



Sia Partners

Report on Phase Two Consultations

Re: Report on Briefing & Feedback

15/09/17

STRATEGY • CONSULTING • INSIGHT

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Report to Discussions Group for OGB re Briefing & Feedback with Staff, Officials, Clubs. June – August '17

Introduction

The Discussions Group of OGB (DG) has been committed to undertaking its work with the input of key stakeholders. It commissioned Sia Partners to undertake a detailed first consultation, giving staff, officials and clubs an opportunity to shape the future One Governing Body. It undertook a significant consultation session on a specific topic, geographic structure, in the spring of this year. As detailed in the project plan, with an emerging proposal taking shape, the DG implemented its plan for the second phase of consultation. This took the form of briefing and feedback sessions, undertaken by the DG members, with support from the independent facilitator. The following is the report summarising the output from these sessions and providing an assessment of the support, issues and suggestions from these sessions.

Method

The objective of these briefing and feedback consultation was to hear the views of staff, officials and club members on the emerging elements of a potential proposal for One Governing Body. Every club in Ireland and every Union official was invited to participate in a session. In addition, arising from the first round of consultation, segments of particular interest had a focus group or two dedicated to them. The three focus segments were 'Time Poor' golfers; Junior golfers and 'High Attrition' golfers (or those likely to fall out of golf). All staff of the GUI, ILGU and CGI were invited to participate in a dedicated focus group.

The process was designed to draw out the views of the participants on the emerging elements of a proposal for One Governing Body. Initially, this was done using normal test processes. However, the participants made it very clear that, despite the invitation, they had come to get a briefing on the thinking and had little patience with giving feedback until they got what they wanted! The structure and delivery of the sessions was altered to facilitate that. The segments of particular interest focused on their specialist topic but also picked up comments and suggestions on the overall topics.

The turnout was very large in some areas (prompted by encouragement by the leadership within each Union). Just under 400 people, 103 officials and 275 club members, participated from approximately 200 clubs. There were some disappointing turnouts in a small number of sessions, but those who did come contributed strongly, the smaller group number facilitating more extensive participation by all. The members of the Board of both Unions were asked not to come to the sessions so that their positional power did

not distort the sessions. Most Board member complied with that request. A number did not. In one case this did interfere with the process. There was also some evidence of attempts at using the sessions to advocate for a particular view. Participants were given assurances of no-attribution and so those who did this will not be named.

There was a wide spectrum of views with only a small number of topics having a singular or polar opposite sets of views. The first phase of the sessions tended to adopt a probing for understanding and fault-finding approach. This was followed by a constructive and collaborative engagement with the key topics (with one exception). The final phase was characterised by active suggestions and advice on how to get OGB 'over the line'. It has been remarkable, in all the briefing & feedback sessions undertaken with a focus on the single governing body, that the process of engagement appears to release a constructive and positive energy towards making this happen. This happens as the detailed issues are addressed and fall away as points of concern or debate. This highlights the power of the collaborative approach and the importance of excellent and pervasive communication to inform clubs, golfers and officials of not only the proposal, but also the thinking behind each decision and the context that makes this important.

The participants came with varying levels of anxiety and expectation to the sessions. Their motivation appeared to be the desire to be informed and to bring information and understanding back to their clubs and branches. The different structures in the GUI and ILGU were evident in the different orientations to the sessions. The OGB was seen as a significant change. In very general terms, the men appeared to see change as a threat or a potential loss, while the women saw it as an opportunity for improvement or a reduction in disadvantage. It is important to note that there are a significant proportion of men who support the development of OGB and there are some women with significant doubts about it.

At each session, two members of the DG and the independent facilitator took detailed notes. For all but 9 sessions, the project manager also took notes. These notes and the review session that followed provided a sound basis for the analysis that is presented here.

This report summarises the outcome of the briefing and feedback sessions. There is much more detail available to the DG from the sessions and it continues to inform the DG's deliberations and decision-making process.

