

## HMRC Interim Chief Executive appointment confirmed

We are pleased to confirm today, 1 October, that current Deputy Chief Executive [Jim Harra](#) has been confirmed as HMRC's Interim Chief Executive with immediate effect.

Jim will remain as Interim Chief Executive until a permanent appointment is made, and has also been appointed Interim Accounting Officer.

Having [announced his departure in July 2019](#), Sir Jonathan Thompson officially left HMRC on Monday 30 September to take up a new role as Chief Executive of the Financial Reporting Council.

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## Brexit readiness fund extended to help businesses to prepare

- Up to an additional £5 million is being made available to support trade associations and other business organisations in helping businesses prepare for Brexit
- funds will support business representative organisations in working with businesses across the UK to understand the steps they should now take to be ready for 31 October 2019
- business organisations will have extra time to apply for funding

Additional funding is being made available to business organisations and trade associations throughout the UK, to support events, training and the production of advice packs to assist businesses in making sure they are fully prepared for Brexit on 31 October 2019.

Up to an extra £5 million is being made available through the Business Readiness Fund – taking the total up to £15 million.

The deadline for applications is being extended by a week, to Monday 7 October.

Activities funded by the grants must be open to both members and non-members, and to businesses large and small preparing for Brexit on 31 October. This will ensure all businesses will benefit and can be reassured that they are fully ready, from major British producers to the smallest tech startups and entrepreneurs. There will be no barriers, such as affordability of membership.

Applications for grants are being administered through [a dedicated website](#). Funding will have to be used on activities to be completed ahead of 31 October 2019 in order to ensure they are focused on Brexit preparations and that our businesses are fully prepared for Brexit day.

The fund will be open to business organisations, trade associations, chambers of commerce, chartered institutes and other professional membership bodies with a significant membership.

Applications are invited for practical advice and support, including (but not limited to): advice packs; information campaigns; webinars; podcasts; events or training workshops.

Activities supported by the fund must:

- be delivered in their entirety by 31 October 2019
- be additional to those activities already in delivery or planned to be delivered
- be made available to all businesses in the sector or geographical area and cannot be restricted to an organisation's members or subscribers
- be free (non-chargeable) to businesses
- not create a competitive advantage to certain businesses
- proposed initiatives will be required to deliver their intended impact by 31 October 2019, and this will be subject to government scrutiny

The funding forms part of the £108 million recently announced by HM Treasury to promote and support businesses in ensuring they are ready for Brexit, including a national programme of business readiness and helping exporters to prepare for, and capitalise on, new opportunities.

The minimum bid size remains £25,000, with consortia welcome to apply.

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## [New British Ambassador presents his credentials to the President of Lithuania](#)

Earlier today, Mr Brian Olley presented his credentials as Her Majesty's Ambassador (HMA) to the Republic of Lithuania to His Excellency the President of Lithuania, Mr Gitanas Nausėda.

After the ceremony, the Ambassador said:

I am hugely excited and honoured to be starting my tenure in Lithuania. I look forward to strengthening still further the United

Kingdom's links with Lithuania across a wide range of issues including in cultural, economic, political and defence areas.

H.E Brian Olley joined the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 2002. Prior to his arrival in Lithuania he was a Director in Lloyds Commercial Bank in the City of London from 2017 to 2019. He was previously the British High Commissioner to Cameroon and non-resident British Ambassador to Chad, Gabon, Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea from 2013 to 2017.

His FCO career has covered a wide range of roles including working in New York at the United Nations, Afghanistan, Cyprus and Finland. Mr Olley started his career in Her Majesty's Forces where he served in Hong Kong, Nepal, Germany, Canada and the UK.

When presenting his Letters of Credence to His Excellency the President, the Ambassador reaffirmed the UK's unwavering friendship and support for Lithuania.

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## **Statement by the Foreign Secretary on Hong Kong**

Whilst there is no excuse for violence, the use of live ammunition is disproportionate, and only risks inflaming the situation.

This incident underlines the need for a constructive dialogue to address the legitimate concerns of the people of Hong Kong. We need to see restraint and a de-escalation from both protestors and the Hong Kong authorities.

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## **Opening of the Legal Year 2019: Robert Buckland QC speech**

Having attended many of these occasions, I am keenly aware of the imperative of being brief.

With that in mind and in the spirit of Mark Twain's observation that 'a good lawyer knows the law; but a clever one takes the judge to lunch', I don't intend to keep you too long from yours.

These are challenging and highly-charged times, but today allows for a brief pause for reflection on the year just past and a look ahead to the coming year.

As ever, you have discharged your duties with great diligence and dignity. The individual cases over which you preside at all levels are invariably complex and contentious in their own right and require immense intellect, impartiality and integrity.

I am in no doubt that the judiciary and all those who work in and support our legal sector lead the world in demonstrating those qualities.

Judges must be able to act without fear or favour in considering, as you rightly do, questions of law. I want to reaffirm my commitment to you, as Lord Chancellor, to defend your independence and uphold the rule of law.

I also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to, and recognise the work of judges across the jurisdictions of the United Kingdom, in Scotland and Northern Ireland and here in England and Wales. Collectively, they are a huge asset to this country as a whole.

Finally, in reflecting on the legal year, I'd like to thank Sir Brian Leveson who retired as President of the Queen's Bench Division in July this year and welcome Dame Victoria Sharp.

And as we mark the 10th anniversary of the Supreme Court this year, I want to thank Lady Hale, who is retiring as President in January, for her incisive and inspiring leadership and for her promotion of diversity. I look forward to welcoming Lord Reed in the new year.

With that, thank you all again, and please enjoy the lunch.