

COURSE POLICY DOCUMENT TEMPLATE

This template is a guide to producing your own Course Policy Document. It contains a suggested layout and advice on the content of such a document and references for further information.

The R&A's website RandA.org and its course management section are excellent sources of additional information and guidance. The following may be of particular value in helping you produce your own Course Policy Document:

[*Golf Course Management*](#)

[*Rules Explorer*](#)

[*Pace of Play*](#)

[*Running a Competition*](#)

NAME OF CLUB
COURSE POLICY DOCUMENT
DATE

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Introduction

The document sets out the policy of the golf club, as agreed by the membership, with regard to all matters impacting on course preparation. The aim of the document should be to establish a clear and consistent approach to course management to fulfil the potential of the course for the benefit of members, their guests and visitors. The document should lay out the vision for the course and provide long-term continuity for management of the course.

Note that a course policy document is a working manual which will have to be reviewed and amended from time to time, in accordance with changing climate, usage, resources and course layout and changes in the game of golf itself. Any major changes should only happen after broad consultation, both within the club and with designated professional advisors, and after a full vote by the membership.

General information on the golf course should be included here, such as:

- *when the club was founded*
- *who designed the original layout and any modifications to this*
- *the current length and Standard Scratch Scores*
- *a card of the course*
- *the area of land taken up by the course and that of the entire complex*
- *a brief description of the nature of the land, soil type and its geology*
- *the construction of the greens*
- *the current grass species composition of greens, green surrounds, fairways, tees and semi-rough*
- *the nature of the rough vegetation*
- *the climate and weather patterns experienced.*



Roles and responsibilities

Many of the roles and responsibilities relating to this document will be determined whatever the constitution of the club. In this section of the document specific responsibilities must be credited to individuals to ensure they are met. These may include:

The green committee

The green committee should be responsible for:

- *implementing the policies outlined in this document*
- *formulating management strategies*
- *proposing amendments to the policy document*
- *assessing progress in relation to the objectives of this policy document.*

The green committee should be kept to a small number to facilitate effective decision making. The course manager is an essential member of this committee and must attend all meetings to provide guidance and feedback to the other committee members.

The green committee would report to the main committee, council or board on a regular basis to provide updates on progress and to agree running budget proposals. The term of office for committee members should be long enough to benefit from what they learn in the initial phase of their tenure, but they should not outstay their welcome as new members will bring fresh ideas and enthusiasm. A four to five year period is probably best, with turnover of members on rotation so that there are only one or two new members at a time, ensuring a clear line of succession for the chairman's position.

The course manager

The course manager should be responsible for the day-to-day implementation of agreed management strategies. In order to fulfil this role, the course manager should be responsible for:

- *producing budget proposals*
- *staff performance issues relating to course management*
- *health and safety issues relating to course management*
- *informing the members of impending works on the golf course which will disrupt play.*

The course manager should provide regular, e.g. monthly, written reports on developments and proposals for course management to the green committee.



To ensure the implementation of agreed policies that meet set objectives, the course manager must carry out routine inspections of the golf course, which necessitates walking the course as it is played. Ideally, the course manager would actually play the golf course on a regular basis as part of his duties – agronomic practice has to be manipulated to produce the best playing surface and the success of this

can only really be judged by playing the course or assessing areas of the course through the playing of shots, e.g. putting on greens or playing approach shots into putting surfaces.

The staff

Ensure that all individuals physically involved in the maintenance of the golf course appreciate the importance of their role to the team. This should include everyone working on the golf course throughout the year, including apprentices and part-time or seasonal workers.

Members, their guests and visitors

Notify those using the facility that they are expected to accept responsibility to take every possible care of the course. This will include all aspects of etiquette according to the Rules of Golf, such as the repair of all damage they cause to playing surfaces, e.g. pitchmark repair, divot replacement where possible and the raking of bunkers after play, obeying instructions regarding traffic management notices, accepting all decisions made with regard to course usage and to always alert greenstaff when they are about to make a stroke that might endanger them. It may be necessary to note that failure to comply with these requirements may result in disciplinary action or a ban on future play.



