



The USGA and The R&A have announced they are working with golf's handicapping authorities to develop a universal system which will apply all over the world. Firm proposals will be made later this year.

Currently there are six different systems around the world, providing handicaps for over 15 million golfers in more than 80 countries. Handicaps reflect a player's skill and mean golfers of different abilities can play and compete together on equal terms.

The announcement follows an extensive review of existing handicap systems administered by Golf Australia, the Council of National Golf Unions (CONGU) in Great Britain and Ireland, the European Golf Association (EGA), the South African Golf Association (SAGA), the Argentine Golf Association (AAG) and the United States Golf Association (USGA).

Golf organisations from different parts of the world have also been engaged with the current handicap authorities for the past two years to help shape the proposed system, which takes into account the many different golf cultures and most common formats of play. Research conducted to date has also reviewed systems and best practices inherent to handicapping, such as course rating and administration.

A joint committee led by the USGA and The R&A has been formed, including representatives from each handicap authority as well as the Japan Golf Association and Golf Canada. The joint committee plans to announce its proposals later this year.

Martin Slumbers, Chief Executive of The R&A, said, "We have been concerned for some time that many golfers find the handicapping landscape to be complicated and can be frustrated when it is not always applied in the same way in different parts of the world.

"We are working closely with the existing handicapping bodies to benefit from their insights as we try to formulate a system that will be easy to understand and can be applied consistently on a global basis. We very much appreciate their support for this initiative."

Mike Davis, Executive Director and CEO of the USGA, said, "One wonderful aspect of golf that separates it from other sports is the ability of players of differing abilities to play on an equitable basis through handicapping. With one global system, golf courses will be rated and handicaps calculated in a like manner everywhere in the world. Reducing borders or barriers to provide an easy way for all to play together is great for the game and golfers everywhere."

Bob Carrick, Acting Chairman of CONGU, said: "The Council of National Golf Unions welcomes the R&A/USGA's initiative to develop a single Worldwide Handicapping System for the sport. We think that this is an exciting opportunity for standardising the system and for more players to obtain an official handicap. We will be delighted to work closely with other handicap authorities to ensure a smooth implementation."

Frequently Asked Questions answered by the R&A and USGA

What are the key objectives of this initiative?

To unify 6 different handicap systems into a single World Handicap System that will:

- enable golfers to play and compete anywhere around the world on equal terms
- be easy to understand and implement, without sacrificing accuracy
- meet the needs and expectations of golfers, golf clubs and golf authorities all around the world.

Why would this be a good change?

Each of the existing handicap systems is well received in the areas where it operates. However, because they all calculate handicaps differently, the result can be players of the same ability having different handicaps. A World Handicap System would mean that a handicap of 6.0 in Lima should be the same as a handicap of 6.0 in both London and Los Angeles.

What are the other benefits of a World Handicap System?

As the world becomes a smaller place with a much greater frequency of international play, we believe that the game of golf will benefit from a unified handicap system, where handicaps are portable from country to country. It would result in less confusion, easier administration of international events and, potentially, it could allow national associations more opportunity to focus attention on golf development and strategic planning to support the game. A single world handicap system would also provide the opportunity to aggregate data to help ensure the game remains healthy.

Where are the existing systems currently used around the world and how do they differ?

The attached map and tables show the current handicapping landscape around the world and compares the key components of each system.

When did work on this project begin?

During The Open Championship at Royal St Georges in July 2011, The R&A and USGA met informally with the other handicap authorities to put forward an embryonic idea of a world handicap system and to ascertain whether there was any interest in pursuing this initiative. That meeting marked the inception of the project, and progress has been steadily gathering pace since that time with the following key milestones:

- May 2012 - first formal meeting between The R&A, USGA and the handicap authorities
- April 2013 - presentation by USGA's CEO and Executive Director, Mike Davis, at The R&A's Working for Golf Conference.
- March 2016 - Joint Committee structure established and operational.

Why is The R&A involved?

Prior to 2011, The R&A had no direct involvement in handicapping matters since the 1920s, and its role in this project began as an independent facilitator. However, as discussions continued, it was recommended that a World Handicap System be positioned under the USGA/R&A governance umbrella along with the Rules of Golf, the Equipment Rules and the Rules of Amateur Status. The R&A has since formed a handicapping department to help facilitate this governance function along with the USGA and will do so together throughout the world. The day-to-day management of handicapping will continue to be the responsibility of individual national associations and handicap authorities.

Is it possible to have one identical handicap system the world over?

It is true that there are variations in how golf is played around the world and it is not our intention to try to force a cultural change in the way that golf is played. Through collaboration with national associations around the world, the goal is to try to accommodate those cultural differences within a single World Handicap System.

Does the project have the support of National Associations around the world?

A series of briefing sessions was conducted all around the world in 2015, which aimed to cover as many National Associations as possible. The reaction was very positive.

It is also worth stressing that the work that is being done to develop a World Handicap System is very much a collaborative effort and all of the National Associations who are directly involved in the process are very supportive of the initiative.

When will details of the proposed new system be made available?

After additional collaboration around the world, we plan to share the details of the World Handicap System later in the year.

Why are you saying something now?

We wanted to make a short statement at this time, to jointly confirm that this project is moving forward and to allow National Associations to begin to communicate with their constituents. As the project continues to receive support, preparations for change will be required everywhere around the world, which requires time. Until now, the project has been treated as confidential, and messaging has been restricted primarily to National Associations. This communication will also serve as notice that further details will be forthcoming later in the year.



What is the timeline for implementation?

Details of the proposed timeline will be made publicly available later in the year, but the proposed World Handicap System will not be implemented before all the necessary consultation, testing and education has been carried out and the necessary infrastructure has been put in place.

What will the system be called?

It is proposed that the Rules of Handicapping and the Course Rating System together will be jointly referred to as the World Handicap System (WHS).

Have you consulted with golfers on this proposal?

Until now, consultation and feedback has been mostly restricted to National Associations. However, we will be embarking on a communication effort with golfers and handicap administrators during the summer of 2017.

Does this have impact on the current technology infrastructure?

While the installation of a World Handicap System will invariably impact upon the different technology systems and structures currently in use around the world at various levels, it is hoped that any disruption will be kept to a minimum. We aim to develop a cohesive and cost-efficient structure which, at the very least, provides a smooth transition.