



## Area & County Forum

26 January 2019

### 1. Championships

Summary of Competitions

#### **Fixtures**

General feeling that there are currently too many fixtures for junior golfers, which is making it almost impossible for A&C to avoid clashes. Not all A&C supportive of the junior tour and feel that there isn't a need for extra fixtures in an already busy calendar. The high number of events forces players to choose between events and leads to players choosing to play in other events and not support their A&C events.

#### **Order of Merit**

A&C not aware that their respective champions are allocated points on the OOM.

#### **A&C Competitions**

Consensus of opinion amongst all attendees that they would be willing to explore the possibility of opening up some of their competitions to players from out with their A&C to increase number of competitors and strength of field. All agreed to complete a survey on events that are currently offered within their A&C – field sizes, formats etc.

#### **Next Steps**

Survey to be put together on coaching and competition to capture this information.

OOM document to be circulated to all A&C.

Events

#### **2019 Scottish Golf Involvement**

In 2019 the events will be supported by Scottish Golf (SG) in an administrative capacity only with 2 members of the SG staff working in partnership with a host Area / County to deliver the events.

Host venues for the Men's Area Team Championship (Leven / Scoonie) and Women's County Finals (Peebles) have been confirmed and planning meetings involving host Area / County and SG to commence in May.

All costs, except those attributable to the SG staff presence onsite, will be borne by A&C's.

### Summarised Forum Responses

Set questions were asked to each group and the collated responses are summarised below:

- **Venues** should rotate on a North, East, South, West on a 4-yearly basis, visiting a different A&C each time they return to ensure everyone gets an equal chance to host.
- Continued **Scottish Golf involvement** valued to promote events as well as support host A&C in an administrative capacity and in the procurement of venues.
- **Local officials** should be used where possible to support events and reduce costs.
- **Additional financial burden** of attending both Jamborees and County Finals annually is not sustainable. Unless funding changes other options would need to be investigated by counties.
- Majority of **Areas** feel the Men's Area Team Championship is sustainable in current format but options to investigate alternate formats and reducing number of courses required is worth investigating further.
- Playing **Boys Area Team** simultaneously with Men's was not a feasible option and there is a need for a Boys or Junior (potentially incorporating Girls) to be included in the calendar going forward but most appreciate further discussion around format and timing is required.
- While headline event costs were shared a more detailed **financial breakdown** was requested. This has been compiled and circulated separately.
- There was a willingness to investigate **different formats or smaller team sizes** to reduce costs and make events more financially sustainable for A&Cs going forward.
- Host A&C to assist with securing **cost-effective accommodation** for visiting teams.
- Could a **funding bridge** be considered in 2019 to allow events to go ahead as normal this year and provide more time to consider future options?

### Next Steps

To help identify preferred options on the Area Team Championships and County Finals, a survey link will be circulated to all Area & County Secretaries requesting feedback on specific questions. Feedback will then be collated and consensus circulated before the end of April. Thereafter SG Events team will contact host A&C to arrange planning meetings for 2019 events with a view to these taking place during May.

## 2. Coaching

### Common Themes

#### Communication between SG and A&C's

- Disconnect between Scottish Golf and the A&C's
- No real communication from SG – A&C's used to nominate players for the Performance Academy, now not included in the process
- SG website is difficult to navigate and doesn't show a clear pathway for players

#### Role of A&C's

- Counties need to know what SG expect from them?
- Quite a few Areas would be happy to welcome girls into their coaching programme/competitions – This is already happening in some areas but received a mixed response from the counties when discussed at the forum
- Stirling fully support that the boys should play at the highest level possible for the, so if an area match clashes with a bigger competition they encourage the boys to play the bigger competition
- Ayrshire supportive of sending players to the next level to help their development

#### Challenges

- Financial – difficult to run meaningful coaching programme, mainly on county side
- Too few girls playing
- Really difficult to get information from clubs on junior member numbers
- Clubs without pros are often failing to identify promising juniors
- In East Lothian there is a challenge with kids being members of multiple clubs (sometimes 3 or 4) No loyalty to club.
- Free memberships make it too easy for kids to get everything
- Free coaching also affects commitment levels
- Pros need to be involved at beginner level to get better coaching. Clubgolf not providing the best possible coaching and no transfer to membership

