Introduction

Obtaining their first handicap is a memorable experience for many junior golfers and golf clubs should aim to make this process simple and not too lengthy. A handicap is often the easiest way of monitoring the improvement of juniors and provides a real motivation for youngsters to continue or increase their participation within the game. There is now an even easier way for golf clubs to assign junior handicaps through the recommended CONGU scheme, allowing juniors to obtain a handicap up to 54.

Junior golfers should be encouraged to practice, to help them develop and reduce their handicap and it is important that there are opportunities for them to practice in a safe and interactive environment. Juniors should also be provided with the correct information to practice and this can be achieved by integrating it into a structured coaching programme.

Access to regular and diverse competitive golf within the golf club will assist a junior’s development and of course is the method by which players reduce their handicap. Juniors should be supported so that they can reach a certain standard to progress onto the course and into competitions and any restrictions for juniors to compete in main club competitions should be no different to those for adults. Clubs should try to make competitive golf fun for juniors and try using a variety of formats.
Recommended handicapping scheme:

The EGU and ELGA encourage clubs to adopt the Junior Handicapping Scheme recommended by CONGU, that helps to:

- Initiate a common policy for all juniors across England.
- Make it easier for juniors to obtain their first handicap.
- Link with the CONGU scheme.
- Cater for juniors of varying abilities.
- Help junior organisers maintain junior handicaps.
- Allow juniors to compete against each other from an early stage.
- Provide juniors with a handicap of between 29 and 54, with the junior only having to play a minimum of 6 or 9 holes to obtain it.

The EGU/ELGA recommend that golf clubs use a junior handicapping scheme. This type of scheme helps to encourage and motivate new junior golfers, who perhaps can only manage 6 or 9 holes of golf during one visit, but need to be able to measure their own progression and compare themselves against other juniors.

The junior handicap awarded is not an official handicap, but is a form of club handicap, which the club can modify to suit its own needs. Another advantage of using this format is that clubs can compete against each other.

CONGU recommends the following procedures for allotting and adjusting handicaps for juniors:

1. Obtaining a Handicap

1.1 To obtain a handicap a junior shall submit three cards at his [her] Home Club (preferably over a measured course) each of which shall be signed by a person acceptable to the Club Committee.

1.2 Any score more than 2 [3] over par at any hole shall be amended to 2 [3] over par. (The maximum reduction under this clause shall be 6 strokes per round).

1.3 After these reductions have been made an Exact Handicap shall be allotted equivalent to the number of strokes by which the best of the submitted rounds differs from the SSS of the course.

1.4 Juniors justifying a handicap of 28 [36] or less shall have their handicap controlled and adjusted in accordance with the stipulations contained in the current CONGU Standard Scratch Score and Handicapping System.

1.5 Handicaps in the range 29 to 54 [37 to 54] may be allocated as “Club Handicaps” to those juniors not capable of playing to a handicap of 28 [36] or better.

Note: At the discretion of the Home Club it is permissible for “Club Handicaps”, in the range of 29 to 54 [37 to 54], to be allocated to juniors submitting cards over 6 or 9 holes, such cards are to be adjusted to an 18 hole score, e.g. a Junior with a ‘best of three’ score of 60, adjusted in accordance with paragraph 1.2, over 9 holes on a course with a par of 35 would receive a handicap of (60 x 2) - (35 x 2) = 50

It is recommended that this concession should only be applied to juniors of 14 years or younger.

2. Alterations to Handicap

2.3 Juniors with a handicap of 28 [36] or less shall have their handicap adjusted in accordance with Clause 16 of the CONGU Scheme, otherwise:

2.4 Returns of 1 - 6 strokes below the SSS will result in handicap reductions of 0.5 of a stroke for each stroke below the SSS.

2.5 Each additional stroke below the SSS will result in a further reduction of handicap of 1 stroke, e.g. A Junior with a Club Handicap of 42 returning a nett score of 60 over a course with a SSS of 70 will be reduced as follows:

2.3 2.4 No CSS shall be calculated, Buffer Zones do not apply and handicaps shall not be increased other than in exceptional circumstances under clause 19.

42 – (6 x 0.5) – (4 x 1) =35
Practice:

Juniors should be encouraged to practice on a regular basis ideally as part of a structured coaching programme. Practice will help the juniors to focus and improve on their game and can be conducted in a fun and interactive way. Some juniors may wish to spend all their time on the course, whilst others will understand the benefits of practice. Below is some simple advice that can be given to juniors to ensure they get the most out of their practice:

- Do not be tempted to hit too many balls in a limited amount of time.
- Always place the ball first and go through your pre shot routine.
- Do not practice when you are physically or mentally tired.
- Do not continue to practice if things are going badly and progress seems unattainable.
- Only practice for short periods of time in adverse weather conditions – consistency will be far harder to achieve.

