

FAO Club Handicap Committees, Club Competition Committees

Notice to all Clubs

From 1st April 2025, Golf Ireland will be implementing a change in the application of the WHSTM Rules of Handicapping in Ireland in respect of the guidance for the calculation of the Playing Handicaps.

This will mean that effective 1st April 2025, the Committee in charge of Competitions in a Club will have the **option to change the Playing HandicapTM allowance which applies in competitions.**

In Singles competitions which count for handicap purposes, this effectively means clubs will have three broad choices going forward:

1. They can retain the current allowance of 95%, as recommended in Appendix C of the Rules of Handicapping.
2. They can reduce the allowance to either 90% or 85%.
3. They can increase the allowance to 100% of the Course HandicapTM, thereby removing the concept of a Playing Handicap as a separate value completely in singles competitions.

Likewise, in Four-Ball stroke play, stableford or V-Par competitions which are played in counting conditions and for which scores in certain specified circumstances may count on a player's Handicap Record, the same choices apply and equate as follows:

1. Retain the current allowance of 85%.
2. Reduce the allowance to either 80% or 75%.
3. Increase the allowance to 90%.

Why might a club consider opting for a lower Playing Handicap allowance?

If circumstances have been observed in a club where lower handicappers are struggling to compete, the Committee in charge of a competition may wish to consider a lower Playing Handicap allowance as a means of enhancing the equity of a competition. The feedback which Golf Ireland has received through tracking surveys in the past year suggests that this is an acutely felt issue in a number of clubs.

The general guidance provided in Appendix C of the Rules of Handicapping is that a lower Playing Handicap allowance is more likely to provide equity larger fields (i.e., in excess of 100 golfers) where the difference in shots between the lowest and highest Handicap Index in the field is significant.

Why might a club considering opting for a higher Playing Handicap allowance?

Essentially, this might be considered in circumstances which are the opposite of the above – i.e., where there are smaller fields (e.g. fewer than 30 players) and the difference in shots between the lowest and highest Handicap Index in the field is negligible.

Why is Golf Ireland doing this?

Consistent feedback indicates that many clubs feel the need for more options to address specific issues they are encountering with handicapping in their competitions. Moreover, a similar trendline in the feedback has indicated that lower handicappers in a number of clubs feel less competitive as a result of the changeover to the WHS, and in some cases are even less inclined to play in club competitions. In these circumstances, the option to lower the Playing Handicap allowance is one that club committees may wish to consider.

Similarly, however, a number of clubs also find that their members are struggling with the complexity of the WHS, and that in scenarios where there are comparatively few golfers playing in competitions, there is a question as to whether there is a need for such complexity. In such clubs, having a Playing Handicap that is directly equal to the player's Course Handicap (ie, 100%) goes some way to simplifying the handicap calculation that is made for competitions.

The purpose of the changes, therefore, is to give clubs a degree of flexibility in responding to their own specific challenges with regard to handicapping in their own competitions.

When do clubs have to implement this change?

The options will be available from 1 April 2025, but clubs can proceed at their own pace, and there is no requirement for a club to introduce this change if the judgement of the club committee is that the current Playing Handicap allowances remain appropriate.

If a club wishes to implement this change, how do they go about it?

The setting for the Playing Handicap allowance will be available on the club's own competition software. No change to any settings will need to be made on the Clubhouse.

Will changing the Playing Handicap allowance have any repercussions for the PCC?

No. However, it will be even more important to ensure players are aware that their score for the purposes of their handicap record is always based on their Course Handicap rather than their Playing Handicap. As a result, players should be encouraged to finish out on holes where they may not have a stroke in the competition, but do if applying their Course Handicap.

Does the Club have to introduce this rule for a minimum period of time, or apply it to all competitions?

A committee in charge of competitions can apply a new Playing Handicap allowance to all of its competitions – and in many cases this is probably desirable in most cases to give players' clarity. However, this is also at the committee's discretion and a club could also choose to apply different allowances to different competitions. Likewise, a different approach could be applied to Men's and Women's competitions within a club. Whatever approach is taken, the decision should be made following consideration of the size of fields and the spread of Handicap Indexes in order to rationalize their decision.

Note:

At this time, no change is being made to the Other formats of play listed in Appendix C, i.e., Matchplay, scrambles etc..

For further guidance, please see Appendix C/1 of the Rules of Handicapping – [click here to view](#).