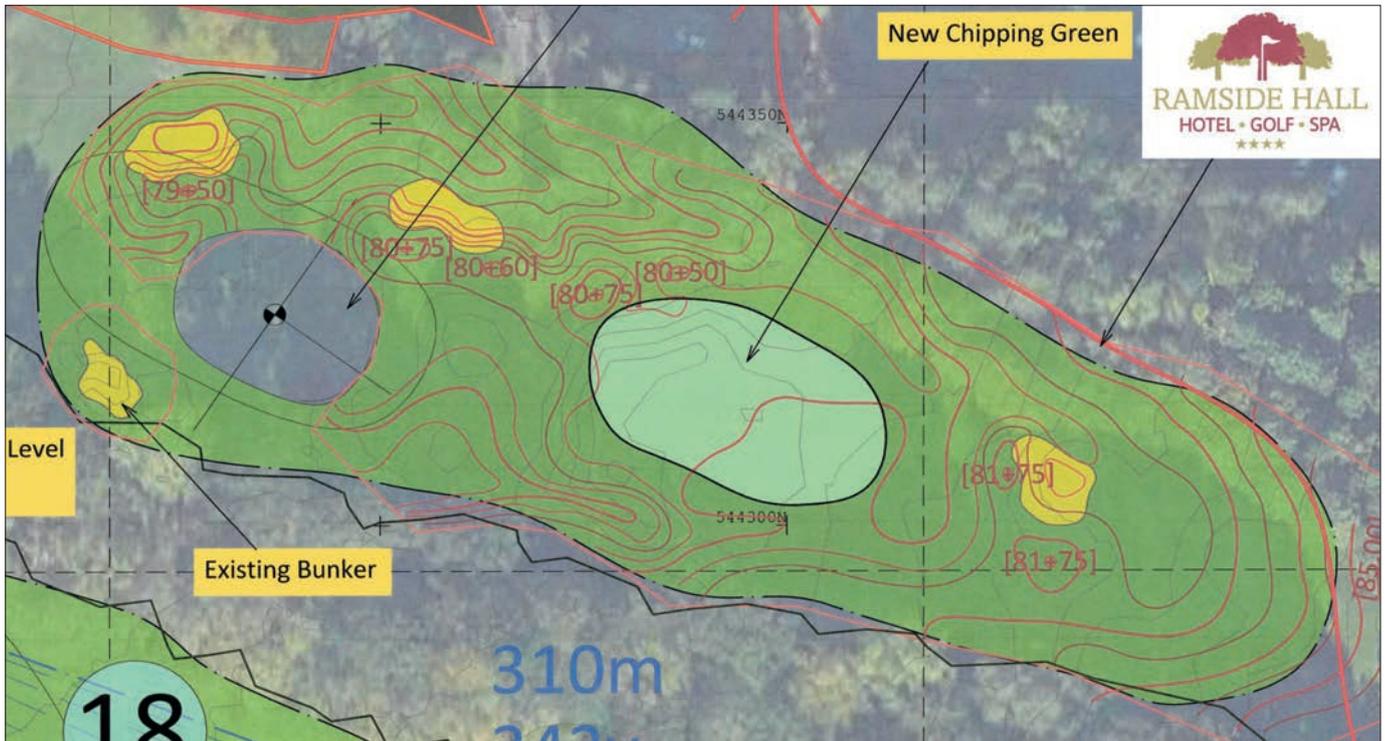
I have to admit that we're getting more enquiries for these kinds of facilities than ever before, but that doesn't mean to say that we've not been asked to create them in the past, because we have.

Some of these projects are costing hundreds of thousands to build, and there are some fantastic examples, with Woburn being, possibly, top of the list. My company has been asked to create something similar at Ramside Hall in the north-east of England, more of which later.

However, when you see this level of investment, the average golf club member will look on and ask, "How are these new facilities ever going to pay for themselves?"

