



Sia Partners

# Phase One Consultation Report

One Governing Body for Golf in Ireland

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# One Governing Body for Golf Consultation - Phase One

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## Preface

The Irish Ladies' Golf Union (ILGU) and the Golfing Union of Ireland (GUI) are in the process of holding discussions regarding the creation of one governing body for golf in Ireland. These discussions are exploratory and no decisions have been made on proceeding with OGB at this stage. This one governing body, if agreed, will aim to serve the game of golf, and its players and clubs, into the future.

To progress those discussions, The GUI and ILGU established One Governing Body Discussions Group (Discussions Group), with members from each union. The role of the Discussions Group is to develop a proposal for One Governing Body for golf in Ireland that is inclusive, modern, democratic and fit for purpose, and to present that Proposal to the relevant governance structures in the respective organisations.

Deliberations to date have identified the need for both organisations, collectively, to consult with various stakeholders. This first consultation was commissioned by the Discussions Group with the assistance of Sia Partners, which has undertaken consultations like this each year for the last 28 years.

## Acknowledgements

Sia Partners would like to acknowledge the following without whose work and insights the consultation could not have been undertaken:

- The Officials of the ILGU and GUI who participated in the consultation sessions and gave their views, opinions and insights from the perspective of an official in the district and branch structure.
- The club officials and officers who participated in the consultation sessions and brought the club perspective to the work.
- The staff at the GUI and the ILGU who made arrangements for invitations, logistics and the like.
- The clubs who made their facilities available to host the sessions, often on busy days with competitions.
- The Discussions Group who commissioned the consultation, defined its scope and found the resources to set it up and conduct it.

## Introduction

This report summarises the first consultations undertaken by the Discussions Group, as outlined in the preface. The first set of consultations with stakeholders were undertaken with affiliated clubs' representatives and with officials of both Unions. These consultations are designed to provide an opportunity for various stakeholders, including golf clubs and club members, to voice their ideas and visions for one governing body. All clubs are to be given an opportunity to participate in the consultation process and individual members of clubs will be surveyed for their views.

This report summarises the views expressed by the participants in the recent consultation process on the subject of One Governing Body for golf in Ireland. It is designed to give a full and clear picture of the spectrum of those views. The draft report was circulated to participants to verify that the report captured the key elements of the views of GUI/ILGU officials and of the representatives of the men's and ladies sections within the clubs participating. The deadline for feedback was July 21st.

The Discussions Group will rely on the views of key stakeholders for the basis of any proposal for One Governing Body. Other consultations will be held with differing groups of stakeholders such as elite players, the rest of the clubs, golfers and officials over the coming months. These will also form a key input to the discussions.

## Objectives and Method

The Discussions Group, with the two unions, decided that any One Governing Body (OGB) would be developed based on the views, needs and expectations of clubs, officials and golfers. To that end, and before any consideration of what OGB would look like, the Discussions Group set about obtaining those views through a consultation process. All views were to be captured and reflected in the report, no matter how divergent or how many people put forward that view. The approach was a 'blank sheet', to which the consultations sessions would provide the picture and articulation of requirements that would meet the expectations and needs of clubs and golfers. There was no proposal on the table for these consultations.

The participants in these sessions were club representatives and union officials. As a key authority on the needs and expectations of clubs and golfers, a representative sample of Clubs' representatives and of Unions officials were invited to separate

sessions to provide their views. All other clubs will be invited to consultations over the course of the Discussions Group's work so that their views can be heard and taken on board.

The sessions were professionally facilitated and the views of participants noted for this report. The participants' views are not personally attributed. Where the words of participants are used to illustrate the point, these are presented in italic.

The sessions were introduced by two members of the Discussions Group who then handed over to the facilitator and become observers at the session. The core questions put to each group were:

**Dream of an ideal governing body for golf and describe what it would look like?**

**What are the valuable things the current Unions do for clubs, regions and golf?**

**What elements of the current must be retained and what could be left behind?**

**What role could the officials/clubs play in creating one governing body?**

All views were captured in over 120 pages of notes. The analysis and reporting was done to ensure that all views are reflected, rather than the more usual approach, which is to report the areas of consensus and dissent or points that had support from more than one person. The full spectrum of views has been captured.

All of the sessions reached, at some point, to the current issues in golf as a basis for responding to the above questions. Many participants contributed suggestions of principle that are important to them, from their experience or their belief of what is best, for OGB.

