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The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple
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15 November 2021

Copied to: Middle Temple LGBTQ+ Forum Steering Committee

Dear Master Treasurer,

We are members of the Inn, other barristers, pupil barristers and students. Some of us are LGBTQ+; others of us are allies. We write to express our profound disappointment at the organisation of the inaugural Middle Temple LGBTQ+ Forum annual dinner and discussion on 16 November 2021 and to urge the Inn and the Forum to understand the very real consequences it has for trans members of the legal profession.

When the event was first promoted on 20 October 2021, the discussion was advertised as “The fight to ban gay conversion therapy”. Nancy Kelley, Chief Executive of Stonewall was invited as the guest speaker, with contributions from Robin Allen QC and Kieran Aldred.

The event had been organised as a ‘chance for the LGBTQ+ members, students and Benchers of the Middle Temple – and their Allies, guests, family and friends – to dine together, to learn, to celebrate and to get some glitter on their lapels’. The talk on conversion therapy was to be followed by a reception and dinner. The event had clearly been organised carefully to provide an affirming environment for LGBTQ+ members, as well as an educational one: the dress code stated that while the event was Black Tie preferred, gender rules did not apply and colourful accessories were encouraged. It was clear that the original event as envisaged was reflective of the [values and objectives of the Middle Temple LGBTQ+ Forum](#). Many of us were looking forward to attending an enjoyable and interesting evening – a rare occasion for us to come together in a spirit of pride and solidarity.

That changed when late on 11 November 2021, only a few days before the event, the discussion topic was changed to “Banning Conversion Practices: The Path to Good Law”, now billed with contributions from Robin Allen QC, Jayne Ozanne (Chair of the Ban Conversion Therapy Coalition), Nancy Kelley and Naomi Cunningham. Our concerns arise from the inclusion of the last speaker.

Naomi Cunningham's own statements about trans people speak for themselves. In a [blogpost](#) on the website Legal Feminist from this October, she states that she refuses to refer to trans women as trans women, instead stating she would use the terms 'trans-identifying man' or 'trans-identifying male'. [In September 2021](#), she wrote a blogpost criticising Mridul Wadhwa, a trans woman of colour and pioneering campaigner against sexual violence, referring to her as a 'man' repeatedly and using the pronouns 'he' throughout. Someone who uses demeaning and insulting language about trans women should have no place at a Qualifying Session organised for Middle Temple students. Naomi Cunningham's inclusion in a discussion on conversion therapy is particularly troubling given the need for sensitivity when exploring the topic.

We are also concerned that the last-minute inclusion of Naomi Cunningham was the result of pressure to include someone with a 'critical' perspective on trans inclusion. LGBTQ+ organisers must be free to host discussion events made up of panellists who share a commitment to LGBTQ+ equality, including equality for trans people. They should not come under any pressure to include anti-trans speakers in their events.

The decision sends a damaging message to trans members and prospective members of the Inn that their inclusion is not something they can take for granted but is 'up for debate', even at events that were originally organised to welcome them specifically. Trans people are woefully underrepresented at the Bar and experience significant discrimination in the legal professions. This development undermines important efforts to remove the barriers to trans people's full and equal participation in the law.

This last-minute change has turned an event that was meant to be a celebration of inclusion into a debate between those who support and oppose trans rights.

In light of the above, we call on Middle Temple and the Middle Temple LGBTQ+ Forum to:

- Postpone the Qualifying Session on 16 November,
- Offer full refunds to any participant who no longer wishes to attend, in light of the last-minute changes to the nature of the event,
- Acknowledge and apologise for the distress these developments have caused, particularly to the Inn's trans members,
- Engage with trans members of the Inn to ensure that future events properly reflect the values and objectives of the LGBTQ+ Forum, so that all are welcome.