It is imperative that golfers consider others and help promote and implement the objectives of this document.

The Etiquette section of the Rules of Golf is a useful source of reference and this is available from The R&A's website [here](#).

Course management objectives

Any management document has to set out objectives to provide guidance and direction for those implementing the policy. The objectives should be specific, realistic and costed.

An over-riding objective for the future development of the course may be worthwhile and could be considered a mission statement for the promotion of quality at the club. This is probably the only objective that can contain purely subjective statements.

The course management objectives should be presented for each playing area and should include desirable playing and maintenance performance characteristics. The following is given as guidance.

Greens

Putting surfaces should:

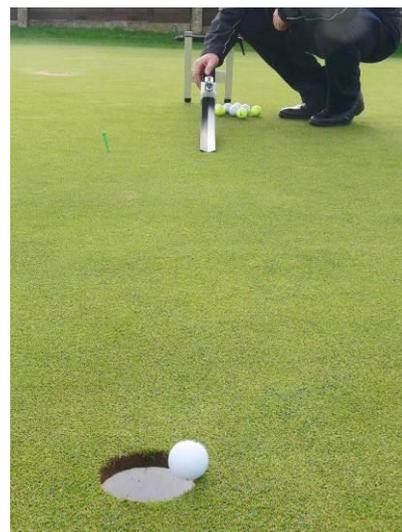
- be true, smooth, firm and dry
- be consistent within and between surfaces, including practice greens
- deliver the effects of spin on well-struck shots
- provide an acceptable, sustainable speed
- be available for play for as much of the year as possible
- provide a good average standard of putting surface for as much of the year as possible, with the potential to be able to produce very high standards of putting surface for short periods at intervals through the main growing season
- be of tidy appearance.

One of the most important objectives is to identify the desired species composition and to outline a programme of taking objective playing performance measurements so that progress can be analysed. Target ranges should be site specific and reviewed annually to refine the process.

Objective measurement: putting green playing performance target ranges

There are a number of assessments that can be made to determine the quality of putting surfaces being presented to the golf. These include:

- [Holing Out Test](#) (from 3, 6 and 9 feet)
- Firmness (Gravities)
- Trueness (mm/m)
- Smoothness (mm/m)
- Speed (feet and inches)



Note: if there are distinct seasonal differences in playing performance then record a more relaxed target range for low season compared with those set for high season.

Objective measurement: putting green agronomic target ranges

The key agronomic measurements to take are:

- Grass species composition
- Soil moisture content (% volumetric)
- Organic matter content at 0-20, 20-40, 40-60 and 60-80 mm depths.

More information on putting surface assessment is available from The R&A website [here](#).

Green surrounds

The green surround should be maintained to provide a smooth, well presented transition from fairway to putting green. This may include a close cut fringe, collar and apron. Banks and mounds within the green surround should be mown at a height which retains an attractive presentation without promoting scalping, drought or wear stress.

The green run-up and collar should comprise a similar texture and density of turf to the greens, providing firm and dry surfaces which will facilitate a wide variety of approach play. Identify the desired species composition.

Fairways

The fairway area should be defined, e.g. as the ground lying between the carry from the tee and the green apron. Identify the desired species composition. The mowing of fairways should present an attractive appearance, producing a margin which complements natural and man-made features. Other characteristics which may be included:

- Firm and dry
- Provide freedom of swing, i.e. aim to eliminate any sharp contouring or outside impediment such as overhanging tree branches
- Provide consistently acceptable lies
- The ball should sit on top of the turf
- Provide consistent bounce characteristics
- Provide relatively even landing areas of consistent width
- Tidy presentation.

