

# [FCDO apologises for historic ban on LGBT staff](#)

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has apologised for the historic ban on LGBT people working in the Diplomatic Service, which was lifted in July 1991.

In a message to staff, Sir Philip Barton, Permanent Under-Secretary at the FCDO and Head of the Diplomatic Service, said:

The ban was in place because there was a perception that LGBT people were more susceptible than their straight counterparts to blackmail and, therefore, that they posed a security risk.

Because of this misguided view, people's careers were ended, cut short, or stopped before they could even begin.

And the diplomatic service undoubtedly deprived itself of some of the UK's brightest and best talent.

I want to apologise publicly for the ban and the impact it had on our LGBT staff and their loved ones, both here in the UK and abroad.

Sir Philip noted the progress made by the FCDO as a diverse and inclusive employer in the 30 years since the end of the ban, and the work the UK does to champion LGBT rights internationally.

He said:

In the 30 years since the ban was lifted, the FCDO has made great progress in becoming a proud and inclusive employer of LGBT people, and a champion for LGBT rights around the world.

I pay tribute to all our LGBT staff – past and present – who helped secure change within the Diplomatic Service, while representing their country with professionalism and dedication.

I thank them for the contributions they have made, and continue to make.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

I am grateful to the UK's LGBT diplomats, past and present, who so brilliantly represent our country and promote our values around the world.

As co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition, we are working with 41 partner countries to tackle discriminatory laws and prejudice globally.

The UK champions LGBT rights because we believe freedom and tolerance are a source of strength in communities at home and abroad.

The announcement comes as the UK prepares to co-host a conference of the intergovernmental [Equal Rights Coalition](#) (ERC) on 6-7 July. The ERC is a group of 42 countries that are committed to the protection and promotion of the rights of LGBTI people.

The conference will launch a new five-year strategy aimed at increasing international cooperation and action on LGBTI rights. It will bring together ministers from the 42 ERC countries, representatives from civil society organisations, and participants from international organisations including the United Nations and World Bank.

The ERC conference will be an important milestone ahead of a UK-hosted international LGBT rights event next year.

[‘Safe To be Me: A Global Equality Conference’](#) will take place on 27-29 June 2022, which coincides with the 50th anniversary of the first official London Pride marches.

It will focus on making progress on legislative reform, tackling violence and discrimination, and ensuring equal access to public services for LGBT people.

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## [UN Human Rights Council 47: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Belarus](#)

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## More support for victims of domestic abuse at risk of homelessness

From today (5 July 2021) victims who are homeless due to domestic abuse will be prioritised for accommodation from their council.

Under the government's landmark [Domestic Abuse Act](#) councils will have to find accommodation for people made homeless through domestic abuse, helping to ensure victims do not remain with their abuser for fear of not having a roof over their head.

Previously, victims had to be assessed as being 'vulnerable' as a result of domestic abuse to be identified as having a priority need.

Under the new legislation, domestic abuse will be a standalone reason to qualify as needing this support.

This is one of the first of many measures to support victims and their children included in the Domestic Abuse Act to come into effect.

Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, Eddie Hughes MP said:

Domestic abuse is a heinous crime and it is a tragedy that some victims remain with their abusers for fear of not having a roof over their head.

Today's change will mean all councils must find accommodation for victims who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse – ensuring they have a safe space to rebuild their lives.

This is part of the government's wide-ranging programme of support for domestic abuse victims under the landmark Domestic Abuse Act.

Councils have been allocated £1.5 million this year to meet the changes – on top of £310 million that has been delivered through the Homelessness Prevention Grant so that councils can support those at risk of homelessness, including victims of domestic abuse.

Under the Domestic Abuse Act, councils will also have a new duty to help victims and their children access life-saving support in safe accommodation – backed by £125 million funding for 2021/22. Councils were provided with the funding in April so that they can start to fulfil those functions ahead of this duty coming into force later this year.

The government has taken action to help the most vulnerable in society during the pandemic, with an unprecedented £76 million pledged in May 2020 which ensured vital services including refuges, helplines and counselling remained accessible.

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# Artificial Intelligence used on Army operation for the first time

News story

The British Army has used Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the first time during Exercise Spring Storm, as part of Operation Cabrit in Estonia.



Soldiers from the 20th Armoured Infantry Brigade used an AI engine which provides information on the surrounding environment and terrain.

Through the development of significant automation and smart analytics, the engine is able to rapidly cut through masses of complex data. Providing efficient information regarding the environment and terrain, it enables the Army to plan its appropriate activity and outputs.

**The Army's Director of Information, Major General John Cole said:**

The deployment was a first of its kind for the Army. It built on close collaboration between the MOD and industry partners that developed AI specifically designed for the way the Army is trained to operate.

The lessons this has provided are considerable, not just in terms of our support to deployed forces, but more broadly in how we inform

Defence's digital transformation agenda and the best practices we must adopt to integrate and exploit leading-edge technologies.

