

WSP
62-64 Hills Road
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24 May 2023

Dear WSP,

Making Connections: tCI's final report of the peer review of WSP's work on the consultation

The Consultation Institute (tCI) was commissioned in February 2023 by WSP to peer-review WSP's work on the 2022 *Making Connections* consultation. The main bulk of the consultation happened in the summer/autumn of 2022, so while the peer review was able to look at some of the analysis process 'live', several elements of the consultation (e.g., the construction and delivery of the consultation survey and accompanying documents, the running and data-capture from the stakeholder groups) were necessarily reviewed on a *post-hoc* basis.

Notwithstanding this, tCI was able to provide regular feedback and advice to WSP during the period of analysis and reporting, much of which was accepted. In our view the end result is stronger for it. Whilst there is always an element of professional judgement in the best way to report on consultation findings and always more that could be done, we are satisfied that, overall, the approach taken by the Greater Cambridge Partnership was honest, transparent and reasonable.

We wish to thank WSP for their co-operation and open approach during the review, and we look forward to seeing the end result of the consultation.

Please, therefore, find attached tCI's final report of our findings.

Yours faithfully



Corey Smalley,
Chief Executive Officer
The Consultation Institute

Summary report on the consultation from the Consultation Institute

Introduction

1. In early February 2023, the Consultation Institute (tCI) was appointed by WSP Associates to conduct a full peer review of the consultation 'Making Connections', a project that WSP was undertaking on behalf of Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP). The bulk of the consultation work itself had already taken place in 2022, and had been Phase 2 of preparatory consultations and engagement activities that began in 2019. tCI's role was to review the work already undertaken on the Phase 2 consultation, and to provide feedback on the analysis and reporting section of work undertaken by WSP during Spring 2023. tCI's work has included reading documents, attending meetings, conducting interviews, and observing processes; throughout this period, tCI provided regular feedback to WSP; this short report is a summary of tCI's findings. It is divided into six sections covering the main aspects of the consultation process: *Scope; Documentation; Questions; Delivery; Analysis; Reporting.*

Scope

2. tCI was satisfied that the scope of the Phase 2 consultation was correct, and that reasonable efforts had been made to reach both the general population, and to identify particular groups of stakeholders (either by location or by Protected or other Characteristic) for more in-depth discussions.

Documentation

3. tCI was generally content with the consultation brochure and the online documents available as background to the consultation. The proposals were generally well set out (although there were some ambiguities where technical terms might have been better explained). We welcomed the draft impact assessments, and were particularly pleased to see a question on equalities impact in the survey, and an incorporation of the impact of the proposal on low-income groups.

Questions

4. tCI was generally content with the survey: it asked the questions that needed to be asked. The open questions, though, were often very open, unstructured and top-level, putting a considerable onus onto the coding, analysis, synthesis and reporting processes. In general, WSP met this challenge with success, although we acknowledge that further interrogation of the data at a detailed level is yet to take place (see also: 'Reporting' below).
5. Only one option was presented in the survey (and in other means of data collection), and the questions all related to this. WSP and GCP need to ensure that documentation exists to demonstrate that the views of stakeholders and the public were transparently taken into account when narrowing the proposals down to the single option presented in Phase 2.
6. The plan and documentation made little reference to the Opinion survey conducted on a representative sample of the population likely to be affected by the proposals. tCI welcomes this baseline check (rarely seen in consultations we have come across), and were pleased to see that its results were used well in the consultation report.

Delivery

7. Aspects of delivery we looked at included: whether there was sufficient publicity of the consultation and sufficient opportunities to participate in it; the objectivity of the questions; the adequacy and clarity of the information provided; the sufficiency and quality of public and stakeholder events. In general, tCI was content with the aspects of the delivery of the consultation that we could observe. It became clear, however, that the main focus of the consultation (certainly in the analysis process) was the survey.
8. We reviewed a sample of comments coded as critical of the consultation process and/or materials. Some of those who opposed the proposal felt that the questions were biased, while others would have liked more detailed information about certain aspects of the proposal. A number of respondents pointed out that the link to the Equalities Impact Assessment did not work. There were one or two suggestions of inaccurate details in the consultation document text or maps. We have no view on whether these criticisms are reasonable. However, taken overall, and based on the sample we looked at, the level of criticisms is not felt to be unusual for a consultation of this scale and complexity.

