

Members' and Proprietary Golf Clubs' Survey 2023/24 Report

In association with



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Welcome to the 2023/24 annual members' and proprietary golf club survey report from Hillier Hopkins, now in its 18th year.

I would like to start by thanking the 103 golf clubs that took the time to complete this year's comprehensive survey and our survey partners at the Golf Club Secretary Newsletter and the UK Golf Federation. Without their help this survey and report would not be possible.

Given the turbulent economic picture of the past 12 months with high inflation, interest rates and reductions in household disposable income, the achievements of golf clubs participating in this survey are to be applauded. Golf for a significant proportion of the public remains a sport and social highlight that few are prepared to forego.

For the majority of members clubs, member numbers have increased again with only 24% of clubs reporting more leavers than joiners. However, with fewer people on waiting lists and people waiting for shorter periods of time, the pipeline of new members may not be as healthy as it was 12 months ago. The proportion of lady members has increased from 15% to 18% over the same period. Despite this the average surplus now stands at £80,000, a fall on the previous year where the average surplus stood at £102,000, but considerably higher than the £64,000 surpluses from 2021 and 2020.

The benefits of member increases have been offset by increasing costs. Insurance costs have, to give just one example, increased significantly with 64% now paying more than £15,000, compared to just 36% in 2021. 95% of clubs say they will increase subscription fees in 2024 to meet increased costs. For CASC clubs, the survey's results confirm the anecdotal evidence that we have seen many clubs considering coming out of the CASC regime in order to increase fees.

The age of golf club members remains high with 43% of club members aged over 61. Just 16% of club members are aged under 30. It is a trend that clubs continue to struggle to reverse.

Clubs are responding to changing demands and looking for additional ways to attract members and justify subscription increases. 77% are now offering a driving range or practice ground, whilst many have also invested significantly in what they already have. Clubs have also invested in swing studios, which are now offered by 64% of clubs.

Some clubs have brought retail and pro shops in-house and as a result record additional revenues of £150,000 or more. On-site accommodation, however, remains in short supply with just two clubs participating in this survey offering 'lodge-style' accommodation. Just three clubs have an on-site gym for member use.

Members' clubs recognise the need for modernisation, with 95% saying they would change rules and regulations to facilitate this. It will be interesting to learn whether they do and if so, how.

For proprietary golf clubs, a similar proportion of 92% were looking to increase fees in 2024 and were prepared to change their rules in order to modernise. The proportion of clubs with waiting lists has increased to 17% from 14%. Other headline trends outlined in this report appear more unusual and should be read with the caveat of the data being from a smaller sample size than the members clubs' data, however useful insights can still be gained from this report.

We hope you find this year's members and proprietary golf club survey report interesting and helpful and would welcome your thoughts.



Sam Hodson
Director

A word from our survey partners

Jeremy Ellwood, Editor of The Golf Club Secretary newsletter

In 2021 we were assessing the impact of Covid, both good and bad; in 2022, it was the so-called 'cost-of-living crisis' and whether the good that had perhaps unexpectedly arisen as a result of Covid in terms of increased participation and membership had been significant enough to help mitigate the impact of rising costs.

Last year, with interest rates continuing to rise but the rate of inflation falling quite markedly, what did that all add up to for golf clubs, and have they mostly still been able to weather the storm to a reassuring degree?

This is where the annual Hillier Hopkins Golf Club Benchmarking Survey comes to the fore, assessing the state of play out there via a healthy sample size so golf club managers, secretaries and owners get a better idea of what is going on in the industry and can make wiser and more-informed short- and long-term decisions as a result.

For example, from a first quick read of this year's survey you can see that fewer members' clubs now have a waiting list yet more have an entrance fee; well over 90% of both members' and proprietary clubs are increasing subscriptions this year by an average of 6%; 44% of respondent members' clubs (with a reasonable geographic spread) are now charging more than the CASC threshold of £1,612pa for full subscriptions; and both wage and utility bills are up significantly, with electricity nearly doubling year-on-year at members' clubs.

That's just the tip of iceberg in terms of findings, and why we at The Golf Club Secretary (GCS) would encourage every golf club manager to set aside some time to study the survey in detail. We have been associated with it for well over a decade now and still resolutely believe that it is essential reading, just as our monthly newsletter at £295pa remains a shrewd investment for any golf club manager seeking to stay up to speed in all key aspects of golf club management.

Our Golf Club Secretary - Open Championship continues to go from strength to strength, too, providing the ideal environment for secretaries and managers to catch up and discuss the state of affairs within our industry (armed with this survey data!) at some of the finest courses in the UK&I. In 2024 we will be visiting Royal Porthcawl, Hillside, Temple, Luffenham Heath, Piltown, Prestwick, The Richmond and Royal Cinque Ports before May 2025's finals at a new (to The GCS) classic English venue, which will be revealed shortly.



Douglas Poole, Chief Executive Officer of the UK Golf Federation

Running any business requires many skills & owning or managing a golf facility is no different to any other business. The problem can be that passion gets in the way of good sensible logic, costs creep up on you and changes in outside activities hit your customers through reduced income or time available to play their golf.

The latest Hillier Hopkins Annual Report is a must read for all involved in operating a golf facility. For many years Hillier Hopkins have provided our sector of the golf industry with accurate and valuable information on market trends, costs and developments which help us all to keep ahead and enable our businesses to grow and prosper.

The 2023/24 Survey and Report is a great source of information and starts to show the impact of the higher inflation in the country and huge increases in operations materials and power etc. I believe this year's report is a recommended read for all with golf facilities and is a great way to check performance and costs against others in our business.



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2023/24 Report

Members' clubs

Members' clubs' key highlights

77 clubs

This year we bring you data from 77 members' clubs across 9 regions, with 22% from London and the South East (outside of the M25). Clubs are predominantly 18-hole clubs.

56%

An increasing proportion of members' clubs have 600+ members. The proportion of lady members (18%) has increased.

46%

A reduction in the percentage of members' clubs who have a waiting list. This has also been accompanied by fewer people on waiting lists and more members leaving, but there has been an increase in the number of new junior members.

95%

A substantial majority of members' clubs are planning to increase subscription fees in 2024. In 2023, more clubs (43%, rising from 36%) were already charging standard playing member subscriptions above the CASC threshold.

89%

In 2023, 89% of clubs have a turnover exceeding £600,000, compared to 80% in 2022. 68% of all members' clubs have a turnover of £1 million+, the same as in 2022.

70%

Of members' clubs now have annual bar revenues exceeding £150,000, recovering from just 37% in the COVID affected 2020.

35%

Increases expected in average energy prices expected by members' clubs over the next year.

95%

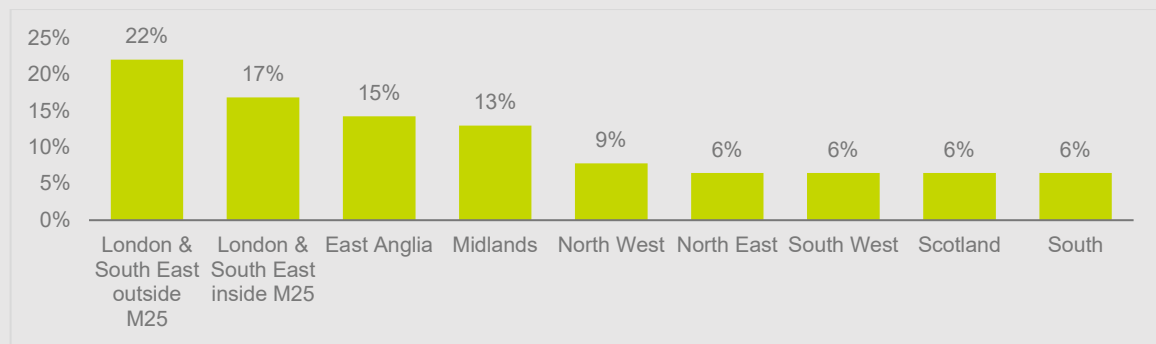
Of members' clubs were prepared to change their rules and regulations to modernise.

Members' clubs' results 2023/24

77 clubs, typically with 18-hole courses

This year we bring you data from 77 members' clubs from across nine regions of the UK, with 22% from London and the South East (outside of the M25). These were predominantly 18-hole clubs (82% - slightly more than in 2022), with 8% 27-hole, 5% 9-hole and 5% 36-hole (or more) clubs.

Residence of members' clubs



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2023/24 Report

Members' clubs

Staffing

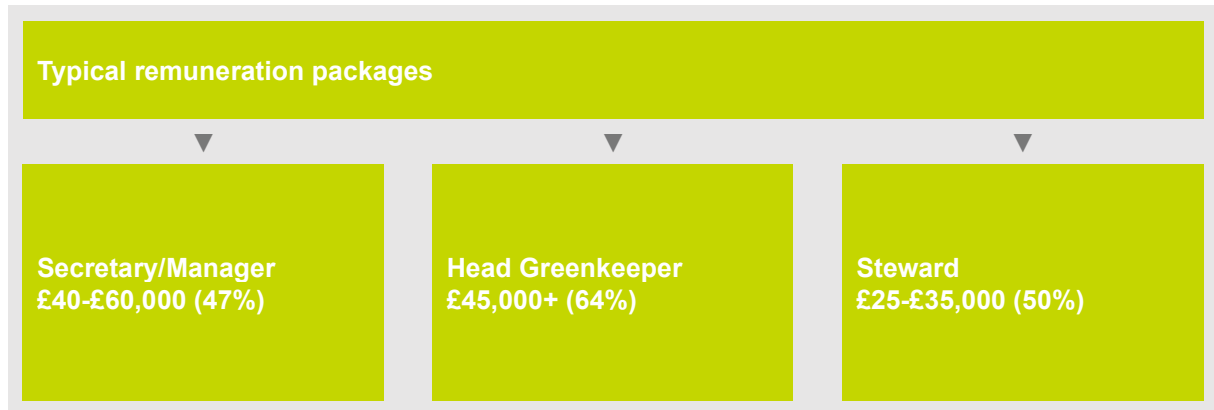
Staffing

Increasing remuneration packages

Typical respondent remuneration packages were higher than 2022, with 84% of Secretaries/General Managers earning in excess of £40,000, compared to 70% last year.

Head Greenkeeper remuneration packages also increased this year, with 45% earning in excess of £50,000, compared to 37% in 2022.

55% of members' clubs do not have a steward (an increase from 41% in 2022), but among those who do, 71% earn in excess of £30,000.



PGA professionals with retainers

The majority (94% - identical to the 2021 and 2022 figures) of members' clubs have a PGA professional and these are typically (94%) paid a retainer. The level of retainer is also the same as that reported in 2022, with 65% earning in excess of £2,000 per month.

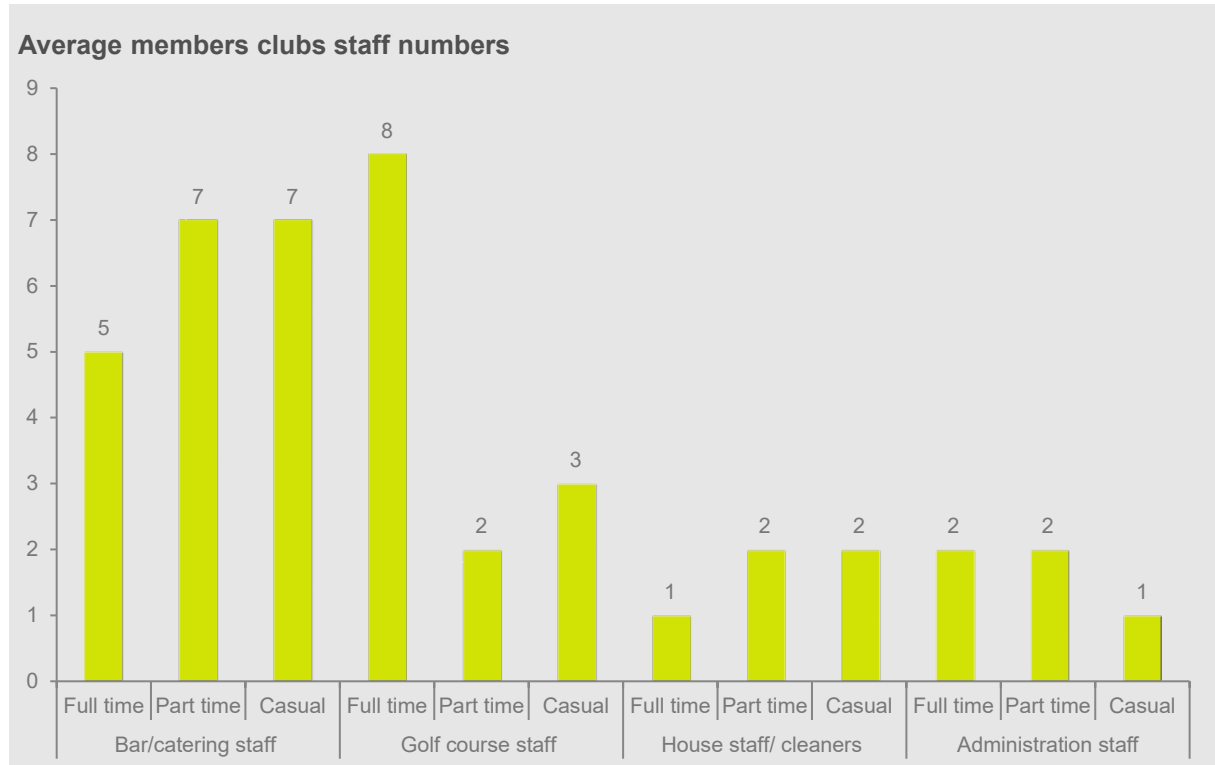
Members' clubs pay a typical PGA professional monthly retainer of £2,000-£3,000 (52%)

Fewer members' clubs pay commission to their professionals

23% of members' clubs pay commission to their professional, compared to 31% paying commission in 2022. Actual commission rates are typically in the same range (5-10%). For the few members' clubs where the professional pays the club a percentage of their golf lesson income, the amount is between 8%-25%, with most (50%) paying 25%.