#### Pathway Visibility

- No clear pathway for players, SG need a strategy for junior golf which shows a clear pathway for how players can progress
- Competition pathway should be linked with coaching pathway

#### **Development Academy Programme**

- Takes kids away from county programmes
- Location of development academies has been an issue, perception that only the 'posh' clubs were accepted, some clubs with good junior sections were turned down and then the kids moved away from their own club to join the 'National' programme
- Belief that Scottish Golf coaching should be aspirational and therefore shouldn't be able to just pay to join a national programme
- Too many programmes competing with each other eg SG, Foundations, SALJA etc

#### Suggestions

- Coaching programmes should be all year round, not just winter

- SG should ask for a kick back from professionals who have been supported and are then successful
- P&K suggested that the gap in the pathway is between clubs and a&c level and so Development Academy should sit below a&c level
- Group agreed that it would be useful to collect info on what competitive opportunities were available to players

### **Next Steps**

- The majority of Areas have the resource to deliver a coaching programme but very few counties do which will leave a gap in opportunities offered to girls coming out of club level competition, need to look at ways to fill this gap
- Next steps are to send out a survey to gather information on coaching and competition opportunities currently available to get a full picture. The groups agreed this would be a useful exercise and could start a piece of work to encourage working closer together, especially for those in more remote areas with fewer numbers of players.
- When the pathway diagram work is closer to completion it will be important to get feedback from A&C's

### 3. Volunteering

#### Key Themes

##### Course Rating

A general feeling that the course rating process taking too long, between the course being rated and the club receiving the official paperwork. This could be down to a lack of awareness of the process, which has been communicated previously. There is also a perception of a lack of resource within Scottish Golf to do the required work.

Within more remote areas (particularly the North), consideration should be made to the increased costs involved for accommodation. Approval of accommodation has been slow and therefore the cost of bookings increases. Staff should be aware of the prices and the need for booking in advance.

Mixed views on the role of Areas and Counties within the Course Rating teams. Some Areas feel that they should have more ownership while others felt it should be more open in order to attract more volunteers into the system. In general, there should be more clarity and transparency on roles and responsibilities.

Most delegates believed improved technology should be utilised for course rating with a view that software could streamline the process. Delegates welcomed the software pilot being rolled out this year and sought more information on this for those involved.

Course rating was regarded as under-valued and most golf clubs and golfers lacked awareness of the importance of course rating and the key role played by volunteers. This could be addressed by a marketing campaign on social media and better communication through clubs. More visibility of volunteering opportunities was required, to attract younger people and provide roles for those interested. Communication needs to be simpler to understand and a perception that some of the training put people off from continuing.

Lack of awareness of who the Course Raters were in certain Areas and Counties and what level of expertise they had. Delegates would like to see more integration between male and female teams, while some newly trained course raters felt that they weren't being given the opportunity to gain experience because the 'old guard' didn't want to let go. Feels like a 'closed shop'. A streamlined process using software would also allow course raters to do their work in the evenings, which would help with recruiting working people to the roles.

Better communication of process to clubs required, particularly around applications for extended Preferred Lies beyond the winter period. Most clubs would go to their Area Association to ask for this.

##### Refereeing & National Event Volunteering

General perception that the pool of qualified referees was getting smaller. Could this be addressed by running Rules Courses regionally, rather than all being in St Andrews. Current Rules Course regarded as expensive and inaccessible. Refereeing qualification 'pathway' required so those involved were aware of what training was needed to progress. Significant variance in volunteer support for national championships, depending on which part of the country the event is being staged. Some Area volunteers not being asked to help. A lack of consistency with Scottish Golf's approach – currently ask the club first, then the Area, but could it be the other way around?

## Engagement

Scottish Golf website needs a revamp so that volunteers can access relevant information more easily. Much of the content is out of date and signposting needs improved. General view that the Club E-Newsletter is good, but the Area & County Newsletter needs to be more regular, with information that is specific to the audience, not just a variation of the club newsletter. Could there be a summary at the top with links to each section, so readers could easily find the information relevant to their area of interest?