It depends on the club, of course, but some clubs do charge for their use - for example, at Blackwell Grange in Co. Durham, or Clitheroe in Lancashire, where they offer a separate 'academy membership'. This academy membership is open to non-golf club members, but it is, effectively, a way of joining the waiting list.

However, other clubs don't charge an extra premium, but they still need to find a way of getting a return on their substantial investment. This may be in the form of new members, but even at some of the higher-level clubs in the UK you would still need at least a hundred new members to cover the cost of some of these facilities.



Plans for the new short-game area at Ramside Hall

The new six-hole Copse course at Goodwood opened last year and this is to provide an additional service to members rather than to necessarily provide another revenue stream.

The cynical member may say they never practise anyway, so, there is a possibility that these new facilities may end up as well-intentioned white elephants, knowing how few people actually practise their short games.

With regard to short courses, there is also the view that established golfers will quite possibly think that if they've got any time to spare in their pressured worlds, they would prefer to spend it playing 'proper' golf rather than some 'novelty' variety. However, it depends where you live and where you play your golf.

Having spent time working and travelling through the USA, I soon noticed that short-game areas were - if well-designed - of as much interest to the golf or country club member as the golf course itself. The short-game area we designed and built at Greensboro Country Club in North Carolina gets (almost) as much use as the golf course today.

A good friend of mine regularly visits Prince's in Kent and stays at The Lodge. He always intends to make use of the excellent putting/chipping green they have (on the doorstep) before or after dinner or breakfast... but he virtually never does, and says he rarely sees anyone else out there either. It might be the good red wine on offer...

So, there's a dilemma - should a club embark on a short-game area project, or not? Is it really worth the disruption and the cost and how likely is it that the project will be a success? If you were to ask the opinion of The Wildernesse Club in Kent, they would definitely say that their short-game area has been a total success, because the project was professionally designed and built, and brought into play with limited disruption, even

though it is positioned smack-bang in between the pro shop and the 1st tees. Their existing (and new) members love it.

This is the key to success - position the facility strategically so that it is easy to access. A short- game area needs to be close to the car park, the pro shop and the clubhouse. A three-, six- or nine-hole short course needs to be close by, too. Otherwise, members and visitors will take the easy option of walking directly to the putting green or to the 1st tees and end up bypassing the new practice facilities.

The other main point is getting the facilities professionally designed - and that's not by a golf professional. It's by a golf course architect, who discusses the requirements with the golf professional and then brings those ideas together sensibly, logically and efficiently. This liaison also needs to extend to the course manager, who will be expected to maintain the new facility to a high standard, in keeping with the golf course. So, you must 'spec' the design to a high standard, too.

Other projects we're currently working on are fully funded by the importation of inert subsoil. In the past this was considered to be a 'lowly' method of funding golf course improvements. However, many higher-profile clubs have used this process to great success in recent years - for example, Manchester GC, Headingley GC (Creative Golf Design), Horsforth GC, Stoneham GC (EDI Golf), Selby GC and - our latest project - Moor Allerton GC.

In all of these cases, the cost of the entire new facility - including our fees, and all other professional fees, plus planning application surveys and costs - was covered by the importation of inert subsoil. This makes the question, 'How can we get a return on the investment?', a simple one. In fact, the way this often works for the clubs who sign up to this kind of deal is that they also get a bonus at the end of the project (a royalty) which is theirs to spend as they wish. One of the clubs above has, post-project



*Goodwood's Copse course provide an additional service for members*



*The new short-game area at Manchester Golf Club*

completion, funded an entire new irrigation system, and others have invested in bunker remodelling projects throughout their entire course.

So, with forward-thinking management within the club, there is an opportunity to develop a new facility cost-effectively that can provide members and visitors alike with something additional to what they might expect.

Our latest project at Ramside Hall Hotel in Durham includes a short-game area that is designed to be playable all year round and will be floodlit, too. It measures 150m x 50m, with two USGA-specification greens, four bunkers and 12 artificial

turf tee boxes to offer multiple practice options for members and visitors, and especially for group lessons with the club professionals, who have, importantly, had a say in the design. Most importantly, it is within 50 metres of the clubhouse and car park and is on the way to the 1st tee of the Cathedral Course.