Competitions:

A junior golfer can only learn and practice so much before they become eager to progress into competitions. It is therefore important that a junior golfer is allowed...
to play competitive golf as soon as they are ready, however they should be supported and taught the required skills to make playing competitive golf enjoyable.

It is important that golf clubs offer a variety of junior competitions that cater for all abilities. Mixed competition between boys and girls encourages the development of their games and allows girls in particular, who can sometimes be alone in their membership category, to participate with others of a similar age or ability.

Like anything else in golf, there should be a structured route for a junior to progress through the various stages of playing competitive golf. Progression into competitive golf should be linked into a structured coaching programme.

The various stages might be as follows:

- Make some short holes on the practice ground for beginners to be introduced to the concept of a golf hole and measure their improvement by recording their scores (some clubs have a short course or pitch & putt course that they can utilise).
- Once the juniors can play these holes in a competent manner, allow them to play a few holes on the course. A good time to do this would be after coaching or in the evening when the course may be quieter.
- Allow them to play 9 holes accompanied by an adult to advise them on etiquette and course management during the course of play.
- The juniors’ scores should be recorded each time to measure their improvement.
- A junior handicap can be obtained after only playing 6 or 9 holes (see recommended handicapping scheme).
- Progression to a full 18-holes accompanied by an adult.
- The junior’s knowledge of the rules of golf, etiquette and course management should also be monitored, as this will help determine when a junior is able to play unaccompanied by an adult.
- Juniors with handicaps of 29-54 [36 to 54] should be classed as beginners and therefore should only play in junior competitions until they obtain a CONGU handicap.

- Once a junior has a CONGU handicap they should be allowed to play in the main monthly medals and other club competitions as long as they meet with the handicap criteria of the specific competition.
- Age should not be a barrier to prevent juniors playing in club competitions.
- Encourage juniors to play in competitions, to help them maintain an accurate handicap and avoid criticism.
- Each golf club should hold a Junior Championship for their junior members, having a gross and nett score winner for boys and girls.

To help juniors mix with other members of the golf club and also to help them develop, internal matches could be arranged between the junior section and other sections of the golf club, such as:

- Senior’s section
- Ladies’ section
- Rabbit’s section

If there are any annual events against other sections they could be listed on the club’s fixture diary. To play for a cup would give the matches added value and possibly a member from each of the above sections would be willing to sponsor a trophy.

The golf club should examine entering the junior section into a local junior league (if there is one). Playing in local leagues ensures that juniors are given the opportunity to experience a higher level of competition, to compare their performance against their contemporaries, and widen their social circle. If there is no local league, golf clubs should contact their County Union/Association to encourage the formation of one or arrange friendly matches with other clubs.

With regard to juniors playing in main adult competitions such as the monthly medal or club championship, it is recommended that ability (not age) should be the only factor for juniors entering, providing that the handicap limit for juniors is no different to adults. Golf clubs should review competition restrictions for juniors in possession of a CONGU (official golf club) handicap to review their competition entry criteria and make them more equitable (see Section 6 – Juniors Within Your Club).
Competition formats:

It is important that the juniors, as part of their development, experience all formats of competition, both in junior and main club events. The main factor is to make the competitions fun and enjoyable for all participants:

- **Stroke Play** – the most commonly played competition where only the gross and/or nett scores are counted (the number of strokes taken by a player at each hole is entered on the card) - the winner is determined by the lowest score for each round. (Gross or scratch score is the total before the handicap is deducted and the nett score is the score after the handicap is deducted).

- **Match Play** – a form of competition in which each hole is a separate competition, the winner is determined by the number of holes won rather than the total score. If the number of holes runs out the match finishes (if a player is 3 up with 2 holes left the player has won 3 & 2).

- **Stableford** – the game is based on a points system where points are determined by the score on each hole (eagle 4 pts, birdie 3 pts, par 2 pts, bogie 1 pt, double bogey or worse 0 pts). In this form it is polite for players to pick up their ball if points can no longer be scored on a hole.

- **Par (Bogey)** – a competition where a player plays against the par of the course. For a nett birdie or better a player records a win as a ‘+’ sign, a par is recorded as a half and a ‘0’ sign and for a bogey or worse a player records a loss as a ‘−’ sign (diagram overleaf).
An EGU/ELGA RDO is available to advise you on handicapping and competitions and the most effective way for a golf club to access this support is by registering for the GolfMark award (see Section 12 – GolfMark).

