

# Press release: British Embassy Bangkok moves to a new home for the 21st century

Diplomats and consular staff at the UK Embassy in Bangkok will move to new premises by 2019, following the sale of the existing site to a joint-venture consortium of Hongkong Land, a member of the Jardine Matheson Group, and Central Group for over £420 million.

This is the biggest land deal in Thai history and the FC0's biggest ever sale. The proceeds will be reinvested in the FC0's overseas estate and will fund 30-40 modernisation projects around the world that are necessary for security or health and safety reasons.

The new embassy building will be based in the AIA Sathorn Tower in the central business district from where diplomats will continue to promote UK interests in Thailand, a key partner on security and prosperity, as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and wider region.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

Britain is a leading player on the global stage and I'm determined to ensure that our diplomats have all the necessary tools to do their job effectively. This includes working in modern, safe, fit for purpose premises not just in Bangkok but around the world.

Our workforce in Bangkok will be moving into a state-of-the-art premises by 2019 and this can only enhance our trade links and bilateral relations in Thailand and throughout the region.

Simon McDonald, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office said:

In a tight fiscal environment, it is right that we take tough decisions to ensure that the UK can maintain a global presence while getting the best value for taxpayers.

This deal will ensure that we have a modern, state of the art premises in Bangkok, confirming our long-term commitment to our relationship with Thailand, while releasing much-needed funds to modernise other embassies around the world, including in Cairo, New Delhi and Washington.

The sale is part of the FCO's continual review of its global estate, which is designed to ensure the maintenance of a world-class platform from which to promote UK interests, and also deliver value to the British taxpayer.

The existing embassy building, which dated from the 1920s, required a significant upgrade and refurbishment to make it fit-for-purpose for a modern working environment, with large parts of the embassy building no longer usable.

After exploring all the options for the Bangkok estate, and conducting an independent valuation of the site, the decision was taken to sell the compound to the joint-venture consortium of Hongkong Land, a member of the Jardine Matheson Group, and Central Group following an open competition.

The new embassy will reaffirm our long-term commitment to our relationship with Thailand – a key partner for the UK's security and prosperity interests and a leading ASEAN nation.

We are also strengthening our trade links through the new the Thai-UK Business Leadership Council, and this is complemented by the strong collaboration on science and innovation through our £3 million Newton Fund for Thailand.

Our diplomatic staff are also working with the Thai authorities on preventing child exploitation, organised crime, money laundering and human trafficking. And we will continue to maintain our focus on supporting human rights defenders, promoting freedom of expression and encouraging full Thai cooperation with the Universal Periodic Review process.

## **Notes for editors**

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## **[Press release: Highways England appoints major projects director](#)**

Peter, who has held the post on an interim basis since August, has extensive UK and international project and programme experience across rail, road, airports and utilities.

In addition, Peter has also led substantial business units, working at board level, with accountability and oversight for delivering global engineering design and programme management services responsible for safety, financial, people and overall business performance.

The appointment takes effect from 1 February,

Highways England Chief Executive Jim O'Sullivan said:

I congratulate Peter on his appointment and am pleased he will continue with Highways England and the Executive Team as we deliver the Government's £15bn road investment programme.

Peter said:

I am delighted to be joining Highways England at such an exciting time as we focus on delivering our significant portfolio of major projects and continue to prepare for the next roads investment period and beyond. With so much achieved in recent years, I look forward to working with our leadership and teams across the business as we continue to focus on safety, customer and delivery towards the aim of safer, smoother and more sustainable roads.

Peter has previously held senior positions within a number of construction industry related organisations.

### **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

### **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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## **[Press release: The Earl and Countess of Wessex in Sri Lanka to celebrate young people and the Commonwealth](#)**

The Earl and Countess of Wessex arrive in Sri Lanka and are welcomed by Sri Lankan State Minister of Foreign Affairs Wasantha Senanayake and Mrs. Senanayake

His Royal Highness The Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, and Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex, arrived in Sri Lanka today. Their five day visit will focus on the long-standing UK and Sri Lanka relationship, the Commonwealth, education and young people.

During the visit Their Royal Highnesses will meet young people overcoming challenges from a variety of communities across Sri Lanka. During their visit

to the Schools for the Deaf and Blind in Ratmalana, they will meet able and differently-abled young people following the Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme, and witness how the scheme helps the communication impaired integrate into society in meaningful ways.

The Royal couple will also meet with young athletes and para-athletes who will represent Sri Lanka at the upcoming Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast.

British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka James Dauris said:

We are delighted to have The Earl and Countess of Wessex in Sri Lanka to celebrate the strong links between our two countries, young people and the Commonwealth. Their visit comes just two months before we host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London and allows us to celebrate our Commonwealth links and the important role young people will play in developing its potential.

His Royal Highness The Prince Edward is the youngest child of Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh. Their Royal Highnesses will represent Her Majesty The Queen at the 70th anniversary celebration of Sri Lanka's independence on Sunday.

The Earl and Countess will also travel to Kandy where they will visit the Temple of the Tooth Relic and the Royal Botanical Gardens.

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## **Press release: PM to set out ambitious new approach to UK-China education**

Chinese students already constitute the largest single source of overseas students in the UK, with 155,000 students currently in the UK worth an estimated £5 billion annually.

There are also now some 9,000 young British people studying and interning in China, with numbers up 60% since 2013.