It is designed to match the high quality of the new multi-functional golf entertainment centre and high-tech range - The Pin - which was due to open in September. This project has been fully funded by Ramside Hall Hotel, which has enjoyed its most successful year on account of its courses being open, uninterrupted, throughout the season. [GCS](#)

# Failure to increase contractual hours amounted to disability discrimination



*Alistair Smith, CEO of the NGCAA, highlights the need to treat all staff fairly and equally, with reference to a recent case that resulted in a successful claim for disability discrimination.*

Golf club managers and secretaries will be interested to hear of a recent Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) decision involving *Ladbrokes Betting*, which acts as a reminder of the potential consequences of not considering the impact of, sometimes seemingly innocuous, decisions, particularly where disability is a factor.

Here, *Ladbrokes'* failure to increase an employee's contractual hours of work due to her inflexibility (actual or perceived), when another colleague's hours had been increased, amounted to disability discrimination and constructive dismissal.

## Facts

The facts of the case were that Ms Omi ("the Claimant") worked for *Ladbrokes* from 2016 until her resignation in 2022. She was originally contracted to work 30 hours per week. The Claimant has Conns Syndrome (an accepted disability). In December 2021, she commenced a period of sick leave, and her fit note suggested that on her return to work she should work afternoon or evening shifts, avoiding early shift patterns.

Consequently, and shortly after commencing sick leave, her contractual hours were reduced to 17 hours per week. The Claimant returned to work in January 2022 and raised a complaint in February 2022 that she did not agree to the reduction in her contracted hours and that overtime was not available to her when it was available to others.

The Claimant then went on a second period of sick leave with depression in August 2022 after she had learned in July that another employee, Tejas, who was contracted to work 20 hours per week had had their hours increased to 30 hours per week in June 2022, at the same time the Claimant had been seeking an increase to her hours.

The Claimant resigned in November 2022 and brought several claims, including for direct disability discrimination.

## The law

Direct discrimination takes place where "because of a protected characteristic" a person treats another person less favourably than that person "treats or would treat others" (section 13 Equality Act 2010 (EqA)). Thus, a comparator is required to make out a case of direct discrimination.

Section 23 of EqA 2010 dictates that "there must be no material difference between the circumstances" between the person alleging discrimination and the comparator. However, this is not the same as saying that an employee has to have an "actual comparator". They can rely on evidential comparators, such as

a colleague who has material differences to the employee but whose circumstances are sufficiently similar, or they can rely on a hypothetical comparator.

## Decision

The Employment Tribunal found that the failure to allow the Claimant to increase her contractual hours, compared to Tejas, was an act of direct discrimination, which resulted in her constructive unfair dismissal. *Ladbrokes* argued the difference in treatment was because of the need for flexibility (not because she was disabled per se), something the Claimant could not provide. However, the Employment Tribunal (ET) did not accept this as it was not clear why the general practice of offering additional hours was not given to the Claimant when it was given to others and found that "the claimant's lack of flexibility was effectively a proxy for [her] disability, as she was unable to work flexibly because she is disabled".

The EAT rejected the *Ladbrokes'* appeal. It held that the ET was entitled to conclude that Tejas was an actual comparator on the basis that both Tejas and the Claimant wanted an increase to 30 hours per week and that shifts were available. It held that any other differences were immaterial including the Claimant's desire to not work early shifts in comparison to Tejas – evidence showed that Tejas had secured overtime on afternoons and evenings when, in line with the medical advice, the Claimant was not restricted from working but those shifts had not been offered to her.

## Comment

A key factor in this case was that *Ladbrokes* sought to argue that it did not increase the Claimant's hours because of a "flexibility" requirement, in an effort to distance the decision from being affected by her disability. The EAT warned that the operation of such a requirement can have unintended consequences, including discrimination, as it did here. It is therefore important for employers to have in mind that, when they operate a discretion (here, who to offer overtime to), they do need to consider why they have made a decision one way or another and whether the exercise of this discretion could have a discriminatory consequence, intended or not.