Staff numbers at members' clubs

Always highly variable and dependent on the size and needs of each club in question, total staffing figures range from 2 to 95 across members' clubs, with an average of 26 total staff (a substantial increase on the 16 reported in 2022). Average numbers across each function are broken down as follows.



Most figures are within 1 person of the numbers recorded in 2022. The exception is for bar/catering staff, where the average number of full-time staff has increased from 3 to 5, and part time staff from 4 to 7.

Members' clubs

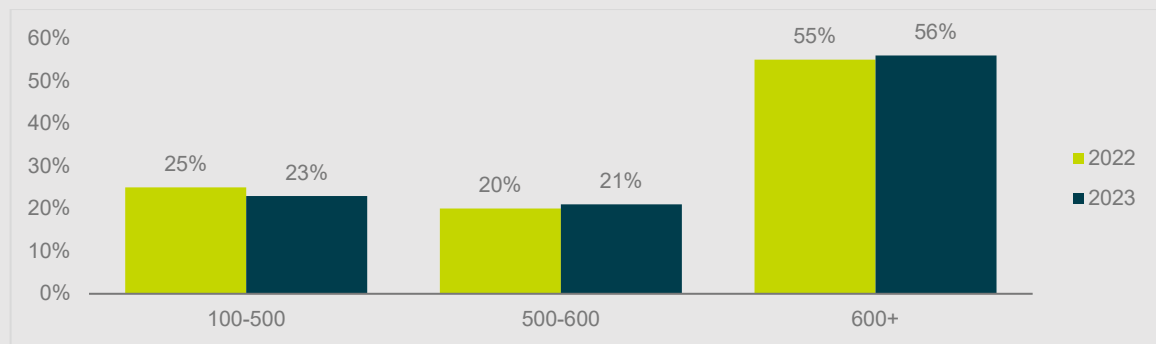
Members

Members

Member numbers increasing

The proportion of members' clubs with more than 600 playing members has continued to increase. The 2023 figure of 56% is only slightly higher than the 55% in 2022 but compares with just 38% in as recently as 2019.

Playing members at members' clubs



Flexible membership

The proportion of members' clubs who offer flexible membership has continued to fall, from 36% in 2022 to 34% in 2023.

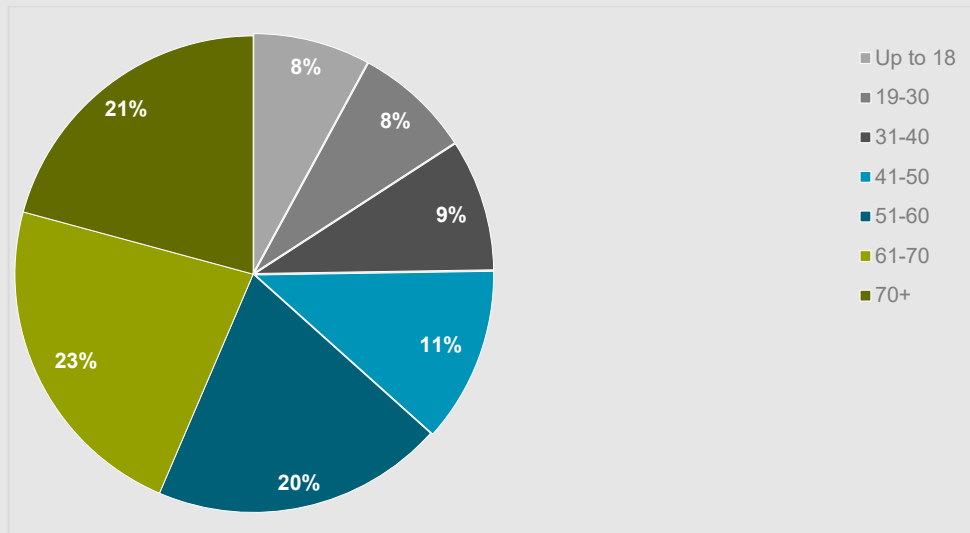
Deals included:

- Linked to number of rounds played.
- Benefits for Lady and Junior members.
- Points-based schemes.
- Voucher and credits-based systems.
- Schemes related to times, days of the week and seasons.

A consistent age profile of members

As in previous years, the age distribution of members' clubs shows more older members than younger members. The profile split is very similar to last year, with all categories within 1% of the 2022 figures.

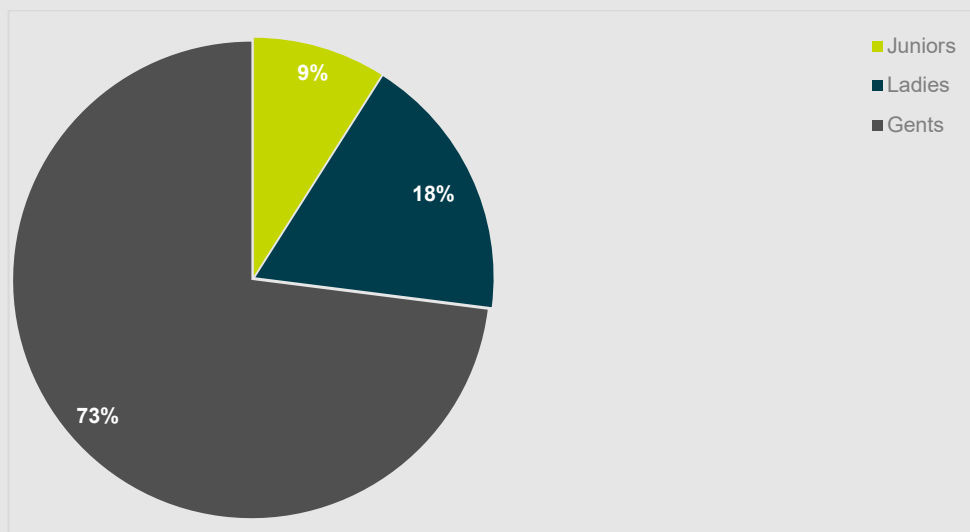
The age of members' club members



More lady members

In 2023 the proportion of junior members has remained unchanged, but compared to 2022 there are slightly more lady members (18% compared to 15%) and fewer gentlemen members.

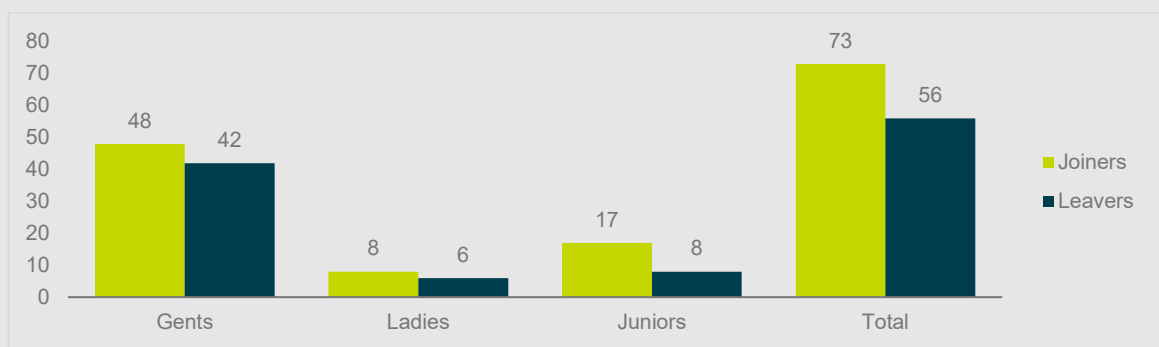
The profile of playing members at members' clubs



Joiners and leavers

In 2023, there were an average of 73 joiners for members' clubs, a slight increase on 70 in 2022. Most of this increase was due to additional junior members – 17 per club, compared to 12 in 2022. However, there was also an increase in the average number of leavers – from 48 in 2022 to 56 in 2023. Most of these leavers were gentlemen members – 42 in 2023, compared to 36 in 2022. 24% of members' clubs reported more leavers than joiners in 2023 – similar to the 23% reported in 2022.

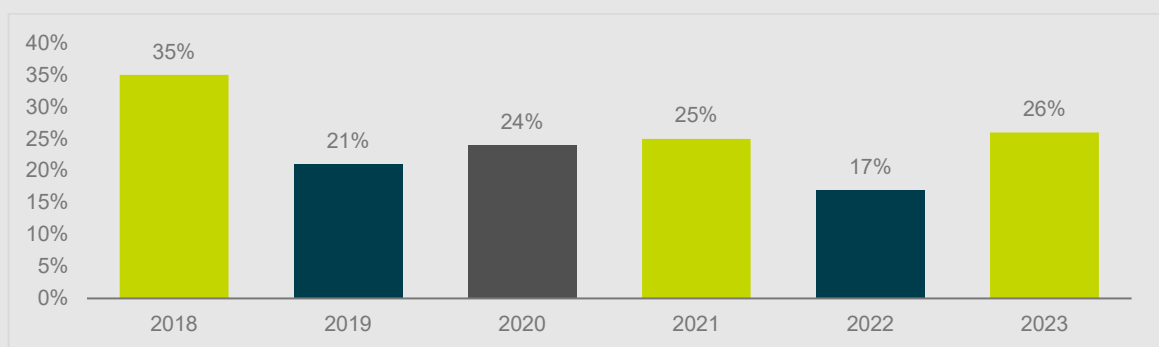
The profile of joiners and leavers at members' clubs



Additional social members

The proportion of members' clubs with a social membership exceeding 100 (26%) is the highest reported since 2018.

Members' clubs with over 100 social members



Rounds of golf delivered annually

Members' clubs were delivering between 400 and 85,000 rounds of golf to MEMBERS each year. Whilst the highest number of rounds played has increased from the 65,000 reported in 2022, the average number of rounds played in 2023 (27,000) has reduced from the number reported in 2022 (29,500).

The equivalent figures for VISITORS ranged from 75 to 22,500 with an average of 5,800 in 2023, increasing from 4,500 in 2022.

Society rounds

The number of rounds played by societies ranges from 3 to 10,000. The average number of rounds played this year (1,100) is exactly the same as in 2022.

Welcoming new members

In 2023 there were fewer activities offered by clubs to welcome new members. The most popular activities were:

- Introduction to the club professional – offered by 55% of members' clubs in 2023, compared to 59% in 2022.
- Induction programmes – 55% in 2023 and 61% in 2022.
- Social events – 42% in 2023 and 59% in 2022.

Other popular activities include a complimentary round of golf (22%), free coaching sessions (17%), and a new members questionnaire (15%).

Member social activities

Members' clubs often ran member social events during 2023, with the number of activities at each club ranging from 0 to 35. The average number of 11 events run by members' clubs in 2023 is a slight decrease on the 12 reported in 2022.

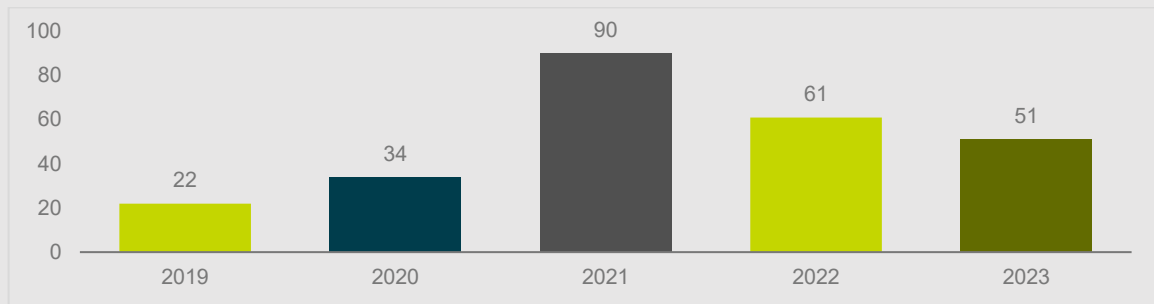
Member competitions

The number of member competitions run during the year ranged from 4 to 1,000, with an average of 121 – similar to the 122 in 2022.

Waiting lists

The proportion of members' clubs with a waiting list has continued to fall this year – from 52% in 2022 to 46% in 2023. This has been accompanied by a reduction in the average number of people waiting to join – currently standing at 51, compared to 61 in 2022. Most clubs (55%) keep those on the waiting list informed about the situation, and during 2023 an average of 24 members at each club progressed from the waiting list to membership at the last renewal.

Average number of people on members' clubs waiting lists



More downgraded memberships

The number of downgraded memberships (i.e., reducing from a 7-day to a 5-day member, etc.) increased in 2023. This figure ranged from 0 to 74, with an average of 18, compared to 10 in 2022.

Upgraded memberships

The survey also asked clubs about the number of upgraded memberships during the year (i.e., going from a 5-day to a full membership or flexible to full membership, etc.). This figure ranged from 0 to 77, with an average of 13, an increase on the 11 in 2022.

