



CONGU[®]
THE COUNCIL OF NATIONAL GOLF UNIONS

A QUICK GUIDE TO THE CONGU[®]
HANDICAPPING SYSTEM

FOR

Golf Clubs

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INTRODUCTION

One of the reasons why golf is a popular sport is that golfers of differing abilities, men and women alike, can compete on a fair and equitable basis. This is because a handicap is given (allotted) to all members of affiliated golf clubs which reflects their standard of play and provides a level playing field.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the golfer's club to ensure that he or she is allotted a handicap that accurately reflects their current standard of play. The purpose of this guide is to help new handicap secretaries and their committees to achieve this aim.

GETTING STARTED

This Quick Guide is for people who are new to the world of handicapping. It is not the definitive guide – that's the CONGU® Manual. (All mentions of Clauses and Appendices refer to the CONGU® Manual.) However, this guide will help you to understand the basics and be able to answer day-to-day questions from your fellow members.

Nevertheless, you should have the latest copy of the CONGU® Unified Handicapping System Manual, currently 2016-2018. Make this your friend! Copies may be obtained from your national governing body (England Golf, The Irish Ladies Golf Union Ltd, The Golfing Union of Ireland, Scottish Golf Ltd or The Golf Union of Wales), or by downloading it from the CONGU® website (www.congu.com).

This Quick Guide begins with a Glossary. It is worth skimming this before you read on in more detail. However, all the words that appear in the Glossary appear in the text in bold type.

Following the Glossary is the Compliance Checklist. One of the best ways to get to understand what you need to know is to run through this checklist – frequently!

It will reduce your workload considerably if your fellow members also understand the rules of handicapping. After all, the player has the responsibility to play from the correct handicap. As well as this Guide, there is a *Quick Guide for Players*. Suggest to your club manager/secretary/club committee that a copy is put in new members' club induction packs and let your members know where they can download a copy. Also, keep your members up-to-date with changes to the system (such as the change to four-ball better ball stroke allowances) by posting notices on the appropriate board or sending out email circulars.

As handicap secretary your job, and that of your handicap committee, will be to ensure all members play off a fair handicap. You will do this through:

- ensuring that **qualifying competitions** are run and closed down promptly and properly
- conducting the **annual review** of handicaps of *all* members
- regularly reviewing the handicaps of new players
- letting players know about **ESR** reductions as appropriate (these do not apply in Scotland)
- watching out for **continuous handicap review** alerts and actioning as appropriate
- making sure that your members are able to play **supplementary score** rounds if they so wish and ensuring these are entered on the computer and the **CDH** updated
- checking that 'away' scores are entered on the **CDH**
- knowing if a member has more than one club and which is his 'home' club for handicapping purposes .

You will also need to work with your club manager and head green keeper to ensure that the club has current **Certificates of Measurement** and has been **rated** for each set of tees that are used for competitions, and that tees are in the right places during competitions.

GLOSSARY

Affiliated club a club which pays to its national governing body a specified annual fee in respect of each eligible member

Annual review of handicaps is the process where the handicap committee must review the performance of all members during the preceding year and adjust handicaps as necessary

Area authority appointed by the national governing body to act on its behalf in handicapping matters

Away club a second club where someone may belong and play competitive rounds and supplementary scores but *not* where their handicap is maintained

Central Database of Handicaps (CDH) a national central database of handicapping information collected electronically from affiliated clubs when they close down qualifying competitions

Central Database of Handicaps ID Number (CDH ID Number) a unique number allocated by a national governing body to a member that allows them to be registered and recognised for handicapping purposes

Certificate of Measurement the document that provides the exact measurement of your course from each set of tees used in competition. It must be supplied by a 'competent' organisation or person – see CONGU® Manual, Appendix A

Competition scratch score (CSS) the adjusted scratch score of the course played calculated following the conclusion of a qualifying competition

Conditions of competition the rules under which a competition is played. These should include the tees to be played from, who is eligible to play, how ties will be resolved, the latest times cards may be returned

Continuous handicap review after seven or more consecutive increases of 0.1, there is an alert in your handicap software. You may wish to review someone's handicap before waiting for the annual review – or even a general play review