Although a slightly peripheral point in this case, it reiterates that where an employee's fit note suggests adjustments are made, an employer should look to consult with the employee about any changes to their terms and, in particular, the duration of this change rather than imposing them unilaterally. This not only increases the prospects of a successful reintegration to the workplace but limits the risk that the employee feels they are being discriminated against due to sickness which could be linked to a disability.

**Case Reference: *Ladbrokes Betting & Gaming Limited v Omi* [2025] EAT 99**

For further advice on this subject or any other matter affecting your club, please contact **Alistair Smith**, CEO of the NGCAA, on **01886 812943** or **office@ngcaa.co.uk**

# Mental health team support programme

Former golf club manager and long-time Golf Club Secretary subscriber, **Richard Hall**, now specialises in supporting golf club managers as a Mental Health First Aider. Here, he advocates the advantages of a mental health team support programme, with thoughts and suggestions about how to create and implement one and the benefits your club and staff team could potentially reap.



Richard Hall is now a Mental Health First Aider

**M**ental health is a vital component of personal and professional well-being. Within teams, especially those in the golf industry and hospitality services, unaddressed mental health challenges can lead to burnout, stress, reduced morale and lower performance. A structured support programme ensures that individuals and teams build resilience, maintain productivity and sustain positive mental health practices.

In my previous article in the August issue of *The Golf Club Secretary*, I highlighted the difficulties of people addressing mental health issues and finding support. It indicated the problems and stigma attached to this issue.

This programme is designed to give support to the golf club manager and other team members through a holistic approach. By integrating awareness, peer support, skill-building and wellness practices, the programme creates a sustainable culture of well-being and care.

It is advisable to get your committee or board on-board in signing up to a mental health programme and ensuring that there is a comprehensive policy in the staff handbook. Agree a suitable budget and decide whether this programme is outsourced or conducted in-house.

## Programme objectives

It is best that the programme is designed with the following objectives:

- To promote emotional well-being of team members – helping individuals cope with the pressures of work and life.
- To build resilience and coping strategies – equipping staff with tools to manage crises and stressful situations effectively.
- To improve communication and peer support – fostering a collaborative environment that encourages openness and trust.
- To reduce stigma around mental health – creating a culture where seeking help is normalised and supported.
- To enhance overall team performance and morale – ensuring that teams remain motivated, engaged, and efficient.

## Target audience

This programme is intended for a wide range of participants:

- Support staff such as your administrative personnel, line managers and assistants who can play a crucial role in mental well-being.

- Your greenkeeping team, who might encounter unnecessary direct criticism from club members while performing their duties on the course.
- Part-time staff, who might require early exposure to resilience and wellness practices.
- Your hospitality staff, who may encounter stress issues related to club members' attitudes and would benefit from improved mental health awareness.

## Programme components

The programme is built around five major components:

- **Awareness workshops:** these cover topics such as stress management, work-life balance, burnout prevention and reducing stigma. The sessions are interactive and involve real-life scenarios.
- **Peer support groups:** confidential spaces where colleagues can share experiences, challenges and coping strategies. These groups build trust and reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Wellness activities:** these incorporate mindfulness exercises, yoga, relaxation practices and physical activities that support overall health and well-being.
- **Skill development:** focused training in communication, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence and stress management, which enhance both professional and personal life.
- **Access to resources:** this provides team members with counselling services, referral pathways, helplines and digital self-help tools to ensure ongoing support beyond the programme sessions.