This AI capability, which can be hosted in the cloud or operate in independent mode, saved significant time and effort, providing soldiers with instant planning support and enhancing command and control processes.

Announced by the Prime Minister last November, Defence has received an increase in funding of over £24 billion across the next four years, focusing on the ability to adapt to meet future threats. Further outlined in the Defence Command Paper, the MOD intends to invest £6.6 billion over the next four years in defence research and development, focusing on emerging technologies in artificial intelligence, AI-enabled autonomous systems, cyber, space and directed energy systems.

**20th Armoured Infantry Brigade and user of the AI, Major James Mcevoy said:**

This was a fantastic opportunity to use a new and innovative piece of technology in a deployed environment. The kit was shown to outperform our expectations and has clear applications for improving our level of analysis and speed at which we conduct our planning. I'm greatly looking forward to further opportunities to work with this.

In future, the UK armed forces will increasingly use AI to predict adversaries' behaviour, perform reconnaissance and relay real-time intelligence from the battlefield.

During the annual large-scale NATO exercise, soldiers from France, Denmark, Belgium, Estonia and the UK used the technology whilst carrying out live-fire drills.

Operation Cabrit is the British Army's deployment to Estonia where British troops are leading a multinational battlegroup as part of the enhanced

Forward Presence.

Artificial Intelligence has already been incorporated in a number of key military initiatives, including the Future Combat Air System, and is the focus of several innovative funding programmes through the Defence and Security Accelerator.

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## [Forestry Commission acts on bark beetle tree pest](#)

Woodland managers, land owners, the forest industry and tree nurseries are being urged to remain vigilant after several new breeding populations of the larger eight-toothed European spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) were identified in Kent and East Sussex.

The UK Chief Plant Health Officer confirmed two breeding populations in two woodlands in Kent on 25 June and 1 July following routine Forestry Commission plant health surveillance activities. On 9 July, three further outbreaks were confirmed, also in Kent and East Sussex. Forestry Commission, Forest Research and the Animal and Plant Health Agency will continue surveillance in the local areas, and the Forestry Commission are overseeing the required eradication measures.

Following a finding of the beetle in woodland in Kent in 2018, a demarcated area, enforced by the Plant Health (*Ips typographus*) (England) Order 2019, remains in place covering parts of Kent and East Sussex. Within this area, additional movement restrictions apply on conifer material capable of spreading the pest. Given the recent findings, the boundary of this demarcated area will be extended to help prevent the accidental movement of this pest.

**Nicola Spence, the UK Chief Plant Health Officer, said:**

Several outbreaks of the eight-toothed spruce bark beetle in areas of woodland in Kent and East Sussex have been confirmed. This beetle poses no threat to human health, but can have a serious impact on spruce trees species and the forestry industry.

We are taking swift and robust action to limit the spread of the outbreaks as part of our well-established biosecurity protocol used for tree pests and diseases, and legislation is in place that restricts the movement of spruce trees in the area.

I encourage anyone who suspects a sighting of the bark beetle to report these to the Forestry Commission through the Tree Alert portal.

Enhanced plant health surveillance within the area this year has intercepted a number of bark beetles through the wider environment trapping network, most likely due to natural dispersal of the pest from the continent. As a result, the Forestry Commission and its partners are increasing their surveillance and management activity in the area during the next few weeks.

The beetle does not affect human health but can be a serious and destructive pest of the spruce tree species across Europe, although it generally prefers weakened or damaged trees.

Spruce Christmas trees are considered to be at low risk to *Ips typographus* as the majority sold will be healthy trees, whereas *Ips typographus* prefers dying and stressed spruce trees. However precautions have been put in place in the demarcated area around the *Ips* outbreak sites in South East England for spruce Christmas trees 3 metres in height or more. If you trade in Christmas trees please read the following information.

### **Moving spruce Christmas trees grown within the demarcated area**

Movement of spruce Christmas trees over 3 metres in height must be authorised by a Forestry Commission Plant Health Inspector. The demarcated area has expanded this year, please [check the latest map](#).

The material will be subject to inspection before dispatch and its movement must adhere to conditions set out in an authorisation letter provided by a Forestry Commission Plant Health Inspector. If you grow Christmas trees over 3 metres in the demarcated area, please contact [plant.health@forestrycommission.gov.uk](mailto:plant.health@forestrycommission.gov.uk).

### **Moving Christmas trees grown outside of the demarcated area**

Outside the demarcated area, you must use a plant passport if you want to move any Christmas trees over 3 metres in height within Great Britain. This relates to spruce and non-spruce varieties and includes foliage taken from conifer trees that is over 3 metres tall.

You need be registered and authorised with the Forestry Commission if you want to use plant passports. For more information, visit the [GOV.UK guidance page](#).

Members of the public can read [further information on tree pests and diseases, and how to identify them](#).