



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3 p.m. – 7.27 p.m.

Gibraltar, Monday, 13th February 2023

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The House adjourned at 7.27 p.m...... 75

The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3 p.m.

[MR SPEAKER: Hon. M L Farrell BEM GMD RD JP *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: S Galliano Esq *in attendance*]

Thoughts with victims of Turkey and Syria earthquake

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, before we start our prayer this afternoon, I
5 thought it would be fitting that the whole House, as we start our prayer, should keep in mind
those who have passed away in the tragedy that hit Turkey and Syria a week ago, and of course in
particular Dr Chami, who was one of our colleagues in the Gibraltar Health Authority.

PRAYER *Mr Speaker*

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Monday, 13th February 2023.

10 Order of Proceedings: (i) Oath of Allegiance; (ii) Confirmation of Minutes – the Minutes of the
last meeting of Parliament, which was held on 18th, 19th and 20th January 2023.

Mr Speaker: May I sign the Minutes as correct?

Members: Aye.

15

Mr Speaker signed the Minutes.

Best wishes to Sir Joe Bossano for a speedy recovery

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, very quickly, before we start the business of
20 laying papers on the table etc., everyone in the House will know that the Hon. the Father of the
House has been in hospital for some considerable time. He is now back home, but not well enough
to join us. I am sure I speak for the whole House in saying that we very much look forward to

25 seeing him back amongst us, as always the most energetic of us, as always the most combative of us, and no doubt watching us right now on television, hating the fact that we are talking about him, our deep affection for him and our best wishes. (*Banging on desks*)

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

30 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, on this side of the House we join with the remarks of the Chief Minister.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

35 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Mr Speaker, I associate myself with the comments and wish the Father of the House a convalescence and a speedy recovery for us all to continue to enjoy him in the House for years to come.

PAPERS TO BE LAID

Clerk: (iii) Communications from the Chair; (iv) Petitions; (v) Announcements; (vi) Papers to be laid – the Hon. the Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities.

40 **Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):** Mr Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the Mental Health Board Annual Inspection Report 2022.

Mr Speaker: Ordered to lie.

Questions for Oral Answer

HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, YOUTH AND SPORT

Q114/2023

Europa Sports Complex – Management and manning systems

45 **Clerk:** (vii) Reports of Committees; (viii) Answers to Oral Questions.
Question 114/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Mr Speaker, can the Minister for Sport update this House in respect of the progress made since his answer to Question 439/2022 to permanently settle the management and manning systems at Europa Sports Complex?
50

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Employment, Housing and Sport.

55 **Minister for Housing, Employment, Youth and Sport (Hon. S E Linares):** Mr Speaker, the arrangements in respect of the management of the Europa Sports Complex are in a transitional

period with final arrangements currently being discussed. I expect I will be in a position to provide more information to this House at the next session of Parliament.

60 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, I understand what the Minister is saying in his answer. In previous answers, he has also said it was work in progress and so on. If the Minister hopes to be able to update the House at the next session, with your leave, Mr Speaker, when should I be able to pose this question so we can have an update?

65 **Mr Speaker:** Will the Hon. Minister be ready with an answer at next month's meeting of the House in the third week in March?

Hon. S E Linares: Yes, Mr Speaker, as I have stated, in the next session, which would be the March session.

70 **Mr Speaker:** Then the hon. Member can lodge a question accordingly.

Hon. E J Reyes: I am extremely grateful, Mr Speaker, for your assistance in that.

Q115/2023
Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority –
Update re staffing

Clerk: Question 115/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

75 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government update this House in respect of the agreed staffing complement at the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority, indicating which posts are presently vacant and which are being filled in an acting capacity?

80 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Employment, Housing and Sport.

Minister for Housing, Employment, Youth and Sport (Hon. S E Linares): Mr Speaker, there is no agreed staffing complement at the GSLA, but at present the GSLA has a staff complement of 61. There are no current vacancies at the GSLA.

85 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, going back a few months, the Minister, in one of his answers, said that he was discussing with the representatives of the GSLA having an agreed complement, which was subject to the needs, which he was analysing at the time, of Lathbury Barracks Sports Complex and so on. I appreciate that he said there are 61 members of staff now within the complement, but I do not quite understand why he says there is no agreed complement because that does not
90 coincide with the answers given in the past, that they were discussing what the complement was going to be. Can the Minister enlighten us further on that?

Hon. S E Linares: Mr Speaker, the hon. Member knows that in all Authorities and Agencies there is no set manning level or complement. It is a flexible thing that we ... Even so, we are still
95 looking at how we man Lathbury, so there are still negotiations going on in relation to Lathbury. What I have just stated is that the complement is currently 61 and the management is working out how best to run Lathbury together with the Victoria Stadium – or should I say the Bayside Sports Complex.

100 **Hon. E J Reyes:** It does shed some light, at least, Mr Speaker. I understand that it is work in progress, which is what the Minister is saying.

Mr Speaker, would you agree if I gave him, let's say, three months, maybe after the Easter recess, perhaps shortly before that six-month period? Would I be allowed to seek an update in, say, three months' time, so that we have this issue alive?

105

Hon. S E Linares: Mr Speaker, the hon. Member is now giving us dates via asking his questions. I think, in all fairness, if he wants to pose the question in three months in a different way, he can do so. All I am saying now is that I might not be in a position in three months' time to give him the answer. I am not going to be bound by a three-month period because, like I said, it is work in progress and it might take longer, or even shorter.

110

The hon. Member must understand that these are two different complexes that we are running. We have never run them before – for example, the wonderful 52 m swimming pool – and we have to see how we can manage the best we can.

115

Mr Speaker: I think it is not going to be possible. On the basis of what the Minister has said, you are going to have to wait for the six months.

120

Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, Mr Speaker, I understand your guidance on that question. However, sir, if we are in February, I was thinking in three months' time one thinks the month of May. By then the GSLA is about to put into practice the summer schedule, which brings about more active participation by the sports and so on, so I do not think it is unreasonable that in May we are in a position to at least have some updates. However, if, reluctantly, one has to wait six months, we are talking of after the summer recess, so it leaves not just myself but sports lovers and users of facilities totally unaware of what the situation is. I do not know if the Government can enlighten us further on that.