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Members' clubs

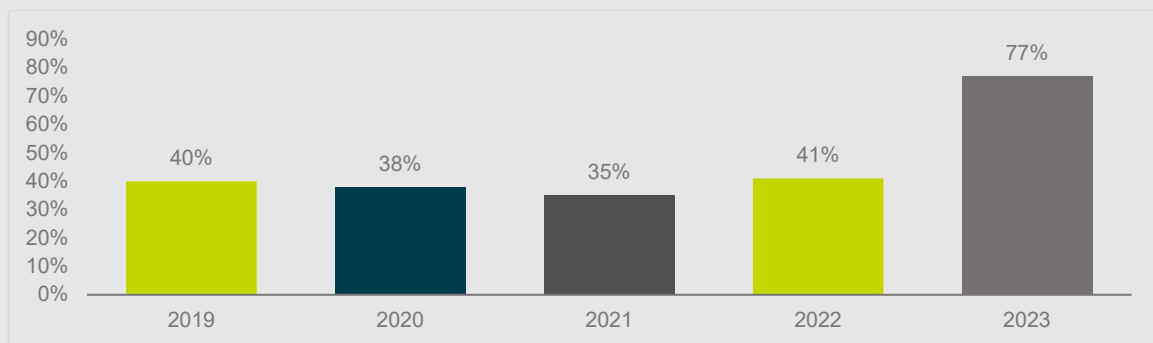
Facilities

Facilities

Most members' clubs have a driving range or practice ground

This year we slightly changed the question about driving ranges – from “Do you have a driving range?” to “Do you have a driving range **or practice ground?**” As a consequence of this, there was a substantial increase in positive responses. 77% of members' clubs confirmed that they have a driving range or practice ground, whilst in 2022 just 41% had a driving range.

Members' clubs with a driving range (or practice ground)



This year, just 41% of members' clubs reported driving range income in excess of £5,000 – significantly lower than the 61% in 2022. In 2023, 32% of members' clubs earned over £10,000 from their driving range, falling from 36% in 2022.

Fewer members' clubs with a driving range are reporting increases in their driving range income. In 2023, only 15% saw a slight or modest increase and no clubs identified a significant increase. In comparison, 26% of members' clubs reported increases in driving range income in 2022, and 44% in 2021. For 80% of members' clubs the driving range income in 2023 was about the same as in 2022.

5% of members' clubs offered pre-bookable driving range slots (similar to the 4% in 2022). Ball tracking technology was used by 5% of members' clubs driving ranges, slightly less than the 7% reported in 2022.

Short game practice area

88% of members' clubs have a short-game practice area.

Few members' clubs offered a hotel, on-site accommodation, or spa

Only two members' clubs offered any hotel or on-site accommodation, and this was in the form of lodges at both clubs. No spa facilities were offered by members' clubs and only three members' clubs had a gym.

Most members' clubs have swing studios

Swing studio facilities were offered by 64% of members' clubs in 2023, an increase on the 61% in 2022. Most (85%) were run by the club professional and generated an average income of £4,700 (exceeding the £3,500 reported in 2022). For the majority of members' clubs (85%) this swing studio income was about the same as the previous year, whilst 7% saw an increase and 8% a decrease.

Retail shops

Most members' clubs retail shops are operated by the PGA professional (77%, similar to the 76% in 2022). A further 19% of members' clubs operate a shop themselves, whilst 4% do not operate a retail shop. Annual revenue generated by these shops is over £150,000 for most (57%) members' clubs – but this is a reduction on the 64% in 2022.

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Members' clubs

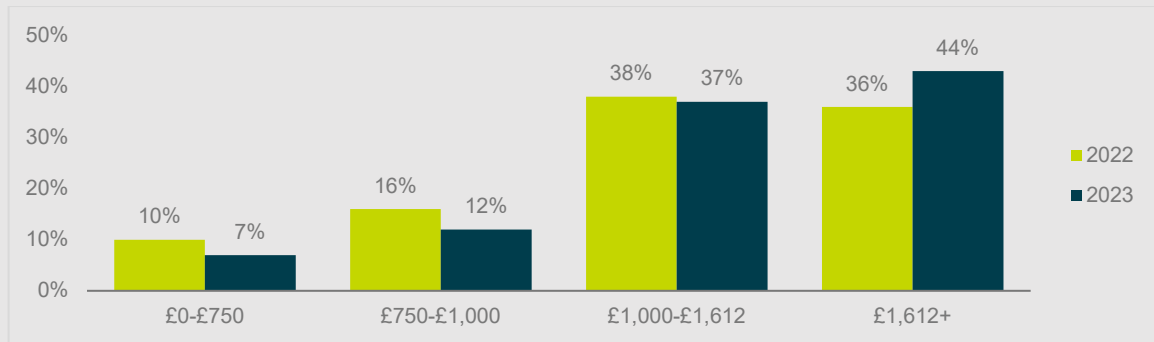
Fees & charges

Fees & charges

Higher standard playing member subscriptions

Membership fees for standard playing members in 2023 are, as in previous years, typically in the £1,000-£1,612 range, with the latter figure being the upper CASC threshold. This is evident for 37% of members' clubs, similar to the 38% in 2022. 44% of members' clubs had member subscriptions exceeding £1,612, compared to 36% in 2022.

Members' clubs' standard playing member subscription



Most members' clubs planning to increase subscription charges

A substantial majority (95%) of members' clubs are planning to increase subscription fees in 2024, even higher than the 92% in 2023. The levels of planned increases range from 3% to 11.5%, with an average of 6% (compared to 7% average in 2022).

Social membership charges

The most typical social membership charge (for 53% of members' clubs) was, as in previous years, £50-£150 – an increase on the 42% in 2022.

Joining fees

The proportion of members' clubs charging an joining fee continues to rise, to 70% in 2023 compared to 61% in 2022 and 53% in 2021. An additional 4% are also intending to introduce a charge in the future.

Joining fees range from £50 to £5,000, with an average fee of £1,770, similar to the £1,700 in 2022. 74% of members' clubs allow joining fees to be paid in instalments, rising from 68% in 2022. These range from 1 – 5 years, with payments over 2 or 3 years being the most typical options.

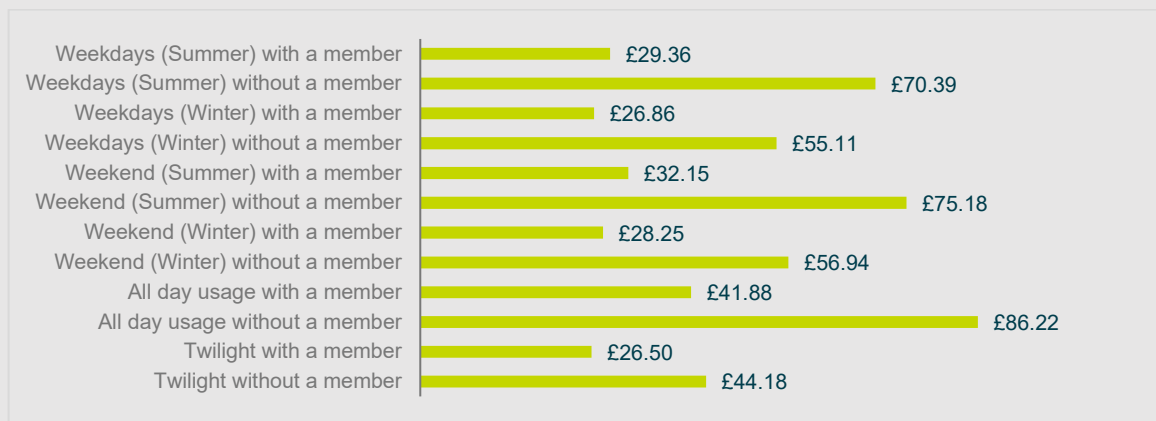
Booking systems

An online tee booking system was used by 64% of members' clubs, less than the 75% in 2022. Most (74%) of those members' clubs who use a tee booking system use a specialist company for this.

Green fee charges at members' clubs

In 2022, members' clubs' average green fee charges ranged from £28.81 for weekdays with a member, to £108.25 for all day without a member. This year the format of the question was expanded to provide extra information about seasonality and time of day. Comparisons to previous years are therefore not provided, but the average green fee charges in 2023 are shown below.

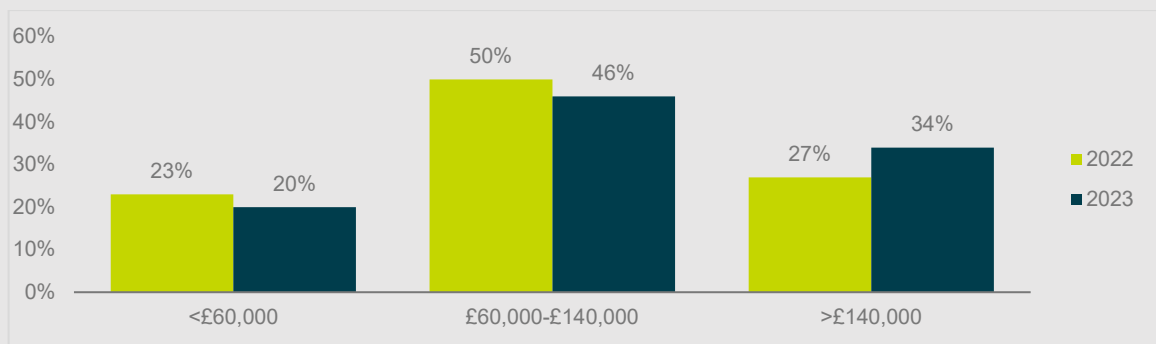
Members' clubs' green fee charges



Increasing green fee incomes at members' clubs

Members' clubs' green fee income has increased this year, with 80% of clubs now generating annual green fee incomes in excess of £60,000.

Members' clubs' green fee incomes



Green fee ticket systems

Fewer members' clubs were using a numbered green fee ticket system in 2023 - 28%, compared to 38% in 2022. In order to ensure that all visitors have paid before play, these clubs used a variety of ways of monitoring this system, the most popular of which were control by the pro-shop and monitoring by Course Marshalls.

Society packages and their costs

99% of members' clubs indicated that they allow society usage – similar to the 98% in 2022. Society package costs are shown below. Costs have risen since last year for 9-hole and 18-hole packages (by 72% and 9% respectively), but have fallen for 27-hole and 36-hole packages.

Members' clubs' society package costs



Average room and facility hire

As in 2023, this year celebrations/parties were the most frequent reason for room hire, for 68% of members' clubs - slightly less than the 74% in 2022. Other reasons included business events/seminars (42%), weddings (36%), and health and fitness classes (3%). 29% of members' clubs in 2023 did not permit external hire – more than the 23% in 2022.

Average annual revenues generated from room hire show both increases and decreases between 2022 and 2023. However, there was a substantial increase in revenues generated by hire for weddings. This was evident in the number of clubs reporting revenue from weddings hire, as well as the average revenue per club.

Room / facilities hire average annual revenue



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Members' clubs

Financial information

Financial information

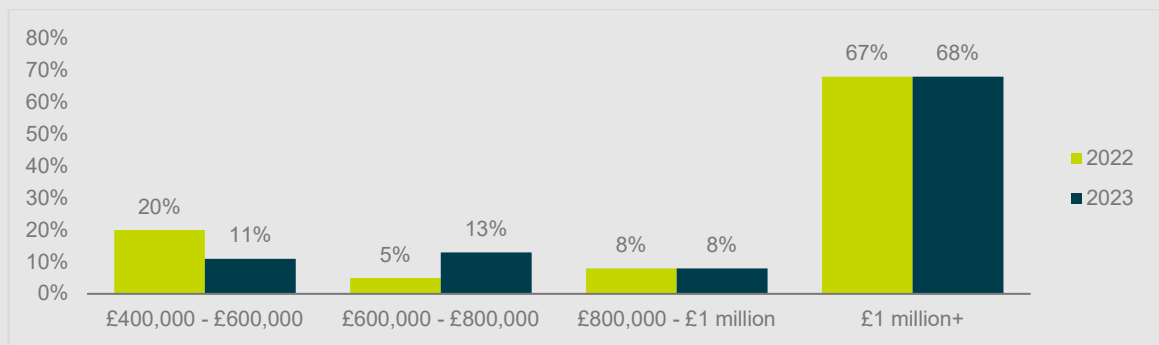
VAT partial exemption

In 2023, 39% of members' clubs had made a VAT COVID claim. 53% of members' clubs dealt with their VAT partial exemption in-house – exactly the same as in 2022.

Members' clubs with higher turnover

Members' clubs report turnover levels ranging from £400,000 to £1million+. This year saw more clubs generating turnover between £600,000-£800,000.

Annual members' clubs' turnover



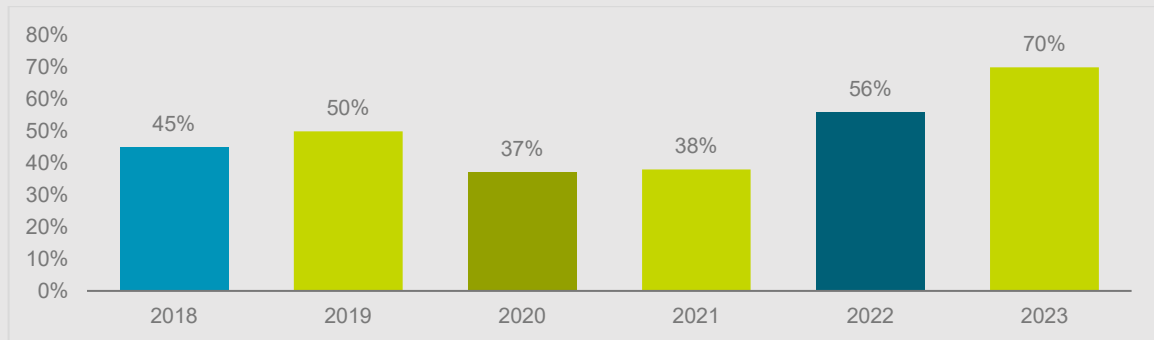
Society income at members' clubs

Society income of £20,000-£40,000 was reported by 28% of members' clubs in 2023, exactly the same as in 2022. However, more clubs now receive Society income of over £40,000 – 55% in 2023, rising from 42% in 2022.

