

LAUNCH OF THE EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

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On 13 February 2024, Gray's Inn hosted the launch of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Statement ('EDI Statement'). The launch took place in the evening in the Hall and was well-attended with students, members and judges present. This marked the official circulation of the EDI Statement as well as a note on being an 'Ally'. The event concluded with a call to action for Gray's Inn members to support the work of the new ED&I Committee.

The Inn was fortunate to hear from a panel of excellent speakers:

- The Treasurer of Gray's Inn, Master Peter Coulson, spoke about his own background from a working class single parent family and the importance of EDI at the Inn. The Treasurer made clear that the EDI Statement was more than aspirational words and would be supported by action led by the ED&I Committee.
- Chair of the ED&I Committee, Master Jasbir Dhillon, is a commercial silk at Brick Court Chambers. He introduced the EDI Statement and explained that it would be supported by an annual Action Plan. Master Jasbir spoke about his own journey to the Bar, being the first person in his family to attend university and the child of immigrants from rural Punjab to England in the 1960s.
- Member of the ED&I Committee, Master Denise Breen-Lawton was one of the first people in her home town, and the first person in her family, to attend university. Her journey to the Bar involved working throughout to be able to support her studies. Denise practises in criminal law and was the first female Head of Chambers at St Paul's Chambers in Leeds and is soon to be the first female silk from her chambers.
- David Karmel Scholar and Lord Bingham Scholar, Shaniqua McKenzie, is a student member of Gray's Inn and of the EDI Committee. Shaniqua explained her journey to the Bar, including her triumphs in the Employment Tribunal. She explained and emphasised her vision that ambitions should have no limit.



Daniel Holt, guest speaker

The guest speaker for the launch event was Daniel Holt, who is the Founding Chair of the Association of Disabled Lawyers, the Chair of Middle Temple's Disability Forum and pupil barrister at 39 Essex Chambers. Daniel provided illuminating guidance on the meaning of EDI, the minimum legal requirements for equality and discrimination, the key issues that are barriers to progress, and his case for the importance of EDI at the Bar. In particular, he emphasised that there is a need for cultural shift to take proactive rather than reactive steps, for example in the area of reasonable adjustments for disabilities. He gave specific examples and recommendations for chambers and for barristers in practice. He has his own website if you would like to take a look (<https://www.danielholt.org>).

Following the panel session, the Under Treasurer asked for volunteers from the student body to join the ED&I Committee and to be Change Makers at the Inn. The formal session was then followed by questions from students and members and then a drinks reception.

The ED&I Committee welcomes further questions and feedback from all members of the Inn on the EDI Statement and looks forward to working constructively with all those at the Inn to achieve the goals set out in the Statement and Action Plan. ■