

Queen's Counsel Appointments Ceremony 2020: Lord Chancellor speech

It's a great pleasure for me to be here today to preside over the formal appointment of all those 'taking silk' and receiving the rank of Queen's Counsel, as well as those being awarded the grand Honorary Queen's Counsel. And it is also a great pleasure to welcome you to these august surroundings. As the oldest part of the Palace of Westminster, the hall has stood for the best part of a thousand years. When fire broke out here in 1834 it was decided that efforts should be concentrated on saving the great hall, leaving the rest – including the old Commons and Lords that is – to burn down.

The hall has served many purposes down the years but at the time of the fire it was used mainly as courts of law – housing the Court of King's Bench, the Court of Common Pleas and the Court of Chancery. I'm sure the decision to concentrate on the hall and leave the rest to ruin had nothing to do with the esteem in which lawyers were held over politicians(!).

Today, however is all about esteem. It's about you as professionals at a high point in your career. It is a public recognition by the Crown – of your excellence, of your experience, and your expertise in your particular fields of law.

Steeped in tradition going back centuries, the title of Queen's Counsel has always been a mark of quality. Attaining it sets you apart among your peers and signifies supreme confidence in your abilities as advocates and as lawyers.

From its common law precedents to its independent judiciary, we know the English legal system is admired the world over. Our elite rank of legal professionals, which you are joining today, is a key building block in that reputation for excellence.

I hope it is not too early to suggest that some of you may go on to become judges yourselves – adding your expertise to the bench for the benefit of a system which has given you so much. But that can, of course, come later – this ceremony is about your achievements to date.

I know getting here won't have been easy. Literally as well as metaphorically may I say. As a barrister and a law officer for over 25 years, I know that much of your careers won't have been spent in wig and gown advocating for a client but outside the court, mastering a brief so you can make those appearances before a judge and jury, or any specialist tribunal so effortless.

As I look around the room, not only can I see the new silks nodding along but their partners and families too. You've all collectively made sacrifices so that today could happen and I think it is really fitting that they are here with you.

You will rightly be very proud. I know you will use your new status as an opportunity to enhance your roles as leaders in the law and as role models for the next generation of legal minds. This is something silks have taken very seriously for generations.

I am delighted this year that, on my recommendation as Lord Chancellor with the support of the selection panel, Her Majesty has been pleased to grant letters patent conferring the title of Queen's Counsel on 114 barristers and solicitor-advocates.

The process of application and selection is rightly a gruelling one – both for those desiring the title and those advising on the merits of achieving it. I am grateful to each of you for your dedication to seeking the award and to the panel for their sound and independent advice on awarding it.

There are also 10 awards this year for Queen's Counsel, *Honoris Causa* – to individuals who have made a significant contribution to the law of England and Wales outside practice in the courts.

I want to express my gratitude to the honorary award selection panel, which consisted of:

- Annabel Burns a Director at Ministry of Justice who chaired
- Professor Thom Brooks, the Vice-President of the Society of Legal Scholars
- David Cooper, from the Association of Costs Lawyers
- Carl Creswell, a Director at the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
- Simon Davis, the President of the Law Society
- Stephanie Pagni, the General Counsel for Barclays UK
- Professor Rebecca Probert, the President of the Society of Legal Scholars
- Lady Justice Vivien Rose DBE from the Court of Appeal
- Andrew Walker QC, the former Chair of the Bar Council
- And Amelia Wright, a Deputy Director at the Ministry of Justice

I want to take a few moments to talk about each of the individuals receiving the honorary award but let me first say how pleased I am to see such a diverse list this year. Diversity is, I think, a strength – because it amplifies a wider skillset.

The more diverse our legal thinkers, the better the law becomes.

A strong advocate for inclusion, Elizabeth Gardiner the first woman to hold the position of First Parliamentary Counsel. Under her leadership, the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel has been instrumental in the drafting of recent primary legislation.

Lynda Gibbs is the Dean of the Inns of Court College of Advocacy. She co-authored the national 'Advocacy and Vulnerable' training course, which supports advocates in how to treat vulnerable people in the criminal justice system.

Millicent Grant's commitment to excellence in legal practice, as well as driving diversity and social mobility truly enriches our legal sector. She is the first person of a non-white/minority ethnic background to lead any legal professional membership body in this country.

The work of King's College London's Professor Eva Lomnicka is routinely cited in court and her contributions on consumer credit law have been instrumental in overhauling the system. As a trustee of the Money Advice Trust, she is also committed to supporting those who find themselves in financial difficulties.

Glyn Maddocks, a fellow countryman, is recognised for his expertise, not just in overturning specific wrongful convictions, but in the way they are dealt with as a legal concept; and is a founding trustee of the Centre for Criminal Appeals.

A legal academic noted for her expertise in public child law, Professor Judith Masson's work has not only improved the understanding among legal professionals of care proceedings but has resulted in significant changes to the law.

Professor Clare McGlynn of my alma mater, Durham University, has had a major hand in the development of the law and policy on the regulation of image-based abuse and sexual violence, including the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015.

A former President of the Law Society, Rodger Pannone's contributions to the law – from improving personal injury law to his pioneering work on health and safety legislation – are wide-ranging. He played a key role in securing rights of audience for solicitors.

Professor Jane Stapleton is Master of Christ's College, Cambridge, and a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. She is recognised internationally as an expert on causation and duty of care in the law of obligations. Her work is frequently cited in judgments.

Founder of the InterLaw Diversity Forum, Daniel Winterfeldt is a solicitor at Reed Smith. His commitment to fostering inclusion in the legal sector has seen him work closely with government, regulatory bodies, and law firms, particularly around changing culture.

And that is just a brief mention of their contributions to the law, which I know go so much further. As do those of all the appointees today.

Let me just say in closing how pleased I am to preside over this ancient ceremony. The surroundings here today certainly add something to that sense of tradition. I know you will feel, to coin an old adage, the hand of history on your shoulders as you each now take up your new rank.

The title of Queen's Counsel is not just a mark befitting respect but a signifier of the esteem in which you are held and I wish you every continued success for the future.