Increased bar revenue and activity

In 2023, 70% of members' clubs generated annual bar revenue exceeding £150,000, the highest level since this survey started and a significant increase from the 56% in 2022.

Members' clubs with a bar revenue >£150,000



Average margins and rate costs this year were:

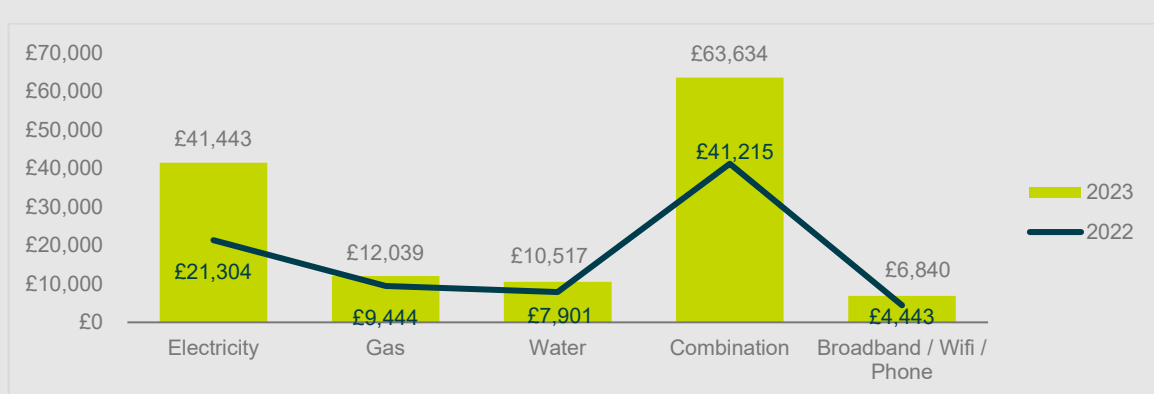
- Gross margin 57% (60% in 2022).
- Net profit 25% (19% in 2022).
- Rate cost £28,443 (£24,791 in 2022).

62% of members' clubs indicated that their bar revenue had increased in 2023. This was less than the 87% reported in 2022, but this figure was positively affected by the recovery from the effects of COVID in 2021.

Increasing utility costs

Average annual utility costs have increased significantly this year due to the effects of higher energy prices and inflation. Averages are as follows, with comparisons to 2022 showing that costs have increased in all categories this year, by between 27%-95%. Clubs were also asked what percentage increase they expected in energy costs over the next 12 months, with increases expected of up to 300% and an average expected increase of 35%.

Average annual utility charges



Average course maintenance and wage costs

Average members' club course wage costs in 2023 of £255,734 are 18% higher than the costs in 2022. However, this year the average course maintenance costs have risen by the lower level of 5%.

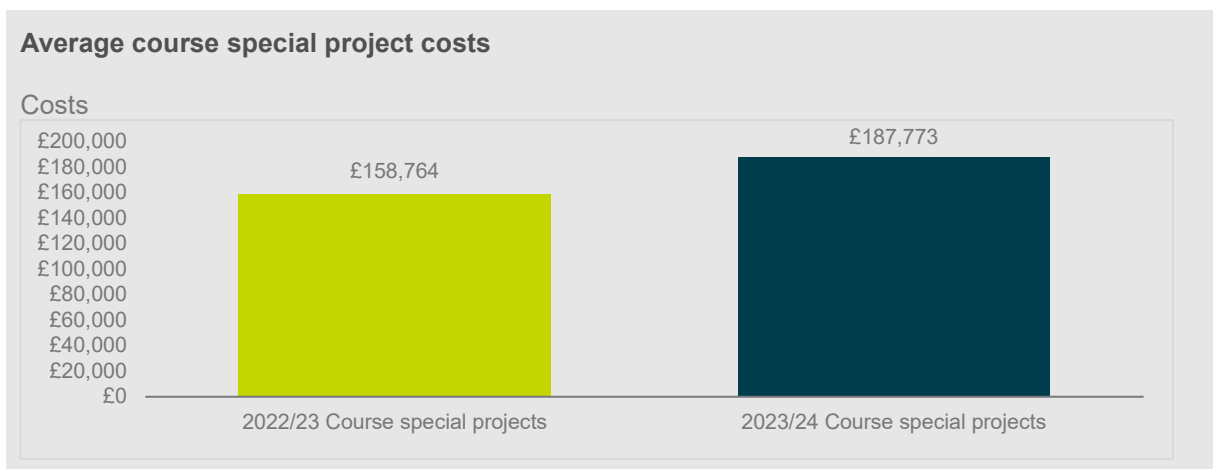


Irrigation

57% of members' clubs reported that they had fairway irrigation installed in 2023 – a significant increase from the 44% in 2022. For those members' clubs who *do not* currently have fairway irrigation installed, 35% are considering it. Greens and tees' irrigation systems have been updated recently by 38% of members' clubs – compared to 28% in 2022. There was a wide range in the costs of these updates, from £2,000 to £950,000, with an average cost of £256,000.

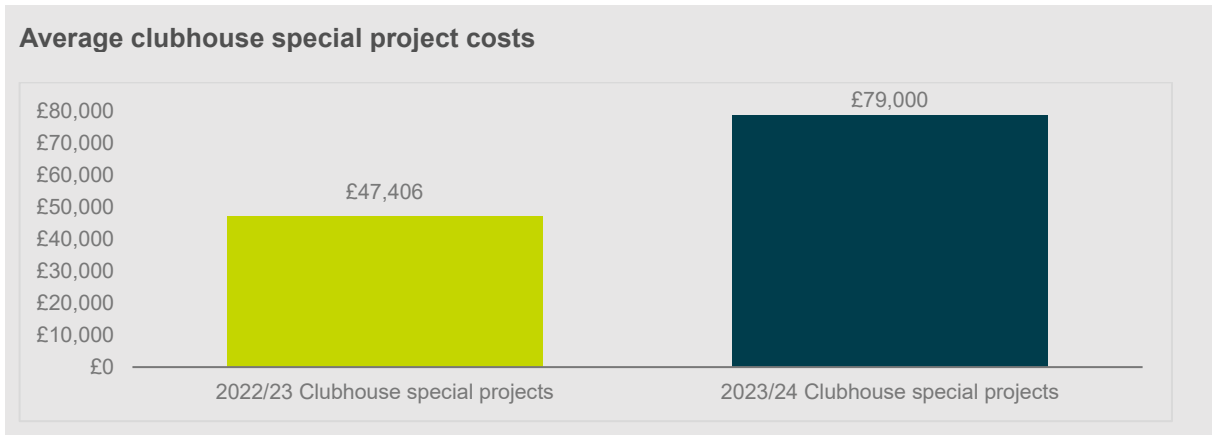
Average course special project costs

The average spend of members' clubs on course special projects is expected to increase next year, from over £158,000 in 2022/23 to almost £188,000 in 2023/24.



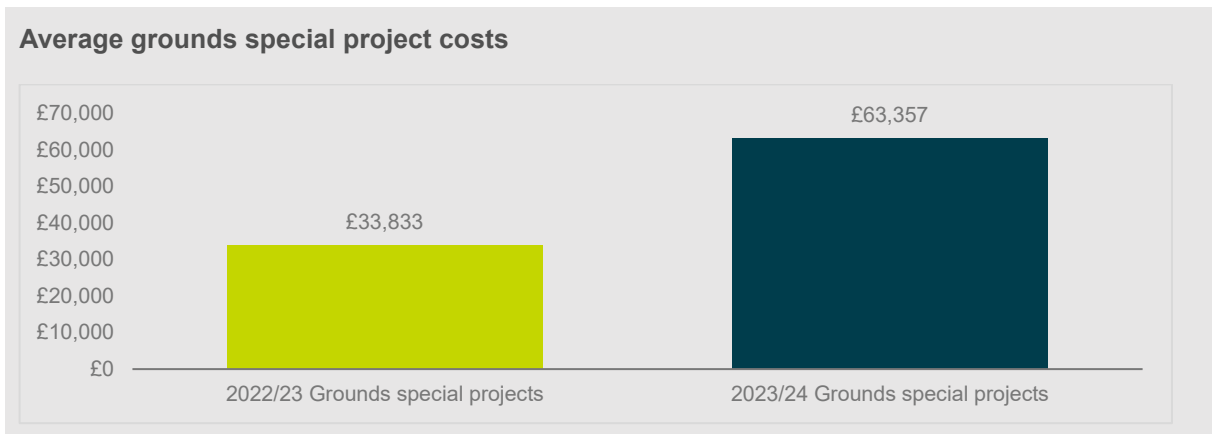
Average clubhouse special project costs

Spending is also expected to increase on next year's special project clubhouse costs, rising from £47,406 in 2022/23 to £79,000 in 2023/24.



Average grounds special project costs

Spending is expected to increase significantly in 2023/24's special project grounds costs, rising from £33,833 in 2022/23 to over £63,000 in 2023/24.



Average equipment special project costs

In contrast, spending is expected to decrease on 2023/24's equipment special projects – from just over £80,000 in 2022/23 to less than £70,000 in 2023/24.

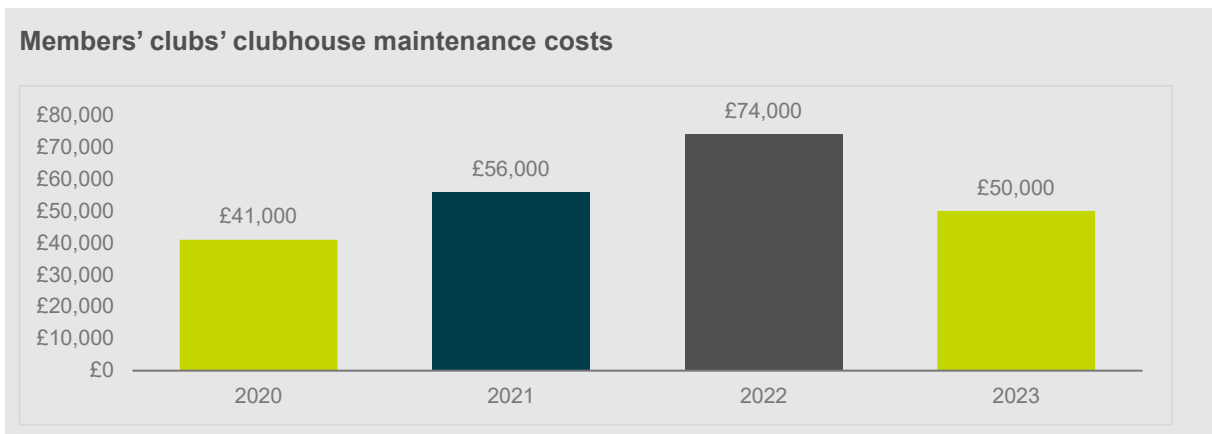


Other special projects

Of the members' clubs that gave an indication of other special projects they were undertaking this year, these included the creation of an irrigation lagoon.

Clubhouse maintenance costs and staffing

Average clubhouse maintenance costs reduced this year, from £74,000 in 2022 to £50,000.



Average clubhouse staff wages among members' clubs were £196,000 in 2023, similar to the £198,000 in 2022.



Members' clubs catering

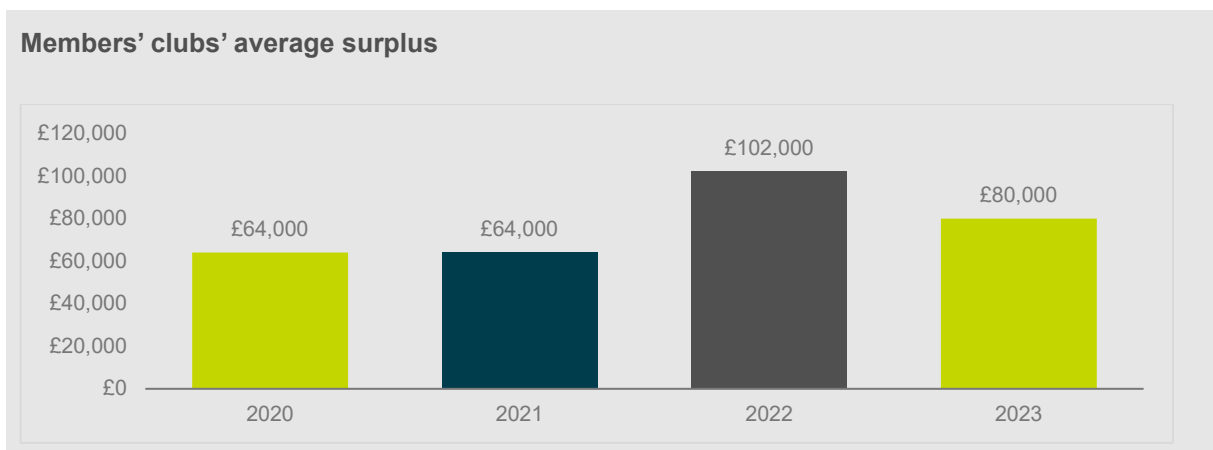
In 2023, 18% of members' clubs were using franchise catering, a significant reduction from the 30% in 2022.

Among those members' clubs who cater *without* the services of a franchise, revenue levels from catering range from less than £50,000 to £250,000 plus. Just over a third of these clubs (34%) generated revenues between £100,000-£200,000, less than the 50% reported in 2022. In 2023, 46% of these clubs generated revenues of over £200,000.

56% of members' clubs indicated that their catering revenues increased in 2023 and only 10% saw a decrease. Gross profit margins in 2023 range from a loss of 14% to 65%, with an average of 54% (similar to the 58% average in 2022). Net profit margins range from a loss of 27% to a profit of 53%. The average net profit of 8% was a reduction from the 19% in 2022.