Acknowledgements

The DG members devoted significant effort to conducting this briefing & feedback, at a busy time with many other demands. The members of the DG travelled to the four corners of Ireland to hear and to understand what the representatives of clubs and the members of the current governance structures in each Union.

The DG is very grateful to all of the participants for their time, contributions, their willingness to engage and to raise questions, make suggestions and give their views, hopes and fears on the topic of one governing body and the future of golf.

The consultation formally included sessions with Juniors, in keeping with national policy on including children's voices and views in matters that affect them. This required the assistance of Junior Conveners, CGI staff with expertise in child protection & Junior golfer development, together with the support of parents and grandparents who brought children to and from consultations. As a number of Juniors said, they are the future of golf. Their input is significant and welcomed.

Findings Overview

The most striking initial impression was the limited information and understanding of OGB that exists and the interest and demand for more information and briefing. The lack of interest in all but a small number of topics was striking. This could be taken as trust in the leadership to get the basics right, coupled with a desire to focus on the areas of significant change and aspects where there are concerns.

The consultation set out to test elements of the emerging Proposal. Clear views were obtained on the areas of interest and the core elements of the future focus and intention of the OGB. Clubs had limited interest in the overall structure, except where it related to their playing of the game. Clubs were most particularly interested in the proposals for club services, the regional structure for competitions and the role of the OGB in promoting golf and moderating activities that impinge on the game and the viability of clubs. As mentioned above, clubs were very exercised by a perceived danger that the OGB would 'tell them how to run our club'. Interest in how the Proposal will be voted on and the transition arrangements were also evident. Clubs emphasised good communications and the availability of suitable information for clubs to consider before the vote.

The overall governance structure was of keen interest to officials together with the proposal for the regional governance structure. The financial arrangements and the

need for cost efficiency was a strong theme. The way the Proposal will be voted on was also a key focus.

Staff members were most interested in the promotion and development of the game of golf and its future success through modernisation and development. They had an interest in their own position in the OGB but deferred this in favour of providing their views on the proposals and the need to adjust these in some cases e.g. regional structure and travel distances.

Juniors are very interested in the game of golf and its development. They are also interested in being treated well in golf and being seen as its future. There was good evidence of clubs that have a strong Junior focus being a good place for Juniors to play. However, there was also evidence of poor behaviours and facilities that send a message that Juniors are not respected in some clubs. Juniors also want to see modernisation but without losing the ethos of golf. Examples given included Wi-Fi in clubs, dedicated areas for Juniors, and participation by Juniors in the running of clubs.

The participants were initially most interested in three items that were not in that agenda – What is this about? Why are we doing it? and What are the benefits? A fourth area of concern emerged through the process. It centred on the nature of the relationship between OGB and clubs. The intent of the OGB to lead, support, influence and govern clubs was questioned. These were not topics to be included in the consultation session, but participants came with a different purpose in mind i.e. they wanted information and understanding. The final proposal will need to have a clear articulation of the reason for moving to OGB, the benefits to be gained and the risks of doing it, or not doing it. In addition, the Proposal will need to define the role of the new OGB, its relationship with clubs, balancing support and development aspects with regulation, value with governance. These were covered in each session to a degree but still remain to be communicated fully to a much wider audience.

There were differences in views depending on geographic location, gender, scale of club, urban and rural, Union official compared to club representative. There was some evidence of an interest in the health of the game of golf. However, there was also evidence that self interest and 'How will this affect me and my golf' as a key lens applied to considering OGB, with the exception of the staff, who are very focused on the health of golf and its future development.

Findings on Elements Tested

Governance structure for OGB

The governance structure for OGB received a lot of focus from officials and a bit less from clubs. There was broad acceptance of the Company Limited by Guarantee, with two participants at one officials group in Ulster contesting it strongly. The role of the President and the sufficiency of one person to carry out these duties was an area of concern. The logistics and proportionality to membership of rotating President was questioned and considered inappropriate by some males.

The gender 30/30/40 was broadly accepted by most but challenged by some males on the basis that it is not proportionate to the current membership in golf and by some women as being too low with 40/40/20 suggested as an alternative. Rotation was broadly welcomed by women but reservations on the duration of 4 years for a term contested by men, with a counter suggestion of the option of a second four-year term.