125

Mr Speaker: I do not think we can hold the Government to a certain period of time. When the Government is ready to make the announcement it will do so. I think that is still my position. You will have to wait the six months unless the Minister wishes to speak to you ahead of those six months and can advise that he is ready with the information – then we might consider allowing you to put the question in before those six months, but we cannot hold the Government to account on this basis.

130

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, can I just, if it is helpful ...? The hon. Gentleman has said a few things which I think are just entirely wrong. There is no question of the public not knowing about these new arrangements, if we agree them, simply because the hon. Gentleman cannot ask the question in this House.

135

The rules of this House, as you have set out, are very clear. The arrangements are being pursued by the Minister. If an arrangement is reached, it is very likely that the Minister and the unions will want to issue a statement to the membership and more widely, but in this House there is a rule, and the rule is that you ask no more than once every six months on the same subject. That does not mean that the public will not find out.

140

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q116/2023

**Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority –
Cancellations at facilities**

145 **Clerk:** Question 116/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government inform this House how many cancellations have been necessary at any of the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority facilities since 1st September 2021, indicating the location, date and reason for the cancellation?

150

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Employment, Housing and Sport.

Minister for Housing, Employment, Youth and Sport (Hon. S E Linares): Mr Speaker, I now hand over to the hon. Member opposite the information requested.

Answer to Q116/2023

The cancellations incurred at GSLA facilities since 1st September 2021 are as follows:

GSLA Swimming Pool Complex:

Accessible Pool:

Date	Remarks
9 th September 2021	Faecal Accident
26 th September 2021	Faecal Accident
25 th October 2021	General Power Cut
6 th to 8 th November 2021	Air Handling Unit Malfunction
3 rd January, 2022	Burst Compressor
5 th to 11 th January, 2022	Gas Burner malfunction
16 th January, 2022	Faecal Accident
9 th February, 2022	Faecal Accident
20 th to 22 nd March, 2022	Gas Burner Malfunction
9 th April, 2022	Vomiting Incident
31 st July to 2 nd August 2022	Various Issues with plant room
8 th to 14 th September 2022	Works in the plant room. Burst pipe on Accessible Pool system
28 th November to 28 th January 2023	Damage to main air handling unit. Industry shortage on spare parts.

Bayside Sports Complex

Hockey Pitch:

Date	Remarks
2 nd to 8 th August, 2022	General Water Shortage

155 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful for this information. Perhaps a little clarification. From 31st July to 2nd August we had a couple of days of closure of the accessible pool, listed as 'various issues with plant room'. They could be of a minor works nature and so on. But then a month later, from 8th to 14th September, it closed again because of, it says, 'works in the plant room'. This one at least expands on 'burst pipe on accessible pool system'. Was the closure due
160 to the same reasons and probably just lasted a month before it went again? And a burst pipe – to take about a week to fix a burst pipe somewhere that is full of water at first sight does not quite make sense.

Perhaps the Minister has some notes given to him by the staff there with a bit more detail on what the various issues were at the end of July and what works in the plant room ... It is just a
165 burst pipe. To take a week to fix a burst pipe, there must have been a considerable amount of loss of water through the burst pipe. I do not know.

170 **Hon. S E Linares:** Mr Speaker, when he has a burst pipe at home, I hope he has another tap, so that he can close the whole of the system so that it does not waste water. But be that as it may, if it says here the various issues in the plant room ... If I remember correctly, there were some issues with some parts that were fixed, and if it has taken a week for the burst pipe in the accessible pool to be fixed, it means that they might not have had this pipe in stock and therefore had to procure it from somewhere else until it came in.

175 I do not see it as unreasonable. Why would they take longer? Why wouldn't they want the accessible pool working? I think they would do the works as fast as is possible.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q117/2023
Varyl Begg Estate –
Removal of weeds

Clerk: Question 117/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

180 **Hon. D J Bossino:** What progress, if any, has been made to remove weeds which continue to be seen growing in roof gutters at Varyl Begg Estate?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Employment, Housing and Sport.

185 **Minister for Housing, Employment, Youth and Sport (Hon. S E Linares):** Mr Speaker, the removal of weeds – the hon. Member does not like calling them weeds, they are just plants – growing within the gutters to some of the buildings forming part of Varyl Begg Estate have been tackled in the recent past. However, there are still a number of buildings to address. Aquitania House, Valiant House and Royal Sovereign House will be the next buildings to receive this treatment. Other buildings suffering from this issue will follow suit in the near future.

190 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes, he did say, in answer to the question posed by my hon. Friend Mr Reyes in February 2020, that the matter was being tackled. Can he explain why it is taking so long for the issue to be tackled once and for all?

195 **Hon. S E Linares:** Well, apart from there was a pandemic in between, I would not know why it has taken so long. This is the answer I have from the authorities I have asked. I am sure it is just a rolling contract or a rolling maintenance that they have, and therefore ... I do not know why it is taking ... Maybe there weren't weeds in 2020. I do not know whether the hon. Member saw the weeds then.

200 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, I did not ask the question, it was asked by my hon. Friend Mr Reyes, and it must be because there were weeds.

205 Mr Speaker, he mentions by name three or four blocks within Varyl Begg Estate, and then he mentions other buildings. Can he state which those are, and are they all within Varyl Begg Estate?

210 **Hon. S E Linares:** Mr Speaker, just to be helpful, I will read the supplementary that has been prepared for me. There are 18 buildings that form part of Varyl Begg Estate. The Housing Works Agency is currently looking into the possibility of adapting the roofs with an access hatch and safety lines to avoid having to erect the scaffolding every time there is the requirement for removing weeds.

May I say to the hon. Member that these were refurbishments that were done during the GSD for Varyl Begg and we are having loads of problems in the new roofing that they did.

215 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The hon. Member makes a party political point, which is of absolutely no assistance. Can he please answer the question? Which other buildings does he refer to in his prepared reply? He has not answered that question.