Club surpluses and deficits

Among members' clubs, the highest surplus figure was over £870,000, with a highest deficit of £29,000. The average surplus of £80,000 this year was significantly lower than the £102,000 in 2022.



Annual general insurance

25% of members' clubs are paying between £15,000-£20,000 for annual general insurance. In contrast, in 2022 32% were paying £10,000-£15,000. 64% of members' clubs now pay more than £15,000, compared to just 36% in 2022 and 14% in 2021.

Freehold properties

47% of members' clubs (37% in 2022) indicated that they hold freehold properties other than the clubhouse. These clubs each held between 1 and 6 such properties, with 48 properties in total - 18 of which were valued at over £500,000. 83% of these were being rented out, sometimes to staff, but also to third parties.

The survey also established that:

- 75% of members' clubs own freehold land and buildings.
- Annual ground rent at each club is an average of £51,500 (£59,600 in 2022).
- Members' clubs each cover an average area of 160 acres (136 in 2022).

Cost of supplying a round of golf

Members' clubs indicated a range of costs for supplying a round of golf – ranging from £8 to £120, and with an average of £27.76 (£35.10 in 2022).

Raising finance

A variety of methods are used by members' clubs to raise finance for the club, the most popular being bank loans, which were used by 38% of clubs - an increase from 30% in 2022. Other popular methods included:

- Hire purchase/finance leases (used by 32% of member clubs, falling from 58% in 2022).
- Loans from members (19% in 2023 and 26% in 2022).
- Donations from members (16% in 2023 and 30% in 2022).
- Grants (16% in 2023 and 23% in 2022).
- Bank overdraft (11% in 2023 and 12% in 2022).

Other methods, all used by less than 9% of members' clubs, included sponsorship, subscriptions, sale of property, cash reserves and private finance.

Regarding how members' clubs had financed any shortfalls or fixed asset additions: the most popular method was by bank loans, used by 42% of members' clubs (33% in 2022). Overdrafts and sales of land or buildings had also been used.

Members' clubs

Business Development

Business Development

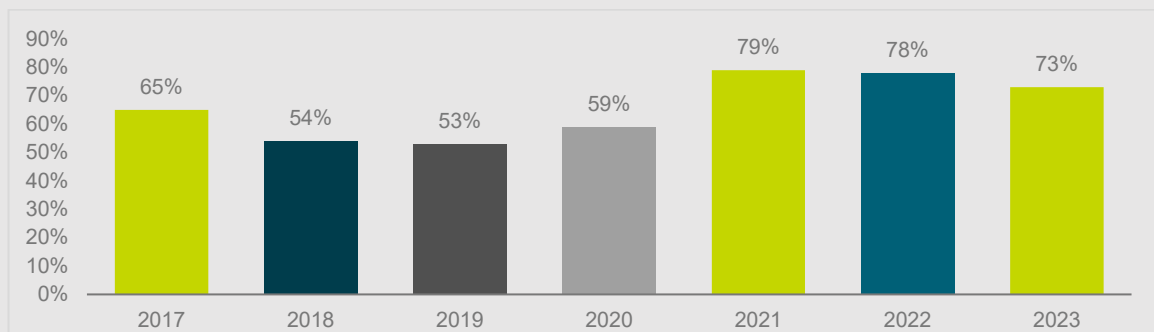
A steady proportion of members' clubs reporting growth

The number of members' clubs reporting growth was 73%, slightly less than the 78% in 2022.

The level of growth in the last 12 months varied between 5% and 50%, with an average of 11% (12% in 2022).

A further 27% of clubs reported that they were standing still and no clubs reported a reduction.

Members' clubs reporting growth



Members' clubs investing in marketing

Member referrals remain the most utilised method of marketing activity, used by 64% of members' clubs this year, although this was less than the 75% in 2022.

The other most commonly used marketing activities in 2023 included advertising (47%) social media (42% - far lower than the 63% in 2022), and networking (18%). Email campaigns were used by just 9% of clubs, compared to 31% in 2022.

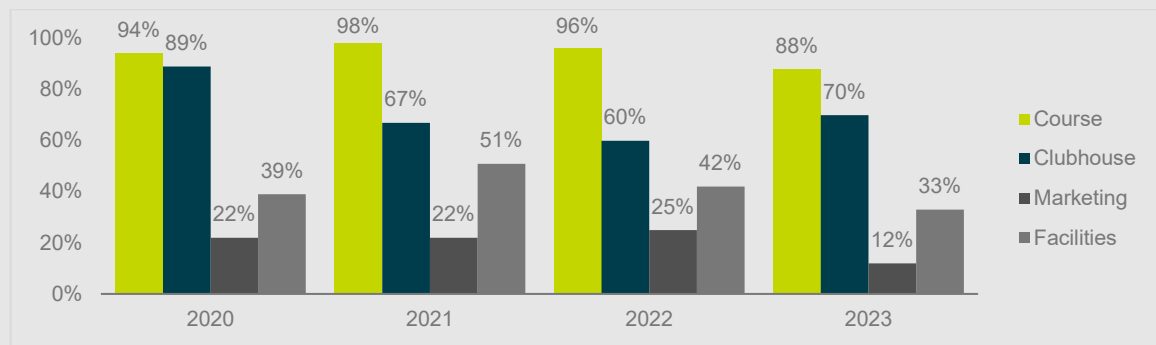
Other forms of marketing used in 2023 included events (11%), special offers (9%), direct mailings (7%), and corporate brochures (7%).

The most *successful* forms of marketing activity in 2023 were perceived to be member referrals (specified by 40% of members' clubs) and social media (21%).

A continuing focus on the golf course as the major source of investment

Investment in courses, clubhouses and facilities has largely remained steady since 2020, with levels of investment in courses being consistently high. In 2023 there has been a significant reduction in investment in marketing.

Members' clubs' investment



Members' clubs

Miscellaneous

Additional

Information

Miscellaneous additional information

Set opening hours

Slightly fewer members' clubs in 2023 (51% compared to 55% in 2022) indicated that they had set opening hours defined as 'daylight hours plus'. 36% (38% in 2022) had set opening hours and 13% (7%) had no set opening hours.

Days closed

Members' clubs had closed the course/clubhouse for between 1 and 30 days due to maintenance or bad weather, with an average of 11 days of closure.

Use of temporary greens in winter

The use of temporary greens in winter was more frequent in 2023, rising from 52% in 2022 (and just 40% in 2021) to 64% in 2023.

Dress codes

The percentage of members' clubs that have a dress code fell this year from 97% in 2022 to 90% currently. Codes frequently included 'smart casual' and golfing attire, with discouragement of denim, jeans (with or without rips), slogan clothing, shorts, tracksuits, t-shirts, football shirts and trainers.

Mobile phones policy

73% of members' clubs (71% in 2022) have a mobile phones policy.

Dogs

45% of members' clubs allowed dogs. Where they were allowed, this was often on condition that they were well behaved, kept on leads and not allowed in the clubhouse.

Sports channel subscriptions

The average annual cost of SKY and/or TNT sports (formerly BT Sport) subscriptions has risen slightly from £7,477 in 2022 to £7,494 currently.

The impact of the living wage

In 2023, 50% of members' clubs indicated that they were impacted by the increase in the minimum living wage and workplace pensions – slightly more than the 47% in 2022. This typically affected between 5-10 staff (comparable with the average of 8 in 2022), although as many as 30 staff were affected at some clubs, with cost increases of up to £50,000.

Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASC)

This year, just 7% of members' clubs indicated that they were Community Amateur Sports Clubs, falling from 18% in 2022. No clubs indicated that they were considering becoming one.

Rules and regulations

95% of members' clubs confirmed that they were prepared to change their rules and regulations to modernise the club – an increase from the 89% reported in 2022.

Club structure

59% of members' clubs indicated that they are currently incorporated, a reduction from the 67% in 2022. Of those clubs not already incorporated, only 16% of clubs are considering it (compared to 41% in 2022). Reasons given for this consideration most commonly relate to limiting liability for directors/committee members/trustees/members.

Board structure

In 2023, 89% of members' clubs had board members, exactly the same as in 2022, with an average of 8 members each (also 8 in 2022). The numbers at individual clubs range from 4 to 14.

The expertise present in the boards of members' clubs in 2023 was mainly in Business (92%) and Finance (90%). Other areas of expertise present included Marketing (51%), Legal (36%), HR (26%), and others (such as Property, Construction and Project Management – 10%).

Anticipated changes affecting golf clubs in 5-10 years

The following changes were suggested/anticipated by members' clubs. Changes anticipated within the next 5 years largely mirror those anticipated over the next decade, with a definite increase in concerns regarding environmental issues (especially water supply), cost of living and rising costs:

Membership Issues

- Falling membership numbers
- Demographic changes and an ageing membership profile
- Inclusivity and diversity.

Commercial and Financial Issues

- Rising wages and staffing, with a knock on effect on membership prices
- Economic uncertainty in the context of inflation, cost of living/lower disposable income and climate change issues
- Rising utility bills.

Environmental Considerations

- Adapting to climate and ecological change and sustainability issues
- Managing water security, availability and supply issues
- Irrigation changes - due to bans on grass treatments, pesticides, chemicals, water shortages, etc.

Golf Rules and Regulations

- Shorter formatting of the game.

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Proprietary clubs

Proprietary clubs' key highlights

26 clubs

This year we bring you data from 26 proprietary clubs across 8 regions, with 31% from the Midlands. Clubs are predominantly 18-hole clubs.

35%

Just over one third of proprietary clubs now have 600+ members (56% in 2022). Fewer members are aged 51-60 (20%, compared to 28% in 2022).

17%

Of proprietary clubs have a waiting list (compared to 14% in 2022). Most clubs had more joiners than leavers and there was a 50% increase in the average number of joiners.

92%

Of proprietary clubs are planning to increase subscription fees in 2024. In 2023, 29% of clubs charged standard playing member subscriptions of at least £1,000, compared to 57% in 2022.

54%

Of proprietary clubs now with a turnover of £1 million+, compared to 73% in 2022.

53%

Of proprietary clubs with annual bar revenues exceeding £150,000, compared to 83% in 2022.

100%

100% of proprietary clubs anticipate that energy prices will increase by between 5% and 100%.

92%

Of proprietary clubs were prepared to change their rules and regulations to modernise.

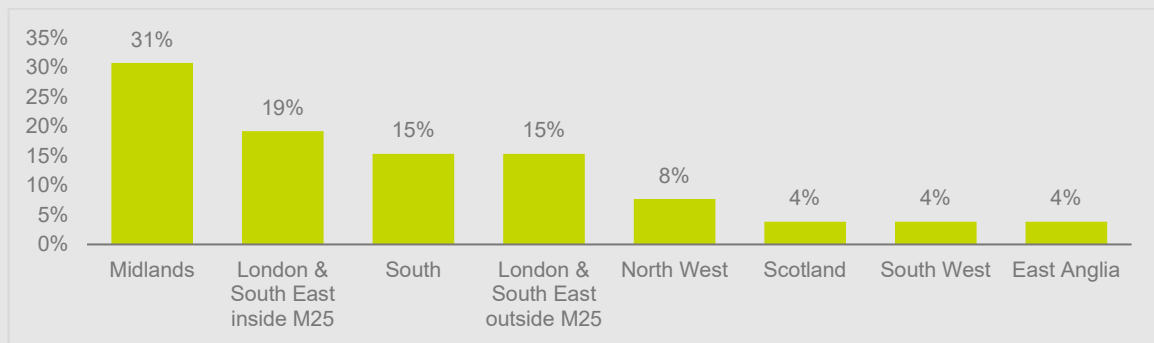
Proprietary clubs' results 2023

26 clubs from across the UK, typically with 18-holes

This year we bring you data from 26 proprietary clubs from the Midlands (31%), London and the South East (inside the M25) (19%), the South (15%) London and the South East (outside of the M25) (15%), the North West (8%), Scotland (4%), the South West (4%) and East Anglia (4%).

These were predominantly 18-hole (50%) clubs, with 9-hole (19%), 27-hole (15%) and 36-hole or more (15%) also evident.

Residence of proprietary clubs



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Proprietary clubs

Staffing

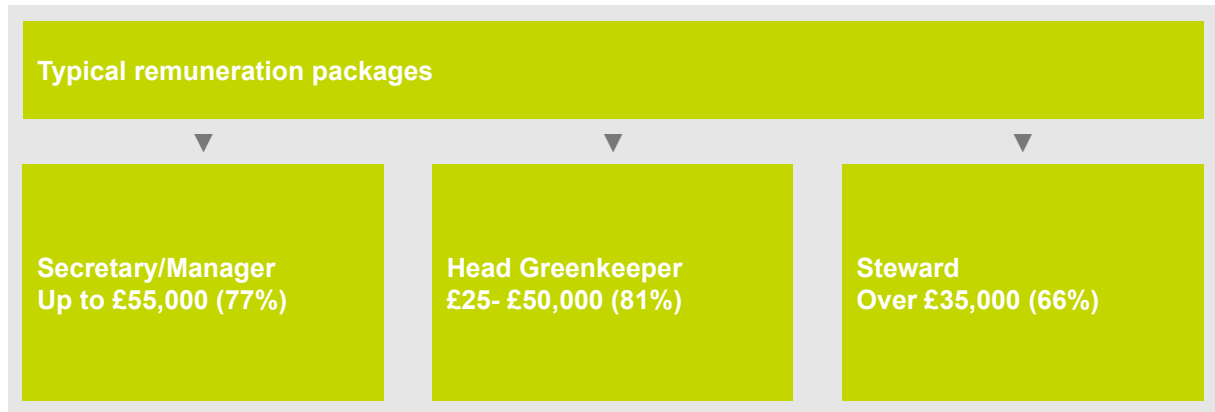
Staffing

Changing remuneration packages

There was again a large variance in the remuneration packages of survey respondents this year, ranging from under £10,000 to over £80,000. However, this year, only 23% of Secretaries/Managers received a package over £55,000, compared to 36% in 2022.

