

Press release: New Foreign Office booklet published on its historic ban on homosexuality

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has today published a new booklet which for the first time provides insight into one of the most controversial parts of its history – the ban on diplomats being homosexual which was only lifted in 1991.

The booklet reveals the human cost of the ban, detailing specific cases of individuals whose lives – professionally and personally – suffered. Based on recently discovered archive files, it includes the various historical definitions of “acceptable” and “unacceptable” homosexuality circulating among British diplomats; the pressure from campaign groups and the press on the Foreign Office to alter its policy; and the lengths to which officials went to identify and remove anyone suspected of defying the ban. The foreword has been written by Sir Stephen Wall, a former British Ambassador who concealed his homosexuality for his entire diplomatic career.

It also demonstrates how times have changed. Today the Foreign Office takes a prominent role in promoting equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people around the world and since 2014, British embassies and consulates have held marriages for over 400 British same sex couples in countries where such marriages are not recognised. The Foreign Office takes part in Pride celebrations around the world and there is a very active staff association (FLAGG). The Afterword to the booklet is written by John Kittmer, an openly gay diplomat and former British Ambassador to Greece.

By highlighting these contrasting times, the Foreign Office hopes to use its own experience to show how attitudes can change and use this to support the work of British diplomats around the world to promote tolerance and end discrimination.

James Southern of FCO Historians who wrote the publication said:

If we are to make today’s FCO a tolerant and open institution, then it is vital we understand its past. I hope this publication and event go some way to help all of us realise that we have a shared history and a shared responsibility to shape the present.

Simon McDonald, Head of the British Diplomatic Service said:

I am proud to lead an organisation with a diverse workforce which stands up for people persecuted around the world because of their sexuality. But it’s important we don’t hide the past and are honest about our mistakes. We changed our attitude to homosexuality, and

now set an example for others.

Lucy Monaghan of the Foreign Office's network for LGBT Staff, FLAGG, said:

This report shines a light on the history of the sexuality bar in the FCO and the significant struggles many LGBT officers experienced. We hope it will enable the FCO to learn from its history and continue to stand up for LGBT rights within the FCO and across the world.

The report is available online [here](#)

Further Information:

Foreign Office staff who declare themselves as LGBT now represent the UK all around the world and at all grades. We have openly gay ambassadors in countries including Ukraine (Judith Gough), Israel (David Quarrey) and Thailand (Brian Davison).

Further information on the FCO Historians and their publications can be found [here](#) or on Twitter [@FCOHistorians](#).

FLAGG tweet the latest news about the FCO's work to promote LGBT equality on twitter [@FCOflagg](#)