220 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, this House, in the days whilst we are dealing with the final stages of negotiation of a treaty within months of having come out of a pandemic, has now spent five minutes talking about weeds in a gutter. That is not a party political point that the hon. Gentleman has made, it is an important point. He will want to know that despite all the other things that we are dealing with, because we work together on these issues and because I visit the estates, I have seen how the weeds come back. Weeds are removed, weeds come back, weeds are removed, and weeds are going to continue to vex us for many years in those buildings and in other buildings, a whole list of which I think I would propose we should provide to the hon. Gentleman behind the Speaker's Chair – not because it is secret, but just to let him have it – or by letter, not across the floor of the House, and we should not waste this House's time further with weedy questions of the sort that we are dealing with now.

230 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, this is an important question which has been raised with me and Members of this side of the House, and I and nobody else on this side of the House is going to be controlled, as he tends to do ... what we do. He can rest assured that we will continue to ask questions that matter to people, and this matters to many residents in Varyl Begg Estate, and we will continue to ask these questions.

235 He has failed to answer the question. His Government has failed to answer the question. Is the answer that he does not have the information in relation to which buildings still require to be fixed in order to remove the weeds?

240 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, certainly the Government is not going to be controlled by the Opposition and certainly we are not going to be controlled by the hon. Gentleman in particular, whose style appears to be to want to come here to make points about his style rather than points about what matters to people.

245 What matters to people is that their estates should be in the best possible condition. That is the condition that the estates are in today after the very considerable number of millions of pounds spent by this Government in the teeth of the opposition of hon. Members opposite when we have refurbished the estates, we have clad the estates, we have removed weeds from the estates, we have improved conditions in the estates and we will continue to do so.

250 Therefore, the answer to the question will remain as helpful as it was when I first rose. We will write to the hon. Gentleman with all of the details that he seeks. That is how we provide the fullest answers possible to the questions that he pretends to be seeking answers to.

Mr Speaker: Last question.

255 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, he knows he is not being helpful at all, and I am afraid to say that he is able to stand up in his usual way and score as many party political points as he thinks he can score and level against us. But let me tell him this. Can he not agree with me that he simply needs to answer the question by saying he does not have the information I sought? The purpose of the question and answer session is to seek information. Can he tell me that he does not have this information available? Yes? No?

260 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to cross-examine me, he should bring proceedings in a court of competent jurisdiction, and there, as counsel, he can ask me to answer questions on the basis of a yes or no answer.

I will avail myself of the parliamentary privilege that I enjoy as Leader of this House to answer the question in the way that I think is in the best interests of the people of Gibraltar, and that is to tell him that we will give him all of the information available to us, in respect of weeds in gutters, in a letter that we will write to him which provides all of that information, if what he really wants is transparency.

265 As to his suggestion that we are here to score goals, the only thing I can say to him is that as a long-suffering Liverpool supporter, I very much look forward to being in the Champions League final, and that is the only place I am interested in scoring goals.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q118/2023

Lift maintenance in Government rental housing – Details of provision and level of satisfaction

Clerk: Question 118/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

275 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Some things never change, Mr Speaker.

Please provide details of the lift maintenance programme the Government has in respect of the Government rental housing estate to include (i) how often lifts are subject to maintenance; (ii) whether the Government is satisfied with its effectiveness; and (iii) which company provides the service.

280

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Employment, Housing and Sport.

Minister for Housing, Employment, Youth and Sport (Hon. S E Linares): Mr Speaker, the lift maintenance regime has three facets.

285 First, the current lift maintenance provider, General Lifts Ltd, carries out its own monthly maintenance checks to all passenger lifts servicing Government rental housing accommodation.

Second, the client's specialist lift inspector undertakes six-monthly inspections and then programmes the works on a 'very high' to 'low' priority basis, always in conjunction with the findings of the aforementioned inspections.

290 The third and last facet is the reactive approach to the lift repairs, whereby a defective lift is reported via the reporting office or after-hours duty manager for the necessary action. This third aspect is in line with the reactive reporting of all defects within Government rental housing accommodation.

295 These arrangements appear to be working well. In fact, the current company has a very prompt response to calls and all maintenance issues that arise.

Hon. D J Bossino: When he says that it appears to be working well, is he satisfied in relation to that? On what basis does he come to that conclusion?

300 **Hon. S E Linares:** On the information that I am given, and I am satisfied.

Hon. D J Bossino: Who gives him that information?

Hon. S E Linares: The Housing Works Agency.

305 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Did he mention two companies? He talked about General Lifts Ltd and then he talked about, I think, the client's specialist company. Can he give more information on that? I think I understand what they each do and the different roles they perform, but I was not able to obtain information in relation to the second company.

310 **Hon. S E Linares:** Mr Speaker, the second company is engaged by the Housing Works Agency and is called Specialist Lift Inspectors, which is WJ Enterprises Ltd, to co-ordinate, supervise and oversee the maintenance and repair programmes of all lifts.

315 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is that the client that he was referring to as the client of the Housing Works Agency? Is that understanding correct?

Hon. S E Linares: Yes, sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q119-122/2023
Kings Bastion Leisure Centre –
Ice-skating rink; boulder park

320 **Clerk:** Question 119/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: In the last 12 months prior to its closure, how many people used the ice-skating rink at the Kings Bastion Leisure Centre?

325 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Employment, Housing and Sport.

Minister for Housing, Employment, Youth and Sport (Hon. S E Linares): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 120 to 122.

330 **Clerk:** Question 120/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: In the last 12 months prior to its closure, what was the net income or deficit of the ice rink at the Kings Bastion Leisure Centre?

335 **Clerk:** Question 121/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: In the past 12 months, how many people have used the boulder park at the leisure centre?

340 **Clerk:** Question 122/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: In the last 12 months, what has been the net income or deficit at the boulder park at Kings Bastion Leisure Centre?

345 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Employment, Housing and Sport.

Hon. S E Linares: Mr Speaker, during the 12 months prior to its closure, the ice rink received 11,800 admissions with a deficit of £50,921.

350 In the last 12 months prior to 6th February 2023, the boulder park has received 16,400 admissions, with a net profit of £52,405.