The Head Greenkeeper remuneration package was lower than in previous years, with 31% earning more than £45,000 (50% in 2022).

The proportion of clubs with a Steward is similar to last year (35% this year compared to 36% in 2022) and for those who did, their remuneration was typically in excess of £35,000.



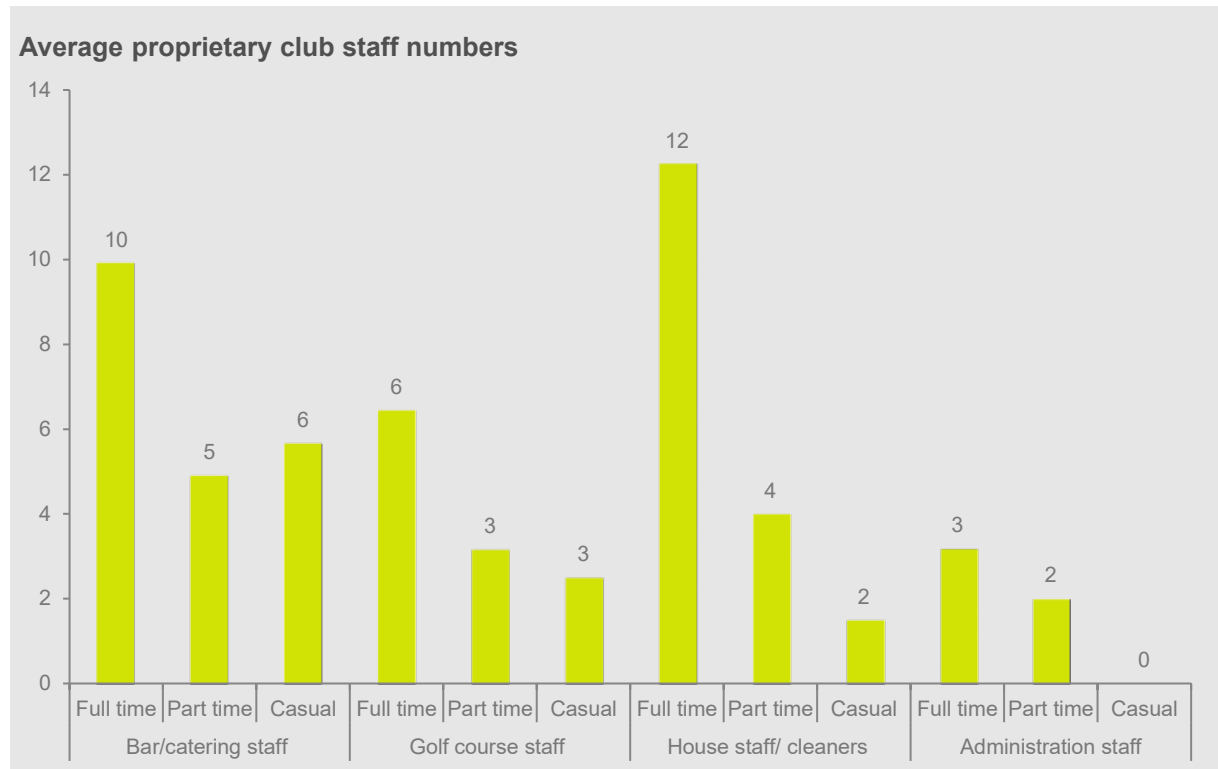
Fewer clubs with PGA Professionals

This year, fewer proprietary clubs indicated that they have a PGA professional - 85%, compared to 91% in 2022. 35% of proprietary clubs pay a monthly retainer to the pro, compared to 43% in 2022. Half of proprietary clubs pay a retainer of less than £1,500 and half between £2,000-£3,000 (all clubs paid their pros £2,000-£3,000 in 2022). 65% of the pros pay the club a percentage of their golf lesson income (57% in 2022) - typically 10%-30% of this income.

An average of 26 staff at proprietary clubs

Always highly variable and dependent on the size and needs of each club in question, staffing figures range from 4 to 160 across proprietary clubs, with an average total staffing number of 26 – an increase on the 13 reported in 2022 and comparable to the 28 in 2021.

Average numbers across staff roles are broken down as follows.



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Proprietary clubs

Members

Members

Proprietary clubs with a large variety in playing member numbers

Once again, proprietary clubs have a very varied range of playing members. 30% have less than 300 (25% in 2022) and a further 26% have 300-500 (25% in 2022). However, the 35% of clubs with over 600 members is a reduction on the 50% in 2022.

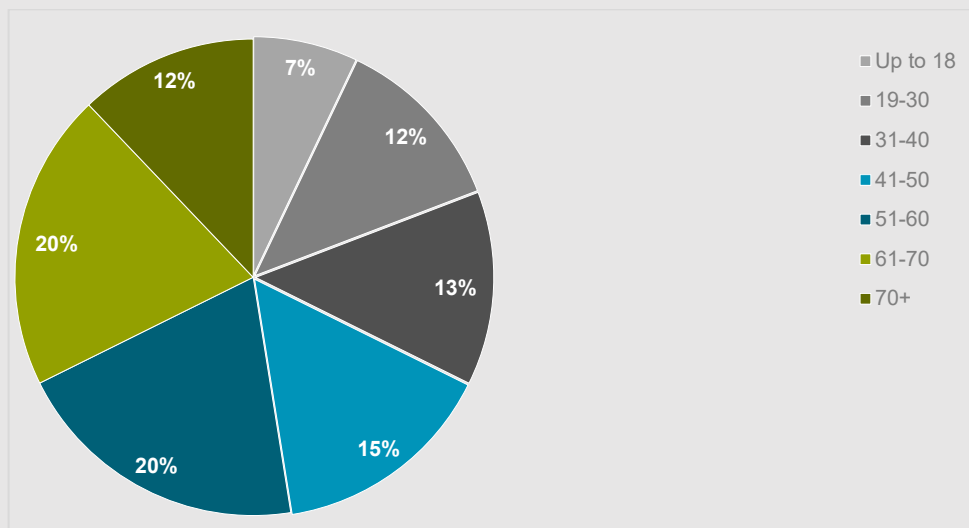
Fewer flexible memberships

In 2023, 57% of proprietary clubs are offering flexible membership – a reduction on the 67% in 2022. These offerings typically included points-based systems, a reduction in green fees and schemes related to days of the week.

Fewer members in the 51-60 age group

As in previous years, the age distribution of proprietary clubs shows fewer younger members and more older members. The results in most age brackets are similar (within 4%) to 2022. However, the exception is members aged 51-60, where the proportion has fallen from 28% in 2022 to 20% currently.

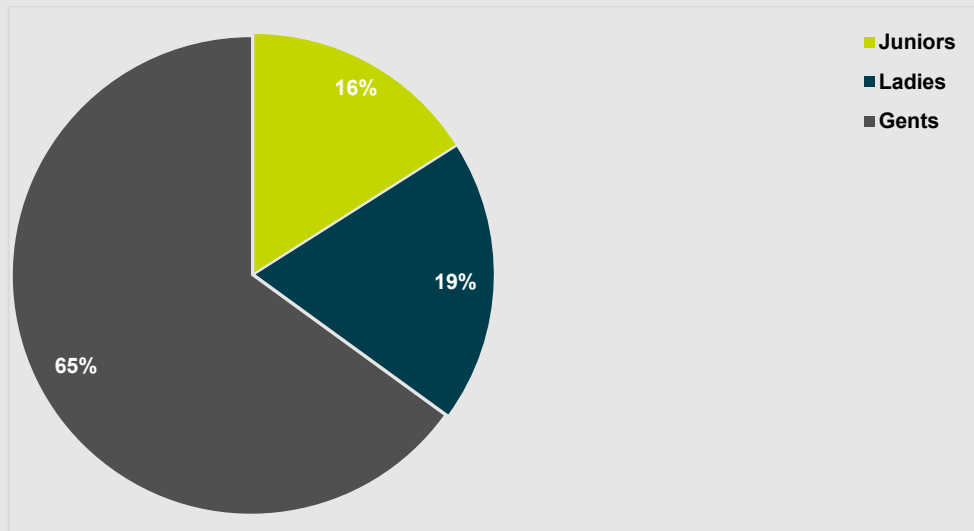
The age of proprietary club members



More junior members

There has been a healthy increase in the proportion of junior members in 2023 – 16%, compared to 10% in 2022.

The profile of playing members at proprietary clubs

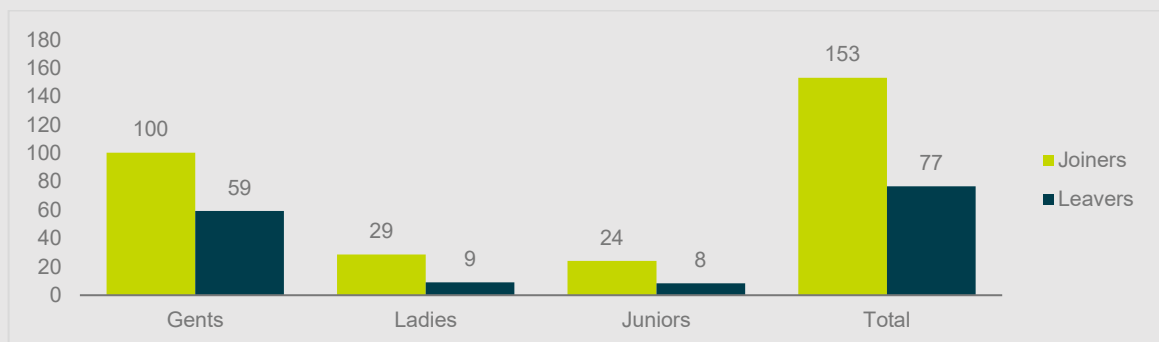


More joiners and fewer leavers

The numbers of joiners and leavers at proprietary clubs showed many positive changes in 2023. In particular:

- There was a substantial increase in the average number of joiners, from 102 in 2022 to 153 in 2023.
- Only one club saw a reduction in membership numbers with more leavers than joiners in 2023, whereas in 2022 this was experienced by half of proprietary clubs.
- In 2023 there was an average of 76 additional net members per club, compared to just 5 in 2022.
- There were significant increases in the average numbers of joiners for gentlemen (71 to 100), lady (13 to 29) and junior (18 to 24) members.
- There were also lower average numbers of leavers for lady (15 to 9) and junior (27 to 8) members.

The profile of joiners and leavers at proprietary clubs



Increasing numbers of social members at proprietary clubs

The proportion of proprietary clubs with a social membership exceeding 25 people has risen for the first time in four years and now stands at 60%, compared to just 13% in 2022.

Fewer society rounds

Fewer rounds were played by societies in 2023, ranging from 36 to 7,000, with an average of 2,500 (compared to 3,470 in 2022). However, despite this reduction in the overall average, 58% of clubs had seen an increase from 2022 - although this was lower than the 67% reported in 2022.

Rounds of golf delivered annually

Proprietary clubs were delivering up to 68,000 rounds of golf to MEMBERS each year – with an average of 29,441, compared to 17,625 in 2022.

The equivalent figures for VISITORS ranged from 8,000 to 55,000 with an average of 19,000, compared to 22,700 in 2022.

Welcoming new members

Free coaching sessions were not as popular as in previous years. In 2023, the most popular activities to welcome new members were a complimentary round of golf and social events. Other activities included an introduction to the club professional and induction programmes.

More member social events

Proprietary clubs held more social events in 2022, with clubs running up to 30 events, and an average of 8 (compared to 5 in 2022).

More member competitions

Most proprietary clubs ran member competitions during the year, with the number of competitions at each club ranging from 6 to 1,000, and the average number of 148 (compared to 128 in 2022).

Waiting lists

Just 17% of clubs had a waiting list in 2023 – similar to the 14% recorded in 2022. The average number of people on waiting lists in 2023 (164) was also similar to 2022 (170). 36% of proprietary clubs keep those on the waiting list informed about the situation, and during 2023 an average of 28 members at each club progressed from the waiting list to membership at the last renewal.

More downgraded memberships

This year the number of downgraded memberships (i.e., reducing from a 7 day to a 5-day member, etc.) ranged from 0 to 100, with an average of 20, double the 10 in 2022.

More upgraded memberships

However, the number of upgraded memberships also increased this year, ranging from 0 to 150, with an average of 22 (compared to 8 in 2022).

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Proprietary clubs

Facilities

Facilities

Driving range and practice ground

This year we slightly changed the question about driving ranges – from “Do you have a driving range?” to “Do you have a driving range **or practice ground?**” Despite this, fewer proprietary clubs had these facilities – 77%, compared to the 91% who had a driving range in 2022. Income from driving ranges is again within a varied span of from less than £5,000 to more than £25,000. Most of these proprietary clubs with a range earn more than £25,000 (68%) and 74% of clubs saw an increase in this income from 2022 to 2023 (compared to 50% in 2022).

Only a small proportion (6%) of proprietary clubs offered pre-bookable slots - far less than the 20% in 2022. There was also a reduction in the proportion of proprietary club ranges providing ball tracking technology – 32% in 2023, falling from 50% in 2022.

Short game practice area

88% of proprietary clubs have a short-game practice area, identical to the figure reported in 2022.

