

Looking back at 125 years of the Bar Council

23 December marks 100 years since the passage of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act that allowed women to enter the legal profession.

The Government Legal Department has been profiling a few of the incredible women who have left their mark on the legal profession.

Amanda Pinto QC, an expert in international financial wrongdoing and cases raising intricate cross-border questions, was appointed Vice-Chair of the Bar of England & Wales in 2019. She will take over as Chair of the Bar in January 2020. Called to the Bar in 1983, Amanda has carved out a tremendously successful career and acted as Counsel in some of the most high-profile cases in her field, receiving silk in 2006.

She recently gave a speech at the Temple Church to mark 125 years of the Bar Council and highlighted the importance of the early pioneers who made her career possible. With 2019 marking 100 years of women in law, there was plentiful mention of the incredible women who have also left their mark on the legal profession. Amanda reiterated that the Bar Council continues to play a crucially important role “in the delivery of justice in our country”, encapsulating the values of integrity, excellence and justice.

The Bar has changed significantly since 1894, with the Bar Council now representing over 16,500 barristers. Representation at the Bar has greatly improved since 1894, with 50% of entrants now being female. Ivy Williams and Helena Normanton were the first women called to the Bar in 1922, with Amanda remarking that “early pioneers paved the way for more women to come to the Bar and the Bar Council was one of the first professional bodies to have an equality and diversity code.”

Today, however, the proportion of QCs who are female is still around 16% and only about a quarter of High Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court justices are female. This indicates that there is still considerable work to be done to retain excellent female barristers and ensure the vital work they do is valued.

Despite the low representation at senior levels of the Bar, Amanda is encouraged, remarking that “there are grounds for hope that this is changing” and that it is important that the Bar Council takes steps to “support the diversification of the profession, so that the Bar may attract and keep the very best, regardless of race, background or other characteristics, better to reflect the society it serves.”

Amanda reiterated the importance of making sure the Bar is “accessible to those from diverse backgrounds and not just the career of the privileged,” which will consequently make justice more reflective of society. The Bar Council has been an asset to the legal community for 125 years and continues

to uphold its values of integrity, excellence and justice. As the legal community continues to grow and the demands placed on it increase, the Bar Council will do more than ever to ensure that these values are put into practice and are strongly adhered to.

The Government Legal Department employs a number of barristers and solicitors each year, if you should be interested in a career with the government please look at [our careers page](#).