## Implementation plan

The implementation of this programme follows a phased approach to ensure effectiveness and sustainability:

- **Phase 1:** Needs assessment – conducting surveys, interviews and focus groups to understand the mental health challenges and specific needs of the team.
- **Phase 2:** Training of facilitators – preparing leaders, supervisors, and selected staff to facilitate workshops and peer support sessions. (This might be difficult with a small team of staff – perhaps outsource this support to professionals.)
- **Phase 3:** Programme launch – rolling out half-hour sessions, peer groups and wellness sessions, with active participation encouraged (see 'empowered half-hour support' below).
- **Phase 4:** Monitoring and feedback – collecting feedback from the teams, observing changes and making adjustments as required.
- **Phase 5:** Continuous improvement – using evaluation data to refine the programme, ensure long-term engagement and integrate the programme into daily workplace culture.

## Expected outcomes

By the end of the programme, the following outcomes are expected:

- Improved staff morale and retention, leading to a more stable workforce.
- Reduced stress and burnout levels, promoting healthier lifestyles and professional satisfaction.
- Stronger teamwork and collaboration, enabling better service delivery and collective problem-solving.
- Increased mental health literacy, empowering individuals to recognise signs of distress early.
- Establishment of a sustainable culture of support, where well-being is prioritised at every level.

## Evaluation

The success of the programme will be evaluated through a range of tools and methods:

- Pre- and post-programme surveys to measure changes in stress levels, resilience and general well-being.
- Anonymous feedback forms and group discussions to collect qualitative data on your teams' experiences.
- Analysis of key performance indicators such as absenteeism, turnover rates, productivity and staff satisfaction.
- Regular reporting to the teams to demonstrate outcomes and ensure accountability.

## Conclusion

The mental health team support programme provides a comprehensive framework for promoting well-being within your golf club teams. By addressing awareness, resilience, peer support and wellness, it ensures that both individuals and teams can thrive. The programme also emphasises sustainability by embedding practices into workplace culture and ensuring continuous improvement.

Active participation from team members and strong support from leadership are vital for the programme's success. Involve your board and committee members in this whole process. Together, they can create a healthier, more supportive environment that benefits not only staff but also the communities they serve.

## Empower half-hour support for your team

As well as having a comprehensive support programme for your staff as discussed above, I have suggested below a half-hour empowered presentation for club managers to consider adopting with their teams.

### 1. Support presentation - introduction

- Mental Health Awareness Week takes place in May to increase people's understanding of mental health. The theme this year was 'movement' - moving more for our mental health.
- Research has shown that regular physical activity can make us happier and healthier.
- Our bodies release feel-good hormones when we're active that can reduce anxiety and stress and help us sleep better.
- By building movement into our working day, it can have a positive impact on productivity and focus.

- There are other activities we can also introduce to improve well-being at work. Involve your greenkeepers (once a week) and the hospitality staff too!

### 2. The half hour

- Take a half-hour break, as a change of scenery or activity can boost energy levels and help to focus the mind.
- 'Empower half-hour activities' will help your team to explore the link between mental and physical wellbeing.
- Encourage them to connect with one another and start new, healthy habits.
- Better work relationships provide a foundation that may mean it's easier to spot the signs when someone's struggling with their mental health.
- And in turn, this can help people feel comfortable in coming forward to speak to someone at work if they need to.

### 3. Movement Ideas

- Moving is good for our physical and mental health.
- How about planning a movement challenge? For example, how many steps your team do in half an hour.
- You could also try 'walking meetings' around the golf course (enjoy the location and scenery).
- Suggest chair yoga and perhaps some lunchtime exercise clubs.

## Effective team bonding

- Getting to know colleagues and other team members helps us work more effectively together.
- Support and celebrate one another by taking time to encourage. Perhaps ask a colleague to run a session to highlight their qualities.
- Write and share riddles about yourself and get the team to guess who is who?
- Share your favourite foods - encourage people to bring in a different dish for lunch for everyone to try.
- Feeling connected to other people helps contribute to resilience and happiness and can increase our feelings of self-worth.
- If you are comfortable and feel safe to do so, try and share more of yourself with your colleagues. Talk about your lived experiences, your hobbies outside work and if you have any weekend plans.