## Reward and Recognition

Rewards and benefits package not regarded as a key requirement of volunteers, but more could be done to recognise their work. There were mixed views on staging volunteer golf days, with some delegates wanting a national volunteers golf day (similar to the old Course Raters & Championship Volunteers Day) but a larger number suggesting a regional volunteer golf day for volunteers at all levels. Some delegates questioned spending budget on golf days, given cutbacks in other areas. General view that more recognition could be done via news stories and website content.

One group suggested that the Scottish Golf Awards could be reintroduced but purely focused on volunteer recognition and grass roots achievement. Ticket prices should be affordable and the event should focus on recognition rather than being too commercial/corporate.

## Volunteer Recruitment

More could be done by Areas and Counties to attract younger volunteers. Successful example in Ayrshire where recent recruits have been in their 20s – 40s, through succession planning and provision of specific job descriptions for committee roles. Areas and Counties could benefit from a Business Planning Workshop, which was piloted by Scottish Golf a few years ago. East Lothian Ladies created a Parents Committee, which helped engagement with young golfers and their parents. Shorter, more engaging committee meetings would help – could Scottish Golf assist in helping plan meetings?

## General

- One group requested better co-operation between Scottish Golf and the Areas for collation of club affiliation fees and membership numbers. Can the process be improved and shared?
- Lack of support for club coaching volunteers over the past three years – more support required for clubs without a pro or club manager
- Solheim Cup / big events – regular volunteers should be given priority
- Areas and Counties required more guidance on Child Protection and Safeguarding specific to their work

## **Next Steps:**

- Improved communication and clarification of the Course Rating process and timetable
- Campaign to raise awareness of Course Rating importance with clubs and members
- Review Course Rating training programme and promote volunteer opportunities
- Consideration and budgeting of regional volunteer days led by the RCDOs
- Marketing team to review Areas & Counties Newsletter – schedule and content
- Consideration of a Business Planning Workshop/Forum for Areas & Counties (would link into their governance)

## 4. Funding & Grants

### Fee Structure at Area & County Level

Generic discussion and update of approach to funding of Areas and Counties, with all of the men's areas operating on a per capita basis that ranges from £1.50 to £3.75 and whilst a few of the Counties are also operating on a per capita basis (Borders, Dumfries, Northern Counties) the majority continue to operate on an option for females to join at an annual fee ranging from £8 to £65. Within that range there are significant differences both in terms of member numbers and in approach to competitions, where some counties obtain courtesy of courses and don't charge their members to enter events and others who have to pay a green fee or facility fee which means they do charge entrants to play in the different competitions they host.

It would appear that in the main, the Areas obtain courtesy of the courses in their geographic region on a rotational basis but the same is not the case for the Counties who in the main find it more difficult to get courtesy – a number of Areas suggested that closer working with the respective County organisation particularly in terms of fixture planning and negotiation with clubs might assist with lowering costs for ladies competition. Additionally, it was suggested that Scottish Golf should intervene and encourage clubs to act equally towards the gents and ladies requests at Area and County level. The wider challenge that was acknowledged was that clubs are autonomous bodies and many are struggling to maintain an income profile that matches the expenditure needs of their facility and giving away free golf is becoming more and more difficult for them to absorb.

### Administration of Fee

Varying views in relation to charging of a single fee to golf clubs to cover both the National Governing Body and Area/County per capita fee. Whilst a number saw the potential for saved administration at both club and area/county level, there was concern with regards to the differences in per capita both in value and approach that would make this a potentially challenging situation to administer. It was acknowledged that if parity in approach to charging methodology was introduced then this would be a sensible approach, however it was noted that all organisations would wish to maintain or increase their current level of income.

The continued challenge of an honesty box approach to collation of membership numbers from clubs was discussed and whilst we are trying to improve the accuracy and understanding of the importance of this return to the member clubs it does remain a struggle in some instances. It was agreed that increased collaboration between Scottish Golf and Areas/Counties in terms of informal "audit" or reconciliation of numbers would be helpful and as a first step in that process, KS would circulate a list of our current returns for cross checking.

