

# Sport and the equality duty

## Facts and figures about women and girls in sport: gender equity and the equality duty

### The place of gender equity in sport

The concept and practice of equity is fundamental in sport, and needs to underpin all thinking in the sports sector.

The Gender Equality Duty, which came into force in April 2007, was the first step to ensuring this happens. It was the biggest change to sex legislation since the 1970s and provides a unique opportunity to achieve equality in sports provision at all levels. It placed the emphasis on public authorities (and other bodies) to positively promote gender equality, whereas previously the onus was on the individual to prove discrimination.

However, the recently announced Equality Bill will supersede the existing Gender Equality Duty. The change in legislation will see the unity of the previously separate public sector equality duties of race, disability and gender to create one *Equality Duty*. As well as bringing these strands together, the new Bill will also see them extended to include age, sexual orientation, religion and gender reassignment.

Under the duty local authorities, schools, colleges and other organisations have to provide disaggregated data on who uses their facilities and take action to redress any imbalance. It is difficult to predict the impact the Duty will have, but its potential to address the gap in male and female participation should not be underestimated. For WSFF this is a major step towards achieving the equality in sports that we have been advocating for many years and we eagerly await to see what it may bring to women and sport.

### What is gender equity?

Equity and equality are often confused. The Equal Opportunities Commission defines equality, in

this context, as: 'having a society where everyone is free from assumptions and discrimination based on factors such as gender, race or disability'. Equity is synonymous with fairness and justice. To be equitable means to be fair, and to be seen to be fair. Equity addresses many forms of discrimination on the basis of race, gender, ability, age, national or ethnic origin, religion and sexual orientation. Equity is not just about treating everyone the same – it may also use positive action initiatives and measures to address existing inequities.

Gender equity is the principle and practice of fair and equitable allocation of resources and opportunities for females and males.

A primary goal of gender equity is to provide all individuals with access and opportunity to take part in a full range of activities: this enables them to benefit from, excel at and fulfil their human potential.

### What does a gender equitable organisation look like?

An organisation which is gender equitable has systems and structures that do not discriminate against women or men. This includes:

- creating opportunities for both women and men to assume leadership roles;
- making sure that committees and decision-making working groups have a balance of women and men;
- using language and images in publications and promotions that represent women and men positively;
- keeping track of gender patterns and trends;



- understanding specific issues facing girls and women in sport and using this information to make decisions; and
- making the workplace and the sporting environment accessible and attractive to women and girls as well as men and boys.

### Why is it an issue in sport?

Women are under-represented at all levels of sport:

- in participation;
- in positions of leadership and coaching;
- in public recognition and media coverage; and
- in employment

This is not because of a lack of interest by women, but reflects a long history of direct and indirect forms of discrimination. It is important for men and women to work together to enhance sport for all.

**What are the benefits of gender equity to a sports organisation?**

Sports organisations have much to gain by committing themselves to gender equity in sport. For example:

- it ensures fuller representation of the population base that sport serves;
- it increases the talent pool of skilled administrators, coaches and officials;
- it demonstrates leadership, innovation and risk-taking (an organisation at the leading edge); and
- it widens the pool of participants: this increases participation rates and, in turn, leads to a wider pool of talent to draw on for success.

**Working for change in sports organisations – how can we achieve gender equity?**

- Build a case for women's sport (that defines the issues in factual terms) with irrefutable evidence and rational arguments for change. *See WSFF's 11 compelling reasons why sport should work with women*
- Communicate why women and girls should have more opportunities to participate and lead in sport.
- Deliver the case to those who can influence change – political leaders, regional decision-makers, chief leisure officers and governing bodies.
- Work with individuals from other organisations committed to gender equity both in and out of sport. This includes working with governing bodies and County Sports Partnerships to help them achieve the Equality Standard for Sport.
- Consult with women and girls so that you understand the barriers that prevent them from participating in or advancing in sport.

**The Equality Duty**

**What is it and why do we need it?**

- The Equality Duty is potentially the most significant change to gender equality legislation in 30 years
- It is targeted at public bodies to promote equality between men and women (and the six other strands) and eliminate unlawful discrimination.
- Compared to previous sex equality legislation, the Equality Duty is a shift in onus from individuals proving discrimination to authorities positively promoting equality.
- The Equality Duty is an opportunity to radically improve the delivery of public services such as healthcare, transport and leisure services.

**What are the implications of the duty on women's sports?**

- Organisations will still be able to run single sex sessions where these are positive action schemes to redress existing inequalities in participation.
- Women participate less, are paid less, receive less funding and experience greater barriers in taking part in sport – the duty will oblige organisations to look at this in detail.
- Councils will be increasingly accountable for their sports and leisure services and will be obliged to report on how they are addressing unequal access between men and women. Authorities will have to produce data on who uses their sporting facilities, split by sex. They will then be obliged to investigate any differences and put into place programmes to address any disparity.
- They will be obliged to publish equality schemes, use information on how policies and practice affect gender equality and implement actions set within the scheme within three years.
- Provision of sports does not need to be identical but must attract the same resources and meet the same standards. For example, schools will not be expected to run football or rugby teams for girls where there is no demand, But if girls demand a rugby team, schools could be expected to provide it.

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**How will the duty change sport?**

**Here are two scenarios showing what impact it might have...**

**Before**

**After**