Tees

Identify the desired species composition. Other characteristics to consider for teeing grounds:

- Level, firm and dry
- Adequate recovery capacity, i.e. be of a size able to retain this characteristic
- Provide acceptable presentation qualities including definition
- Of sufficient elevation to provide view and definition
- Fairly aligned.



Bunkers

Bunkers should be maintained to provide hazards which collect balls to a central depression with adequate room for a full swing from this position. They should be designed to drain freely, be visible and influence play. The sand used should be of a specification and laid to a depth to provide for a consistent playing surface.

Ideal characteristics for the sand used in the bunkers should be written down, e.g. for most inland situations the sand should have the majority of its particles in the 0.125 to 1 mm range and be of a light tan colour to provide for good definition and contrast, for links the native sand should be used if it is available.

Important criteria to adopt:

- Dry and firm sand
- General guidance for depth of sand is a firm 100 mm across the bunker floor, with depth tapering out on sloping walls. The top 8 to 12 mm of sand should be kept looser with raking
- Consistency within and between bunkers
- Fairness
- Shaped and raked to keep balls away from the bunker edge
- Of appropriate design relative to the character of the hole and course
- Containing clean sand
- Facilitating the fair presentation of the ball
- Facilitating a satisfactory stance for the golfer
- Well presented and defined.

Rough

The semi-rough should be mown to provide a nominal penalty to the wayward shot. Identify the desired species composition and other characteristics such as uniformity of texture and height grading. The deeper rough shall be managed to retain and encourage the native vegetation as discussed in the separate environmental management plan.

Course management policy

The main maintenance practices should be listed and policy agreed. The basic philosophy of sustainable management to best practice should be followed. When writing a policy statement do not be too specific, where appropriate give a range of values and be aware that there will always be exceptions to the rule. You must provide enough flexibility within the guidelines described to react to any situation which may arise.

Any limitations to providing the stated objectives should be noted within each section, e.g. where design, drainage, size, shape or situation limits maintenance solutions, with proposed programmes of work to overcome them, e.g. drainage of green surrounds/fairways, reconstruction of greens and tees, evaluation of bunker condition and proposed refurbishment.

Note that maintenance, particularly to the greens, will be programmed to minimise disruption to play but, where possible, to maximise the benefit from each operation.

Greens

Mowing: note seasonal frequency and height of cut range. Clippings to be boxed off. Indicate the type of machinery to be used.

Brushing, grooming and rolling programmes should be formulated to perfect putting surface performance.

Verticutting, top dressing and aeration programmes should be formulated to prevent the development of an excess of dilute thatch to the turf base and to prevent the development of notable compaction to the upper reaches of the soil profile.

Deep scarification, aeration and top dressing programmes should be formulated to reduce layers of accumulated thatch in the upper profile and to prevent the development of notable compaction to the soil profile through depth.



Fertiliser: the programme adopted must comply with a minimal input philosophy. Highlight the need to use appropriate nutrient sources in relation to growing conditions and soil temperatures. Avoid applying fertiliser at times when surface run-off is possible and use formulations which minimise leaching.

Irrigation will be provided to a minimum level, to comply with objectives. Highlight the need to encourage root action through moisture penetration to depth; the quantity of water applied per watering event will have to vary with prevailing weather and soil conditions. Formulate a programme of works, e.g. aeration, wetting agent, to enhance the efficient use of irrigation. Identify water source and quality issues.

Pest and disease management should follow Integrated Pest Management (IPM) principles, in accordance with all relevant legislation, looking to prevention rather than cure. Identify tolerance levels for disease scarring, pest damage and weed incursion. Cultural management should be at the fore, e.g. the removal of single broad-leaved weeds by hand as seedlings or plugging out of procumbent weed

patches from a purpose-grown green-quality turf nursery. Identify potential biological controls. Note that pesticides may be used (if available) as a last resort, as identified within the overall IPM programme.

Hole changing: note seasonal frequency and standard expected.