Continuous Review Increase (CRI) a handicap increase resulting from the **continuous handicap review**

Council of National Golf Unions (CONGU®) comprising representatives from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, is responsible for maintaining and updating the rules of handicapping used by all affiliated golf clubs in these countries

Distance point the fixed, or permanent, marker on a tee from which the length of the hole is measured

Exceptional scoring reduction (ESR) a reduction in a player's exact handicap that is applied over and above the decrease applied by the *UHS* when certain patterns of scoring are triggered by a combination of both the level and frequency of scores. These do not apply in Scotland

General play adjustment a change to a player's handicap, other than by a qualifying score, that is authorised by the handicapping committee/authority between annual reviews

Handicap – Exact and Playing

Exact handicap – a player’s handicap calculated to one decimal place

Playing handicap – a player’s exact handicap rounded to the nearest whole number

Handicap committee the body appointed by the handicap secretary or an affiliated club to administer the handicapping system within the club. The majority of the committee should be *members*

Handicap secretary the person appointed by the affiliated club to deal with the day-to-day matters of handicapping and who is likely to chair the handicapping committee

Home club the affiliated club a member belongs to which administers that player’s handicap

Measured course any course at an affiliated club the length of which has been certified in accordance with Clause 11. A standard scratch score will have been allocated by the area authority or national governing body

Member an amateur golfer who belongs to an affiliated club and who has the opportunity to play in a reasonable number of qualifying competitions and to submit qualifying scores during the year

National Governing Body (NGB) the body that oversees golf in your country, namely England Golf, The Irish Ladies’ Golf Union Ltd, The Golfing Union of Ireland, Scottish Golf Ltd and The Golf Union of Wales

Open competitions where both home members and visitors compete together. See the CONGU® Manual Appendix B.3 for the calculation of CSS

Par the number of strokes that an expert golfer should require to complete a hole; this is an indication of the length of a hole but not necessarily its difficulty

Preferred lies are taken when a player, whose ball comes to rest on a close mown area through the green, is allowed to mark, lift and clean the ball then place it within 6 inches not nearer the hole. Your national governing body will specify the time of year you may use preferred lies but still allow qualifying scores

Qualifying competition any competition in which competition play conditions prevail and, for handicap adjustment and record purposes, full handicap allowance is applied and a **competition scratch score (CSS)** is calculated

Reduction only (R/O) a qualifying competition where the scores are so poor the CSS increases by 3 and no player’s handicap increases. Handicaps can only go down

Single CSS Adjustment a calculation that allows you to calculate one change between SSS and CSS for a competition played off multiple tees

Standard scratch score (SSS) the score allocated to an 18- or 9-hole golf course following course rating

Supplementary score a score, other than in a qualifying competition, returned for handicapping purposes in accordance with CONGU® regulations at any club to which a player belongs

UHS the CONGU® Unified Handicapping System developed by the Council of National Golf Unions and applies to men and women throughout GB&I who are members of affiliated clubs

COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST

To ensure that all clubs interpret and apply the **UHS** rules consistently, here is a list for you to check your club's performance. The clause quoted refers you to the CONGU® Manual.

Can your club tick 'Yes' to the following?

