



Golf Ireland Celebrates 2024

Golf Ireland is delighted to share its year in review for 2024, highlighting significant growth in participation, further investments in clubs and facilities, and some major achievements on the course, both at home and abroad.

Research from the Golf Ireland / R&A Golf Barometer quarterly survey highlights that in 2024, approximately 800,000 people across the island of Ireland have engaged with golf in some capacity. This includes traditional on-course play and alternative formats such as driving ranges, simulators, and adventure golf facilities. The survey confirms that over 500,000 adults have played on an 18-hole course at least once this year, reaffirming the sport's consistent participation levels. It also found that 20% of the non-golfing population are interested in participation.

Further research conducted by Golf Ireland shows that 43% of the population are interested in golf in some capacity, as a player, spectator or fan. While only cycling and soccer finished ahead of golf in terms of sports participation in Ireland.

Participation and Development

There was a significant increase in participation in Golf Development activities this year, with numbers jumping by over 10,000 to reach a total of 30,530 participants.

The Golf Ireland participation and development team was boosted by the addition of five new Golf in the Community Officers to be followed by a Development and Participation Manager in early 2025. Thanks to funding from the Irish Government, supported by Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland, Golf Ireland now has a team of officers on the ground with the ability to deliver a range of participation initiatives within club and community settings.

In November, these Golf in the Community Officers helped to launch a new schools initiative as part of the Golf Ireland Major Events Legacy Programme. Approximately 180 schools participated throughout the year, with almost 17,000 students involved (8,666 girls / 7,929 boys). The organisation is targeting over 500 schools to engage with over the next three years.

There was a continued focus on inclusion with a total of 1,254 individuals attending Golf4All awareness days where participants with disabilities were introduced to the game for the first time. To further drive growth in this sector, Golf Ireland provided access to Golf4All coaching programmes and travel bursaries for individual players while 31 clubs availed of Golf4All club grants.

An expanded event calendar for golfers with a disability was delivered in 2024 including a new Junior Golf4All event series and eight Disabled and Inclusive Golf Association (DIGA) events, attended by 170 participants. There was funding for

€12m public funding 140 clubs.



NIBGA Blind/Disabled Golf Opens with the ISPS Handa Irish Open for Golfers with a Disability taking centre stage at Roganstown Golf Club. Golf Ireland also supported new players to complete the player classification process to be able to compete in European Disability Golf Association (EDGA) events.

Women and Girls

Golf Ireland recruited its first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion manager in 2024. To promote diversity of content across its media channels, Golf Ireland launched the #GolfLikeMe campaign in August. This was created to help increase the visibility and representation of golfers from underrepresented backgrounds and walks of life. Eight advocates were chosen as part of the initial visibility campaign and advisory group.

The Women in Golf Charter Gold Presentation Awards took place in Carton House during the opening round of the KPMG Women's Irish Open in August, with a total of 160 golf clubs now at the Gold Standard level. The Women in Golf Charter aims to increase women and girls' participation and membership in golf, encourage more families to enjoy golf as a leisure activity, and create more opportunities for women to work in the golf industry.

Get into Golf continued in 2024, with 117 clubs running programmes, of which 2,791 participants took part. Post programme saw a 58% conversion rate to club membership. A further 97 clubs ran a Girls Golf programme, with 824 participants and 800 new club members.

Ireland's first Women's Social Golf Community, Chip & Chat, also went from strength to strength this year with ten events taking place and just over 300 attendees. This is set to grow further next year with over 15 events planned across all four regions, with the new Golf in the Community Officers leading the rollout.

Sustainability

Golf Ireland launched a Sustainability Action Plan, Drive the Green, in March. The organisation developed a bespoke pilot initiative, Sustainable Golf Ireland Leader's Programme, with 20 clubs and one facility involved. This initiative assists clubs in all areas of sustainability, including decarbonisation, biodiversity, and sustainability - covering energy, water, and waste.

In January, Golf Ireland installed a new Solar Photovoltaic System at the governing body's headquarters in Maynooth, and the new phase of a 30kw Solar PV system on the roof of Golf Ireland HQ is already beginning to show its worth. It is estimated the new solar panels will generate approximately 55% of the electricity required on-site and reduce Golf Ireland's carbon footprint by 8.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per annum.



38 golf clubs across the island also benefited from the government's Shared Island Sports Club EV Charging Infrastructure Scheme. This scheme provides essential support to sports clubs in installing electric vehicle (EV) charging points at their facilities.

Meanwhile, the KPMG Women's Irish Open collaborated with Golf Ireland to promote sustainability at their event by introducing the Deposit Return Scheme. This initiative ensured that players and spectators took part in a shared sustainability journey, with the return of bottles and cans to reduce the event's carbon footprint.

Supporting Clubs

Golf clubs continue to be the lifeblood of Golf Ireland, with a network of 376 clubs across the island. While the data suggests that the 2024 figures for registered club members will remain consistent with last year.

Golf Ireland announced the finalisation of three rounds of funding through the Sports Energy Support Scheme, thanks to the Irish Government and Sport Ireland. €2.1 million was distributed to 127 eligible clubs, enabling them to sustain operations and maintain facilities.

More recently, following the Irish Government's announcement of €230 million in grants for sports clubs and facilities, phase two of the Community Sport Facilities Fund delivered over €11 million to 107 golf clubs. A further 23 clubs shared €770k in equipment-only grants.