The four regions (see below) got a lot of attention. On the governance of the regions, there was broad support for the nature and number in the proposed structure. However, there were issues raised on the reduction in the number of elected positions that are currently available in the GUI. There was also a concern about the challenges of being elected in a large geographic region. The gender designation of 1/1/1 added to this.

In summary, the governance structure was accepted, with opposition from a view, held by a number of participants, that the membership numbers should be the basis for the gender split and the concern about the reduction in the number of elected positions for volunteers.

Regional Structure

The briefing & feedback sessions tested two potential regional structures for OGB. The need for change was predicated on the opportunity of starting again with a clean sheet and the assessment that neither of the current structures in the two Unions is ideal. The Westmanstown consultation had validated the two options as being viable and endorsed the need for a new structure.

The briefing sessions brought out a range of views on the two options tested with participants:

There was support in all but one session for the fairness of the straight line model. This was seen as a fair model that addresses an issue in the small size of Connaught and the dominant size of Leinster. Having equal influence in decision-making was seen as important to the operation of OGB. Various suggestions were made for ‘tweaking’ the straight line model. The chief issue identified was travel times. A more detailed explanation of the sub-zones addressed these concerns, to a degree.

Changing from the provincial divisions did cause some issues and concerns. Others encouraged OGB to be brave and go with a new structure, while just getting on with it. It was also pointed out that other than travel, the issues raised only impact on a small percentage of the golfing population as these are competition issues for the top golfers.

The county boundaries option was also tested in each session. There were variations in the feedback on this with some resistance to the concept, recognising an affiliation to county. This was countered by the views the small number of players who are impacted by this move. Provincial allegiances were considered to be more important and more difficult to overcome. Where it was happening elsewhere i.e. not in my current branch/district, there was much less of an issue. The most intense resistance was in Shannon on the issue of Clare being in the West or the South, related to a Southern championship. ‘Don’t care, does not impact me’, was the more pervasive underlying theme. Some evidence exists that the issue of identity is emerging, as is often the case in moving from one membership body to another.

Model club structure

This topic produced a visceral reaction, apparently triggering an anxiety that the OGB will dictate to clubs on how they should be run. Addressing this took energy and patience, demonstrating this is an emotive subject on which there are strong and immovable views. Over the course of the sessions, the nuances of this view became clearer. There is a fierce autonomy amongst clubs and particularly the well off clubs. Legally, the clubs are members owned (or shareholder owned) but they are also part of an international sporting fraternity/sorority whose international bodies require adherence to rules. This was identified as an issue that could result in a ‘No’ vote.

Once assured that all clubs will be affiliated on day one to the OGB, the heat dissipated but was easy to rekindle with a carelessly chosen word. The next level of response was to point out that there were many different ‘types’ of clubs on the island of Ireland. Any development by OGB of club models would need to take this plurality into account.

The consensus was that model club structures could be developed, for longer term implementation i.e. 5 years. However, these could not be mandatory. OGB could advise and support clubs, particularly ones in trouble. OGB must insist on the rules and legislation being upheld but not tell clubs how to run the rest of their business. OGB can be very effective also by leading by example. The counter view was also expressed that if there was no change at club level, OGB would be a failure and enough progress must be possible to get a ‘Yes’ vote.

Challenges in getting good people to serve as club officers were articulated in relation to the possible models for good club governance. The workload is seen to be significant. The suggested 25% rotation is seen by GUI officials as a drain in talent but ILGU participants see it as a way of moving on the long termers and refreshing the talent pool.

The changes envisaged were perceived to involve a lot of work and so would be draining on resources at a time that clubs are under pressure. This would not be popular.

Club Services

This was seen to be a key selling point. Clubs would welcome additional services (but are not prepared to pay for them/or would not initially pay but might as they see the value). The specification presented – around membership, governance, competitions/handicapping, finance, training were all endorsed. This was summarised in one group as advice, information and CGI type programmes.