	Clause in Manual	Yes ✓
• display the conditions of competition in a prominent position	6	
• appoint a handicap committee as required in the 'Responsibilities of the Affiliated Club'	6.3	
• issue handicap certificates with the CONGU® Handicap mark	6.4	
• calculate and maintain handicaps strictly in accordance with the UHS	6.4	
• where a computerised system is in place, use a licensed software supplier for maintenance of handicaps (with latest version update)	6.5	
• have a current Certificate of Course Measurement for all tees from which qualifying competitions are played	6.6	
• know of its responsibility to notify the Union (NGB) , or Area Authority if so delegated, when permanent changes have been made to the course, particularly increases and decreases in playing length	6.7	
• ensure that all qualifying competitions are played from a measured course as defined and inform green staff of this requirement	6.8	
• have a mechanism by which a competitor must signify his intention of playing before starting play on the day of a competition	7.2	
• ensure all qualifying scores are uploaded promptly to the national Union (NGB) CDH	7.4	
• display a list of current handicaps in a prominent position	7.6	
• conduct an annual review of the handicaps of all members with consideration given to increases as well as reductions	7.7(i)	
• have a book or equivalent recording system to allow members to return details of Away scores including supplementary scores returned at other clubs where they are members	7.7(j)	
• display a notice or otherwise advise (and remind) members of their responsibilities to the UHS	8	
• accept that adjusting the conditions of a competition to make it non-qualifying on a technicality is an abuse of the spirit and intent of the UHS that may result in the national body imposing sanctions under Clause 6.2	17	
• play all stableford/par/bogey competitions with full handicap allowance for handicap purposes	17.2	
• accept that it is not permissible to declare in advance that a competition is for 'reduction only'	Definition	
• accept that it is not permissible to adjust handicaps either upwards or downwards at the conclusion of a non-qualifying competition (Ireland permits such adjustments)	17.3	
• increase and decrease handicaps as soon as practicable after the conclusion of a qualifying competition	20.9	
• accept for handicapping purposes supplementary scores in accordance with national requirements	21	
• have a defined procedure for members to signify, in advance, their intention to return a supplementary score and provision for the return of cards	21.7	
• have a recognised procedure to advise members of handicap alterations following annual review , General Play Adjustment, ESR or CRI changes?	23.5	
• apply the recognised handicap allowances	Appendix F	

If the answer to all questions is 'Yes', your golf club is complying with the requirements of the **UHS**.

You do need to be able to answer 'Yes' to all these questions so if you cannot then, together with the club manager, or whoever is in charge, you should put together a plan and take action to resolve the matter. If your club still has difficulty in complying with the above requirements then you should contact your **national governing body** or **area authority** to whom authority has been delegated and ask for advice and help.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

CONGU® (Council of National Golf Unions)

CONGU® manages and develops the Unified Handicap System (**UHS**). It regularly publishes a manual, currently 2016-2018, which outlines the system and which is essential reading for handicap administrators. The clauses noted in this Quick Guide refer to the current CONGU® Manual.

Changes to handicapping rules and procedures are agreed by CONGU®, relayed to software providers, and published annually.

Affiliated club

Part of the affiliation agreement between the club, the county, province or region and national governing body is to provide a structure which administers handicaps for club members. This includes all the following.

The course standard scratch score (SSS)

The national, area authority or county course rating team will assess the **standard scratch score (SSS)** of the golf course from each of the tees used for **qualifying competitions** and this is used as the basis for the calculation of handicaps. Any changes to the course which may affect its difficulty, such as length, must be notified to the county, area authority or course rating team leader. The club will also need to have a **Certificate of Measurement**, provided by an appropriately qualified person or company, for each set of tees used for **qualifying competitions**.

Because the methods of calculation of an SSS and individual handicaps are different in many parts of the world, scores from outside England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales cannot be used in the CONGU® system.

Handicap secretary and committee

Every club must have a handicap committee with a minimum of three people, of which the majority must be members (as opposed to employees) of that club (Clause 6). They should have a good working knowledge of and be familiar with the CONGU® regulations. If the committee looks after all handicaps in the club then both men and women should be represented on the committee.

They have a responsibility to record, maintain and update handicaps of their members, and notify members of handicap changes (Clause 7).

They must also ensure that scores which count for handicap are updated electronically to the national **central database of handicaps (CDH)** (where appropriate) after every competition or handicap change.

The handicap committee must meet once each year in the late autumn (October/November/December) for the **annual review**. The committee may also find it necessary to meet more regularly to discuss and agree any changes under 'general play' of handicaps and to review newly allotted handicaps. The Committee should meet each month to review any players flagged by the CRI report.

The handicap secretary has the task of updating the club handicap records with all qualifying scores returned by its members from other courses and ensuring that any changes are published. (In Ireland they will also have to ensure non-qualifying scores are entered on the record.)

In practice, it is the handicap secretary who is ultimately responsible to see the committee fulfils its responsibilities.

As handicap secretary you need to know if queries should be referred to your **national governing body (NGB)** or **area authority**. You must also keep these bodies informed of contact details of the handicap secretary to ensure that communication and notifications are readily forwarded.

As handicap secretary you need to let your members know what *their* responsibilities are under the system.

