



ENGLANDGOLF

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO THE CONGU
HANDICAPPING SYSTEM

FOR
CLUB HANDICAP SECRETARIES

November 2013

INTRODUCTION

One of the reasons why golf is a popular sport is that a golfer can play against any other golfer and have an equitable chance of winning.

This is because, unlike most sports, a handicap is assigned to all members of affiliated golf clubs which reflects their standard of play and provides a level playing field (pardon the pun).

It is ultimately the responsibility of the golfer's club to ensure that they are assigned a handicap that accurately reflects their current standard of play.

The purpose of this guide is to assist clubs to achieve this aim.

GETTING STARTED

All handicap secretaries should have the latest copy of the CONGU Unified Handicapping System manual, currently 2012-2015.

Copies may be obtained from the England Golf online shop (www.EnglandGolfShop.org) or your county office, or by downloading from the CONGU website (www.CONGU.com) or by using the link from the England Golf website.

The best way to start to acquaint yourself with the handicapping rules is to read Appendix L in the CONGU manual, the UHS Compliance Checklist.

Any query over your club's compliance should be discussed with your County Secretary or Handicap Advisor.

DEFINITIONS

Affiliated Club

An Affiliated Club is a club which pays to the County and England Golf a specified annual fee in respect of each eligible Member.

Central Database of Handicaps (CDH)

The CDH is a 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)

The CDH ID Number is a unique number allocated by a Union to a Member that allows them to be registered and recognised for handicapping purposes.

Competition Scratch Score (CSS)

The Competition Scratch Score is the score calculated following the conclusion of a qualifying competition.

CONGU- Council of National Golf Unions

This organisation, constituting representatives from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, is responsible for maintaining and updating the rules of handicapping used by all affiliated golf clubs in England.

Handicaps – 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

A Handicap Committee is the body appointed by an affiliated club to administer the handicapping system within the club.

Handicap Secretary

The Handicap Secretary should be appointed by the affiliated club to deal with the day to day matters surrounding handicapping.

Qualifying Competition

A Qualifying Competition is 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 is calculated.

Standard Scratch Score (SSS)

The Standard Scratch Score is the score allocated to an 18 hole golf course (two rounds of a 9 hole course) following course rating.

Supplementary Score

A Supplementary Score is a score returned for handicapping purposes in accordance with CONGU regulations at a player's home club other than in a Qualifying Competition.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

CONGU (Council of National Golf Unions)

CONGU publish a manual every four years, currently 2012-2015, which is an essential text book for handicap administrators. References to clauses in this 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, and England Golf is to provide a structure which administers handicaps for club members.

This includes all the following:-

- **THE COURSE SSS**

The county course rating team will assess the Standard Scratch Score (SSS) of the golf course which 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 or course rating team leader.

After each 'qualifying' event, a Competition Standard Scratch Score (CSS) is calculated, usually automatically by the club's handicap software, and is based on the performance of all the players and gives a score by which the individual player's score is judged and their handicap altered.

Because the methods of calculation of a Standard Scratch Score and individual handicaps are different in many parts of the world, scores from outside the Home Unions cannot be used in the CONGU system.

- **HANDICAP COMMITTEE**

Every club must have a handicap committee, minimum number of three people, of which the majority must be members of that club (Clause 6).

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 Central Database of Handicaps (where appropriate) after every competition or handicap change.

The handicap committee should meet once each year for an annual handicap review and may also, if necessary in exceptional circumstances, discuss and agree any changes under "general play".

- **HANDICAP SECRETARY**

In practice, it is the Handicap Secretary who carries out the work involved on behalf of the club.

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.

The updated contact details of the Handicap Secretary should be notified to the County Authority to ensure that communication and notifications are readily transferred.

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 club. A player must only have one home club and one handicap (clause 8).

When a player scores under their handicap, it is their responsibility to reduce their handicap immediately in accordance with the handicap rules.

Players should register with the CDH via the England Golf Handicap & Benefits programme on the England Golf website (www.Englandgolf.org/members) so they can view their updated handicap record at all times, and know their own unique CDH reference number.

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

As Handicap Secretary you need to let your members know what their responsibilities are under the system.

NEW MEMBER

When a player joins your club, you should first ascertain their handicap history, whether they have ever held a CONGU handicap, have a CDH number etc. From this evidence, in addition to them returning three informal cards if their handicap is not current, you should make a judgement as to a current handicap (clause 16).

If you wish to give the player a category 1 handicap (see clause 20.1 for details of categories), your handicap software will ask you for a code which you must obtain from your County Secretary or Handicap Advisor.

