

Speech: New Queen's Counsel appointment ceremony speech

It is a pleasure to be here today in Westminster Hall to preside over the formal appointment of all 119 barristers and solicitors to the rank of Queen's Counsel, as well as those being appointed as Honorary Queen's Counsel.

Let me welcome you warmly, the only warmth you will feel for a while. This is the day when your hard-earned achievements are publicly recognised by the Crown and by your peers. It is also a proud day for your long-suffering spouses, parents, children, friends and wider family, who I hope will enjoy the ceremony and importance of this day for you.

Today represents a journey to the pinnacle of your profession. That journey has been more marathon, than sprint, and I congratulate you on lasting the course so far.

The title of Queen's Counsel is a mark of excellence, not just in this country but around the world, where it plays an important role in supporting the attractiveness of English and Welsh legal services more broadly.

Since the eminent jurist, Sir Francis Bacon, who was the first person to be titled King's Counsel in 1604, the title has been sought after both by practitioners and by clients seeking to instruct counsel.

It recognises the depth of expertise and eminence you have in your particular field of law. It is also a mark of distinction in the art of advocacy, in developing and advancing a client's case and getting the best outcome for them.

As you will be well aware, the process for becoming Queen's Counsel is a robust and rigorous one, based on competence and merit. It is important that it is a process open to all suitably qualified advocates – including solicitors.

Given my own background, I was pleased to see that there are solicitor-advocates who are being awarded the title of Queen's Counsel amongst us today.

It's now 21 years since the first solicitor advocates were appointed as Queen's Counsel. One of those appointed in 1997 subsequently served on the Supreme Court. We should recognise and promote talent from whichever branch of the profession it comes.

I am also pleased to note that this year, 64% of female applicants have been recommended for practising QC, and 55% of BME applicants. As the leaders of your profession, you are role models for all aspiring lawyers and I hope you take this responsibility seriously.

This year there are 119 awards of silk. Her Majesty the Queen makes the appointments on the advice of the Lord Chancellor. My predecessors and I would not be able to undertake this role without the valuable advice of an independent selection panel. I am incredibly grateful for the work Sir Alex Allan has done in chairing the panel – and to all its distinguished members; including:

- Wanda Goldwag
- Tony King
- Martin Mann QC
- Edward Nally
- Quinton Quayle
- Dame Janet Smith
- Dr Maggie Semple OBE
- Shaun Smith QC
- Ranjit Sondhi CBE

They continue to provide advice of the highest quality, and run a transparent and open competition which ensures that we can have confidence that appointments have been made fairly and justly on merit.

In addition to those who have been awarded silk, there are also seven awards for Queens Counsel, *honoris causa*. I would like to thank the highly qualified selection panel, chaired by Scott McPherson, a former Director General at the Ministry of Justice and consisting of:

- Amelia Wright
- Professor Peter Alldridge
- Andrew Langdon QC
- Joe Egan
- Lord Justice David Richards

This award is recognition for lawyers who have made a major contribution to the law of England and Wales outside of practice in the courts.

Honorary QCs

I would like to say a few words about each of those who are receiving the title of Honorary Queen's Counsel today.

Professor Michael Bridge is a leading academic and Fellow of the British Academy who has made a major contribution to the law of England and Wales in relation to the sale of goods.

Professor Louise Gullifer has contributed widely through her work in academia and beyond, including as Professor of Commercial Law at Oxford and her work on Security Interests as part of the UK delegation to the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law.

Dr Charles Harpum, who unfortunately is unable to attend today's ceremony, is a barrister and former academic who served as a Law Commissioner and made a major contribution to the law of England and Wales as a significant architect

in the shaping of the Land Registration Act 2002.

Janet Legrand is a pioneer in enhancing the role of women in the law, promoting social mobility, diversity and inclusion within her own firm and the wider profession through the board of PRIME.

Professor Nigel Lowe has done a mixture of international work and family law and is particularly known for his work relating to the Hague Convention.

Professor Nicola Padfield has made a huge contribution in both academia, where she is Professor of Criminal and Penal Justice at Cambridge University, and in the criminal justice system, where her research focuses on sentencing and parole.

Finally, Professor Maurice Sunkin has pioneered an empirical approach to the law and undertaken a number of leading studies of the use, operation and effects of judicial review in England and Wales.

Conclusion

I'd like to warmly congratulate all of you and thank you for your contribution to the law across such a diverse range of disciplines and fields.

The role of Queen's Counsel is not only a mark of quality recognised around the world, it also promotes high standards of advocacy in the legal profession.

All of us here today, and all those who supported your appointment, have shown confidence and belief in you. That's a confidence and belief that I entirely share.

I would like to again thank everyone involved in the process of appointing this year's selection of barristers and solicitors to the rank of Queen's Counsel and Honorary Queen's Counsel.

I would like to congratulate you all again on being appointed Queen's Counsel and wish you well for the future.