

Press release: FCO dedicates room in celebration of its LGBT+ staff and their contribution to the department.

The head of the Diplomatic Service, Sir Simon McDonald, has officially opened the 'Watkins Room', demonstrating the FCO's recognition of the invaluable work of LGBT+ staff and coincides with the 20th anniversary of the founding of FLAGG, the department's LGBT+ staff association.

Sir Simon McDonald, the FCO's Permanent Under-Secretary and Head of HM Diplomatic Service said:

The Watkins Room honours the contribution and commitment of Graeme and all LGBT+ members of staff, past, present and future, to the Diplomatic Service.

This includes recognising the hard work of those colleagues who in the past may not have been able to be open about their identity at work. This month, we also mark the 20th anniversary of the FCO's LGBT+ Staff association, FLAGG, which Graeme co-founded. Since then, the FCO has made important progress to become a more supportive environment for LGBT+ diplomats and continues to work to ensure that our staff fully represent and champion the diversity of the UK today.

Jake Beesley and Lucy Monaghan, the co-chairs of FLAGG, said:

This marks a day of celebration for LGBT+ rights within the FCO, shining a spotlight on how far we've come since our staff association's founders, including Graeme, took a brave step to bring things up to date. We're proud to lead a community of LGBT+ staff, and straight allies, who continue this work today and who make the FCO a champion for LGBT+ rights, at home and overseas.

The Watkins Room is named after Graeme Watkins, diplomat and co-founder of FLAGG. Graeme was born in 1961 and joined the FCO in 1979, spending time in London, UKREP, Singapore and Managua. Sadly, he died in 2000. As a gay man working at the FCO, Graeme was subject to the bar on homosexuality which forbade openly gay men and lesbians from serving as diplomats until 1991.

As co-founder of FLAGG, Graeme left an important legacy to LGBT+ diplomats. His partner, friends and family were present at the opening of the 'Watkins Room' on 1 November to celebrate his contribution to the beginning of a campaign that has led to important changes within the FCO.

Today, FLAGG is a highly active staff association which works closely with the FC0 to champion the contribution of LGBT+ staff to UK diplomatic work overseas, including promotion of LGBT+ rights overseas. In the past year, a range of events have showcased this work, from the launch of a report into the history of homosexuality in the FC0 attended by Sir John Major (July 2017), to the month-long celebration of its 20th anniversary now underway.

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