# Ministers ban gay and trans pride lanyards to cut civil service spending



Civil servants in the UK will no longer be able to purchase lanyards adorned with the gay and trans pride 'progress flag' as part of a wider initiative aimed at cutting 'wasteful spending' within government departments. This decision, recently confirmed by ministers, forms part of a comprehensive review targeting what is deemed non-essential merchandise, a move that officials argue will direct taxpayers' money towards more critical public services.

The 'progress flag' adds additional stripes to the traditional Pride rainbow flag to represent a broader spectrum of marginalised communities, including transgender individuals and those affected by HIV/AIDS. However, under the newly outlined guidelines from the Cabinet Office, public servants will be prohibited from acquiring any forms of branded merchandise unless essential for official duties, such as diplomatic engagements or international trade promotion. Cabinet Office Minister Georgia Gould reaffirmed that while existing lanyards may still be worn, future purchases will be strictly limited.

The impetus behind this decision reflects a significant governmental push to reduce unnecessary expenditure. Senior minister Pat McFadden articulated that reducing waste allows for greater investment in frontline public services such as education and policing. The recent clampdown also follows an earlier freezing of civil service credit cards, suggesting a systematic effort to analyse and cut back on bureaucratic costs across the board.

The ban on rainbow lanyards is indicative of a broader controversy surrounding the portrayal of political neutrality within the Civil Service. In May, Esther McVey, the Minister for Common Sense, had initially announced this ban as part of a strategy to eliminate perceived political statements in the workplace, further fuelling discussions around the appropriate expression of identity in civil service roles. This has led to mixed reactions, with some cabinet members, including Defence Secretary Grant Shapps, expressing personal indifference towards the lanyards while underscoring the necessity for civil servants to concentrate on their primary responsibilities.

Opposition leaders have seized upon this government focus, with Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer labelling the policy a 'war against lanyards'. He contended that such controversies detract from the more pressing issues plaguing the nation, such as the state of the prison system. His comments highlight a growing sentiment that governmental efforts are misplaced, particularly in the context of significant social and economic challenges faced by the public.

Moreover, contrasting policies across government departments have sparked discussions on the consistency of approaches regarding symbols of support for the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, it has been noted that Border Force personnel are permitted to wear rainbow epaulettes, raising questions about disparate policies within public sector roles concerning political symbols.

This evolving narrative suggests that as the government grapples with the implications of its spending cuts and the quest for political neutrality in civil service, the dialogue surrounding identity, inclusion, and expenditure will continue to provoke debate and dissent.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749911/Ministers-ban-civil-servants-gay-trans-pride-progress-flag-lanyards.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/05/14/lgbt-rainbow-lanyards-esther-mcvey-civil-service-guidance/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749911/Ministers-ban-civil-servants-gay-trans-pride-progress-flag-lanyards.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/05/13/esther-mcvey-pledges-to-ban-rainbow-lanyards-civil-service/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/08/border-force-staff-lgbt-pride-rainbow-epaulettes-braverman/), [[6]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/culture-war-rainbow-lanyard-ban-estger-mcvey-b2544061.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2024-05-15/the-war-against-lanyards-starmer-mocks-pm-over-ban-on-rainbow-lanyards), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/esther-mcvey-grant-shapps-civil-servants-rainbow-lanyards-common-sense-b1157556.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749911/Ministers-ban-civil-servants-gay-trans-pride-progress-flag-lanyards.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/05/14/lgbt-rainbow-lanyards-esther-mcvey-civil-service-guidance/> - In May 2024, Esther McVey, the Minister for Common Sense, announced a ban on rainbow lanyards in the Civil Service, urging civil servants to wear standardised lanyards to avoid expressing political views through accessories. However, subsequent Cabinet Office guidance did not specifically reference lanyards, focusing instead on maintaining political impartiality within the Civil Service. This led to confusion and debate over the implementation of the ban, with some ministers, like Defence Secretary Grant Shapps, expressing personal indifference to the lanyards but emphasising the importance of civil servants focusing on their primary duties.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/2024-05-15/the-war-against-lanyards-starmer-mocks-pm-over-ban-on-rainbow-lanyards> - Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer criticised Prime Minister Rishi Sunak over the government's focus on banning rainbow lanyards in the Civil Service, labelling it a 'war against lanyards'. He argued that the government should prioritise more pressing issues, such as the state of the prison system, rather than focusing on the colour of civil servants' lanyards. This criticism highlights the political debate surrounding the ban and its implications for civil service impartiality and expression.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/05/13/esther-mcvey-pledges-to-ban-rainbow-lanyards-civil-service/> - Esther McVey, the Minister for Common Sense, announced plans to ban rainbow lanyards in the Civil Service, stating that civil servants should not express political views through accessories like lanyards. She advocated for a standardised design to reflect unity within the government. This move is part of a broader crackdown on perceived 'woke' state spending and aims to prevent the 'inappropriate backdoor politicisation' of the Civil Service.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/08/border-force-staff-lgbt-pride-rainbow-epaulettes-braverman/> - In October 2023, it was revealed that Border Force staff are permitted to wear rainbow epaulettes on their uniforms to celebrate Pride. This policy allows immigration enforcement and Border Force guards to voluntarily display the rainbow symbol, highlighting a contrast in the treatment of Pride symbols within different branches of the UK government. The decision has sparked discussions about consistency in policies regarding political symbols in the public sector.
6. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/culture-war-rainbow-lanyard-ban-estger-mcvey-b2544061.html> - Esther McVey announced a ban on rainbow-coloured and other 'random' lanyards in the Civil Service as part of a new series of measures for a Tory 'war on woke'. She indicated a set of measures related to the so-called 'culture wars', including ending contracts with organisations like Stonewall. McVey stated that civil servants should wear 'standard design' lanyards to reflect unity within the government and prevent the expression of political views through accessories.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/esther-mcvey-grant-shapps-civil-servants-rainbow-lanyards-common-sense-b1157556.html> - Defence Secretary Grant Shapps distanced himself from Esther McVey's call to ban 'political' lanyards in Whitehall. While McVey advocated for standardised lanyards to prevent civil servants from expressing political views through accessories, Shapps expressed personal indifference to the lanyards, emphasising the importance of civil servants focusing on their primary duties. This highlights differing perspectives within the Cabinet on the issue of rainbow lanyards and civil service impartiality.