

HM Ambassador to Greece Matthew Lodge presents his credentials

World news story

The new British Ambassador to Greece Matthew Lodge presented his credentials to Her Excellency the President of the Hellenic Republic Katerina Sakellariopoulou.



Matthew Lodge presented his credentials today, Wednesday, 22 September, to Her Excellency the President of the Hellenic Republic Katerina Sakellariopoulou.

On the occasion of the ceremony at the Presidential Palace, Her Majesty's new Ambassador to the Hellenic Republic, Matthew Lodge, stated:

"It is an enormous pleasure to be taking up the position of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Greece. And it's particularly moving for me as I have close ties with Greece for the past twenty years or so.

From today, it will be my honour to represent my country to work for the interests of British nationals in Greece and to work tirelessly to cultivate the excellent relationship between our two countries.

Together, I'm confident that we will confront and overcome common challenges that face us and to work together to make the most of the opportunities that we find for tomorrow."

This is Matthew Lodge's second appointment to Athens – his first term was between 1998 and 2000, where he served as First Secretary of the Political Department.

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First UK manufactured rapid tests deployed across England

- Rapid COVID-19 tests made by SureScreen in Derbyshire are the first UK-made lateral flow device (LFD) to get the green light for supervised testing.
- Expansion of Derby-based SureScreen Diagnostics has created more than 370 jobs in the Midlands.
- Rollout of SureScreen tests will support the testing of university students as they return to campuses and lecture theatres.

The first UK-manufactured rapid tests – otherwise known as lateral flow devices or LFDs – are being rolled out to universities across England.

As the government continues to back companies and technologies working to help break chains of COVID-19 transmission, these new tests will bolster efforts to detect asymptomatic cases of COVID-19, and support more than 370 jobs in the Midlands.

Produced by Derby manufacturer, SureScreen Diagnostics, this LFD generates a result in under 15 minutes and is officially the first British test to be validated in a laboratory by Public Health England (PHE).

The rollout of the rapid assisted tests began in universities in August, and is set to help protect thousands of students as the new term approaches. In preparation for their launch, SureScreen tests have been used in certain wider public sector supervised settings in recent months, including prisons and daily contact testing settings.

The company currently has the capacity to manufacture approximately 7 million tests per week, with plans to increase this to 14 million per week by the end of December, strengthening the government's procurement strategy while supporting British innovation.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid said:

Whether it's an F1 company developing ventilators for hospitals, our academics developing lifesaving vaccines or a pioneering manufacturer producing lateral flow tests, British innovation and ingenuity has been everywhere you look during this pandemic.

Our testing programme has already helped us reclaim many of our lost freedoms and it will continue to be at the heart of our efforts, through the Winter Plan, to keep this disease at bay in the colder months to come.

Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), Jenny Harries:

Testing – along with vaccines – is one of our first lines of defence against COVID-19 and in the months ahead rapid tests will keep fortifying these defences, as thousands of university students use them to check whether they are infectious and likely to transmit the virus, all at lightning speed.

As we return to a more familiar way of life, testing, and isolating when necessary, remain a vital way of controlling the spread of the virus and protecting one another.

SureScreen tests, which have been partly assembled by Omega Diagnostics in Alva in Scotland, will form an essential part of the government's rapid testing programme which has made free LFDs available to everyone in the UK. The government confirmed the extension of free testing as part of the Winter Plan outlined by the Prime Minister last week.

Around one in three people with COVID-19 do not experience any symptoms and may be spreading the virus unwittingly. Rapid testing detects cases quickly, meaning positive cases can isolate immediately. A negative LFD taken within the previous 48 hours can be used as certification for the NHS COVID Pass app, along with full vaccination or a negative PCR test.

The partnerships struck by government with companies such as SureScreen also supports the wider resilience of the UK's diagnostics industry which, from a standing start at the beginning of the pandemic, is now at its largest size in UK history.

All LFDs used in the national testing programme have undergone rigorous clinical evaluation and are a vital tool in helping to identify cases of COVID-19, including variants of concern. The tests have been proven effective at detecting high viral loads and registering an appropriate positive result. This means they are able to identify people who are likely to be the most infectious.

Background information

- Founded in 1991, family-run SureScreen produces technology to screen for drug abuse, infectious disease and other illnesses.
- More details on tests that have passed PHE validation, including SureScreen, can be found [here](#)

[Civil/crime news: LAA annual report](#)

and accounts 2020-21

News story

Annual report and accounts highlighting the performance of the Legal Aid Agency in 2020-21.



Chief Executive of the Legal Aid Agency Jane Harbottle addresses the challenges posed by the pandemic in her foreword to the report.

She said: “The last reporting year has been a particularly challenging period which has seen the Agency grip the unique challenges presented by the Coronavirus pandemic.

“We have worked proactively with our internal and external partners to navigate and respond to the pandemic, inspiring confidence in the Agency as we have done so.”

Challenges

She said: “Despite the challenges we have held ourselves to the highest of standards and have continued to look outwards and forwards.”