The proposal to have services based in the regions and accessible there was strongly endorsed.

There was a fear that CGI was not involved/would be lost in the development of OGB. This is likely to need broader communication, as CGI is the name that clubs most associate with supports and valuable services.

Financial Arrangements

In overall terms the financial arrangements were positively received. They were seen to be efficient and suggested for the right reasons. The 'Officials' visibly relaxed when the suggestion of a regional bank account and cheque book was made. There was a suggestion in a number of sessions that the Hon Treasurer role should be retained.

A forceful suggestion that the assets of the Ulster branch are branch and not GUI assets was made by one official in an officials session. Legal advisors were suggested to clarify the position.

The topic of the levy or annual affiliation fee did cause a lot of discussion in some groups. The message coming from all of the inputs is for OGB to hold the fee at the current level, demonstrating that the figure is a fair average of the current span of fees, and seek to increase it to fund additional services when the value of those services under OGB is demonstrated and when the new organisation has proved its efficient. A two-year hold of the level was suggested.

Legal Arrangements

The issues raised about the company structure were mentioned above. The issue was identified as being a problem of the perception of the GUI being taken over by the ILGU.

Transfer of assets also got a legal treatment, with belief that the Ulster assets belong to the branch, due to the basis on which the money was raised.

(See below on voting for OGB and in OGB)

Clubs would find assistance with the revisions to their constitutions very helpful. The participants were relieved to hear that there will be a transition period and there will be time to put in place any constitutional changes.

Communications

There was great relief at the announcement that the website would be enhanced to make it more user friendly. (It may have been heard as the web site is being replaced).

The balance of the Communications proposals were agreed. There was a lot of emphasis on the importance of communications to ensure clubs are briefed on the Proposal and for OGB to be a success.

Lots of suggestions on how to do communications well were made, including ensuring there is a feedback loop into OGB to hear what clubs and golfers think.

Voting for and in OGB

This subject covered the way the decision on OGB would be taken. The clubs sessions were consistent in saying that ordinary club members should have a say or be consulted. Some went as far as to suggest a full plebiscite with the two Unions issuing ballot papers to all golfers with a handicap. Others said that only full members of a club should have a say. Others suggested that Juniors should have a say as they are the future of the game. Some said this should be a matter for the Committee in the club. Guidance from the Unions on this would be of use to clubs.

OGB Concept

The vision for OGB was not presented in these consultations as they were designed to test specific elements of the emerging proposal, not to do a 'sales' pitch for the OGB. There is a strong desire to hear why One Governing Body this is being considered and what the benefits of OGB will be for golf and particularly for club golfers.

Through the views and questions posed, the differing views of segments in the participants became clear. A segment of golfers recognises the challenges golf faces and the need for a strong and co-ordinated effort to address the issues of declining numbers, ageing club membership, time required to play, perceptions of golf as elitist, competition from alternatives such as cycling and individual competitions such as 10K runs and triathlons, and others.

A further segment of golfers and officials do not want to see any change from what is in place at present. They want to retain the current structures, practices and environment. It is golf as they know and love it.

Women are looking to OGB to be a catalyst to change and greater equality – not just gender equality but also geographic, age, and social spectrum equality.

Other OGB Elements

Championships were considered too demanding to be run by one committee at all levels. The concept of mixed rules and handicapping committees was accepted in general.

The proposals on Volunteering were positively received and endorsed.

Concepts around game development did not get a lot of time but the general sense was welcoming. Some concerns about the fear that OGB would be forcing changes in tee positions or colours.

Conclusion

The briefing and feedback delivered some clear confirmation on specific elements and some useful suggestions for modification. It also provided a useful understanding of where clubs are focused on the issue of OGB and what they need to be ready to take a decision on this important step. It also showed where Officials are positioned on OGB and gave some useful insight on their views on key elements. Staff and focused segments provide an energetic and clear set of inputs to the Proposal.

There is lots of detail, suggestions and comments that are available to the DG for the balance of its work.