

## **Open letter**

28 March 2024

To Members of the Garrick Club,

We are delivering this letter to you today to express our concerns about the discriminatory practices of your club in refusing to admit women as equal members. We request that this letter be sent by email to all members of the Garrick Club immediately, without exception.

Discrimination against women is wrong. Discrimination against women by an organisation that includes amongst its members some of the most powerful men in our country, including senior judges and Members of Parliament, is nothing short of scandalous.

While it may be correct to say that members do not bring paperwork to or hold business meetings at your club, it is untenable to deny that your members network and establish relationships that extend into their professional lives while socialising and dining in halls and at tables from which women are excluded. Recruitment from within these networks only perpetuates the discrimination that is fostered in your club. A connection made over dinner or drinks leads to 'unconscious' (and this term is generously used) exclusion of women. Regardless of intent, the outcome is the same. The Garrick Club embodies the old boys' club and maintains sexist inequalities and the male establishment.

Last week, over 100 legal professionals signed an [open letter](#) calling on judges to resign their membership of a male-only club, which is incompatible with principles of justice, fairness, and equality which those who sit on the bench are meant to uphold. Since then, at least four judges have resigned their membership. We attach a copy of the legal open letter for you to carefully consider.

For too long, the Garrick Club has stood as a symbol of exclusivity, a bastion of power maintained by the privileged few- predominantly white men who hold sway over the decisions affecting our society, our political system, our justice system, our media, and arts and culture. Women have been systematically excluded from your corridors of influence and power, though, we note, are permitted in their capacities as cleaners, waiters or guests of men.

Today, we stand outside the Garrick in protest, as we have never been allowed inside on equal terms to men. We are calling for a different tomorrow, one where women are equal to men.

Male-only clubs, like the Garrick, White's and Travellers, serve as stark reminders of entrenched power structures that maintain male privilege and contribute to the marginalisation of women in positions of influence and authority. The Garrick Club is complicit in perpetuating these injustices- a fact that should weigh heavy on the conscience of every member who values fairness and equality.

Many members of the club publicly support diversity and inclusion, some even positioning themselves as feminists (like Benedict Cumberbatch), yet they remain members of

male-only spaces of exclusivity, and power. It strikes us as profoundly hypocritical for any member to purport to be an inclusive advocate when this club's very existence is predicated on the exclusion of women.

Nearly 100 years ago, Virginia Woolf remarked, "how unpleasant it is to be locked out". She remarked on "the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition" on her profession as a writer. The existence of the Garrick Club continues to reflect this very injustice.

It is time for the Garrick Club to unlock its doors and acknowledge the effect of its tradition by committing to a future free from sex discrimination. Women must be welcomed not as interlopers, guests, or staff but as equals and members. Ending the role of men-only clubs in promoting exclusion is not just a matter of fairness; it's essential for building a more just and equitable society for all.

We stand together, not just in support of admitting women to the Garrick Club but in solidarity with all those who have been marginalised and excluded. We strive to change the world for the better, not maintain a status quo. We call for the Garrick Club to lead by example and publicly show a commitment to equality.

The time for change is long overdue.

Thank you.

Apsana Begum MP, Labour Member of Parliament for Poplar and Limehouse

Dr Shola Mos-Shogbamimu, PhD, MBA, LLM, MA, LLB, IAQ, New York Attorney and Solicitor of England and Wales

Professor Helen Pankhurst CBE, feminist campaigner

Patsy Stevenson, Gender Equality Campaigner and Writer

Dr Charlotte Proudman, Barrister, Research Associate at the University of Cambridge, Founder of Right to Equality

Elisabeth Traugott, Barrister

Julia Needham, Crime and Public Law Barrister

Professor Jo Delahunty KC, Barrister, Emeritus Professor of Law Gresham College.

Jenny Beck KC (Hon), Solicitor and Director of Beck Fitzgerald

Dr Ann Olivarius, KC (Hon) OBE, and Founding Partner of McAllister Olivarius

Professor Sara Chandler KC (Hon) Chair of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Law Society of England and Wales

Brie Stevens-Hoare KC, Barrister, Gatehouse Chambers

Kate Brunner KC, Barrister, Albion Chambers

Michael Mansfield KC, Barrister

Leon Kazakos KC, Barrister

Joel Donovan KC, Barrister, Cloisters

Manveet Chhina, Solicitor in Family and Criminal Law

Sophia Ufy Ukor, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Violet Simon

Frances Scott, Founder and Trustee, 50:50 Parliament

Melanie Bridgen, Family Law Solicitor

Carolina Marín Pedreño, Partner and Head of the Children Department at Dawson Cornwell LLP

Emily Bendell, Founder and CEO of Bluebella

Danielle Manson, Barrister, Matrix Chambers

Charlotte Bayati, Barrister

Yaa Dankwa Ampadu-Sackey, Barrister

Mikhil Karnik, Barrister

Hugh Sinclair, M.A. (Oxon) Jurisprudence

Louise Hunt, Solicitor

Peggy Ray, Family Law Solicitor

Diana Jordan, Divorce Consultant

Sarah Clarke, Barrister

Patricia S. Quigley, WS

Jane Heybroek, Barrister

Charlotte Schreurs, Female Rights Activist

Rowan Hull, Campaigner

Susan Fitzgerald, Solicitor and Director of Beck Fitzgerald

Rebecca Pantelli, Solicitor and Director of Beck Fitzgerald

Molly Ashcroft, Solicitor and Director at Beck Fitzgerald

Professor Ann Thompson, Emeritus Professor of English, King's College London

James Presland, Barrister

Jemima Olchawski, CEO Fawcett Society