In all, fourteen consultation sessions, in 7 locations around Ireland were held in Carlow, Douglas, Castletroy, Athlone, Westmanstown, Shandon and Derry/Londonderry. A sample of 15 clubs in each area were invited to send two representatives each of the men's and ladies' sections within their club, to one session in each location. In addition GUI/ILGU officials were invited from the regional structure in the area to send representatives to a separate session for golf officials. This is the first set of consultations and further consultation with clubs, officials and other stakeholders will take place.

Participant numbers varied from 16 to nearly 40. In the smaller groups, all participated strongly. As would be normal in larger groups, some people were quieter. There was no sense of people being constrained in their inputs, but participants were careful and

considered. There was an element of ‘getting to know the other side’ in some groups. Some struggled with dreaming of an ideal, but participated none the less. As consultation groups go, these were highly participative, constructive and addressed the topics well.

The participants were representative of the officials and clubs in golf in Ireland. The consultation therefore heard from a representative set of voices and opinions. The sessions were designed for 1.5 to 2 hours and everyone appeared to have had his or her say by the conclusion. There were indications that the thinking of participants was developing as they participated and this is normal. The consultation was strong and yielded very valuable inputs and insights that are detailed below.

The process produced a series of descriptions of the attributes of the ideal governing body. These are presented as individual contributions, rather than as a narrative based on the inputs. This is designed to ensure the voices and views of the participants are presented without editing or alteration or reductionist summary. When the other elements of the consultation are complete, a summary of the full consultation process can be made to synthesise all the elements.

### The dream

The features of the dream that emerged from the process of imagining an ideal governing body for golf in Ireland were as follow:

- **Single body.** It will be one body for all golfers. *‘Separated for two genders is not good’.* It will be able to represent golf, influence in the right circles and secure greater profile and funding for golf. *‘It’s absolutely needed. The union is drifting apart. Separate doesn’t work. For golf and Ireland golf we need to come together. Men and women work better together.’* *‘A single body unified from the top to the bottom’.* It will be modern and efficient. *‘The organisation should be dynamic, energetic and innovative. It shouldn’t be in an ivory tower. The administration should be close to golfers.’* The overall concept of One Governing Body was welcomed by almost all participants. *‘There is general agreement that it’s a good idea – but the devil is in the detail.’* It would be democratic and represent and serve all members. *‘Representation of the normal small country club relative to big city club is important. Voices must be heard.’* There were suggestions that the value of coming together should be assessed and looked at rigorously.

- **Equality.** It will have equality for all golfers. *'Female is the underdog at the moment'*. Many men advocated for gender equality in the new body, as did most women. The significance of gender would disappear and there would only be 'golfers'. *'Men would not forget women exist'*. There were alternative views expressed as *'We shouldn't force men's clubs to become mixed at club level'* and *'Women have less time to play and so can't justify the full membership fee.'* There was a much larger number of views in favour of equality within clubs, and some expressing surprise because they have equality already, but a clear opposite view amongst some men and a few women. Timesheets would be open and flexible. All members in a club would have equal access.
- **Connection and communication.** A governing body that is connected from top to bottom is very important. It should feel like on community with good communications up and down the organisation. Good communication within the body, with clarity, ease of access to information, accurate and consistent information and an identifiable source of information was considered vital. *'Management can kind of take over'*. The body would feel like it is acting always in the interests of members. *'The web site would be easy to use.'* *'On the business side, you would know who to ring and it would be easy to get information.'*
- **Attractive to the full range of potential golfers.** Openness to and welcoming of the full range of potential golfers was a key desire. Juniors would be encouraged and welcomed. Clubs will welcome LGBT golfers, golfers with a disability and others not currently evident in golf clubs. This would increase participation and open access up so that golf would attract more players and retain the 25-50 age group, the 'time poor' and families. Reducing the elitist feel of clubs and the focus on elite players over 'ordinary' players was an aspiration. It was emphasised that standards will still be kept high. The clubs would go to schools and attract kids to play. *'They would go in (to schools) jointly, not men and women separately.'* *'Grab them before rugby does'*. Address the length of play for those who are 'time poor'. Cost is also an issue and the new body should find ways to reduce the costs. A concern also existed that standards would need to remain high and not allowed to be diluted. *'Over the last 15 years we have seen a lot of new people coming into golf clubs. This has an impact on standards'*. *'You need a licence to play golf in Europe. This makes sure you know the rules.'*

