

LSE accepts gender-segregated event was unlawful

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The London School of Economics (LSE) has accepted that gender segregation at a dinner held by its Student Union's Islamic Society was unlawful after a National Secular Society-backed complaint.

At the LSESU Islamic Society's Annual Dinner in March 2016, [separate tickets were issued to 'brothers' and 'sisters' and participants were divided by a seven foot screen.](#)

LSE students complained to the LSE Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Division and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) with NSS support. They said the event had breached the Equality Act 2010 and was unlawful on the grounds of gender discrimination.

Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns director, welcomed LSE's admission in [The Independent](#): "As a society we are much slower to condemn discrimination when it comes cloaked in religion, and particularly Islam. But gender apartheid is an assault on women's rights and dignity, and should have no place on campuses.

"The students should therefore be commended for holding LSE to account. I hope this episode serves as a warning to all universities that turning a blind eye to such discriminatory practices will not be tolerated."

The students first complained to the EDI. Its chair found there was no clear evidence that the segregation was voluntary, and moreover the Annual Dinner could not be considered an act of worship. Therefore, there were no grounds for exemption from the Equality Act.

In the view of the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#): "To be voluntary, all attendees would need to be at liberty freely to choose where they wished to sit without any direction, whether explicit or merely an implicit expectation. Segregation is *not* voluntary where any one individual feels that their choice is constrained due to a pressure to conform to separate seating arrangements of any form in the venue, regardless of whether they have been explicitly directed or instructed as to where they can sit."

But the students were unsatisfied, as LSE refused to take disciplinary action, and unconvinced that the school was committed to preventing future unlawful gender discrimination. They therefore took their complaint to the OIA.

The OIA determined that the complaint was "partly justified". In its conclusion, it said it was not "persuaded that the School provided evidence to support its position that safeguards had been put in place to prevent gender discrimination prior to the Annual Dinner."

It did not accept the complainants' assertions that LSE had prior knowledge of the gender segregation or that the Islamic Society's members were required to undergo training before the event.

Although LSE will not implement disciplinary action, they have stated that they will provide additional training and monitor events in the future.

The NSS is campaigning to [defend equality and anti-discrimination laws](#) from religious privilege and to hold institutions that enable religious groups to break the law to account.

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