Green surrounds

The collar and immediate surround will be managed, except for cutting, in as similar a manner to greens as is feasible.

Mowing: seasonal frequency and height of cut. Are clippings to be boxed off? Type of machinery to be used. Define the mowing pattern to the green surrounds and which machines are to be used on each graded cut, i.e. is there a separate collar which has to be mown with pedestrian machinery?

Weed and pest control measures to be taken as necessary in accordance with policy previously outlined.

Fairways

*Mowing: seasonal frequency and height of cut. Are clippings to be boxed off?
Type of machinery to be used.*

Fertiliser and irrigation to be provided only as required to keep grass alive, not to present a lush and verdant course.

Aeration, scarification and top dressing will be carried out to promote firm and dry playing surfaces throughout, concentrating on main traffic areas and known wet spots.



Weed and pest control measures to be taken as necessary in accordance with policy as previously detailed.

Tees

Tees will be maintained as for green surrounds. In addition, divot repairs will be completed as necessary to fulfil objectives.

Weed and pest control measures to be taken as necessary, as detailed previously.

Policy in relation to use of teeing grounds and spreading of play.

Bunkers

Note the desired frequency of bunker raking. Identify the positioning of bunker rakes. Sand should be topped up as necessary.

The bunker and its boundary to be trimmed as necessary to retain a clear definition to the hazard.



Rough

Define the mowing pattern to the semi-rough and adopt appropriate mowing regimes, detailing the seasonal frequency, height of cut and type of machinery to be used. If operations such as scarification or collecting cuttings are adopted to manage sward quality then list them.

Weed and pest control measures to be taken as necessary in accordance with previously outlined criteria.

Deeper rough vegetation is to be managed as per the environmental management plan.

Course set-up

This section of the document should be complementary to the course management policy, perhaps even incorporated into that section. Course set-up causes much controversy and is one of the great inconsistencies with regard course management. Changes in committee often bring about a change in course set-up, dependent on the predominant standard of golfer represented. It is definitely preferable to have a consistent policy towards this issue.

Consultation on course set-up may be widened beyond the internal decision making process and this may include architectural and agronomic input and, for tournament set-up, that of the relevant authority.

It is an advantage for the member of staff responsible for various aspects of course set-up, notably tee marker setting and hole positions, to be a golfer of a standard to appreciate playing requirements.

When considering the way the golf course is set-up, the following should be taken into account:

- *The general standard of golf played on the course in relation to members*
- *Is the course reliant on visitors and, if so, what standard of golfer is any marketing is aimed at?*
- *The nature of golf played on the course, i.e. how competitive or social*
- *The design concept of the course*
- *Available resources*
- *For competition set-up, the standard of competitors should be taken into account when determining the degree of difficulty of set-up. The R&A has produced guidance on running a competition which contains a section on course set-up, which is available to read and download from The R&A website [here](#).*



Environmental management plan

All golf clubs should develop a broad environmental policy. It is easy to do and instantly sets out the fact the club are developing a commitment to environmental best practice.

The policy binds environmental management into the long-term strategy for your golf facility. It should be prepared and openly endorsed by top level management or committees.

The policy should incorporate the following key elements:

- *A statement of intent to improve environmental performance*
- *The establishment of an environmental working group within the facility, ideally with co-opted outside membership*
- *A commitment to carry out an environmental audit of the site and current management and to develop and implement appropriate environmental actions.*

Golf courses should be good environmental stewards but to achieve this they need to plan. This means they should first of all undertake an appraisal of their environment and the impact of their current operations. From this they will be able to draw up a range of actions to ensure their stewardship of the environment is all that it can be.



The maintenance of the golf course itself is fundamental to this. All maintenance work on the golf course has an environmental impact to a greater or lesser, positive or negative degree, but the plan should also consider issues that affect the clubhouse and maintenance facility such as waste and energy conservation.

Good communication is fundamental to the success of any planning and a series of ideas are suggested for the consultation, adoption and ongoing promotion of the management plan – both within and outside the golf facility.