Additionally, the boulder park does not cause the environmental problems caused by the ice rink and its installation did not require the capital expenditure the ice rink repair would have required. The House will recall, even if the hon. Lady does not, that information about the global warming emissions was given in Press Release 675/2020. This provided that:

This will replace the ice rink, which has now reached a point where it has become beyond economical repair. The Government has been informed that the refrigerant gas used to chill the surface of the ice is no longer manufactured. This follows the global drive to cut emissions of gas that contribute to global warming. In turn, this has reduced the supply available, led to a shortage and increased the cost of the limited supply of gas that exists. The installation of new equipment, the chiller plant and compressors to take a different type of gas has been estimated to cost in the region of £470,000. The replacement of the ice rink with a new Boulder climbing facility will also mean considerable recurrent savings for the taxpayer, since the ice rink has been heavily subsidised from day one. The cost of electricity alone has been running at some £8000 a month, when it has operated on revenue returns of around £3000 a month. There have also been ongoing issues with water penetration from the ice rink to the bowling alley below, given that it was not designed and located on the ground floor. This has resulted in considerable costs to the taxpayer over the years. In 2019 alone, those operating costs, excluding staff and repairs to the bowling alley, came to nearly £150,000.

355 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Mr Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for his answer and the detail of the answer. It is clear that the boulder park makes more sense economically and environmentally, and people are enjoying it a lot more, too.

360 Can I just ask whether, given this drastic improvement in the coffers of the facility, as well as in the usage by people, if the management of the boulder park is looking to enhance facilities or make changes? From what I understand, routes sometimes need to be changed within the facility, and my question is, therefore, because of this enhanced popularity, is there a plan for enhancements and changes to be made?

365 **Hon. S E Linares:** Mr Speaker, I am happy to say that the management of the Kings Bastion are always looking to improving the centre, so much so that they have now bought new machines for children. They will look at entrances and exits of the place. They are managing the boulder park, which as I stated, is now making a profit. Not only that, but they are consistently, and openly will take any suggestions from the general public as to how to improve the Kings Bastion Leisure Centre.

370 Let me just say that when we came into government, the leisure centre had a deficit of £2.6 million – that was the expenditure – and the revenue was a mere £50,000. Now, Kings Bastion costs approximately £1.4 million and the revenue is nearing £900,000, so I am really pleased at the direction, not only of its facilities ... The facilities are improving every single day because the management are proactive, they look at all the modern machines, e-gaming and everything that
375 needs to be looked at. If the hon. Lady would like to go – and I open this to her ... She can go to the management and if she has any suggestions about how they come in or they come out or people flow through the centre, I open that to her.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

TRANSPORT

Q123-24/2023

**Gibraltar Car Parks Ltd –
Services provided; payment received**

380 **Clerk:** Question 123/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government detail what services Gibraltar Car Parks provides under its contract?

385 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Transport.

Minister for Transport (Hon. P J Balban): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 124.

390 **Clerk:** Question 124/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state how much Gibraltar Car Parks are paid for their services?

395 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Transport.

Hon. P J Balban: Mr Speaker, Gibraltar Car Parks Ltd is a Government-owned company. The company is responsible for the implementation of all of Government's parking initiatives.

400 **Hon. E J Phillips:** So, Mr Speaker, logically, then, it does not get paid for the services that it offers our community – is that correct?

Hon. P J Balban: Yes, sir.

405 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

Clerk: Question 125/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

410 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Sorry, just to clarify, the company is not receiving a sum for any contracted service, the employees are paid by the company, but then they get some kind of subvention or subsidy from the Government to pay the employees. How does that work?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): No, Mr Speaker, it operates on exactly the same basis as every government company, like the Bus Company.

415 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

Q125/2023

**Cars registered in last 12 months –
Numbers by fuel type**

Clerk: Question 125/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

420 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, can the Government state, of the total number of cars registered over the last 12 months, how many were (i) petrol, (ii) diesel, (iii) hybrid or (iv) electric?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Transport.

425 **Minister for Transport (Hon. P J Balban):** Mr Speaker, the information requested is as follows. However, the Hon. Member should note the information I shall be providing is in respect of the 12 months for the year 2022: 266 diesel cars, of which 232 are standard and 34 are hybrid; 980 petrol cars, of which 464 are standard and 516 are hybrid; and 25 electric cars.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q126-27/2023
Registered cars –
Numbers of cars per owner and per household

430 **Clerk:** Question 126/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, at 31st December 2022, how many owners of registered cars appear as the owner of one car, two cars, three cars and more than three cars?

435 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Transport.

Minister for Transport (Hon. P J Balban): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 127.

440 **Clerk:** Question 126/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, at 31st December 2022, how many households have one car registered with that household's address, two cars registered with that address, three cars registered with the address, and more than three cars registered with that household's address?

445

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Transport.

450 **Hon. P J Balban:** Mr Speaker, upon requesting the information from the Driver, Vehicle and Licensing Department motor vehicle registration database, I have been advised that in extracting information of this nature there will be an element of inaccuracy due to the potential mismatch of records. However, upon running a query that has checked for forename, surname and address, the figures are as follows: one car, 16,525; two cars, 1,482; three cars, 301; more than three cars, 214.

455 On a similar note to Question 126, I wish to advise the Hon. Member that I am advised by the Driver, Vehicle and Licensing Department that there will be an element of inaccuracy due to the potential mismatch of records, but the details are as follows: one car per household, 11,341; two cars per household, 2,439; three cars per household, 743; and more than three cars per household, 532.

460 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful for that, with the caveat, of course, that I understand the possible inaccuracy, especially as details may not get updated when people change homes and all of that. I understand that.

I do not know if the Minister had asked for details of a similar nature before. Given the caveats to the question, it may be that the Minister had not done that, but does he agree with me that this information is important in terms of the formulation of the overall Transport Strategy and the encouragement of alternative modes of transport and the discouragement of ownership of too many vehicles per household?

