

## NO NEED TO FEAR CHANGES TO HANDICAP SYSTEM

- 36 is the maximum initial handicap allotment for men
- Club and disability handicaps have been retired
- New Category 5 (28.5-36.4) and new Category 6 (36.5-54.0) introduced

Throughout its history there have been regular revisions to the CONGU Unified Handicapping System (UHS) always with the aim of assisting club members to have handicaps that truly reflect their playing ability. These revisions have proven highly beneficial.

Like golfers, the system does not stand still and a number of further refinements, borne out of experience and new evidence, were introduced with effect from 1 January, 2018. A number of key principles were taken into consideration during this review process:

- encourage participation in both competition and social golf
- make the system fairer for players of all abilities
- make the handicapping system uniform throughout Great Britain & Ireland

The handicap limit for male golfers in competition had been set at 28 but a maximum handicap of 54 has been in place for many years under the UHS.

It was introduced for junior golfers in 2004 when handicap committees were permitted to allot an initial handicap in the range of 29 to 54 to those male juniors not capable of playing to a handicap of 28 or less.

In 2008, handicaps for players with disabilities were introduced. Handicap committees were now permitted to allot a handicap in the range of 29 to 54 to those male players with a disability not capable of playing to a handicap of 28 or less.

Prior to 1 January, 2016 CONGU recognised that there were many players unable to play to the maximum handicap of 28 either on age or ability grounds or indeed a combination of both.

On 1 January, 2016 CONGU introduced a club handicap, the purpose of which was to enable players whose golfing ability does not currently justify the award of the maximum handicap of 28.0 or lower to have a higher handicap up to a maximum of 54.0.

Such handicaps were introduced so that:

- beginners have a handicap commensurate with their ability at an early stage of their involvement in the game of golf
- developing players have a yardstick against which to measure their progress
- players of declining ability who hold the maximum handicap of 28.0 but who can no longer play to this maximum can elect to hold a higher handicap (while this may restrict their entry to some competitions it would give them a more realistic handicap for social and club golf)

CONGU also recognised that there was an increasing number of people playing golf who had a disability and so introduced a disability golf handicap (ranging from 29 to 54) for men.

The purpose of the disability golf handicap was to enable golfers with disabilities to play in competitions at club level and to allow them to compete alongside everyone else whenever possible.

Many players with a disability have achieved, or are capable of achieving, a competition handicap but where a disability prevents this standard being attained then the allotment of a disability handicap will allow such players to compete on a more equitable basis.

Following the relatively low impact of these changes, CONGU decided to remove club and disability handicaps. These have now been replaced by a new Category 5 and a new Category 6, providing a maximum handicap of 54 for all golfers.

Up to 31 December, 2017 initial handicaps could be allotted up to a maximum of 28.0 for men. Effective from 1 January, 2018, handicap committees can increase handicaps above the previous limit of 28.0 for men. There is no change in procedure when it comes to allotting an initial handicap.

A handicap can only be allotted after full consideration of a player's previous history at any other club or under another handicap system. The handicap committee must consider all the information available to it in relation to the player's ability.

It is envisaged that many of those players currently with an exact handicap between 27.5 and 28.4 (playing handicap of 28) will, in time, and for reasons of either age or ability or both, progress to Category 5, which has a limit of 36.4 (playing handicap of 36).

In Ireland, it has been agreed that there will be a limit of 36 for men and 45 for ladies in respect of future initial handicap allotments.

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