A small proportion of proprietary clubs offer a hotel, on-site accommodation, spa and/or gym

This year, just one proprietary club (18% in 2022) offered a hotel or other on-site accommodation, which was in the form of lodges.

No proprietary clubs had spa facilities (9% in 2022) and just 12% had a gym (18% in 2022). For these clubs with a gym, two-thirds included the gym in golf club membership.

Fewer proprietary clubs with swing studios

27% of proprietary clubs have a swing studio, but this is less than the 55% in 2022. For most of these clubs (71%), the swing studio is run by the club professional – a far higher proportion than the 40% in 2022. The average revenue from swing studios is £90,000, higher than the £70,000 reported in 2022. Despite this increase in the overall average, most proprietary clubs with a swing studio reported revenues about the same as in 2022 (67%).

Retail shops

In 2023, 96% of proprietary clubs had a retail shop, compared to 100% in 2022. For 12% of these the shop is operated by the club professional (9% in 2022). Most proprietary clubs have a retail shop turnover below £200,000 (74%), but this is a larger proportion than in 2022 (55%).

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Proprietary clubs

Fees & charges

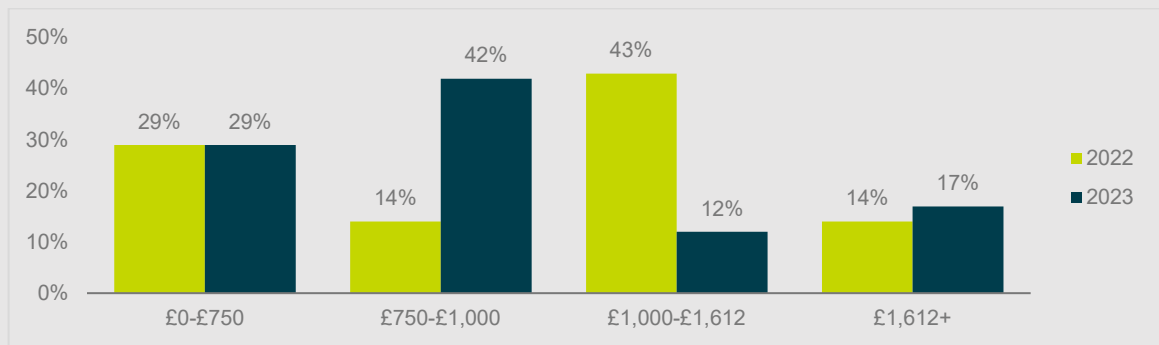
Fees & charges

Subscriptions

As in previous years, membership fees for standard playing members vary significantly. However, this year there are more clubs in the £750-£1,000 range and only 29% exceeding £1,000 (compared to 57% in 2022).

Membership fees tend to be lower in proprietary clubs than in members' clubs.

Proprietary clubs' standard playing member subscription



Increasing subscription charges

92% of proprietary clubs (compared to 100% in 2022) are intending to increase membership fees next year, with planned increases ranging from 3%-10% with an average of 6%.

Social membership charges

Just over half (53%) of proprietary clubs charge over £25 for social membership subscriptions (comparable to the 50% in 2022).

Joining fees

Fewer proprietary clubs charged a joining fee in 2023 – 25%, compared to 43% in 2022. These fees can be paid in instalments at 17% of proprietary clubs – no clubs allowed this in 2022.

Booking system

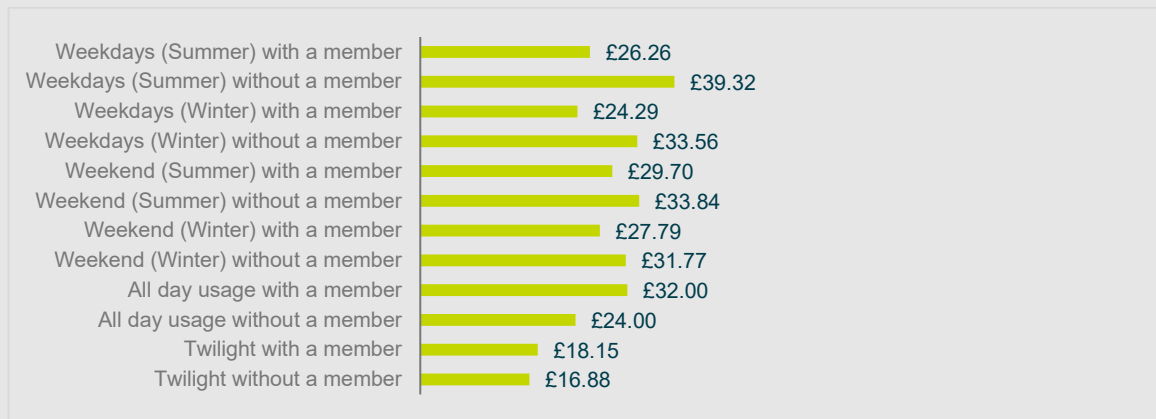
Online booking/tee time systems are used at 88% of proprietary clubs, comparable to the 89% in 2022.

Almost half (48%) of proprietary clubs with a tee booking system used a company/website, far fewer than the 71% in 2022.

Green fee charges

In 2022, proprietary clubs' average green fee charges ranged from £30.00 to £52.86. This year the format of the question was expanded to provide extra information about seasonality and time of day. Comparisons to previous years are therefore not provided, but the average green fee charges in 2023 are shown below.

Proprietary clubs' green fee charges



Green fees are typically collected by the Pro shop (for 50% of proprietary clubs) and reception (21%). No proprietary clubs paid commission on the green fees collected.

Higher green fee income

In 2023 the green fees income generated by proprietary clubs ranged from less than £40,000 to £180,000+. However, the proportion of proprietary clubs generating income at the top of this range (64%) was higher than 2022 (51%).

Green fee ticket systems

A numbered green fee ticket system was used at only 13% of proprietary clubs - less than the 25% in 2022.

Society packages

88% of proprietary clubs indicated that they allow society usage, exactly the same as in 2022. Average costs are shown below. For three of these packages, costs have increased since 2022 by between 9%-52%, whilst for the few clubs offering 36-hole packages costs have fallen.



The data for 9-hole, 27-hole and 36-hole packages was too minimal to provide a good average comparison for cost of society packages.

Room hire

Proprietary clubs hired rooms for a variety of activities, the most popular (for 61% of clubs providing room hire) being celebrations/parties. As only a small number of clubs chose to provide information regarding their room hire revenues, meaningful average hire revenue figures are not available.

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Proprietary clubs

Financial information

Financial information

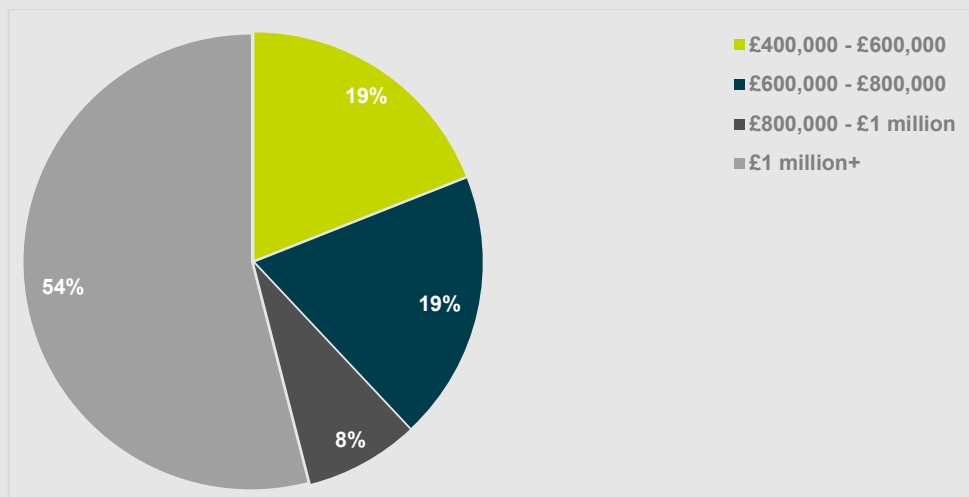
VAT partial exemption

In 2023, 47% of proprietary clubs had made a VAT COVID claim and 87% dealt with their VAT partial exemption in-house.

Fewer clubs with turnover above £1,000,000

Proprietary clubs reported turnover ranges from £400,000 to over £1 million. The percentage of clubs with a turnover exceeding £1 million was lower in 2023, falling from 73% to 54%.

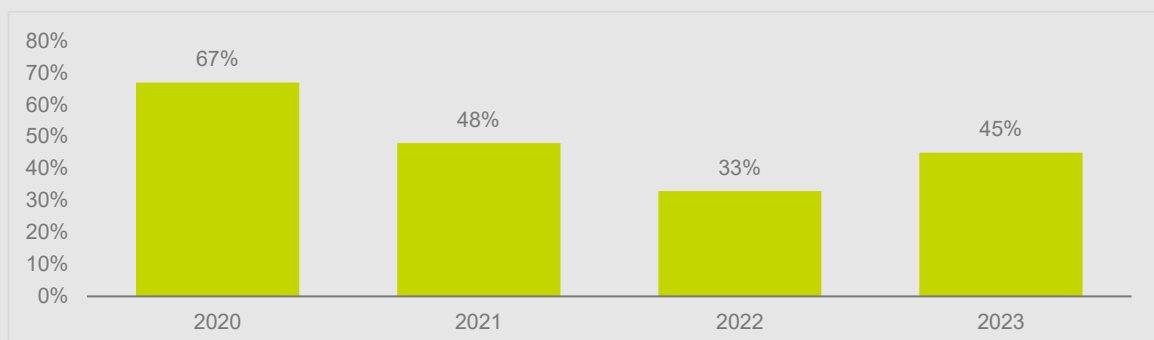
Annual proprietary clubs' turnover



Society income

The number of proprietary clubs with a society income above £60,000 has increased this year.

Society income above £60,000



Bar revenue and activity

Average margins and other costs this year were:

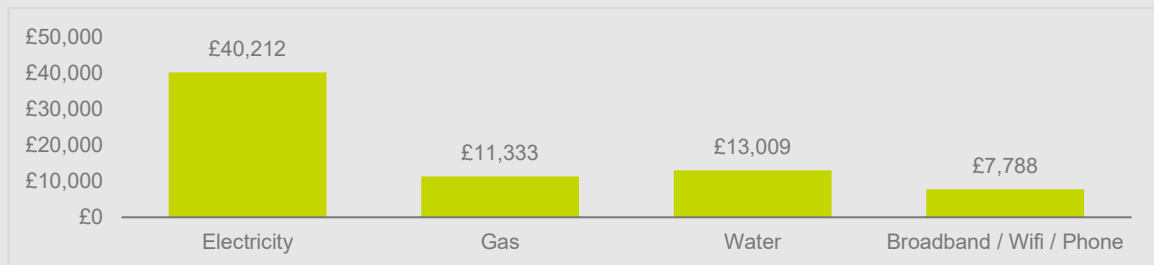
- Net profit 40% (increasing from 11% in 2022).
- Rateable value £249,000 (significantly up from £46,000 in 2022).
- Rate cost £45,000 (up from £22,000 in 2022).
- Club maintenance cost £47,000 (significantly down from £210,000 in 2022).
- Wages level £235,000 (down from £298,000 in 2022).

These should be regarded as indicative of only those proprietary clubs who chose to disclose figures – with approximately one third choosing not to do so. Over 70% of proprietary clubs reported their annual bar revenue, which was in excess of £150,000 for 53% of those reporting (83% in 2022), but 59% of proprietary clubs reported an increase in bar revenues (25% in 2022). The average gross margin of 64% was identical to 2022.

Utility costs

Average annual utility charges for proprietary clubs are presented below. Due to the low number of proprietary clubs providing these figures in previous years, it is not practical to compare them. Clubs were also asked what percentage increase they expected in energy costs over the next 12 months, with increases expected of between 5%-100%.

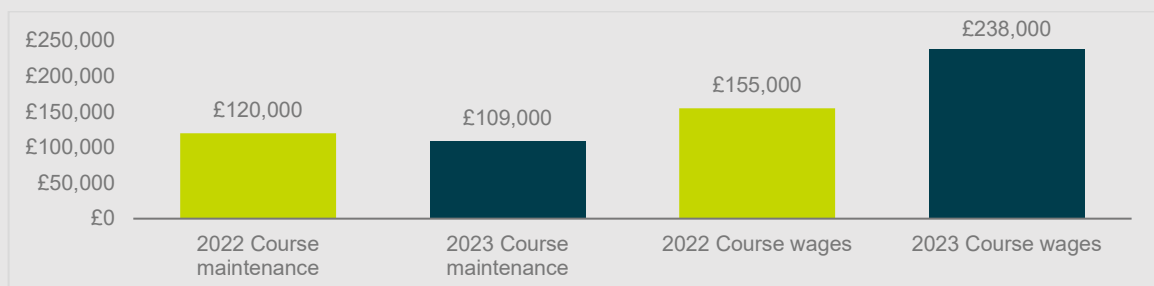
Average annual utility charges



Average course maintenance and wage costs

Proprietary clubs' average course maintenance and wage costs are presented below, although once again these results are based on a small number of clubs providing this information.