- **More enjoyable and fun.** The dream governing body would moderate the emphasis on competition and encourage more fun in golf. The large prizes in recent years was mentioned by many as a key driver in behaviours such as handicapping infringements and the overly competitive focus, at the expense of fun and enjoyment in the game. *'Make the sport look cool and the gear would be attractive to young people'*.
- **Strengthened clubs.** Many clubs are suffering from the declining numbers. In an ideal OGB, they would be assisted by the governing body to be sustainable and in a position to attract new members and to retain the existing membership, thus becoming financially viable again. The membership model for clubs may have to change to facilitate the new world. Addressing the 'roving players' would be a positive step in strengthening clubs and in making all players carry the costs of what is an expensive game. *'CGI came in and helped address the problems. This should be retained'*.
- **More powerful Governing Body.** The role of the governing body was suggested as the promotion, influencing, securing funding, providing supports to clubs, providing programmes that attract greater participation at all ages and genders, organising national tournaments and providing handicapping. There were greater differences of views about the degree to which the governing body would dictate to clubs ranging from *'Clubs are businesses and must make their own decisions on how to run the club'* to *'The new governing body should be able to enforce rules and regulations.'* The typical approach of the new governing body with clubs would sound like 'I'm here from the GUI and I am here to help'.
- **Structures.** The structures should be representative. *'Make sure the men don't take over everything'*. The views articulated about the selection and appointment of people to positions in the governance structures of a new governing body centred on appointment and duration in the role. *'People would be appointed on merit, not gender or who they know.'* *'There should be a maximum term.'* The idea of appointing outsiders to boards and committees for their expertise was suggested. In addition, there was consensus that a regional structure would be needed to create a presence and a local 'personality' for the governing body. In addition, competitions require local resources. In reference to the overall board of the new body there was a view that *'a ten man board wouldn't be good. Without getting into positive discrimination it should be dealt with.'* There was much discussion of the three-

tier structure with suggestions that it has not helped and the opposite view that it is a good structure. 'Need a totally mixed management structure to be equal and to function effectively on one side and *'My dream is separate management for men and women but with one committee of both. This is because we are very different at competitions.'* *'We also have the three tier system and it's a club divided against itself. There should be no internal division.'*

- **Efficient and economical.** The governing body should be very efficiently organised with a view to running at the current level of affiliation fees or less. There was an expectation that joining together would deliver efficiencies (clubs held this view) but time did not allow for probing the feasibility of this.
- **Competitions.** There was broad support for mixed officiating, while some did not support that development. This used to happen for big events where there was a shortfall in officials but it stopped suddenly two years ago. The idea of jointly running competitions did get a lot of support in the dream. There was support for the development of a range of competitions to suit all levels. This theme also brought out the desire to support ways of playing the game for fun, as opposed to just to win prizes.
- **Volunteers.** The new governing body would recognise the importance of volunteers and support their training and recognition. They are vital to the overall playing of the game.
- **High Performance.** The new governing body would have the funds and influence to ensure that the training and facilities at elite level are appropriate for the significant talent that is there. The HP Programme would be very successful and result in many more leading international players.

### Club and Union official's views compared

There was a great degree of consensus between the two types of groups – Unions officials and club representatives. The dreams for OGB were very similar. As would be expected, the officials were more familiar with the current structures and roles of the Unions. Many club representatives had little interaction with the Unions and could only specify their expectations of OGB in broader terms or relative to what needs to change in golf currently. Union officials saw clubs as the most important stakeholders and the determiners of the value of OGB. They believed that clubs would be the most critical of the idea of OGB (which turned out not to be the case).

Clubs were more likely to be impatient to get on with the development, saying that the idea is a good one, is generally accepted but it needs to be done well and at a

moderate pace to allow all to adjust. The fear expressed by clubs was that it would be done in a 'Big Bang' and that this would be very difficult for clubs. *'Is this going to be Big Bang or a journey? Big Bang would be problematic'* There was also some impatience that there was not a proposal available to the groups, at the consultation, that could be assessed and as an indication that the process was underway and in a considered way. *'It's a great idea so far.'* *'A lot of people want to be led about what's best. ILGU and GUI know what they are talking about.'*

### Suggestions for OGB

There were a number of specific suggestions from the consultations for OGB:

- The current list of roles is important to see continued in the OGB: Administering handicapping; Providing expertise to the clubs and regional structures so they can function properly; Be an umbrella body for golf in Ireland; Provide clubs with a framework from which clubs can set their direction; Continue to have a system which allows clubs to go to the OGB for advice and reassurance; Continue to provide the services that CGI provides to support clubs in increasing participation and in business/governance development.
- Be the leader/facilitator/encourager of change in clubs and in golf in Ireland to help the sport to thrive and grow and be as successful as it should be.
- Divide the regional structure so that there is an even number of clubs in each division. *'Choose any number you like (for regional structure) just make sure it's divisible by 4.'*
- Cultural change to underpin equality and an attractive environment. *'Eliminate the old misogynistic attitude.'*
- Start with what the new organisation should do and build from there.
- The Union is paid for by the membership. Be careful not to spread too thin.
- The ladies drive the social side of golf. *'Husband and wife wanted to play against each other and they couldn't.'* Being more flexible around gender would be helpful.
- The position of the proprietary clubs in this development needs to be addressed.
- Diversity of views exists on some subjects - *'Mixed competitions would be a good idea.'* *'Competition should be gender separated'.*
- *'We must talk of the financials – cash and assets of both- where do they go? They must go to a new organisations but since its not a merger, I don't know what happens.'*

- Have to have development officers to get the younger people into golf before rugby gets them.
- The new body needs to make clear what it does, how much it costs and what the result has been. Transparency and accountability are necessary.
- Provide templates for people coming into roles so they can be equipped to do their jobs. There should be specifications of the requirements of the roles so the right people can be appointed and people with the skills will come forward.
- Nine-hole competitions are the answer to 'time poor' participants. They are currently working in many places.
- We need more families playing including children of all ages and levels, not just elite.
- Clubs need to be less intimidating to new people. They won't stay if they know no one in the club and feel odd being there.
- We love our provinces in Ireland. It won't be easy to get rid of them.
- Administration and competitions structures could be different.
- The governing body will have to check child protection in clubs as well as they do handicapping.
- A lot of admiration for the ILGU success with getting girls into golf. An approach to be included in the OGB.
- Representation: *'If we go proportional representation, women will drown. Representation should be equal.'*
- Support and resistance. *'The X Council is ok with coming together, but the details must be worked on. X Council agrees we should look at it. There is a tradition of male chauvinist pigs!'*
- The ordinary golfer does not care about the governing body. He just wants to play golf.
- This should start from the bottom up.
- There are immediate things that could be done jointly e.g. handicapping.
- A junior mixed inter pro completion would be a good idea.
- The concept of local/regional meetings between clubs would be beneficial so clubs could learn from each other.
- Committee rotation does not help knowledge retention within clubs (loss of corporate memory).
- There is a need to resolve the potential conflict that could arise if participation increases outside of the clubs.

- Later stages in the process could usefully involve input from the IPGA and Club Managers Association.

### Role the participants can play

Participants were asked what role they would like to play in creating the proposal for OGB. Many saw themselves bringing back the consultation discussion and getting that conversation going in their clubs/branches/districts. Others want to see an outline proposal so they can react to a more tangible possibility. They will then provide input and will bring it to their clubs/branches/districts for discussion and feedback. Most agreed to discuss it with their peers and to create awareness of the concept and the process. All were anxious to be kept informed and to get further information.

### Queries

During the consultations sessions, a number of queries arose. The session was not designed to answer queries, as no decisions have been made on the shape and form of OGB. The questions are very useful in defining the aspects of OGB that the Discussions Group and the two Unions will need to address when coming back to the stakeholders with a proposal.

### How will the decision on OGB be made?

### Will clubs and golfers have a vote in the decision to establish OGB?

### Why is there not a proposal, based on best practice and experience elsewhere, that could be presented to clubs and officials at this point and the feedback on it taken?

### Conclusion

The consultation with officials and club representatives was very productive. There is broad acceptance that OGB is a good idea and, if done well, will underpin the success of golf into the future. There are suggestions for how that can be achieved, a clear dream of what it could be. Some fears amongst some about the speed of change, the degree of prescription for clubs that might be attempted, and the level of change that might be implemented. Others fear there will not be enough change and that the opportunity to redress the declining numbers and financial position will be lost. Many are anxious to be looking at some concrete suggestions. Almost all women and a significant proportion of men welcome the OGB as an opportunity to embrace equality. A proportion of men are not in favour of equality and hope to contain the extent of

changes to the current position. None wants the position in golf to remain as it is currently. All want to see change in golf. The current Unions are seen to be valuable and critical to the game. There are areas where the OGB could be even more supportive of golf and clubs.