Hon. P J Balban: Mr Speaker, we have requested this data before as part of the study that was conducted, and in fact we look at these figures when we are doing our residential parking schemes to see what are the chances of giving everyone an opportunity to park within the area, or not. This is also how we set our policy in that respect.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND PUBLIC STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS

Q128/2023

New laws re electric scooters and protection for cyclists – Enforcement

Clerk: Question 128/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, given the statements made by the Commissioner of Police regarding policing resources, how confident is the Government that new laws introduced to regulate the use of electric scooters and the 1.5 m distance rule for cyclists will be enforced?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Equality and Public Standards.

Minister for Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, the Government is very confident that the new rules for the protection of cyclists will be fully and properly enforced.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, the recent press coverage in relation to those officers enforcing those rules probably predates the time at which this question was asked, but I note that is in the public domain now. I am not going to withdraw the question, obviously, but insofar as the 1.5 m distance rule, a number of people – motorists and individuals themselves, actually – have expressed some concern about how that will be enforced, given the sometimes narrow parts of our roads. I was wondering whether the Minister had any feedback from the Police in respect of that and any difficulties that they may have been experiencing insofar as enforcement is concerned.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, we have had this discussion in this House before, I think, in the last two months. We clarified that our understanding of the position is that this will be particularly relevant when someone is knocked down. It is not something that will be measured in the day to day, but it is something that will be relevant in an assessment of negligence, carelessness, dangerousness and liability in the context of a cyclist being knocked down, much in the same way as the rules on dangerous and careless driving are not policeable.

People are making this big fuss – and this is the point we made last time – about the 1.5 m and how you are going to measure the 1.5 m and all the rest of it, and do you have to go around with a tape measure to put against the cyclist as you go past? Well, when you are driving inside your vehicle in a way that is not visible from outside ... For those of us who have the age to remember,

if you are trying to remove a cassette tape and it has got stuck, and you are driving and pulling the cassette tape and all the rest of it, that will be dangerous driving because you will not be giving your concentration to the operation of the motor vehicle.

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Of course the Police do not have a camera inside the vehicle. They are not policing you, pulling the tape and trying to get it back together so that it plays the final countdown properly once more, and all the rest of it, but if you crash the vehicle and you hit someone or you break something and the Police turn up and ask, 'What were you doing, for goodness' sake?' and you say, 'I was trying to pull the tape out and I was trying to ...' then it will be relevant.

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We have had that discussion already, Mr Speaker, in the last two or three sessions of the House. I have not been able to search for it in the *Hansard*, but I put it to the hon. Gentleman that we have ventilated it and that is how it is going to be dealt with from our understanding, although the rule is an important one to enable the Police to prosecute if there is an accident, if there is an injury, if there is loss of life, if there is damage, etc.

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Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, I understand what the Chief Minister says. We asked the question about some of the other European laws and compared the fines in respect of the 1.5 m rule, so I think insofar as clarifying the last discussion we had in this House, it was around those legal fines that can be imposed by other jurisdictions in relation to the 1.5 m, which led to a discussion, as the Chief Minister has articulated.

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I think what he is saying quite clearly to us in this House is it is after the event – effectively 'when someone is knocked down' I think are the words he used. Obviously, insofar as careless and dangerous driving there can be instances when an individual is not injured as a result of the careless and dangerous driving, so there is a bit of a distinction there. What I am trying to get at is many members of the community have expressed a concern about the distances that they are operating in relation to those on electric scooters. It is just that I was asking the Minister whether she might be able to provide some reassurance about them. That is all.

525

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, somebody does not have to be knocked down. I gave that example, but that is not the only example. A cyclist could complain, could phone the Police and say, 'G 1116 just passed within a hair's breadth of me. I did not fall because I managed to control myself, but I was put in danger. He came within 20cm. It is very unfair because this is totally outside the rule.' He can complain to the Police and the Police can then investigate, and if there is CCTV in the area, they may use it, or not. So this is going to be policed, as we understand it, in exactly the same way as all other traffic rules are policed.

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535

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q129/2023

New fire station –

Whether, when and where to be built

Clerk: Question 129/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Will the new fire station promised by the GSLP Liberals in 2011, 2015 and 2019 be built; and, if so, where?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations.

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Minister for Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, yes, sir, the new fire station will be built and located at the Rooke site.

550 The plans have already been approved by the Chief Fire Officer and the relevant officers at GFRS, who have been directly involved in the planning stages. The plans will be submitted to the DPC in the coming weeks.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is she able to provide –?

555 **Mr Speaker:** I think you need to refer to the Minister as the hon. Lady, rather than ‘she’.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, I do not think I was being rude at all.

Mr Speaker: I am not suggesting that at all. I am saying that I think you should address her in the proper form. That is all I will say.

560 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, the hon. Lady says from a sedentary position that it is parliamentary etiquette. Does that apply to all Members of the House? So from now on, in the future, we need to refer to the hon. – (*Interjections*) And indeed, my hon. Friend here to my left is called by her first name by Members opposite, so ... But anyway, is that the ruling, that from
565 now on we cannot use the pronoun, we have to refer to the hon. Members as the ‘hon. Member’ or the ‘Hon. Minister’?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, hon. Members have never, other than through inadvertence, referred to a Member of the Opposition or a Member on this side of the House as
570 anything other than ‘the hon. Member’. The hon. Lady says that she was referred to by her first name. I did that in a speech when I was not referring the House to her, I was setting out a recitation of something. But when we refer to each other, when we call each other’s attention through the Chair, we always refer to each other as hon. Members – the hon. Lady, the hon. Gentleman, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition. That is how we have always done it, and hon. Members on the
575 other side I do not think have failed to do so either.

I think you were just rightly pulling the hon. Gentleman up today, but if this is another one of the parliamentary rules that they feel they should change because today they have decided that that is the way they can best put forward their case, well, obviously we are happy to listen to why they think that generations of parliamentary procedure should not be followed.

580 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, I really –

Mr Speaker: No, we are not going to go into a slanging match here. We are now going to continue. The Minister was due to answer the question, the Minister will answer the question and then you can put your supplementary, and we are going to stop there. We are going to ask the
585 supplementaries once the Minister has answered the question.

Hon. D J Bossino: Can I simply point out, Mr Speaker, that we –?

