

Golf clubs are now proactive with sex equality

AGAINST the backdrop of an EU directive on sex discrimination, the NGCAA says it is unfair for press reports to suggest that golf clubs are treating women as 'second class citizens'.

"This outdated stereotype does not reflect reality," says Michael Shaw, national secretary of the NGCAA, which provides legal advice to over 1,200 member clubs.

"The golfing world has taken enormous strides into granting equality for women in recent years. Not only in the professional game, with the introduction of women at the Open but at grassroots level in the thousands of golf clubs across the UK," he says.

Historically, complaints about equality in private member clubs have been centred around voting rights. However, Michael Shaw says the vast majority of UK golf clubs have positively addressed this controversial issue between male and female members:

"The consensus among women golfers today is that they are treated fairly. The view of 'Neanderthals' running the show is not borne out by the views of lady golfers themselves.

"In 2004, the National Golf Clubs Advisory Association, English Golf Union and Ladies Golf Union met David Wright MP at the House of Commons to discuss the issue of sex discrimination. During the meeting, a detailed study was highlighted that revealed females were happy to receive restricted playing access in return for reduced membership fees. It was also accepted that most women prefer to play golf against women rather than men.

"The minority of women that do want full playing rights have been accommodated and any difficulties that have arisen have usually been from an organisational point of view rather than a discriminatory practice. It is an almost impossible task to allow everyone who wants to play in a single-sex golf competition to play on the same day.

"The legitimacy of single sex competitions is supported at all levels and across all sporting bodies. Sufficient cognisance should be taken of this fact not merely from the desire of golfers for this to continue but equally from the organisational difficulties that would follow for sporting clubs if it did not."

The National Golf Clubs Advisory Association provides legal advice to over 1200 member clubs and the number of clubs we deal with that are facing complaints about sex discrimination has dropped dramatically over the last two years.

"Over the years there have been many high profile cases of sex discrimination. Over the last two years however we dealt with just two involving golf clubs.

"There have been at least four attempts at Parliament, in recent years, to resolve the issue of gender equality at all UK private member clubs but the proposals have been defeated by a lack of parliamentary time. In any case, we should beware of a knee jerk reaction and its possible effect on golf clubs. In Australia, where similar legislation was introduced around 15 years ago, female membership at golf clubs fell by 20%.

"It is important that female golfers and their clubs are consulted as any EU directive meanders its way through the UK parliamentary process.

"Golf club committees face a tough task in balancing the competing interests of all the different classes of membership at their clubs. They do a good job and have made real progress."

See www.ngcaa.org.uk