Elsewhere, 124 clubs were awarded the Junior Development grant amounting to €49,600, and 104 clubs received the Girls Golf Programme support grant totalling €41,600. 31 clubs received €54,000 allocated in Golf4All grants in 2024. This funding helped deliver participation programmes for people with disabilities, supporting coaching, equipment, social activities, and disability inclusion training for club volunteers.

Over 500 club meetings took place over the 12 months on a range of subjects, including the Golf Development programmes, the One Club Model, and Women in Golf Charter. Five Club Support and Development Officers and four Regional Managers supported by a range of other Golf Ireland staff in areas such as safeguarding, handicapping, course rating and inclusion, delivered these 1:1 sessions. An additional approximately 1,000 club administrators attended role specific training and education workshops covering topics including safeguarding, junior development and the role of club captains.

Supporting clubs with the administration of the World Handicap System remained a priority in 2024. 89% of clubs attended workshops in the first quarter of the year designed to support Handicap Secretaries in carrying out their roles. 79% of clubs



attended in-person and online workshops throughout October and November, providing guidance and support with the Annual Handicap Review Process.

Launch of iGolf

In October, Golf Ireland announced the launch of iGolf to provide independent golfers with access to an official Handicap Index® under the WHS™. As of 1 December, there are just over 950 subscribers to iGolf across the island of Ireland. The average iGolfer is 42 years old, the average male handicap is 18.7, while the average female plays off 32.9. The largest numbers of subscribers have come from the more heavily populated areas, including Dublin, Cork, Antrim, Kildare, and Meath.

Competitive Play

Outside of iGolf, over 2.5 million competitive rounds were played, up 9% year-on-year, with 89% being competition scores. 18-hole scores accounted for 86% of those registered.

19 National and 67 Regional Championship winners were crowned across 70 different venues on the island in 2024. An estimated 40,000 golfers and 5,709 club teams participated in 16 All-Ireland and 30 regional Inter-Club competitions this year.

The slight decrease in the number of club teams from 2023 is attributed to restructuring rather than a decline in entries, meaning that alongside the GAA All-Ireland Club Championships, Inter-Club competitions remain one of the most widely participated events in all of Irish sport.

National and International Achievements

The North of Ireland Men's Amateur Open Championship determined the Bridgestone Men's Order of Merit winner, with Brian Doran (Millicent) securing the crown. The battle for the Bridgestone Women's Order of Merit came down to the last event, with Edmondstown's Anna Abom claiming the honour.

Internationally, John Moran (Portmarnock) became the first Irish winner of the English U14 Boys Championship (Reid Trophy). Max Kennedy (Royal Dublin) won silver at the European Men's Individual Championship, Joe Lyons (Galway) did likewise at the European Senior Men's, and Declan O'Neill (Grange) claimed bronze.

For only the second time in history and the first since 2016, Ireland won the European Nations Team Championship. Later in the summer, Ireland was crowned Women's and Men's Home Internationals champions for the first time. The Irish also



claimed the 2024 Senior Women's Home Internationals at Castlerock and won bronze at the European Senior Men's Team Championship.

Ireland also performed exceptionally at the inaugural European Mid-Amateur Team Championships, with both teams securing bronze. Additionally, eight players represented Ireland at the G4D EGA European Nations in Germany.

The Great Britain & Ireland team claimed the Curtis Cup for the first time since 2016, with Irish players Sara Byrne (Douglas), Beth Coulter (Kirkistown Castle), and Áine Donegan (Lahinch) contributing to the victory at Sunningdale.

Professional Success

Golf Ireland professional Conor Purcell achieved two wins on the Challenge Tour and secured promotion to the DP World Tour for the 2025 season. Tom McKibbin continued his phenomenal rise, reaching the PGA Tour after his second full season as a professional.

Max Kennedy came through all three stages of the DP World Tour School, only to miss out by a shot. He finished on top of Category 21 and now has full Challenge Tour and partial DP World Tour status for 2025.

Lauren Walsh had a fantastic debut season on the Ladies European Tour (LET), which included making her first major appearance at the AIG Women's Open. Walsh is now aiming for qualification to the LPGA Tour as she competes in the LPGA Q-Series.

Sara Byrne also came through two stages of the LPGA Tour School and will be teeing it up next week at the final stage. She already has Epson Tour status and will be at the final stage of Q-School for the LET as well.

Looking Ahead

Golf Ireland is proud of the achievements and growth experienced in 2024. The organisation looks forward to building on this and continuing to promote and develop golf across the island, in a year where The Open returns to Royal Portrush and the European Amateur Team Championship comes back to Killarney.

There is also excitement surrounding the development of the High-Performance facilities at Golf Ireland HQ in Carton Demesne. This, together with the ongoing schools legacy programme, can help provide a pipeline for more golfers to participate at grassroots level and then excel in the elite.

"Looking back on 2024 and seeing over 30,000 participants in our Golf Development activities along with nearly 17,000 students involved through our new



schools initiative is a significant achievement. It's a testament to the growing passion for golf on the island of Ireland," said Golf Ireland CEO Mark Kennelly.

"Supporting our clubs is central to Golf Ireland's mission and we have distributed some vital funds in order to sustain operations and enhance facilities across the board. Our club support services continue to be engaged with, assisting the many thousands of volunteers to carry out their roles effectively. We also had the chance to open up the game further through iGolf, and it was welcome to see so many independent golfers subscribe.

"Our golfers have performed heroics domestically and internationally too and they continue to do us proud every year. As we look forward to hosting more landmark events in 2025, we're excited about the future and nurturing the next generation."