590 **Mr Speaker:** I am not asking you to point out anything. Resume – (*Interjection by Hon. D J Bossino*) No, I am going to enforce – (*Interjection by Hon. D J Bossino*) You have questioned and queried. Now please resume your seat. I do not want to take this any further.
Where are we now?

595 **Hon. D J Bossino:** My question.

Mr Speaker: Right.

600 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman was about to ask me a supplementary question.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, we have been called to order before when we refer to an hon. hon. Member as –

605 **Mr Speaker:** No. Again, you persist. Please resume your seat.

Hon. D J Bossino: Will the Hon. the Minister please state, if she is able to, when she expects the building of the fire station to be completed?

610 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Mr Speaker, there is an element of overlap with this question and other questions on the Order Paper, as the hon. Member will know. The project has not even gone to planning yet, so clearly this is not something that is happening immediately. Once it goes to planning and is approved, there will be a clearer indication of how long it will take to construct it.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Whilst the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister – and I am grateful for that answer – may not have a specific idea, is he able to give us some further information on, once it goes into planning, how long he thinks the whole project is likely to take in order to come to fruition?

620 I ask this question, Mr Speaker, because this is a promise, a manifesto commitment of the hon. Members opposite in the last three elections, which they won – 2011, 2015 and 2019 – so there is some pressure to see this happening once and for all.

Can I ask the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister if he is able to give an indication as to when it will be finally completed?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, once all the permits and everything are in place, we would expect this to happen within 12 to 18 months. This is only a very rough estimate and I would not want to be held to it. I am simply saying it to assist the hon. Member and to try to answer his question.

630

Hon. D J Bossino: Would the hon. Member agree with me that, at most, this is a project that is likely to be completed during the course of the next Parliament, should the hon. Members be returned to office?

635 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, given that I have made no secret that there will be an election during the course of this calendar year – this calendar year is going to run for another 11 months and the estimate that the hon. Gentleman has been given is 12 to 18 months – I think that he is sufficiently able to do the maths himself.

640 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister is absolutely right that I think it conflates nicely with the question I have in relation to the expressions of interest in relation to the other project. Did he say – I may not have caught it – that the site that has been left out of the Carlton Properties Ltd project in relation to the Rooke ...? Is that the site where the fire station is to be located?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, this is the subject of a separate question on the Order Paper, so if the hon. Member and Mr Speaker prefer, I will answer that when we come to the question.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

650 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, thank you.

Can I ask, in terms of the construction of the fire station, is that something that will be constructed in house, or is it going to go out to tender? If it is going to be in house, does the Government have an estimated cost for the construction of this new fire station?

655 **Hon. Dr J J Garcia:** Mr Speaker, yes, the Government has an estimated cost, but we have not determined exactly how it is going to be done as yet.

Hon. K Azopardi: So the Government is not willing to share across the floor of the House the estimated cost – is that the position?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, it would be grossly contrary to the interests of the Gibraltar taxpayer for the Government to share its internal estimate of what the police and fire station are going to cost, and I am sure that on reflection the hon. Gentleman will agree.

665 The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister has told the hon. Gentleman we have not yet determined whether we are going to build in house or whether we are going to go to tender, so if we were going to go to tender, we would be giving away what we think it would cost, so that if anybody thought they could build it for less, they would not. Therefore, I am sure he will agree with me that it is right that we should not disclose that internal estimate now.

670 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Do I take it from the answer he has just given, unless it was a slip ...? He said it is the police *and* fire station. Is it two stations in one?

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Mr Speaker, it is that the two stations go in the same area.

675 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, if I could just follow on from that question, does the Government have any plans of what it intends to do with the current station, which will be the decommissioned fire station?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, yes, the Government has ideas as to what we want to do with both of them, including putting them out to tender, so it is still open in that sense.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

Q130/2023

Queen's Cinema and Queen's Hotel sites – Update

685 **Clerk:** Question 130/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government provide an update as to the development of the Queen's Cinema and Queen's Hotel site?

690 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Mr Speaker, yes, the Government continues in discussions with a preferred bidder for the sites.

695 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Minister for his answer. If I could just ask two very quick questions, firstly, in terms of the discussions, this is for both sites combined as one development? And then secondly, would there be any linkage between the development of this site, which I imagine will involve the demolition of the Queen's Hotel site and the proposed modular construction at Coaling Island?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, yes, the tender and the development will be for the two sites combined, so it will be one project; and there is no connection between this and the development at Coaling Island.

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Mr Speaker: The Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, can the hon. Member tell us whether their intention will be to sell to whoever the bidder is for a culture incentive, given that this was hailed as the Theatreland hub in, I think, two manifestos previously.

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, this has not been Theatreland for quite a while. I think originally, the hon. Lady is correct, there was an intention. The theatre was mentioned in connection with this project. GBC was also mentioned as a possible location for this project, but in the last expression of interest that was published ... it has come out of expression of interest more than once. In the last one, there was no mention of either of these, but there will be, nonetheless, a cultural dimension to the project as well, yes.

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Mr Speaker: Next question.

**Q131/2023
Europort Road development –
Loss of parking**

Clerk: Question 131/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Following the issuing of an expressions of interest in respect of a plot of land at Europort Road, what measures are being put in place to address the loss of parking spaces that will result should the development proceed?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Mr Speaker, in the event that the site is developed in the future, the parking spaces currently there will be re-provided inside the Rooke development.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Is he able to say how many expressions of interest have been received in relation to this site? I realise now, reading it, that the closing date is not finished, so it may be a bit precipitous for him to answer the question, but is he able to give some form of indication by way of assistance?

735 **Hon. Dr J J Garcia:** Mr Speaker, the short answer is no, because the process closes on 17th February. We will have an indication then of how many there are going to be. In past experience, people tend to leave this until the last minute on the last day.

740 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And in relation to the Rooke site, he is referring to the one that is the subject currently of an application before the DPC, I think, filed by a company called Carlton Properties Ltd. Is he talking about that particular development, which seems to have provided for parking spaces? I assume that the idea is that it will be made a condition that the parking spaces currently on this site, the site that is the subject of this question, will be transferred or will be replaced on the Rook site development.

