



1 February 2021

R&A/USGA Research Topics - Areas of Interest

Please: Publication of the Research Topics – Area of Interest that was originally planned for March 2020 was delayed until early 2021 due to the impacts of the Covid pandemic.

As a follow-up to the email to manufacturers dated 4 February 2020 that accompanied the Annual Driving Distance Report (2019), the Distance Insights Report and the Conclusions from the Distance Insight Project: Implications of Hitting Distance in Golf (the “Conclusions Paper”), this Notice specifies a set of research topics relating to potential Equipment Rule changes.

As stated in the Conclusions Paper, The R&A and USGA intend to review a full range of options including in the following two areas relative to equipment specifications:

1. We will assess the potential use of a Local Rule option that would specify use of clubs and/or balls intended to result in shorter hitting distances. The concept is that equipment meeting a particular set of reduced-distance specifications – for example, a ball that does not travel as far or a club that will not hit a ball as far – might be a defined subset of the overall category of conforming equipment. This could allow committees that conduct golf competitions or oversee individual courses to choose, by Local Rule authorized under the Rules of Golf, whether and when to require that such equipment be used. Such a Local Rule option could be available for use at all levels of play, and golfers playing outside of a competition could also have the option to make this choice for themselves.
2. We will also review the overall conformance specifications for both clubs and balls, including specifications that both directly and indirectly affect hitting distances. The intended purpose of this review is to consider whether any existing specifications should be adjusted or any new specifications should be created to help mitigate the continuing distance increases. It is not currently intended to consider revising the overall specifications in a way that would produce substantial reductions in hitting distances at all levels of the game.

In order to progress these matters, The R&A and the USGA will assess potential changes to both club and ball specifications over a wide range of skill levels and swing speeds that could lead to a reduction in driving distance, lead to a reduction of the distance for other clubs in the bag and lead to an enhancement in the balance between hitting distance and other skills, while at the same time conducting research in other areas beyond those directly associated with equipment specifications.

Regarding club and ball specifications we will evaluate the following:

- Reduction in the limit within the overall distance standard
- Modification in the limitation of ball efficiency (update to IV)
- Other ball specifications (size, mass)
- Reduction in the performance of drivers: club length and clubhead dimensions (including volume)
- Changes in the clubhead specifications on spring-like effect and moment of inertia, also considering the utilization of radius of gyration limitations
- Production of spin from all clubs from all areas of the course

We will also evaluate the potential use of a Local Rule option to specify use of a defined subset of conforming clubs and/or balls intended to result in shorter hitting distances and/or an enhancement in the balance between distance and other skills. The concept is that a Committee or golf facility would have the option of requiring the use of equipment meeting these specifications or a subset of them. We are seeking feedback from manufacturers and stakeholders on this concept and how any of the above listed research topics could potentially be considered for use as a Local Rule.

Conclusion

The research topics discussed in this notice are strictly areas of interest. No decisions have been made about possible solutions and no proposals are being made at this time. Any proposals for Rule changes that might result from this research will be communicated in accordance with the Equipment Rulemaking Procedures.

We welcome your participation in this research and invite you to share any data or perspectives. We ask that all input be received no later than 2 November 2021. These communications should be addressed to Professor Steve Otto at The R&A via the email address equipmentstandards@randa.org.