The player

In order for every player's handicap to be accurate, the player must return every score, including no returns, from **all qualifying competitions** both at their **home club** and elsewhere, and any supplementary scores at their home or **away club**. In Ireland a player must also return *all non-qualifying* scores from team and society golf. A player must have only one *home* club and one handicap (Clause 8).

When a player scores under handicap, it is their responsibility to reduce their handicap immediately in accordance with the handicap rules. Do your players know this? Do your players know how to calculate their handicaps?

Other responsibilities of the player are shown in Clause 8, and should a player be disqualified from a competition, Appendix P of the CONGU® Manual will inform you whether the score is acceptable for handicap and **CSS** purposes.

THE HANDICAP SECRETARY AND HANDICAP COMMITTEE

Managing your members

Home or away?

If one of your members belongs to more than one golf club within GB&I, then he or she will have to decide which is their **home club** – that is, the one where their handicap is kept and managed. Apart from Ireland, your member has a free choice: for example, he or she may have a particular tie to one club even if not much competitive golf is played there. However, in Ireland the player must opt for the club where most qualifying rounds are played (this may change from year to year).

If any of your home members also play at an **away club**, they must let you know the name of their **away club(s)** and they must ensure that scores made there are entered on the **CDH** or returned to you.

You need to have a book or some recording system for all players to be able to return their away scores to you if the scores have not been processed on the **CDH**. In Ireland you must also ask your players for the CDH numbers they will have at each club where they have membership.

Educating your members

It is the players' responsibility to manage their own handicaps ... but they can't do this if they don't understand the system. There is a *Quick Guide for Players* that you can download from the CONGU® website to give to new members and new golfers. If they know how the system works and how their handicaps are calculated then you will have fewer queries to answer.

When changes are introduced to the system – such as the 2016 stroke allowance for four-ball better ball competitions – then do put up notices or use email newsletters to inform your members and keep them up-to-date.

Being clear

A handicap list needs to be available to your members showing both the **exact** and the **playing handicap** of all members. This must be up-dated after every **qualifying competition**. (Your handicap software will be able to produce a list of updated handicaps after a competition has been closed down and results posted to the national CDH.) Perhaps you can pin this on the noticeboard where competition results are displayed? The reason for displaying a revised list as quickly as possible is that although players must reduce their own handicaps immediately, they may not increase their handicaps. They may only play off a higher handicap once the change has been published – either posted to the national CDH or in writing at their **home club**.

Players should also be made aware that handicaps posted on any websites, other than the website of the player's **home club**, cannot be relied upon to provide up-to-date information.

If members have an unexpected decrease – or increase – in handicap, for example through a **continuous review** or **ESR**, you must let them know. They cannot be expected to know about or be able to calculate such changes.

Your members also need to know what competitions they can enter, which tees these are played from, what happens in the event of ties and so on. These **conditions of competition** need to be readily available to all members.

Members need to know where to 'sign in' before they play a **supplementary score** – and where they should put the card when they have completed their round. Have this information clearly available.

Dealing with disputes

Every club has a member who will be unhappy with his – or her – handicap. They may feel that a review was unfair to them ... or that they were disqualified unjustly from a competition. This is one of the reasons it is so important to have a handicapping committee. The responsibility does not fall on the shoulders of one person and the handicap secretary cannot be accused of bias. You need to deal sensitively but firmly with your 'difficult' members and try not to let the situation get out of hand. However, problems may not always be solved to the satisfaction of the player and the committee should have in place a disputes procedure as well as an appeal route for members. This latter should not involve the people who reviewed the problem in the first place. Both the disputes and appeals procedures should be clear and made known to members.

Category 1 players

Special rules attach to category 1 players and, although detailed under the relevant headings in this Guide, they are in brief here as an *aide memoire*.

- Category 1 players may not mark **supplementary scores** except to retain or regain a competition handicap - or if they hold their handicaps in Scotland and have a handicap of 2.5 or higher. Supplementary scores must be played over 18-holes.
- ESRs do not apply.
- A player's handicap cannot be reduced to category 1 during the **annual review** or **general play adjustments** except with the express permission of the **area authority** or **national governing body**.
- A category 1 handicap may not be allotted as a first handicap, or regain a handicap without the express permission of the **area authority** or **national governing body**.