745 **Hon. Dr J J Garcia:** Mr Speaker, yes, that is correct.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q132-36/2023
Rooke site –
Proposed development by Carlton Properties Ltd

750 **Clerk:** Question 132/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: What premium has been or will be paid for the Rooke site, now the subject of a recent application for outline planning permission filed by Carlton Properties Ltd?

755 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 133 to 136.

760 **Clerk:** Question 133/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Which supermarket is expected to form part of the proposed development by Carlton Properties Ltd at the Rooke site?

765 **Clerk:** Question 134/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Will the raised platform deck at the proposed new development at the Rooke site filed by Carlton Properties Ltd be accessible to members of the public?

770 **Clerk:** Question 135/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Why is the plot to be occupied by Carlton Properties Ltd at the Rooke site reduced in space from that advertised in the expressions of interest?

775 **Clerk:** Question 136/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Government supportive of the recently announced development filed by Carlton Properties Ltd at the Rooke site?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

780 **Hon. Dr J J Garcia:** Mr Speaker, the premium to be paid in respect of this development depends on the final form of the proposal that is approved by the Development and Planning Commission. The Government does not consider it prudent, therefore, to disclose an amount at this stage.

The supermarket chain remains a commercial decision to be taken by the developer.

785 To the question in relation to the platform, yes, it was a condition of the Government, as landlord, that it should be open to the public.

On Question 135, as has previously been publicly stated, the plot has been reduced in space to accommodate the elderly residential home at the northern end and the police and fire stations at the southern end.

790 In relation to Question 136, the development filed with the DPC by Carlton Properties Ltd has obviously been negotiated with the Government, as landlord. However, it will be examined further by the DPC from a planning perspective.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, I appreciate that there will be a planning process, but as the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister himself says, the Government will be present as part of that process because it will have voting members within the DPC, and also it is the landlord. In relation to the Government's support of the project, he did not quite put it in those terms. He said that it was obviously negotiated by the Government as the landlord, but if this was a successful applicant of the tender process, I assume that the Government is happy with it and therefore I would suggest that they are also supportive of the project.

800 In relation to that, is he able to comment as to why it is that, according to press reports ... I did not see it in the design statement, I saw it in the *Gibraltar Chronicle* press reports. I calculated that the tallest building, if you include the double flooring just under the podium level, will come to 20 floors. That, so that people understand, is double the size, on any rough calculation, of the modular construction of which we now see the full height. It is going to be double the size of that particular building. How is he able to marry the Government's support in relation to this project and what they said in their 2019 manifesto when they talked about ...? I understand that it was in descriptive terms of the London and Regional proposals at the time, which were relevant at the time, but it says in block letters – and the block bit is the 'not', the negative, 'This will NOT be a high-rise development.' Isn't this a high-rise development? And what does the Government have to say in relation to that?

Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, the Government marries this in a very simple way. First of all, the residential construction will only occupy 20% of the site, so it is to the northern end; 80% of the site – that is to say the bulk of it – will be a green area, a park, sporting facilities, and a restaurant/café, I think it said in the planning statement. So the bulk of the site will be an open area on three storeys, having the car park and the commercial activity taking place below. That is how the Government marries it.

820 In relation to the support in the DPC, the Government Ministers in the DPC are not necessarily bound to support Government projects. There have been occasions when my colleague Minister Cortes and I have voted differently on projects. So developers do not take for granted anymore that because they have the consent of the Government as landlord, it means they will have the consent of the Development and Planning Commission, which looks at different criteria and looks at planning considerations, which is not necessarily what the landlord does.

825 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Just to understand the position a bit further, is it the Government's position that it has been willing to – how can I put it in terms which are as parliamentary and as friendly as possible? – bend what appeared to be a very firm commitment by his party in the 2019 election manifesto that they would not be building high-rise flats in that area? Is that the Government's position, that it is willing to change its position in relation to that very specific commitment, because 80% of the land is going to be, in effect, in the podium-level green area and places of leisure and all the rest of it?

Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, the Government has made it a condition also – as landlord, I should add – that it will not accept that the building should be higher than Midtown, which is the one immediately across the road from it. So there is a restriction imposed, as landlord, that the building will not be higher than Midtown. Given that, and given that the Midtown development is already there, we think it is a good balance to be able to have a site where 80% of the land area will be devoted to public use, to recreational use – it represents a huge public gain – and to confine the development to the north, and that it is, in fact, that development that pays for everything else.

Hon. D J Bossino: He will be sighted on more detail than I am, by far, but from my reading of the papers I am not persuaded that certainly the tallest building is not going to be higher than the Midtown development, which will be, in effect, behind it. It depends which way you are looking at it; if you are looking towards the bay, it will be behind it.

Can I ask him, in relation to the premium ...? This is a preferred bidder, and whilst I appreciate that there will be finality in the negotiations and all the rest of it, and alighting on a specific number, once it goes through the planning process and they go into the specificity of it, is he able to give us at least a range within which the Government has negotiated, by way of a premium price, which he is able to tell the public now?

Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, it is very difficult at this stage to be able to give the Member that information for a number of reasons, including the fact that if, for example, the DPC were to remove five floors from the project and make it economically unviable, we would then have to proceed with the next highest bidder on the list. So it is difficult to give that information.

But in terms of the height point the Member made at the beginning of his intervention, he should not confuse floors with height.

Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask why there was a change of heart in relation to the expressions of interest? The expressions of interest, so that people understand, was originally to include the area, in effect, where the parcel post currently is and where it is now earmarked to include the fire station and the police station. Why that change of heart, when indeed it was the Government's own position that the fire station was going to be located on the Rooke site?

Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, for the sake of clarity, let me read out what the expression of interest says:

A process of consultation and negotiation will follow with the parties that submit ideas or concepts that are of interest to the Government. Such concepts, ideas or proposals may need to evolve or be adapted as discussions or negotiations move forward.

So it is a perfectly common thing that happens in this kind of negotiation that sometimes things change. Sometimes it also happens, I should say, on the basis of practical and technical advice to pursue a different course of action from the one originally intended, but it is perfectly common, normal and standard in any process for this kind of thing to happen.