Visiting the Chinese city of Wuhan today, which has the largest student population of any city in the world, the Prime Minister will announce details of a new approach covering pre-school through to post-grad education. It includes:

- a new commitment to extend the UK-China Maths Teacher Exchange primary school programme for a further two years to 2020. This will enable an additional 140 primary teachers in England to benefit from further training in China. We will also expand the exchange programme to include up to 45 teachers in English secondary schools. The pioneering scheme

involves English teachers visiting China for two weeks and Chinese teachers visiting England for two weeks, enabling schools to experience world-class maths teaching in English classrooms. The exchange programme also supports our work to take the total number of English schools benefitting from the East-Asian style maths Teaching for Mastery programme to 11,000 by 2023

- an agreement to facilitate joint training of pre-school staff in the UK and China
- improved UK-China information-sharing on vocational education through more study exchanges
- the launch of a new “English is GREAT” campaign, promoting proficiency in English for more people in China. There are over 300 million people learning English in China. The campaign will support individuals in improving their language proficiency as a means to achieve their own professional and personal ambitions – and to provide significant commercial opportunities for the UK by opening up a market worth over \$2 billion a year. This will echo the UK-Mandarin Excellence Programme, launched in 2016 and which aims to have 5000 secondary school pupils in the UK fluent in Mandarin by 2020

The Prime Minister will also welcome a major new package of commercial deliverables in the education sector – reinforcing the UK’s position as a global leader in this field.

Education deals totalling more than £550m will be announced as part of the visit, creating over 800 jobs in the UK.

They include a £75m export win for the UK’s biggest childcare provider Busy Bees, who will open 20 new nurseries across China along with their Chinese stakeholder, Oriental Cambridge Education Group.

The Prime Minister said:

The close ties between the UK and China are reflected in our relationship on education. More than 150,000 Chinese students study at the UK’s world-leading institutions and make a significant contribution to our academic life.

The agreements we have signed today will build on that and enable more children and more young people than ever to share their ideas about our two great nations.

And by teaching children to speak our languages we will ensure that our Golden Era of co-operation will endure for generations to come.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Standards are rising in our schools, with 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools than in 2010 and nine out of ten schools given this rating at their last inspection. We want to

build on this success, to ensure all pupils can access a world-class education that inspires them to make the most of their lives, no matter where they live or their background.

Mandarin is the most spoken language in the world, so this partnership will play a crucial role in teaching pupils the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in an increasingly global economy. By opening up these opportunities to more young people, we can help to build a Britain that is fit for the future.

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## [Press release: Scotland to benefit from CMA expansion](#)

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) aims to grow its Edinburgh contingent to around 25-30 employees, with ambitions to grow further, so it can build its talent base and prepare for the UK's Exit from the EU.

While the CMA has always had a small presence in Scotland, it is now building on that to ensure it has the talent to truly promote competition and ensure consumers get a fair deal right across the UK.

The expansion will also be a big part of the organisation's preparation for [Brexit](#). This is expected to increase its merger reviews and investigations into cartels and other anti-competitive behaviours as work previously led from Brussels comes to the UK.

It will allow the CMA to build even stronger relationships with consumer and business groups, other regulators in Scotland as well as the Scottish Government and Parliament, and increase its capability to carry out UK-wide projects from Scotland.

Chief Executive Andrea Coscelli said

It is essential that the Competition and Markets Authority has a presence right across the United Kingdom, so we can make sure competition is working for people, businesses and the economy in every corner of the nation.

Though we already have a great team in Scotland, by expanding our numbers we can go further to understand the concerns and issues affecting ordinary people.

He added:

And as we prepare to leave the European Union, it has never been more important for the UK's competition authority to grow its talent base.

Although the new roles will not focus exclusively on Scottish cases, the CMA can and does address Scottish competition and consumer issues.

As a result of the CMA's work, for example, Glasgow University [no longer stops students from graduating](#) because of unpaid rent in student accommodation fees. In a separate case, the CMA [fined Aberdeen based Balmoral Tanks](#) £130,000 for illegally exchanging price information. The CMA has also recently investigated major mergers in Scotland like the [deal between North Sea oil companies](#) Wood Group and Amec Foster Wheeler and the [purchase by Standard Life](#) of Aberdeen Asset Management.

Beyond specific investigations, people right across the UK are benefiting from the CMA's wide-ranging examinations of certain industries. Last year, it [issued a record £84.2 million fine to pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, and a £5.2 million fine to Flynn Pharma](#), after finding that each charged excessive and unfair prices in the UK for anti-epilepsy drug phenytoin sodium capsules. And the authority's [call for reforms in the care home sector](#) aim to make sure people in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland get the support they need in their old age.

Keith Brown, Economy Secretary for the Scottish Government who will meet the CMA Board in Edinburgh on 30 January, commented

The CMA's expansion in Scotland is a clear sign of its commitment to taking action and making the market fair for consumers and businesses.

It's a move I've championed and provides real opportunity to benefit Scotland's economy by identifying and tackling the problems faced here by our consumers and businesses.

This will support our on-going work around the collaborative economy and ensure that we continue to develop our approach to consumer, competition and regulatory policy.

## Notes to editors

1. The CMA board will meet in Edinburgh on 30-31 January. Minutes will be published on the [CMA website](#).
2. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial department of the UK government with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law.

3. Media queries should be sent to [press@cma.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:press@cma.gsi.gov.uk) or journalists can call 020 3738 6337 or 07774 134814.