## There are 10 important keys to happiness

- |               |                                 |
|---------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Giving     | Do kind things for others       |
| 2. Relating   | Connect with people             |
| 3. Exercise   | Take care of your body          |
| 4. Awareness  | Live life mindfully             |
| 5. Trying out | Keep learning new things        |
| 6. Direction  | Have goals to look forward to   |
| 7. Resilience | Find ways to bounce back        |
| 8. Emotion    | Look for what's good            |
| 9. Acceptance | Be comfortable with who you are |
| 10. Meaning   | Be part of something bigger     |

The above are really important factors for a happy and strong team to focus upon. Keep these at the forefront of all you do with your team in supporting their well-being. [GCS](#)

## Transitioning into autumn conditions

*Paul Woodham, Head of Sustainable Agronomy - Europe at The R&A, highlights some of the key changes to course maintenance to keep turf as healthy as possible as we move into autumn, including increased mowing heights and the timing of any overseeding operations.*

There is undoubtedly more pressure on greenkeepers to maintain main-season performance, even tournament set-up, for daily presentation of the course in the late summer and autumn period. While there can be a graduated transition from main season into autumn, it is important to not delay this process.

This year has seen one of the longest playing seasons I can remember. What constitutes the main season is a matter for debate and a topic which is stretching the boundaries of what is achievable. The golfer has enjoyed many days of fine weather from late February onwards, with numbers of rounds up compared to 2023 and 2024, when poorer weather dominated much of the year. The impact of the increased traffic on turfgrass - physical stress - coincides with the impact of prolonged and often extreme environmental stress.

While October may still be a fine month for golf, it is a point in the calendar when the greenkeeper needs to transition the course into autumn to ensure that there is ample time for recovery and strengthening plant health ahead of winter. There are three key environmental factors which rapidly reduce the plant's potential for growth and recovery heading into autumn, hence the reason not to delay.

- **Reduced day length - shorter photoperiod and reduced light intensity.** Reduced photoperiod in turfgrass leads to negative physiological changes, including decreased growth, leaf area, and tiller density, along with a reduction in chlorophyll and antioxidant enzyme activity, which results in weaker, off-colour turf that is more susceptible to stress and injury.
- **Reduced temperature.** Cool-season turfgrass species reach peak growth potential at around 15-25°C and this drops to around just 20% when average 24-hour temperatures fall below 10°C. This reduced growth rate leads to a reduction in wear tolerance, a potential for diminished sward density and increased susceptibility to disease.
- **Increased period of leaf wetness.** Increased periods of leaf wetness on turfgrass, from autumnal rain and extended periods of dew formation (nights are longer than days), significantly increase the risk of fungal diseases by creating a favourable environment for spore germination and infection.

These factors contribute towards increased stress and reduced recovery. Heights of cut should be increasing during October



*O stands for October and offsetting excessive turfgrass stress or wear*

to ensure that the physical pressure from mowing is relaxed (increased height and a relaxed frequency of cut). The playing surfaces will naturally soften as autumnal moisture raises soil moisture content, thereby allowing the inadvertent potential for mowing to be more aggressive. Seedlings can be wounded and ripped from the surface under the physical disturbance caused by excessive mowing, foot traffic and trolleys.

By October, you will be wanting to have completed any renovation overseeding work and set out areas of protection against intensive wear. It is important to seed as soon as possible while temperatures and daylight can support the germination and establishment of seedlings. Research suggests that overseeding browntop bentgrass when temperatures are below 14°C, with no frost, will deliver a low return. Further research reported that there was very little variation for germination percentage of different species at average temperatures of 7°C (13°C day/ 2°C night), with nearly all cultivars taking approximately 14 days to reach 50% germination.

While growth potential will reduce, it will still be important to commence autumn nutrition and the management of turf hardener and plant elicitor applications for defence against disease pressure.

In summary, the golfer should expect to see a change in the set-up and management of the course coming out of main season. Maintenance and reparations should be underway, so they should expect areas where traffic management is set out and understand the need to relax the intensity of mowing heights. [GCS](#)

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*COMING SOON*

Tax experts Hillier Hopkins on VAT and the partial exemption rules