# David Lammy criticised over bisexual flags at FCDO amid planning permission row



The Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, is facing significant backlash over the decision to display bisexual flags at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) during Bisexual Awareness Week. The brightly coloured flags—emblazoned in pink, purple, and blue—were hung prominently in the courtyard of the iconic Westminster building, igniting accusations of unlawful behaviour. Critics, particularly from the Conservative party, have charged that the FCDO failed to secure essential planning permission for the display, raising concerns about potential legal breaches.

This controversy underscores the rifts surrounding the new Labour government's approach to identity politics. The flags, purchased in 2021 for nearly £300 each to mark the 30th anniversary of lifting the ban on LGBTQ+ individuals in the diplomatic service, were intended to send a message of inclusivity. However, Conservative MP Mike Wood has condemned the display as a violation of both ministerial and civil service codes, alleging that the department “intentionally broke planning law.” He noted that such a breach could result in a fine of up to £2,500. Wood's correspondence with the FCDO reflects broader apprehensions about what he labels a divisive embrace of identity politics within government circles.

In a bid to defend their actions, Foreign Minister Catherine West pointed out that officials were mindful of the flag's lack of "deemed consent" but argued that no approval was required for flags displayed in enclosed spaces. This justification highlights a troubling trend within government departments, where symbolic gestures often eclipse the pressing need for genuine policy reform.

Historical context lends weight to this debate. In 2015, a notable divide within the government emerged when the Cabinet Office flew the rainbow flag for Pride celebrations while the FCDO maintained a longstanding prohibition against such displays, prompting criticism from LGBTQ+ advocacy groups. Additionally, past incidents, such as the 2005 attempt by Westminster City Council to ban rainbow flags in Soho, illustrate the prolonged struggles for representation and acceptance in British society.

While some view Lammy’s flag display as a progressive step toward inclusivity, many detractors see it as a superficial and populist gesture. Critics, frustrated by what they characterize as "woke virtue-signalling," argue that the government ought to shift its focus away from symbolic representations towards concrete policy initiatives that foster real advancements in LGBTQ+ rights. This ongoing dialogue is critical, exposing the complexities surrounding representation and the government's responsibility to advocate effectively for all minority groups.

As Lammy navigates this politically charged environment, the FCDO's actions could serve as a barometer for the new government's commitment to LGBTQ+ rights, revealing not only the measures taken but also the significant challenges that remain in achieving true equality for all.

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, 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 courtyard of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's historic headquarters in Westminster. While some praised the move as a symbol of inclusivity, others accused Lammy of 'woke virtue-signalling.' The Foreign Office defended the decision, emphasizing its commitment to diversity and acceptance both domestically and internationally.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jun/04/localgovernment.gayrights> - In 2005, Westminster City Council banned the display of rainbow flags in Soho, London's gay district, after refusing planning permission for a shop to fly the flag. The decision sparked outrage within the LGBTQ+ community and led to a review of planning policies. Critics, including then-Mayor Ken Livingstone, condemned the ban as deeply offensive and discriminatory, highlighting the flag's significance as a symbol of unity and pride for the community.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/22/cabinet-office-fco-flag-lgbt-pride-london> - In June 2015, a division emerged between UK government departments regarding the flying of the rainbow flag during Pride celebrations. Cabinet Office Minister Matthew Hancock announced the flag would be flown over the Cabinet Office to mark Pride, while Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond refused to allow the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to do the same, citing longstanding policy. This decision drew criticism from LGBTQ+ rights groups and highlighted differing approaches within the government to supporting the community.
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