Competition play

As handicap secretary you probably won't have to be involved in the actual *running* of competitions, however, for any competitions that are run for handicap purposes (**qualifying competitions**) you will have an input. To be 'qualifying':

- all tees for the competition should be within 10 yards (9 metres) of the **distance point**
- the course must not have been temporarily shortened or lengthened by more than 100 yards (91 metres)*. See Clause 13.
- there may be no more than two temporary greens
- **preferred lies** may not be in operation unless it is during the preferred lie 'season' - or the area authority or national governing body has given express permission
- competitors must play off their full handicap and there can be no restrictions such as the number of clubs they may use – other than those related to the Rules of Golf.

*If this is the case you must reduce/increase the **SSS** by 1 and inform your **national governing body** or **area authority**. For greater reductions (or increases) you must consult with your national governing body or area authority – whichever deals with such queries.

Qualifying competition

This is a stroke play/Stableford or bogey/par competition, played over a **measured course**, enabling a **competition scratch score (CSS)** to be calculated on conclusion (Clauses 7 and 18). A competition not held under these conditions is non-qualifying and does not directly affect a player's handicap. Clubs are encouraged to hold qualifying competitions whenever possible throughout the year, in order that handicaps are current.

After each qualifying event, a **competition scratch score (CSS)** is calculated, usually automatically by the club's competition and handicapping software, and is based on the performance of all players in categories 1 – 4 with 'c' status handicaps and gives a score by which an individual player's score is judged and their handicap altered. This is the way different weather conditions are taken into account: a beautiful warm, sunny day is likely to produce better scores than one where the wind is howling and the rain horizontal.

It is not in the spirit of the **UHS** to declare an otherwise **qualifying competition** 'non-qualifying' *before* play begins. However, there are many formats of play other than singles stroke play, such as scrambles, greensomes, four-balls and other 'team' events, that can bring variety and enjoyment to the club calendar.

Note: For Par competitions you *must* use the conversion table (Appendix D in the Manual) for calculating handicap changes.

Conditions of competition

For every competition played at your club the conditions of competition should be clear and available to members. These may be on a noticeboard, on the entry sheet, in a competition book – or other such place as you think appropriate. Conditions of competition will include:

- who is eligible to play in the competition (for example, is it open to both men and women?)
- any handicap restrictions (must players have a competition handicap?)
- the tees from which competitors must play (it might be that category 1, 2 and 3 men will play from the back tees whereas those off 21 and above will play from a forward set of tees)
- any handicap adjustments (in a medal open to both men and women where, for example, the SSS for men is 71 and for women is 72, the women would receive one additional shot *for competition results only*)
- the necessity for players to enter their scores in the computer when they have completed their round (there may be sanctions if they do not do this)
- where they must put their completed cards
- the time the last card must be put in the card box
- how ties will be resolved
- the number of prizes.

No returns/non-return of card

Most clubs require their players to enter their scores into the computer through the PSI (personal score input) system. If a member persistently refuses to do this, the club would be entitled to discipline him – or her. You should also point out to your players the inconvenience it causes if they do not return their cards. It can lead to hours of wasted time when closing down a competition. There are two occasions when, from the *perspective of the competition*, a returned card will be classed as a 'no return'.

- A player becomes unwell or injured during the round and cannot continue. If this seems reasonable and the player wasn't trying to avoid a handicap increase, then you should exclude this card from the competition (and the **CSS** calculation) and there is no change to the player's handicap.

It may be that player's marker could not join up with another group and therefore his or her score is not counted either.

- In a medal competition if a player fails to complete one or more holes, it would still be acceptable for the card to be returned. For handicap purposes, the nett double bogey adjustment is applied to any uncompleted holes. Players should return their cards in these conditions and enter what scores they have into the PSI system. You should explain to them it is not acceptable to enter 18 zeros! Even incomplete rounds will be used during the **annual review** of handicaps.

Mixed events and mixed tees

Men and women both have their handicaps regulated by the same CONGU® rules, although they play from different tees and may have a different **standard scratch score (SSS)**. When a competition is open to both men and women, for the game to be fair the handicap allowances have to be adjusted to allow for the difference in **SSS** between the two courses.

