

King's Counsel appointments ceremony 2026: Lord Chancellor speech

26.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Lord Chancellor's speech at the 2026 King's Counsel appointment ceremony, recognising those who have been formally appointed to the rank of KC and Honorary KC.

Thank you, please take your seats.

It's my very great honour to be here today...

To preside over the formal appointment of all those achieving the rank of King's Counsel...

And to welcome our new Honorary King's Counsels.

To be appointed KC is an extraordinary achievement...

Recognising not only your legal brilliance...

But your diligence, your professionalism and your integrity.

For centuries, the KC title has been a mark of excellence...

A signal, to judges, to clients, and colleagues...

And indeed, to the world...

That those who bear are among the very best of our legal advocates.

So today you will leave here not only with a new title...

A new gown of silk...

And a rather magnificent wig...

You will leave in the knowledge that you have risen to the pinnacle of your profession.

And huge congratulations to you.

And it's not just any field that you've achieved the top of.

Legal practice is not just any profession.

It is one of the great pillars on which our society rests.

The framework that protects our freedoms...

Settles our disputes...

And holds power to account.

It's also the field I chose for myself, before politics chose me.

Studying law at London, and later at Harvard...

Being called to the Bar...

My pupillage at 3 Serjeants' Inn...

And practicing as a lawyer...

Those experiences shaped me.

They shaped how I think, how I argue...

And gave me a fascination with the ways the law itself shapes the world around us...

Not least in the pursuit of social justice.

They also prepared me rather well for politics.

Both professions involve long nights, and even longer documents...

And I have a good sense of the hard graft that has brought you to this hall today.

And there is no more fitting place to celebrate this occasion.

This remarkable building has stood here for more than 900 years.

And during that time, these walls have witnessed some of the most dramatic moments in our legal and constitutional history.

It was here, in the wake of Magna Carta...

That a crucial principle of our justice system took shape.

That "Common pleas shall not follow our court, but shall be held in some fixed place..."

In other words: justice should be rooted, independent, and accessible.

And from that point on, the rule of law took physical form right here...

Under this extraordinary hammerbeam roof.

This hall is where King Henry III took a solemn oath to uphold Magna Carta...

Where many of the most famous trials in our history took place...

King Charles I, proving that no one – not even the king – stands above the law...

William Wallace...

The Gunpowder plotters...

And my own predecessor, Sir Thomas More...

Met his rather grisly fate through legal process in this place.

Thankfully, Lord Chancellors these days face a slightly gentler hazard:

The occasional reshuffle.

And for centuries this hall was the meeting place of the royal law courts.

Rather than the vast open space you see today...

It was once a maze of partitioned courts...

Crowded with judges, lawyers and plaintiffs...

Arguments ringing through the air...

Cases being decided.

For nearly five hundred years, until the Royal Courts of Justice was opened in 1882...

This Hall was the beating heart of English Justice.

And today, it reminds us...

Reminds us of that history....

That the rule of law is not an abstract concept...

But living, breathing,

And you join the ranks of those who carry it forward.

This Hall has also hosted some extraordinary voices on the rule of law, and the values it represents...

So I hope I'm not too much of a disappointment today.

Barrack Obama spoke about how we must hold ourselves up "to a higher standard"...

By living up to the rule of law and due process that we so ardently defend.

President Zelensky praised the United Kingdom's commitment to principle, even in the darkest hours...

For honouring treaties, and ensuring perpetrators cannot act with impunity.

And the late Pope Benedict described our common law tradition as "an inspiration to many across the globe."

Those are the values that echo from this building...

The values you are now the custodians of.

And the values we in government are determined to uphold and promote...

Not least through the English Law Promotion Panel...

Which brings together senior leaders from the legal, academic and business communities...

To champion English law across the world with a clear, and unified voice.

Together, we will make sure our common law tradition continues to be one of our greatest national assets...

One that will flourish – at home and abroad – for generations to come.

Let me now pay tribute to the Honorary KCs being recognised today...

Those who have made an exceptional contribution to our legal system, outside of the courtroom.

Professor Eirik Bjorge's influential scholarship has strengthened the development of English and Welsh public law...

And supported judicial understanding of international legal principles.

Dean Dunham has pioneered accessible alternative dispute resolution...

Developing schemes which handle tens of thousands of complaints each year...

Helping to reduce the pressure on our courts.

Professor Susan Edwards' important work has driven reform of the law on domestic abuse, gender-based violence, and homicide...

Professor Rosie Harding has made a substantial contribution to disability and mental capacity law...

Improving access to justice for disabled people.

Professor James Hathaway has made a huge contribution to asylum jurisprudence...

And shaped judicial interpretation of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Peter Kandler co-founded the UK's first Law Centre and was its first director.

He has transformed access to justice, and inspired the nationwide Law Centres movement.

Her Honour Judge Emma Nott has driven fairness and equality at the Bar...

With important analysis on gender disparities in work allocation and pay...

And Colin Passmore has shaped the modern understanding of privilege...

Through his scholarship, and his leadership in approaches to diversity, social mobility, and responsible business.

Your contributions, of course, extend a great deal further...

And we are all the richer for them.

And so let me come to a close by congratulating all of you again, Kings Counsel Honoris Causa and Pro Meritis.

No speech could do justice to every story represented in this room.

Behind each appointment lies years, or indeed decades, of dedication...

The late nights poring over a brief...

Countless missed occasions...

Cancelled holidays...

Missed birthdays...

Family members wondering if you have quietly moved into your chambers.

Which reminds us that none of these journeys have been taken alone.

So today is a moment to recognise those who have supported you along the way...

Friends and family...

Colleagues and mentors...

The people here with you today...

And many others who have helped you to this point.

Because they have sacrificed...

They have worked hard, too...

And they share in your achievement.

So, take pride in what you have accomplished...

But remember to thank the people who helped you along the way.

And remember to follow their example.

Pay it back with love, support, mentorship, help, and advice.

As one of my predecessors as Lord Chancellor, Sir Francis Bacon, the very first Kings Counsel, observed...

"Every man is a debtor to his profession"...

By which he meant that those who benefit from a profession...

Owe something back to it...

A duty to strengthen it...

To sustain it....

And pass it on stronger than they found it.

I have every confidence that you will do exactly that.

So congratulations once more, to all our new King's Counsels and Honorary King's Counsels.

Thank you very much.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/kings-counsel-appointments-ceremony-2026-lord-chancellor-speech>