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, so make sure that the secretary of the club they are leaving has removed the player from that club's database.

RUNNING COMPETITIONS

QUALIFYING COMPETITION

This is a stroke-play competition, played over a measured course, enabling a Competition Standard 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 affect a player's handicap.

England Golf encourages clubs to hold qualifying competitions whenever possible throughout the whole year, in order that handicaps are current.

The club should declare before play whether or not the event is qualifying, usually within the "Conditions of Competition".

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 54 holes (any combination of 9-hole and 18-holes scores) or has returned Supplementary Scores is considered to have a 'competition' handicap. These handicaps will be annotated with 'c'.

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 players should be given the opportunity to play in some competitions.

Ladies may only compete in England Golf Medals if they have a competition handicap.

THE HOME CLUB

A player must inform their club whether this is to be their 'home club' and also the names of any away clubs. Every player must have only one home club and one CDH number.

Players must ensure that all scores completed on other courses in qualifying competitions are returned to their home club. (The CDH will automatically do this in most instances, however, the Handicap Secretary must accept the 'Away' scores to the home record.)

AWAY CLUB

If you are the away club of a member, you should send any scores back to their home club, or check that the CDH has done so.

Ultimately, it is the player's responsibility to ensure that all scores are returned to their home club. They must also tell you when their playing (not exact) handicap at their home club changes.

MIXED EVENTS AND MIXED TEES

Men and ladies 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). Some competitions may also be played using mixed tees – i.e. some players using forward tees rather than competition tees.

When men and ladies play against each other, for the game to be fair, the handicaps have to be adjusted to allow for the difference in SSS between the ladies' and men's courses. Usually the ladies' SSS is higher, so this difference is added to the ladies' handicaps for competition results and match-play allowance purposes.

When men and ladies play against each other in the same competition, the following rules apply:-

- In a medal competition – the lady adds the difference in the course standard scratch between the men's and the ladies' tees which are used for the competition, to her handicap. (For the competition result only, not for handicapping purposes).
- In a stableford, it is simpler if the players only use either the ladies' or men's card for the par of each hole and its stroke index. In that case, the lady would just add to her handicap as above.
- In matchplay, the lady should add to her handicap the difference between the men's standard scratch and the ladies' standard scratch, before the calculation of shots received.

Appendix O of the CONGU manual gives fuller details of how handicaps for these events should be managed.

HANDICAPPING

GENERAL PLAY ADJUSTMENTS

The handicapping authorities recognise that many players prefer friendly games, fourball 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 county secretary or handicapping authority. A code is required from them to allow club software to effect this change.

Supplementary scores may be submitted by a player during the year, and must be registered in advance at the club before commencing play. (This should be checked regularly). Clubs must ensure where possible that these scores are authentic. Category 1 players are limited to the use they may make of supplementary scores,

THE ANNUAL REVIEW

The Annual Review should take place at any time between 31 October and 1 March each year, and is an opportunity for handicap committees to undertake a comprehensive review of the handicaps of all home players. All the 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.

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. Clause 23(a)/ Appendix M

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. England Golf has a list of all recognised and approved handicap 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.

At the end of a competition, all the scores need to be fed into the software system, hole-by-hole. Many clubs have a Player Score Input system (PSI) which allows competitors to input their own scores – this must be set up properly before the event and closed down afterwards.

Any changes to handicaps need to be communicated to players after an event – usually a revised members' handicap list pinned to the noticeboard will suffice.

EXCEPTIONAL SCORING REDUCTION (ESR)

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 can apply an additional reduction (Clause 23c).

This is triggered if a player returns two scores of 4 under handicap or better. The reduction is based on the second score within a specified number of qualifying rounds. The handicap committee is offered an option to accept or decline the additional reduction, and in most cases the recommendation is to accept it, but this is not compulsory. It does not apply to category 1 players.

If an ESR is applied the committee must inform the player as soon as possible.

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, England Golf, 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.

Players should register with England Golf via the England Golf Handicap & Benefits programme on the England Golf website (www.Englandgolf.org/members) to view their handicap on line and confirm their CDH number.

Using the CDH, players can view their own handicap via the England Golf Handicap & Benefits website. Clubs are able to view all their members' handicaps whilst counties can view all their county clubs' members' handicaps and England Golf can view all members' handicaps

WHERE TO FIND HELP

The CONGU 2012-2015 manual –

Your software provider –

Your county Secretary or Handicap Advisor –