To increase enjoyment of the game, it is becoming more common for competitors to play from different sets of tees. For example, if there is a long carry that many high handicap men cannot make, then, for example, category 4 players may play from more forward tees.

- Medal – the difference in SSS is added to the handicap allowance of the players whose SSS is higher. (In mixed events, this is usually the women’s SSS.) This is for the *competition result only*, not for handicapping.
- Stableford – it is the relationship between the **par** and **SSS** that matters. For example, if the difference between par and SSS for men is the same as that for women – even if the par is different for both, then there is no handicap allowance adjustment. It is recommended that men and women use their own stroke indexes.
- Par (bogey) – as in stableford competitions, it is the relationship between the par and SSS of the groups of competitors playing that is relevant.
- Match play - the player with the higher SSS should add the difference between SSSs to their handicap before any calculation of shots received.

The examples above show how the handicap allowances need to be adjusted to work out the winners of such competitions but you and your handicap committee need to consider how the **CSS** should be calculated for mixed competitions or when, in single gender competitions, players play from different tees (eg, from forward tees as well as tiger tees). CONGU® recommends that you use a Single CSS Adjustment (your software should be able to calculate this for you). By doing this the change in CSS from different tees will be the same for all players. The Single CSS Adjustment takes into account the performance of all players relative to their respective **buffer zones**.

See Appendix O in the Manual for more detail and examples.

Exceptional scoring reductions

For players who are improving rapidly, and whose handicap may not be reducing quickly enough, there is a process included in the club software that applies an additional reduction (Clause 23C). This is triggered if a player returns two scores of 4 under handicap or better and when the second score is within a specified number of qualifying rounds. This does not apply to category 1 players. If an ESR is applied the player must be informed as soon as possible.

Note: ESRs do not apply in Scotland.

After the competition is closed down

Your handicap software will automatically calculate handicap changes. You must make sure that the results are uploaded promptly to the **CDH**. If you have ‘away’ players whose handicaps cannot be uploaded, then you must ensure they have a record to take back to their clubs.

If any of your players have had an **exceptional scoring reduction (ESR)** you must inform them. (See Clause 23, Section C.) Players cannot be expected to know about such a reduction; you should email or telephone depending how your club communicates with its members.

The handicap software will now alert you, through the **continuous handicap review**, to players who have had 7 consecutive 0.1 additions. With the handicap committee, you should consider if they need an immediate handicap increase. (See Clause 23, Section D.) Again, they will need to be informed.

Adverse weather conditions

Much as we would like to believe golf is always played in warm and sunny conditions, we know this is not always the case and sometimes conditions can become so bad that play in a competition must be suspended or abandoned. As handicap secretary, these decisions are unlikely to be yours, but you are the person who will have to handle the effect on handicaps.

If a qualifying competition is abandoned the CSS = SSS. No handicap increases are applied and only handicaps where the nett differential is less than zero are reduced (Clause 18.7).

Whilst the CSS will take care of the effect of some adverse weather, it cannot be expected to compensate for excess water on greens, fairways or bunkers or very high winds on fast, sloping greens. It is not essential for a greenkeeper to be present to close the course formally – a committee member, club professional or club manager must often make this judgment call.

The Scottish Golf website has a useful article on dealing with adverse weather conditions:

<http://scottishgolf.org/club-services/handicapping/qualifying-competitions/adverse-weather-conditions> .

Competition handicaps

For players to have a handicap that reflects their current standard of play, they need to return scores regularly from competitive rounds or to complete supplementary scores. This may not suit some members who prefer to play their golf more informally.

Any player who has played in competitions amounting to 3 qualifying scores (any combination of 9-hole and 18-holes scores) or has returned **supplementary scores**, is considered to have a competition handicap. These handicaps are annotated with 'c' in the records.

Clubs may decide to limit some of their club competitions and open events to those with a competition handicap only. It is entirely up to each club to decide this policy – but all members should be given the opportunity to play in some competitions.

Note: a competition handicap retains its status for the calendar year following its acquisition.