## **Grant Funding**

There are currently fundamental differences between the income platforms of the different organisations which impact on their ability to meaningfully deliver programmes to their membership. In the main the Areas spend fairly significant sums on coaching & competition programmes for junior boys in their regions, often in excess of £5,000 and therefore the former coaching grant provided by Scottish Golf of £1,250 was a small contribution towards the costs but for other smaller Areas and in the main the Counties, their numbers are smaller and therefore to run a similar programme can often be at considerably less expense. Generally with smaller membership numbers this means lower income levels but clearly the costs to participate in events where travel and accommodation expenses are significant, can cause more challenge in terms of having enough funds to cover everything.

Retaining a grant from Scottish Golf was vital for most organisations who felt their ability to continue to provide support to players through coaching and competition opportunities would be reduced if this was to be removed. There were a couple of the more financially secure Areas who suggested that they might not apply for the grant funding if we could ensure that any unclaimed funds would be redistributed to those facing hardship in attending events. For majority of associations an increased grant opportunity would be welcomed. Particularly it was felt key from a County perspective that with the format of their jamborees being divisional through to a national final and therefore for 4 teams to be incurring double travel and accommodation costs that removal of the grant fund for the County Finalists would put the viability of the event in question as most would be unable to afford to attend the final.

Means testing approach to any additional funding opportunity was suggested and positively supported by most, with the audit side of the application considered important and fully supported by all Areas and Counties represented. Other suggestions were that the grant form be simplified to ensure the end user can easily follow and complete the application. Additionally, it was generally welcomed that a widening of the purpose of the grant be introduced, with coaching, player support, junior pathway and event support all being permitted (with parameters or guidelines introduced) from 2019.

## **Next Steps**

KS will review the grant application process taking into account the above feedback with a view to issuing an updated form to all Area & County Secretaries in early March, with a return date by end of April 2019. Support or guidance on completion will be provided if needed and if funds permit we will look at introducing of an additional pot of funding which is more aligned to additional needs based support than the generic grant fund.

## 5. Governance

Issue 1 – amalgamation of areas and counties

### **Recurring Themes**

#### **Boundary Issues**

This is a fundamental issue for many areas and counties (indeed it is still an ongoing issue for the North where amalgamation has taken place) and, for some amalgamations to take place would require a significant redrawing of boundaries - there was no consensus as to whether this was an exercise that should be undertaken.

#### **Finance Issues**

Given the different way that areas and counties memberships are made up and the consequential difference re the way they are funded, there is a view held by some that the women would be disadvantaged financially in the event of amalgamation. This would need to be considered as part of any amalgamation. It should be noted that finances were not simply about affiliation fees but also about entry fees, course courtesies and honoraria all of which would need to be considered.

#### **Cross Overs**

Although some areas and counties have issues with full amalgamation they do work together on a variety of subjects where appropriate including at junior level.

#### **Identity and Tradition**

Some of the Women's Counties felt that they would lose their identities and traditions as any amalgamation would essentially end up being more akin to a take over the area of the county.

**NB** – it is important to note that some of the above issues (if not all) were faced by the North when they amalgamated. They have managed to find solutions around all of these issues with the one outstanding issue re geography.

#### **Suggestions re next steps**

- Ask North to assist with pulling together a case study with particular emphasis on above issues and how they overcame them.
- Possibly look at Borders and see if there are any “quick fixes” – no changes would be made without further detailed consultation

Issue 2 – voting rights

### **Recurring themes**

### **Continuity**

View expressed by a number of areas that, unlike clubs where captains/cttees come and go, the areas and counties provided a continuity of thought which was important when dealing with Scottish Golf on behalf of the clubs. Also feeling that was general club apathy when it came to voting.

Linked to this was view that SGL wanted one club one vote as would be easier to influence and get votes through (in particular given club apathy). Accordingly, was important that areas and counties kept vote as they were the ones that would hold SGL to account.

### **Not Representative**

View expressed particularly amongst some of counties that they are currently not representative and should not have 10 votes (although view was generally that they not comfortable giving up votes if men didn't too – concern re being marginalized). This issue led to some belief that should simply be one club one vote and there were also some views expressed that should be one golfer one vote.

### **Proportionality**

Even where view held that Areas and Counties should keep votes was view expressed by many that 10 across the Board was not correct and some form of proportionality maybe should be considered.

### **Next steps**

- Pull together some potential voting options for further consideration at forums.