Average course maintenance and wage costs



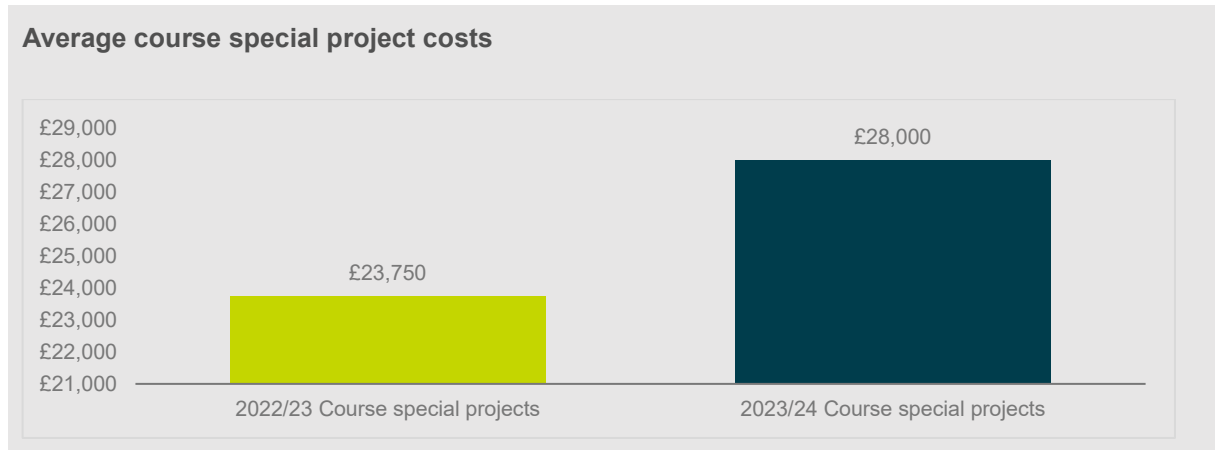
Irrigation

25% of proprietary clubs indicated that they currently have fairway irrigation installed (20% in 2022), but no clubs report that they are considering installing it.

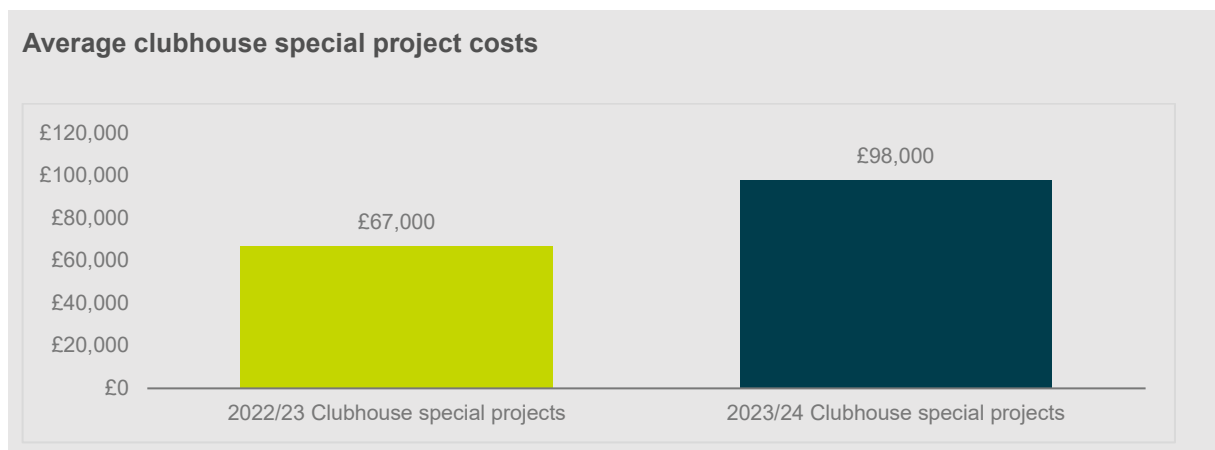
32% of proprietary clubs indicated that they have updated their greens and tees irrigation recently – much lower than the 60% in 2022.

The following graphs present average current and estimated costs for special projects. Due to the small number of proprietary clubs providing this information it is not possible to comment on trends.

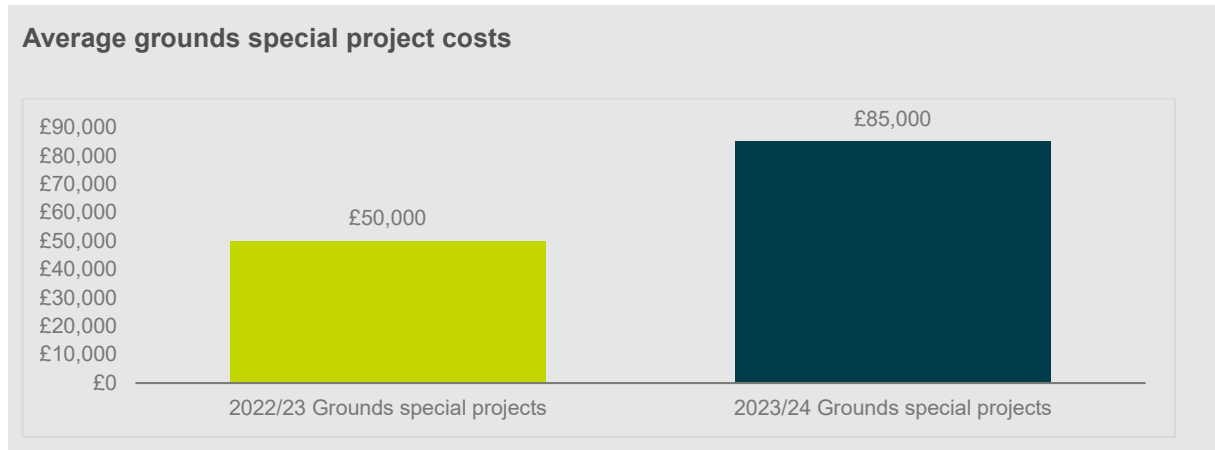
Average current and anticipated course special project costs



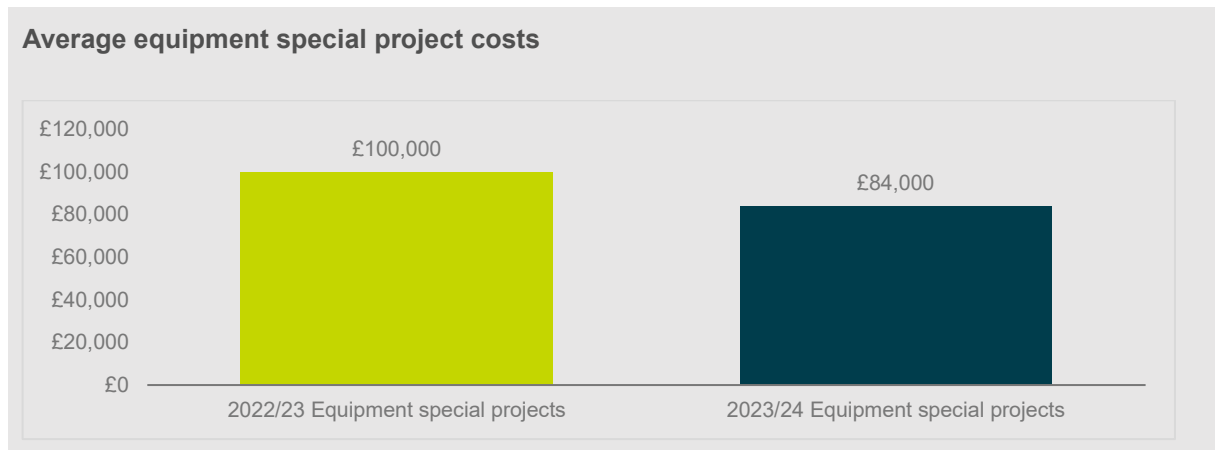
Average current and anticipated clubhouse special project costs



Average current and anticipated grounds special project costs



Average current and anticipated equipment special project costs



Other special projects

Proprietary clubs were asked to describe any other special projects they were undertaking this year, with one club indicating that they were investing in adventure golf.

Proprietary clubs using franchise catering

8% of proprietary clubs used a franchise for their catering in 2022 (14% in 2022).

Among those clubs who cater without the services of a franchise, revenues ranged from below £50,000 to over £250,000, with 42% earning in excess of £200,000 (66% in 2022). 2023 saw a continued post-pandemic increase in catering revenues for these clubs, with 61% reporting an increase from 2022 revenues and only 6% reporting a decrease. Gross profit margins in 2023 averaged 62% (similar to the 65% reported in 2022) and net profit 34% (again, similar to the 31% reported in 2022).

Club surpluses and deficits

Proprietary clubs reported an average surplus of £192,000, increasing from £132,000 in 2022.

Annual general insurance

Proprietary clubs typically pay £5,000-£10,000 for their annual general insurance, a similar situation to 2022.

Freehold properties

18% of proprietary clubs indicated that they held freehold properties other than the clubhouse in 2023, similar to the 17% in 2022. As in 2022, all proprietary clubs holding these properties indicated that they were being rented out to staff.

The survey also established that:

- 48% of proprietary clubs own freehold land and buildings (held by all clubs in 2022).
- Annual ground rent at each club is an average of £86,000.
- Proprietary clubs each cover an average area of 204 acres (134 in 2022).

Cost of supplying a round of golf

The average cost for proprietary clubs of supplying a round of golf ranged from £2 to £100, with an average of £21.77 (lower than the £24.25 in 2022).

Raising finance

A variety of methods are used by proprietary clubs to raise finance for the club. The most popular was private finance (for 47% of proprietary clubs), followed by hire purchase/finance leases (40%). However, bank loans, which have been popular in previous years, were not used at all in 2023.

Proprietary clubs financed any shortfalls or fixed asset additions by leases and sales of land or buildings.

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Proprietary clubs

Business development

Business development

An increase in the number of proprietary clubs reporting growth

The percentage of proprietary clubs reporting growth in 2023 was 65% - an increase from the 60% in 2022. The level of growth in the last 12 months varied between 5% and 20%, with an average of 10% (27% in 2022).

Proprietary clubs continue investing in marketing

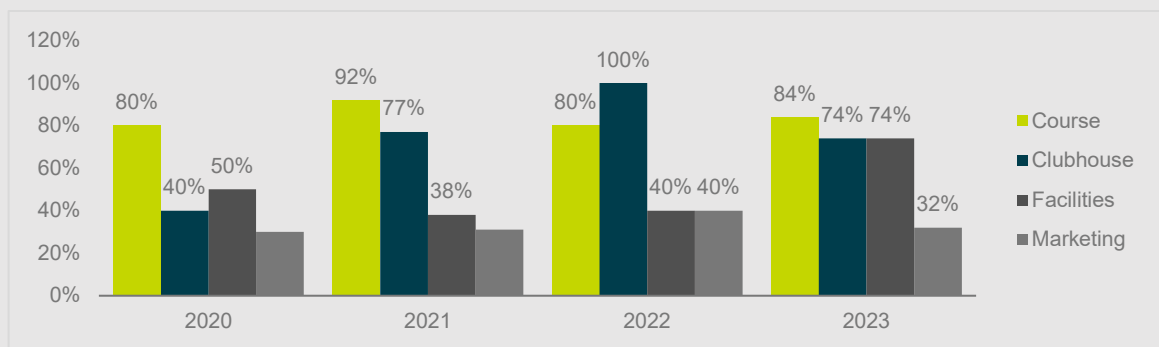
Proprietary clubs continue to market their offer, with the most popular activity being social media, used by 79% of clubs. Other popular activities (all used by over 60% of proprietary clubs) included member referrals, advertising and email campaigns.

The most successful marketing activities (for 29% of proprietary clubs) were social media and member referrals.

Proprietary clubs investment

Investment in the clubhouse and marketing has reduced in 2023, whilst the course and facilities have both seen an increase in investment from proprietary clubs.

Proprietary clubs' investment



Proprietary clubs

Miscellaneous additional information

Miscellaneous additional information

Set opening hours

50% of proprietary clubs indicated that they had set opening hours defined as 'daylight hours plus', compared to 73% in 2022. The remainder had set opening hours (42%) or no set opening hours (8%).

Days closed

Proprietary clubs had closed the course/clubhouse for between 0 and 50 days due to maintenance or bad weather, with an average of 14 days of closure.

Increased usage of temporary greens in winter

69% of proprietary clubs indicated that they used temporary greens in winter - a significant increase from the 27% reported in 2022.

Dress codes

31% of proprietary clubs indicated usage of a dress code – slightly lower than the 36% reported in 2022.

Mobile phones policy

12% of proprietary clubs have a mobile phones policy.

Dogs

Most proprietary clubs allow dogs (62%, compared to 45% in 2022). Where they are allowed, this is usually on condition that they are kept on leads and under control.

Sports channel subscriptions

Proprietary clubs with a subscription for SKY and/or TNT sports (formerly BT Sport) paid average annual subscription charges of £8,300 (£5,000 in 2022).

The impact of the living wage

55% of proprietary clubs suggested that the increase in the minimum living wage and workplace pensions impacted upon them – lower than the 60% recorded in 2022.

Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASC)

No proprietary clubs indicated that they were Community Amateur Sports Clubs - with no clubs considering becoming one.

Rules and regulations

92% of proprietary clubs agreed that they are prepared to change their rules and regulations to modernise the club.

Club structure

33% (20% in 2022) of proprietary clubs indicated that they are currently incorporated, with an additional 11% considering incorporation.

Board structure

Proprietary clubs reported that they had an average of 5 board members in each club.

The expertise present in the boards of proprietary clubs in 2023 was mainly in Business, Finance, Legal and HR.

Anticipated changes affecting golf clubs in 5-10 years

The following changes were suggested/anticipated by proprietary clubs.

Within 5 Years

- Rising costs (fuel, utilities, inflation and cost of living increases)
- Members disposable income also affected by rising costs
- Water use limitations
- Restrictions on use of fertilisers
- Sustainability and environmental impacts
- Diversification.

Within 10 Years

- Rising costs
- Water use limitations
- Sustainability and environmental impacts
- Technology advancements
- Attracting new members.

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Hillier Hopkins LLP
2023/24 Report

Our golf club team

Our golf club team



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