### Online fixture list:

The online fixture list is a comprehensive list of events for both boys and girls. It contains information on local junior open competitions and other junior events. Searches on the online system can be done by:

- Gender
- Area
- Type of event
- Age categories
- Handicap categories

Event organisers, including junior organisers can input the details of their competitions and events online and it will automatically update the system.

The online fixture list is accessible at [www.englishgolfunion.org](http://www.englishgolfunion.org) and information can be viewed and inputted all year round.

### National junior competitions:

There are a variety of junior competitions at national level run by the EGU and ELGA, British championships run by the R&A and LGU and other national events run by commercial organisations such as the Faldo Series. Results achieved in some of these events and other specific tournaments can influence selection representative honours, although there are other factors.

- **Foursomes** – a competition format in which teams are comprised of two players each, and the players alternate hitting the same ball. The first player tees off, the second player hits the second shot, the first player hits the third shot, and so on until the ball is holed. Players alternate hitting tee shots so that the same player doesn’t hit every drive. It is great fun and a very sociable format.

- **Greensomes** – a competition format that is a variation of foursomes (two teams of two, each playing one ball). In greensomes both players on a team tee off, the better of the two shots is selected and that ball is then played alternately until holed.

- **Texas Scramble** – involves a team of four playing four balls, but with each shot coming from the same spot (the best of the four drives is chosen and all four team members then hit from that spot, and so on). The variation in a Texas Scramble is that at least four drives of each member of the team must be used during the course of the round: at least four drives hit by Player A, four by Player B, and so on. The team with the least number of strokes is usually the winner.
A handicap is often the easiest way of monitoring the improvement of juniors and provides a real motivation for youngsters to continue or increase their participation within the game.

There is now an even easier way for golf clubs to assign junior handicaps through the recommended CONGU scheme, allowing juniors to obtain a handicap up to 54.

Practising helps the juniors to focus and improve their games and can be conducted in a fun and interactive session, this can be part of a structured coaching programme.

A junior golfer should be allowed to play competitive golf as soon as they are ready, but must receive support to learn the appropriate skills to make playing competitive golf enjoyable.

Any restrictions for juniors to compete in main club competitions should be no different to those for adults.

There are many opportunities to participate in competitions at club, county and national level and juniors can use the EGU/ELGA website to find this information.
Example 1 - Developing a pathway from beginner to official handicap:

Allowing juniors to progress from their initial start at a golf club to receiving an official handicap should be in stages, see below:

- **Stage 1** – Group coaching sessions with the professional (including practice on a short course or 2/3 holes on the main course).
- **Stage 2** – To complete three 9-hole cards on a short course (or main course) to be marked by an adult or junior over 14 years of age with a full-course handicap, any score to be accepted. On completion, a junior short course handicap (maximum 54) is issued, the junior is then eligible to play in short course or 9-hole competitions.
- **Stage 3** – To complete three 18-hole cards over the short course (or adapted main course, for example markers at the start of a fairway) to average a score of 76 nett or less.
- **Stage 4** – A certificate of competence is awarded and signed by the professional, the juniors can then play on the main course with an adult or junior over 14 years of age (as above).
- **Stage 5** – Juniors are then able to obtain an official handicap (either a junior handicap 29 to 54 or CONGU handicap) when three cards from the main course have been completed.

Example 2 - Not precluding junior members from entering club competitions by virtue of ‘age’ alone:

Many golf clubs agree that ability should be the benchmark whereby a junior golfer can enter main club competitions or represent the golf club in matches. Juniors can be considered for entry subject to the following:

- Attainment of a CONGU playing handicap of 28 [36] or less.
- Pass a knowledge test on the basic rules of golf.
- Pass a knowledge test on golfing etiquette.
- Obtain a certificate of competence (part of a structured coaching programme).
- Play in the company of an adult club member or junior over 14 years of age.
- To be assessed every six months by the junior organiser.

For those younger players that are not yet at the stage of obtaining a CONGU handicap of 28 [36] or overleaf, it is important that junior competitions are available and that they are fun and enjoyable:
• A series of junior competitions over 9 holes could be run by the golf club during the school holidays. The competitions can be for all standards with emphasis on having fun.
• Small prizes can be given to the winners in each handicap category – for example 28 and below, 29 to 34, 35 to 40, 41 to 46, and 47 and above.

• Every participant receives a certificate and/or badge for taking part.
• Run four competitions with the winners from each event taking part in a final.
• Those who don’t qualify to take part in the final can be invited to take part in a coaching activities and games session.
• Following the final, all participants can be invited for a drink and sandwiches in the clubhouse.