

World Handicap System – A Collaborative Process

The vision to unify the six different handicap systems in use around the world into a single World Handicap System required the commitment of, and collaboration between, many organizations. All of the following organizations have given their support to this important initiative and played their part in establishing the key principles, which shaped the proposals and drove forward the initiative to the point where a new World Handicap System can be introduced to the golfing world in 2020:

- Argentine Golf Association (AAG)
- Council of National Golf Unions (CONGU)
- European Golf Association (EGA)
- Golf Australia (GA)
- South African Golf Association (SAGA)
- United States Golf Association (USGA)
- The R&A

Together, they have been instrumental in developing a consistent method for golfers to measure their ability and track their progress. The proposed new system will enable all golfers to compete or play socially on level terms with anyone, regardless of where they are from in the world, thereby providing greater enjoyment of the sport.

The journey began with a meeting between The R&A, the USGA and the other handicap authorities to find out whether there was any interest in pursuing a World Handicap System, incorporating a single set of Rules of Handicapping and a single Course Rating System. It was soon discovered that the core principles of each of the existing systems were very similar, which is to measure a golfer's potential ability so that players of differing abilities can compete on reasonably equal terms. Further, the USGA's Course Rating and Slope Systems are already used extensively around the world which would further ensure consistency for how course difficulty is evaluated within a World Handicap System. This discovery prompted a positive reaction, and a series of meetings followed to advance the work, which included establishing foundational principles accepted by all golfing cultures.

Beginning in 2015, presentations and briefings were made around the world and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive and supportive.

It was decided to establish a formal Committee structure with representation from 15 different National Associations from around the world, including the six existing handicap authorities, the Japan Golf Association and Golf Canada. Other National Associations and bodies were included in various taskforces to help support the main Committees, thus ensuring representation from each region of the world and consideration of all golfing cultures.

For the past two years, these Committees and taskforces have been busy creating a modern, adaptable system that is inclusive and accessible, defining what equity means for various formats of play, devising a technology solution which can be easily integrated into existing infra-structures and developing a transition plan for the next two years, leading to the launch of WHS in early 2020.

During the summer of 2017, market research was conducted to solicit the views of golfers and golf club administrators regarding WHS proposals. Using the services of two independent research agencies and with the help of National Associations, an online survey was circulated extensively in 15 countries and received a remarkable 52,000 responses over a two-month period.

The survey found that 76% of respondents were supportive of the principle of a World Handicap System, with only 2% opposed. The fact that there is already a uniform set of Rules governing how the game is played, the equipment used and to protect amateur status resonated with people and, for the vast majority, it made sense that there should also be a uniform set of Rules of Handicapping.

More detailed research was also carried out in five different markets throughout Europe, the United States and South America where a total of 15 focus groups were conducted, attended by over 330 highly engaged and enthusiastic golfers and golf club administrators. These sessions provided details

of some of the key features of WHS, eliciting valuable feedback and reaction that have helped to shape and refine the system proposals.

From the research conducted, it was clear that a worldwide system that is inclusive and modern and that produces consistent and portable handicaps, with some ability to adapt to local cultures where appropriate, would be welcomed by golfers and administrators alike.