



Master Nicola Davies and her fellow convenors

# THE INNS OF COURT ALLIANCE FOR WOMEN

MASTER CLARE NOON

**O**n 8 February our Vice Treasurer, Master Nicola Davies, presided over the launch of a new initiative to encourage and support women in the profession. She gave the welcome speech in the Bingham Room explaining in the opening introduction: 'The word "Alliance" has been chosen to signify the institutional alliance between the Inns of Court and to demonstrate an alliance of purpose.'

Each Inn is represented within the Alliance by a team of women, each with a co-convenor: Master Davies from Gray's Inn, Judge Khatun Sapnara from Middle Temple, Leigh-Ann Mulcahy QC from Inner Temple, and Karen Schuman from Lincoln's Inn (photographed above). From Gray's Inn, the members are Master Shaheed Fatima and Jessica van der Meer in addition to the Vice Treasurer herself. The terms of reference represent a commitment to

- provide a safe forum where issues facing women in the profession can be discussed
- support the Inns' commitment to equality, diversity, inclusion and social mobility
- take an intersectional approach to talks and events to ensure the voices of women facing inequality are heard
- promote initiatives across the four Inns to support access, retention and progression of women in the profession.

The Alliance's first initiative – on 9 March at Middle Temple – was directed to heads of chambers and senior clerks,

with the aim of developing a practical solution to ensure a fairer and more transparent allocation of work.

This new 'alliance' grew out of the Temple Women's Forum, a joint initiative between Middle and Inner Temple, which in turn was a progression from work begun in 2011 by Professor Dawn Oliver QC, when she was Treasurer of Middle Temple.

Master Davies highlighted as a specific area of current concern gender income disparity affecting in particular women from ethnic minorities, whose average income, according to a report by the Bar Standards Board, was 41% of that of white male barristers when comparing the profession as a whole. Apparently, the gender income gap has consistently widened over the last 20 years.

Such disparity, Master Davies pointed out, could lead to insidious consequences. With income being equated with merit, in chambers 'power' tended to rest with the highest earners, which likely made it harder for women to get the breaks they deserved. That could impact on the allocation of work, and research showed how few leading female silks were instructed as leaders in the Supreme Court.

Retention of women at the Bar was another problem, which in turn meant a more limited pool of women barristers from whom many of the judiciary were drawn. It was necessary to provide appropriate support when needed to ensure that women did not leave because the Bar felt too alienating. ■