Club handicaps

Club handicaps are new, having been launched in January 2016 and clubs are encouraged to introduce them. They range from 29 for men and 37 for women up to 54. They are intended for players new to golf and who want to be able to measure their improvement. There is no limit to the number of **supplementary scores** that may be returned by a player with a club handicap.

Older players who can no longer play to a 28 (or 36) may also opt for a club handicap. If a player does this he or she will not also be able to hold a CONGU handicap of 28 (or 36) at the same time which may limit the competitions they can play. See Manual, Appendix J.

- A club handicap cannot have **competition handicap** status.
- Competitions which players with club handicaps can enter may be restricted.
- Club handicaps are measured against the SSS. Even if players are competing in a competition where a CSS is calculated, their handicap changes are still calculated against the SSS.
- A club may not change a player with a CONGU handicap *up* to a club handicap without his/her permission.

Junior handicaps are now classed as club handicaps. See Manual, Appendix J.

If you have beginners, whether they be adults or juniors, you may wish them to play off a shortened course. This applies particularly to juniors who may not have the physical strength to play a full course; you may adjust their handicaps as you think best.

Handicaps for players with disabilities are covered in the Manual, Appendix L. Although very similar to club handicaps, the crucial difference is that they carry 'c' status.

HANDICAPPING

New members

Assigning handicaps to new members is one of the most important functions of a **handicap committee**. The new player will have to complete 54-holes in any combination of 9- or 18-holes. Following the inputting of the score details from these cards, the computer program calculates a handicap. This should be regarded as a *recommendation* only that should be reviewed in the light of factors such as time of year, prevailing weather conditions, previous playing history, and the most recent past handicap held, where applicable as well as other sporting achievements before a handicap is allotted.

New players should be reviewed regularly to check that they have been given the right handicap. It is not fair to them if the handicap is too low – nor is it fair to your other members if their handicap is too high.

If the new member is joining from another club and has a CONGU handicap and CDH number, that CDH ID number and handicap comes with them (in Ireland each club will issue a new CDH ID number), so make sure that the handicap secretary of the club they are leaving has removed the player from that club's database. All handicaps remain in place for the calendar year after the player attained it.

A player may not be allotted a category 1 handicap without the authority of your **area authority** or **national union**. The relevant body will give you the code you need for your handicap software.

Note: when a member leaves your club you must make sure that his or her record is removed from the club's database. However, you should archive the data. Your handicapping software will offer an 'archive' facility. (In Ireland you must also remove them from the CDH).

Re-activating a competition handicap

As long as someone remains a member of a golf club, they retain their handicap even if it may not be a **competition handicap**. However, many clubs demand that members entering certain competitions have a **competition handicap**. To re-activate a competition handicap a player must return three **qualifying scores**, (any combination of competition or supplementary scores) within a calendar year. . The Handicap Committee also have discretion to re-activate a competition handicap in exceptional circumstances.

Supplementary scores

Both your 'home' and 'away' members may submit supplementary scores during the year, so long as they register their intent to mark a supplementary score before starting play. (This should be checked regularly.) You must make sure that your club members know

- where to 'sign in'
- which tees they must play from
- where they must put their cards after the round
- who may mark a card.

Players in handicap categories 2, 3, 4 and 5 may return up to 10 supplementary scores a year of 9- or 18-holes. This also applies in Scotland to category 1 players with handicaps of 2.5 and higher. Otherwise, category 1 players are limited in the supplementary scores they may submit and these must *not* be 9-hole scores. If a category 1 player has not returned 3 qualifying scores by the end of September then he/she may mark *only* as many supplementary scores as necessary to retain a **competition handicap**. They may also return supplementary scores to reactivate a **competition handicap**.

Players with club handicaps may return as many supplementary scores as they wish.

As handicap secretary, you must ensure that as far as possible supplementary scores are authentic.

General play adjustments

The handicapping authorities recognise that many players prefer friendly games, four-ball games and other formats which do not allow the system to regulate handicaps officially. Some novice and young players also improve their playing ability faster than the CONGU® system can reflect. So the regulations allow the handicapping committee of a club to adjust a player's handicap to ensure that it reflects their current ability. This should be done by consensus of the committee, not by individuals, and can be done as part of the **annual review**, or *at any time if exceptional circumstances require*.

