



Business student's James Smith, Abby Wiffen and James Sopp with Peter Jobe and John Hall from the GCMA Northern Region and fellow student Fraser Mair.

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Students tee-up strategy to help drive golf tourism

New research carried out by business students at Northumbria University is set to help struggling golf clubs across the North of England to futureproof their operations and drive revenue.

Keen to grow golf tourism in the area and tackle the financial challenges facing local clubs, the Northern branch of the Golf Club Managers Association (GCMA), approached the [Business Clinic](#) at Northumbria University for help.

The GCMA is the UK body which represents and provides professional support to 1,800 golf clubs across the country. It recently identified a two-year stagnation in financial performance for many of its members in the North.

The Business Clinic is an education scheme which brings students together to form a 'consultancy firm' with aim of solving a specific business issue and provide free advice to clients. Working on a project basis, the students analyse the problem, consider potential solutions and provide a detailed report with a full presentation of their recommendations to the client.

Sterling Consultancy, a team of four final year business students took on the challenge, researching and reviewing the current marketing and event management activities of various clubs across Cleveland, Cumbria, Northumberland, North Durham and Tyne and Wear.

With the number of golfers taking to the fairways across the country in decline, the students analysed the state of the UK golf market and then researched the approach of clubs in the North and Scotland that are thriving in comparison to their counterparts.

Through extensive market research, competitor analysis and interviews with club managers and golfers across the age spectrum, the team identified a lack of exposure regionally and nationally for Golf Tourism in the Northern Region when compared to Scotland and southern counties.

Club marketing efforts were insufficient with digital marketing and engagement through social media underutilised and inconsistent. There are frequent failures to maximise the value and reach of digital marketing with many websites in poor working order or lacking functionality across mobile devices.

To address the issues identified, Sterling Consultancy devised a range of practical recommendations to drive greater participation in golf for local people and visitors, to ultimately increase club membership, revenue and sustainability. This included taking a collaborative approach with clubs working together to offer golf holiday packages across multiple courses.

Peter Jobe, regional manager, Northern GCMA, said: "The golf industry has changed enormously. Traditionally marketing was never a major requirement;

the sport was always popular attracting members of all ages. The upshot is that now, clubs really need to operate like a business and where internal marketing skills and resources are in short supply, they need to be developed in order to appeal and engage with today's younger, digitally savvy audience.

“I've been extremely impressed by the students' report and recommendations. The team identified valid, inexpensive solutions to help managers to grow and run a profitable business. They understood the brief and provided an excellent level of information and knowledge for us to share with members. We are now considering taking the report to the next level by developing a social media marketing strategy and Northern Golf Week events.”

Speaking on behalf of Sterling Consultancy, Business with International Management student Abby Wiffen, 23 from Cambridgeshire, said: “This was genuine work experience for us. As a team, we developed a good client relationship with Peter and I think we have presented real solutions that will add value to clubs and bring tourism benefits to the local economy.”

Following the success of project, Peter is now actively looking at the feasibility of putting a business student intern into a golf club to produce a marketing programme which could be adopted by most golf clubs through Northumbria University's Santander Internship programme.

Nigel Coates, Business Clinic director, said: “We have been delighted to work with the Northern region of the GCMA. They approached us for support in proactively tackling a very real issue for golf clubs in our region.

“The Business Clinic is committed to making a positive impact on our clients, and our goal is always to provide a real solution to the issue being confronted. We have the knowledge and expertise to support organisations across all sectors, and have been successful in working with businesses both regionally and nationally.”

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