This is the eighth such report for the Agency since it came into being in April 2013.

The Legal Aid Agency was created by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.

Further information

[Legal Aid Agency annual report and accounts 2020 to 2021](#)

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Honduras to benefit from lifeline for some the world's most precious biodiverse habitats

- Six of the world's most important biodiversity hotspots – spanning 18 countries – to share funding from the Government's £100 million Biodiverse Landscapes Fund
- Projects will tackle biodiversity loss, combat climate change and help deliver our goal to protect 30% of the world's land and sea by 2030

Six environmentally critical landscapes across the globe will receive funding to tackle biodiversity loss and combat climate change. The landscapes selected are each home to rare and endangered species: elephants and rhinos in Kavango–Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA); western lowland gorillas in the Western Congo Basin; tigers in the Lower Mekong and jaguars in Mesoamerica.

These species are supported by diverse ecosystems and habitats, including rainforests, wetlands, temperate forests and mangroves. By driving action to protect these landscapes and habitats, the Fund will protect the wildlife that calls them home, through conserving protected areas, improving connectivity between habitats for key species and combatting the illegal wildlife trade.

The landscapes announced today include:

- Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, covering areas of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe
- Mesoamerica, covering areas of Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras
- Congo Basin, covering areas of Cameroon, Gabon and Republic of Congo
- Andes Amazon, covering Ecuador and Peru
- Lower Mekong, covering Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam
- Madagascar

In Mesoamerica, the fund will cover two regions spanning Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. The northern region covers the Guatemalan and Belizean portions of the Selva Maya. The southern region covers the Trifinio region, including a tri-national transboundary biosphere reserve in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Today's announcement forms part of the Government's ambitious commitments ahead of COP26 and builds on successes achieved at the UK chaired G7, which saw G7 leaders commit to protect and conserve 30% of the world's land and ocean by 2030. The global '30by30' target is now supported by over 100 countries worldwide.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The global population of animals is plummeting faster than at any time in human history and precious habitats and species are being wiped off our planet.

We are at a tipping point, and we must act now – right now – to turn the tide of this environmental crisis before it is too late.

Our Biodiverse Landscapes Fund will invest in six of the most environmentally critical landscapes, spanning 18 countries across the globe, to help to combat climate change and protect rare and endangered species.

The Honduran Foreign Secretary, Lisandro Rosales, said:

Any action that increases our capacities to counteract the deterioration of the environment, reducing the effects of climate change, especially in our region, which is highly vulnerable to hydro meteorological phenomena, generates hope for the world. This contribution from the Government of the United Kingdom with the Biodiversity Landscapes Fund shows a genuine interest in humanity.

It is vital to understand that it is urgent to support those of us who cause the least damage to the planet, but we suffer the impact of nature, with destruction and death, on a recurring basis, thanks to the Government of the United Kingdom for being part of the protection of our common home, The earth.

Over seven years the funding will be invested in local projects that support the protection and restoration of landscapes through nature-based solutions, which will tackle climate change while providing sustainable livelihoods for local communities.

On the ground, the projects will be led locally and collaboratively within local communities, supported internationally by environmental organisations, academics and private sector organisations. The projects aim to fast track the recovery of nature through activities such as sustainable agricultural practices, promoting natural resource management and strengthening indigenous people's rights to sustainably manage their lands.

Communities that are most dependent on the resources offered by these landscapes, including indigenous communities, suffer most and suffer first from their loss or degradation. The fund will work with local communities and will support sustainable economic development to allow local people to benefit long-term from their environments.

The projects are expected to start by the end of summer 2022.

The fund counts as Official Development Assistance, part of the UK's commitment to international development.

Guatemala to benefit from lifeline for some the world's most precious biodiverse habitats

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Six environmentally critical landscapes across the globe will receive funding to tackle biodiversity loss and combat climate change. The landscapes selected are each home to rare and endangered species: elephants and rhinos in Kavango–Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA); western lowland gorillas in the Western Congo Basin; tigers in the Lower Mekong and jaguars in Mesoamerica.

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The Guatemalan Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Mario Rojas Espino, said:

Guatemala is considered one of the countries with the greatest biological diversity on Earth. Its diversity constitutes an invaluable and irreplaceable national natural heritage, which provides us with an exceptional variety of environmental goods and services for our well-being, whose conservation should be a priority, and financial resources are certainly needed for protection and conservation.

The nation welcomes the opportunity presented by the United Kingdom through the funding window to protect biodiversity, as it is an opportunity to access financial and economic resources, and carry out joint work that guarantees the protection of our natural resources.

Having financial resources will allow us to implement sustainable development projects, aimed at meeting the goals of the 2030 agenda, within the framework of the Biodiversity Convention. Guatemala applauds this effort of the United Kingdom, through the Biodiversity Landscapes Fund, and hopes to achieve access to these resources as soon as possible, because they will be of great benefit to the millenary Guatemalan biodiversity.

Over seven years the funding will be invested in local projects that support the protection and restoration of landscapes through nature-based solutions, which will tackle climate change while providing sustainable livelihoods for local communities.

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