Analysis

9. We are satisfied that the processes at GCP for receipt, logging and tagging of responses were sufficiently robust. We are content that the systems at WSP were sufficiently robust to ensure that no part of any survey response nor any feedback from other channels such as stakeholder meetings was overlooked. We are satisfied with the measures taken to ensure the data, once collected, was not able to be accessed by anyone except those handling it.
10. A large part of the analysis was coding – that is, free text responses need to be broken up and categorised under a system of codes (or headings) – called a codeframe. tCI was satisfied that the processes for recruiting and training coders (those undertaking the coding process) were robust. The coding team was large and dispersed geographically, and while considerable efforts (including quality checks) were made to ensure communication around uniformity of approach, tCI has made some observations on the ways in which the team could better have co-ordinated in the way they coded responses. Although we observed a sample of the coding process, we did not have the opportunity to conduct a detailed exercise in testing the code allocations, or to investigate more fully the means by which consistency was maintained. The codeframe itself was very broad brush, in line with the policy that WSP's role was to provide an initial top-level analysis, but retaining the data for more detailed interrogation at a later stage. tCI was content that the codeframe, at a top level, contained the right codes to capture the data, but would urge GCP/WSP to continue to interrogate this data at a more detailed level using a more granular coding structure if this (or a similar scheme) proceeds to a future stage of detailed design.
11. A regular feature of consultations are co-ordinated responses by campaigning organisations. These need to be identified so that they can be recognised, and the data captured in context. We note that campaigns identified during the consultation process could have been recognised within the construction of the codeframe in advance to create better efficiency in categorising co-ordinated responses, although we were content that this omission was rectified at a later stage, and a more detailed examination of co-ordinated responses has been undertaken and presented in the consultation report. tCI welcomed the fact that stakeholder responses, the

output of the social media comments, and letters/e-mails had been coded. We viewed a sample of letters/e-mail responses and were content with the separate codeframe and 'sentiment coding' applied to these. We were, however, unable to investigate in detail the summarising process that had been applied to the output of the stakeholder groups and cannot comment reliably on whether all the stakeholder comments made at these groups have been captured.

Reporting

12. tCI is satisfied that WSP has highlighted and quantified the principal themes captured in the codeframe. The analysis (and cross-tabulation/comparative data) of the quantitative questions is generally good, and the inclusion of the results of the Opinium survey as comparator data is to be commended. We were pleased to see some more detailed output from stakeholder and community groups. Overall, we regard the report as a faithful summary of what respondents said.
13. The link between categorising and coding all data received and creating a report is a challenging process; the data needs to be considered for any regularly occurring patterns ('many people who say X also say Y'), the coding process will often separate these ideas, and they need to be reassembled. Such patterns in the data are best observed by the coders themselves, and a system for recording these from the beginning of the coding exercise would have speeded up the process of identifying themes.
14. WSP have made considerable efforts to provide a helpful commentary on the data output. In tCI's opinion, however, it is still necessary for the reader to look in several places in the report to get the full picture about what is being said on a particular issue. We understand, though, that further work is being done to synthesise data from different sources to produce a more thematic version of the report that looks in depth at detailed issues that have arisen in the consultation, which we commend. The consideration given to analysis in the planning for the consultation was not as extensive as we might expect for such a large project, and more forethought about the detail of it at an early stage could have provided greater efficiency in assembly, categorisation and presentation of the data received.

Mike Bartram, tCI Fellow

Barry Creasy, tCI Fellow

On behalf of the Consultation Institute

24 May 2023