

Top university accepts Islamic Society's gender-segregated event was 'unlawful'

A top UK university has accepted that gender segregation that took place at a gala dinner, which saw women and men separated by a curtain, was unlawful, [Islamic Society held a gala dinner](#) for which students had to buy separate tickets depending on whether they were a "brother" or a "sister".

When they arrived at the event, held at a banqueting hall in central London, there was a large screen separating the men's tables from the women's ones, stopping the attendees from even looking at each other.

The university has now conceded that the annual event is "likely to fall foul of the Equality Act 2010 and be unlawful on the grounds of discrimination by gender due to the segregation".

A letter of complaint submitted by students to the LSE Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Division in May last year claimed the requirement for men and women to sit in separate parts of the room was "discriminatory" on the basis of gender in accordance with the EHRC guidance.

"Students were actively segregated through the ticketing process, as well as the presence of the separation wall," the letter stated. "The gender segregated requirements at the event therefore included direction, instruction and expectation with regards to seating, movement and interaction of attendees. In no way could such requirements be classed as voluntary."

In a formal response to the complaint, seen exclusively by *The Independent*, Carola Frenge, chair of the EDI taskforce, wrote: "The School appreciates your position and accepts that there might have been an obligation on the School to investigate this matter more thoroughly at the outset," it read. "I have therefore conducted an investigation into this matter and accept that there is a likelihood that the Annual Dinner was unlawfully gender segregated."

Ms Frenge found that there was no clear evidence the segregation was voluntary, or that the annual dinner could not be considered an act of worship, and that there were therefore no grounds for exemption from the Equality Act.

The LSE also admitted that they did not take adequate steps to formally investigate whether unlawful discrimination occurred, or adequate steps to prevent the risk of similar unlawful discrimination occurring in the future. Despite this admission, LSE brushed off the concerns that the students had raised, and refused to take pertinent action to ensure that gender segregation would not reoccur.

Given the failure of LSE to act, and perceived attempts by the university to delay the process, the students took the complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Students in Higher Education. The watchdog ruled that the appeal to the complaint was "partly justified",