

**BARONESS CARR OF WALTON-ON-THE-HILL,  
LADY CHIEF JUSTICE OF ENGLAND AND WALES**

**The Times Law Essay Awards Dinner, 22 April 2026**

1. My Lord Chancellor, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here this evening in the magnificent Guildhall. I am delighted to see so many stalwarts of the legal professions present, as well as many new faces. Thank you to our hosts, One Essex Court, for their generous hospitality this evening, and for the opportunity to celebrate young students and practitioners who will hopefully become the great legal minds of the future. Thank you also to *The Times* for their continued patronage of this essay competition.
2. It is particularly good to be here alongside the Lord Chancellor. We share many values; most commonly acknowledged among them is a deep-seated respect for the rule of law and its moral, democratic and economic value to the country. Less commonly known are our shared interests outside the law, foremost of which is a love of music and singing. There have been enquiries between our private offices of when we will solidify this with a musical duet – but I will promise to spare you that this evening.
3. While our shared enthusiasm for music is clear, we have not yet ventured into detailed conversation about the written word. But for me, the question of “What are you reading at the moment?” is a perennial favourite.
4. And this year is the National Year of Reading. A pastime that I enjoy whenever time permits. The personal and the professional often overlap in this regard – there is no shortage of writing on the law and systems of justice in the literary canon. Some of it is far from positive. Think Dickens’ *Bleak*

*House* and Kafka's *The Trial*. But before I have all the young professionals running for the door in despair, let me offer the antidote of children's literature. In particular its depiction of law enforcement as a friendly face, defending all the good of society.

5. Actually, one of my favourite books when my children were young was Judith Kerr's *Mog the Forgetful Cat*. It encapsulates a childhood belief in our justice system for delivering comeuppance to criminals, calmly and fairly. That, and also the fact that Mog's owners, Mr and Mrs Thomas, offer their captured burglar a cup of tea while awaiting the police. It always warms my heart – achieving peak-Britishness to the point of satire.
6. Many judges are voracious readers. Fiction has a unique power to awaken empathy and situate us in the lives of others. Furthermore, the construction of a novel allows us to carefully plot our way through a set of discoveries. It gives us the power to change our mind and helps us eventually to reach a conclusion – much like the judicial experience on the bench.
7. And away from fiction, essays such as the ones that we are celebrating this evening provide us with context and clarity to comprehend the world in which we work; to understand its history and social norms. There is inspiration to be found in many judicial writings – I still find myself today recommending Lord Bingham's *The Rule of Law*. I recently attended two book launches: Lady Hale's acclaimed *With the Law on Our Side* which provides a top-to-bottom tour of the law and work of the courts and tribunals – and Sir Ross Cranston's new book about judgecraft. My copy of his book is already well-thumbed – it combines historical depth with a lightness of touch in its commentary on

judiciaries from around the world. I also believe that wider readers make better writers, quite handy not just for judgments but also articles and lectures.

8. Alongside the positive, I feel that it is important also to read the work of those who criticise. *The Secret Barrister* was published five years after I was appointed to the High Court. Later that year, Baroness Kennedy published her equally fascinating yet troubling book *Misjustice: How British Law is Failing Women*. And the following year, Alexandra Wilson published her story of race and class at the junior bar with her book, *In Black and White*. Reading books like these allows you to take on board a wide range of voices and to understand perspectives from across the system. They can also help you navigate the challenges – do read Emma Price and Emma-Louise Fenelon’s recently published *Baby at the Bar: Navigating Life as a Barrister After Becoming a Parent*. And to reflect on the extraordinary achievements of those who have come before us – the *First 100 years of Women in Law* by Lucy Acland and Katie Broomfield tells the story of the challenges facing amazing legal female pioneers.
9. So it is with genuine pleasure that I received the essays from our student finalists to read. Their words have provided food for thought and show a sophisticated engagement with a complex conundrum.
10. In the interests of judicial integrity, you will understand that I will not be providing my own answer to the question raised by this year’s topic. But I would like to emphasise the importance of competitions such as this to the future success of our profession. The judiciary is a pipeline profession and so

increased judicial diversity in the future is dependent on increased diversity in feeder roles in chambers and law firms today. It is in the early legal professions, among law students, pupils and trainee solicitors, that we must double down on our efforts to ensure equal opportunity and diversity of background and thought. This, in turn, will broaden the talent pool for judicial roles in the future.

11. Competitions such as this play a vital role in this regard, providing a platform for students and early-career professionals to test their ideas, sharpen their reasoning and express their thoughts outside of education and training.
12. Reasoning, weighing up evidence and making decisions lie at the heart of judgecraft. These are skills that we will continually refine throughout our careers. So how encouraging and invigorating it has been to read the essays of this year's finalists. Their words challenge established thought, prompt reflection and remind us of the enduring value of informed and respectful debate – qualities that lie at the very heart of effective justice.
13. These writers are a testament to the breadth and astuteness of the next generation. I hope that their curiosity, passion and willingness to grapple with complex questions will shape the law positively in the coming years as new talent climbs the ranks and into the judiciary.
14. But I know that we do not yet have the overall winner announced, and I am sure you are all keen to find out. Partly because of the prospect of your essay being published in *The Times*. But also, because I suspect that the divvying up of the prize money might be adding to the suspense. So, I would like to end by congratulating all the finalists this evening for your high standard of

work and thoughtful words. I look forward to seeing where your careers take you to next and the impact that you will undoubtedly make. It gives me great encouragement for the future of the legal professions and, by extension, the vitality and diversity of our judiciary.

15. Thank you.