The establishment of a relevant and credible environmental management plan will help the management achieve the effective and efficient running of the facility and, at the same time, ensure environmental protection and enhancement are clearly at the centre of the facility's operations. This will have a positive impact on the perception of the facility itself and golf as a whole.

The OnCourse™ programme from the Golf Environment Organization provides guidance on environmental and social stewardship for golf. You can register for the programme on the GEO website, www.golfenvironment.org

Resources

The course policy document should contain both human and financial resource information.

Staff

The optimum number of staff should be identified by a project management exercise, initiated by the course manager, and this should be repeated every three years or as deemed necessary. The club should express its commitment to sustaining the optimum staffing level as finances allow and also to provide for the necessary training and education to retain a structured staffing profile.

Machinery

A full inventory of course maintenance equipment should be maintained. A planned programme of replacement should be produced as an ongoing measure, though there should be flexibility within this structure to delay or bring forward purchases as the need arises.

All machines should be well cared for by the staff, following the maintenance programmes in the appropriate manufacturer's handbook, with main items undergoing routine servicing as agreed with the supplier.



Materials

Only specified materials should be purchased for use on the golf course. Quality should not be sacrificed on a cost basis. Laboratory analysis should be undertaken as deemed necessary.

Accommodation

The club should be committed to providing a good standard of accommodation for the staff, machinery and materials in accordance with health and safety requirements.

Course usage

Members' rounds

Management should have some information on the average number of rounds played by members in a year. Also details of popular times and days. In some cases, clubs carry out surveys during different weeks in the year and use the statistics to work out annual numbers. Some club professionals and their staff ask all members to sign in on a particular week - perhaps once in the spring, summer, autumn and winter. Other clubs make it a rule that members sign in each time they play so that they can develop accurate statistics both at busy times and slack periods. All this can assist in planning maintenance tasks and is a vital tool in course management.

Visitors policy

A policy of use of course and estimated number of rounds should be in place and reviewed regularly. Both financial considerations and interference to members should be carefully studied. A golf play strategy should be in place. In some clubs, there is a need for substantial income from visitors and therefore ways need to be found to encourage them to play. It is common practice for clubs to reserve the course at certain times each day for members only. Sometimes specific days are reserved for casual visitors and golfing parties. Whatever your club's strategy on these matters, it should be communicated to everyone concerned and reviewed each year so that changes can be implemented according to financial need and members' best interests.



Course closure

Whilst it should be the aim to offer year round golf, there will be occasions when the course is deemed unfit for play due to excessive rainfall, frost or snow. The individual who determines this should be identified; usually it will be the course manager as they will generally be the best person to judge potential damage and be most often on site. However, the judgement should consider potential damage on a hole by hole basis and the course should not be closed simply on an assessment of surfaces close to the clubhouse or maintenance facility. When possible, a selection of main greens should be kept open, i.e. the naturally drier ones or those less susceptible to frost. Detail the inspection process.



Clarify policy on temporary greens, if used, winter tee provision and fairway protection measures, including mats, roped-off areas, etc.

Traffic management

Identify measures to control traffic movement round the course and agree policy on the use of trolleys and buggies on the course.

*The effect of compaction, as the result of concentrated traffic, can be seen throughout the golf course, e.g. patches of annual meadow-grass (*Poa annua*) in otherwise 'clean' swards to greens, green surrounds and tees, with similar changes to sward composition or even bare ground where traffic is constantly funnelled through teeing grounds, around bunkers and around putting greens.*

Soft spikes

Policy on the use of soft spikes should be agreed, taking safety issues into account as well as any benefit in relation to wear and tear on course and in the clubhouse.