General play adjustments for category 1 players are particularly sensitive and must be approved by the handicapping authority – **area authority** or **national Union**. A code is required from them to allow club software to make this change.

The annual review

The annual review must take place between 31 October and 31 December each year. (In Ireland this must be during November to ensure revised handicaps are valid for the national cup and shield events of the following year.) The Review is an opportunity for handicap committees to undertake a comprehensive review of the handicaps of *all* home players. All handicap software has a report that should help with this review, by highlighting players who have played better than their handicap suggests in the previous year. Only qualifying scores are taken in to consideration in the review program produced by the handicapping software.

If you have evidence that a player has been performing well in other events such as non-qualifying rounds, match play events or team competitions, the annual review is the ideal time to discuss any potential adjustments to handicaps based on these scores.

The annual review is not just the time to reduce members' handicaps – many players will have failed to play to their handicaps and this is the time to increase their handicaps to something realistic. This is important because if they continue to return scores outside their buffer zones, then their scores will skew the **CSS** calculation. It is possible some players whose handicap you put up will not be happy about the situation. You need to be able to explain, as sympathetically as possible, that it is not just about *their* handicaps but about everyone's handicap and the relationship these have to each other that matters.

You should also invite members to contact you if they feel their handicap should be either increased or decreased. They should support any such request with their reasons and data where appropriate. See Clause 23(A)/ Appendix M.

During the annual review you should also look at the handicaps of players who have *not* returned many/any scores during the year. These players tend to be 'decliners' and may well have given up altogether on entering competitions. Using the knowledge the handicap committee has of the club members, between you, you may decide to increase the handicaps of such players.

Handicapping software and computers

It is now very difficult for a club to administer handicaps without suitable computer hardware, including a broadband connection, and bespoke golf handicap software. The CONGU® website (www.congu.com) has a list of all licensed competition and handicapping software suppliers. Your club will pay the software supplier an annual fee and updates are provided FOC. All suppliers have a dedicated helpline for you to use if things go wrong, or you need help in using the system. Keep details their contact number to hand!

Central database of handicaps (CDH)

The details of handicaps for members of all affiliated golf clubs are kept on the **home club's** handicap software and in addition the national governing body will also keep a copy of these records on a central database, the CDH.

Each club's records on the CDH are updated whenever a competition or handicap change is made. Each club member is allocated a CDH unique number which they keep should they change their **home club** within their *national* jurisdiction. However, players in Ireland are given a CDH number at each of the clubs where they hold membership *in Ireland* and they must still nominate one club as their **home club** (the one where they play most of their competitions) for handicapping administration purposes.

YOUR TO-DO LIST

There is a rhythm to the things you must do as handicap secretary. The chart below gives you an indication of how often you need to manage the various aspects of the job. This is a guide only – there will be times when you must do some things more frequently and others you will choose to do less so.

	Weekly	Monthly	Less often	Annually
That competitions have been closed down correctly and all handicaps uploaded to CDH	✓			
Revised handicap lists are on display for your members	✓			
Any supplementary scores are checked and handicaps up-dated	✓			
Handicaps allotted to new players	✓			
Re-activated competition handicaps are noted	✓			
An audit is undertaken of the signing-in book for supplementary scores			✓	
ESRs are checked and players informed	✓			
Continuous handicap review report is called up and acted on		✓		
Your players with a second club are returning their away scores			✓	
Your players who play golf away, particularly category 1 players, are returning all their scores			✓	
General review of handicaps for players flagged by the monthly CRI report		✓		
General review of handicaps – just to check no-one has had a sudden improvement not catered for by ESRs, or that someone back from long-term illness for example, needs a review			✓	
Members are reminded they need to have completed three qualifying scores to keep a competition handicap				✓
The annual review of handicaps				✓
Greens staff are reminded of tee positions – particularly if head greenkeeper is on holiday			✓	

WHERE TO FIND HELP

The CONGU 2016 - 2018 Manual

Your software provider (software issues)

Your area authority (district/province)/county handicap advisor or your national governing body

www.CONGU.com

Acknowledgment

Thanks go to John Davies, Secretary of the Surrey County Golf Union who wrote the first guide for handicap secretaries

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