# David Lammy’s bisexual Pride flags spark planning law controversy at Foreign Office



Foreign Secretary David Lammy's recent decision to display bisexual Pride flags at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has ignited a significant controversy, with accusations that the department may have breached planning regulations. The striking pink, purple, and blue banners were hung during Bisexual Awareness Week in September 2024, marking an important moment of recognition amid a landscape often viewed as lacking visible support for the LGBTQ+ community within official government venues.

The flags, which were originally procured for £285.93 each in 2021 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the end of the ban on LGBT+ individuals serving in the diplomatic service, have been met with both praise and criticism. Supporters see this visible assertion of inclusivity as a vital step in broadening acceptance and recognition. However, detractors, particularly within the Conservative Party, have argued that the display constitutes a breach of local planning laws, as the flags were displayed without the necessary "deemed consent" from planning authorities. According to Shadow Cabinet Office Minister Mike Wood, this oversight not only violates the civil service code but could also lead to penalties of up to £2,500.

Lammy's display of the bisexual flag stands in stark contrast to historical moments of flag flying within the Foreign Office. For instance, in June 2015, former Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond instructed British embassies not to fly the rainbow flag during Pride celebrations, an act that was widely condemned at the time as a setback for the UK's commitment to LGBTQ+ rights. This directive sparked a rift within the government, highlighting differing attitudes towards the role of government in promoting equality and human rights. Matthew Hancock, then Secretary of the Cabinet Office, controversially opted to fly the rainbow flag over his department, underscoring the internal discord regarding LGBTQ+ visibility.

Catherine West, a foreign minister, defended the decision to display the bisexual flags, contending that while officials acknowledged the absence of deemed consent, this is not an infringement on regulations as the flags were displayed on enclosed land. This assertion points to a complex interplay between government policies on inclusivity, the necessary legal frameworks, and the ongoing debates concerning identity politics within the civil service.

Critics have expressed concern that, amidst pressing global political issues, such displays might prioritise "woke virtue-signalling" over substantive diplomatic engagement. Some commentators argue that the use of public funds for these displays reflects an imbalance between domestic LGBTQ+ advocacy and the Foreign Office's primary responsibilities of international diplomacy and conflict resolution. Despite these criticisms, the flags represent a moment of progress for many civil servants who see it as a vital affirmation of the diverse identities within the UK.

As the discussions surrounding the bisexual flags unfold, they serve as a reminder of the continued importance of representation and recognition in government. These measures, while sometimes contentious, highlight the evolving landscape of inclusion within the UK—one that remains under constant scrutiny and debate as the government navigates its responsibilities both at home and abroad.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2059775/david-lammy-foreign-office> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/09/23/david-lammy-bisexual-pride-flags-foreign-office/> - In September 2024, UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy faced criticism for displaying bisexual Pride flags at the Foreign Office during Bisexual Awareness Week. The flags, featuring pink, purple, and blue stripes, were hung in the department's courtyard, marking the only visible recognition of the week among Whitehall government buildings. While some civil servants praised the move as a symbol of inclusivity, critics accused Lammy of 'woke virtue-signalling' and questioned the expenditure of taxpayers' money on such displays. The controversy highlighted differing views on the role of government departments in promoting LGBTQ+ awareness.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/foreign-office-under-fire-after-confirming-it-will-no-longer-fly-rainbow-flag-during-gay-pride-marches-10322861.html> - In June 2015, the Foreign Office, under Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, faced backlash for deciding not to fly the rainbow flag during that year's gay pride marches. This decision marked a departure from the previous year when the flag was displayed over government buildings to support LGBTQ+ rights. Critics expressed disappointment, emphasizing the importance of such symbols in demonstrating commitment to the LGBTQ+ community. The move sparked debates about the Foreign Office's role in promoting inclusivity and human rights.
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/foreign-secretary-tells-embassies-not-to-fly-rainbow-flag-for-gay-pride-10322822.html> - In June 2015, Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond instructed British embassies not to fly the rainbow flag during that year's gay pride celebrations. This directive was a reversal from the previous year when embassies, including those in Paris, Oslo, Tel Aviv, and Santiago, displayed the flag to mark Pride events. The decision drew criticism from LGBTQ+ advocates who viewed it as a setback for the Foreign Office's commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of LGB&T individuals.
5. <https://anglicanmainstream.org/bisexual-pride-flag-is-hung-outside-foreign-office/> - In September 2024, the Foreign Office displayed bisexual Pride flags during Bisexual Awareness Week, leading to criticism from some quarters. The flags, featuring pink, purple, and blue stripes, were hung in the department's courtyard, marking the only visible recognition of the week among Whitehall government buildings. Critics questioned the focus on promoting Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) events amid ongoing global conflicts, suggesting that the Foreign Office should prioritize its diplomatic responsibilities over such displays.
6. <https://www.attitude.co.uk/news/world/pride-flag-flown-from-cabinet-office-despite-foreign-office-ban-285138/> - In June 2015, a division emerged within the UK government regarding the display of the rainbow flag during Pride events. While Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond instructed the Foreign Office and embassies not to fly the flag, Cabinet Office Secretary Matthew Hancock defied this directive by proudly displaying the flag over the Cabinet Office. This act highlighted differing views within the government on the importance of visible support for the LGBTQ+ community during Pride celebrations.
7. <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/06/22/pride-flag-matthew-hancock-philip-hammond_n_7634458.html> - In June 2015, a public disagreement within the UK government occurred over the display of the rainbow flag during Pride events. Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond had instructed the Foreign Office and embassies not to fly the flag, emphasizing that the Union flag should take precedence. In contrast, Cabinet Office Secretary Matthew Hancock publicly defied this directive by flying the rainbow flag over the Cabinet Office, showcasing a commitment to supporting the LGBTQ+ community during Pride celebrations.