Course development

A rolling long-term, hole by hole course development plan should be formulated to take into consideration:

- *The need for green reconstruction to meet objectives*
- *Upgrading of tees and development of grass winter tees to meet objectives*
- *Installation or upgrading of pipe drainage*
- *Upgrading of bunkers to meet objectives*
- *Installation or upgrading of irrigation*
- *Rough management (see Environmental Management Plan)*
- *Development of practice facilities.*

The plan should comprise a list of proposed projects to be completed on an annual basis but with enough flexibility to allow for movement of individual projects forward or back a year in accordance with limitations of weather and finance.

Health and Safety

Special attention to be drawn to legislation regarding:

- *pesticide handling, storage, use and disposal*
- *construction work*
- *machinery and workplace.*

Refer to the guidance given by national governments. Risk assessments form an essential part of Health and Safety regulations and it is often a sensible move to bring in an expert consultancy to help you draw up your own policy.

Recording and monitoring

A system of recording is necessary to assess progress towards stated objectives and to reset targets when this is applicable. There are a number of areas which fall under the course manager's responsibilities for which a process of objective monitoring will be appropriate, including:

- Playing performance
- Economic performance
- Environmental stewardship.

Refer to [The R&A Evidence Fields](#) which lists the essential key performance indicators that you should be recording and monitoring.

The OnCourse® programme from the Golf Environment Organization provides guidance on environmental and social stewardship for golf and the ability to record and report on your own performance. You can register for the programme on the GEO website, www.golfenvironment.org



Professional advice

Agronomy

The club may agree to fund visits from an experienced professional, independent agronomist to provide support and guidance to the course manager and others involved in course management. The agronomist should be given a remit to advise on course maintenance and development issues, including any resource issue which impinges on these. Continuity of advice is important to the main aim of the policy document.

Course architect

Any significant alteration or addition to the golf course proposed within the course development plan should be presented to a professionally qualified golf course architect for their comments before being undertaken. The architect will be expected to advise on such matters, taking the design character of the course into account.

Environmental management

Environmental management programmes should be agreed and implemented after consultation with a recognised ecologist sympathetic to the needs of golfers and the character of the golf course.

Health and safety

A specialist consultant on these issues should help produce a working document on all issues relating to safe and best practice on the golf course.

Complaints procedure

A clear procedure for accepting and acting on complaints should be adopted. Any complaints relating to the condition of the course or behaviour of employees should be made in writing to the secretary/chief executive (rather than the chairman of the green committee, who will be an unpaid member of the club. This should also help to control any abuse that might occur). Employees of the club or members of the green committee should not be subjected to verbal complaints and employees of the club should have a procedure for reporting golfers who abuse them in this manner.

Communication

Every effort should be made to maintain a dialogue with members on issues relating to course management which have a direct bearing on course condition. This may include the production of a monthly newsletter and notices of works likely to cause disruption to play, drawn up by the course manager in consultation with others holding appropriate positions of responsibility. The latter should be produced in plenty of time beforehand so golfers can make alternative arrangements for play if they consider this appropriate.

Members should be up-dated on progress in relation to the objectives of the Course Policy Document at the appropriate meetings and in the newsletter or by notices if deemed appropriate.

Members may be encouraged to support the objectives of the document by making constructive suggestions, in writing, to the Chairman of the Green Committee or other nominated official.

On-course notices will be used when relevant, but should be kept to a minimum for aesthetic reasons. Information should also be provided to the general public in the local community to prevent misunderstandings or conflict with regards to course management actions and policy.

Tours conducted by the Course Manager to show Committee Members aspects of course management and the maintenance facility can provide a great insight for those not involved in the day to day business of caring for the course. Open days for Members should also be considered to introduce them to the greenkeeping staff and the wide range of skills they employ in their work.



References

Produce a list of valuable reference sources for your own and the management team's use. This could include:

- *Publications such as books and magazines*
- *Websites, such as RandA.org*
- *Specific articles*
- *Professional associations*
- *Professional contacts*
- *Useful organisations*

Provision of this list will also be of great value to those that take on the roles and responsibilities for course management in the future.