Hon. D J Bossino: Or is it because the original proposal was for the developer to pay for the police station and the fire station? Is that what has changed? The expressions of interest state that any expressions of interest should include proposals as to whether there will be provision of a police station or fire station within the area, which was indeed the Government's stated policy decision in 2015 and in 2019.

Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, the developer will still be paying. The Government has found a different way of doing that.

880 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister saying that the developer will be paying for the fire station and the police station?

Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, yes.

885 **Mr Speaker:** We will have one – (*Interjection*)

Hon. D J Bossino: I have quite a number of questions on the –

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, then we will have the Hon. Roy Clinton.

890 **Hon. K Azopardi:** I have two. I am just going to roll them up. They are different questions, but it might be easier. First of all, I am not really sure I understand that last answer you have given, given the previous answer.

895 **Hon. D J Bossino:** No, the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister.

Hon. K Azopardi: Yes, the Deputy Chief Minister, given that he answered before that the Government had not ... He had intimated that the Government was going to pay for the fire station, so I am not really sure. Perhaps he can clarify that.

900 The other issue is when he says that 80% of the site will be green – he is obviously sighted on the plans and we are not – is that a scientific assessment of the percentage proportions of the plot? I cannot really get my head round that, because if it is going to have this new, dense residential commercial development and it has the Rooke elderly site, it has the fire station and the police station all on that site, how is it possible that, once you have built all that, you still have 80%, which is going to be a park?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, the park is on a podium. That is clear from the designs that have been published. It is not at ground level. It is a podium level on a building which will have three floors, which would be spread over the entire site.

910 On the paying point, clearly the developer will be paying the Government and the Government will be choosing its own contractor and paying its own contractor to build them.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Roy Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

915 If I may ask the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister, and following on from the questions that my hon. colleagues to my left have been asking, can the Minister just confirm to the House that the tender has in fact been awarded? There was no Government announcement and, so far, I have not actually heard those words, that the tender has been awarded to Carlton Properties. Is that the case? Can the Minister at least confirm that point?

920 And then secondly, I presume that some heads of agreement must have been drafted with a premium in mind, maybe contingent on certain things, but can he confirm that something is in writing and has been signed? And could he distinguish the process in this scenario from the Eastside project, where we have a premium of £90 million already announced? I do not understand why one has an announced premium and the other one does not. What is the difference?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, the two are different. First of all, the development was put to planning by a preferred bidder, so the entity we are dealing with is still a preferred bidder. There are, as he rightly says, certain heads of agreement or certain terms and conditions which, if those

930 are met and if the Development and Planning Commission approves the development in a certain style and way, will lead to a premium, and we are now close to also developing the detailed MoU.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister. Can he just confirm, then, effectively until this clears DPC, the tender has not been awarded?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, that is correct, and that is why we are unable to give a premium amount at his stage.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Damon Bossino.

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Hon. D J Bossino: I am grateful, Mr Speaker.

Is he able to – because I do not think he has – confirm that the preferred bidder is the company that I have been referring to? I have been referring to that company based on my reading of the design statement, which cites this company as the client. Is it Carlton Properties Ltd? And is he also able to say whether there are any other entities other than Carlton Properties Ltd involved in this project?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, yes, the preferred bidder is Carlton Properties Ltd. Remember, there were two consortiums originally. The Government was negotiating with two in respect of the site. Those two then merged into one. The preferred bidder is the merged entity, and that is the proposal with which they have come forward.

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Hon. D J Bossino: And presumably that is separate to London and Regional, which was referred to in the 2019 manifesto. Is he able to say why that particular project did not prosper?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, London and Regional, if I remember correctly, emerged from a different expression of interest. That expression of interest closed when the Government was unable to agree terms with them, if I remember correctly, and a new one was then put forward, which is the one we are dealing with today.

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Hon. D J Bossino: And in terms of the further detail, is he saying that Carlton Properties is a third named entity which combines two previous entities that he has referred to? Is that the case, or is Carlton Properties Ltd one of the two?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, the two entities were asked to come to the Government with one proposal for the entire site. This is the product of that discussion. Whether legally or technically those two entities are represented in Carlton Properties Ltd is not something I can answer today, but to all intents and purposes, as far as I am aware, this is the product of that joint bid.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, I think it may be of public interest to understand, but if the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister does not have that information with him today, you understand a bit of the history of this, is he able to provide some history in terms of the entities that are involved, or does he not have it? I think he said obliquely in his reply that he does not have that information with him, and if I may, with the Speaker's leave, I would like to ask further questions in relation to that at the next session of the House, because I think it does arise from the question and answer session we have just had.

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Mr Speaker: Does the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister wish to answer the question? Does he have any further information that will answer the supplementary that he is proposing, which he has in his mind and which he would like to put to you? Do you have any answers to that?

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985 **Hon. Dr J J Garcia:** Mr Speaker, I am happy to provide the general history, which we have done in this House already. If you recall, the expression of interest came out, there were two interested parties whose bid the Government liked, we negotiated with them separately, we were then advised that technically and legally and in terms of the lease and other issues it was better to negotiate with one entity rather than with two in respect of that site, we then advised those parties to get together to come back with one joint bid, and that is what has happened and is where we are today.

990 **Mr Speaker:** I think we need to stick to the six-month rule, so if you have any questions now, please put the questions.

995 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, in relation to the exchange we have just had, I do not think I can pursue the hon. Member further because he does not have that information, and it is on that basis and premise that I was seeking your permission to ask the question so that the hon. Member has the information with him. The difference is that I would write to him and I am sure he would be willing to provide the answer to the question.

1000 **Mr Speaker:** Perhaps that may well be the way forward.

Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, I am not quite sure what information he wants. Does he want the names of the two entities. Is that what it is? Right. If he writes to me, I would be happy to provide that.

1005 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Procedurally, Mr Speaker, the only reason why I am asking for your leave is because I would rather this information ... If the hon. Member is telling me it is confidential, then it is a different matter, but if it is a question of simply providing the information, I would rather it be recorded in *Hansard*, and on that basis I would be grateful for a bit of flexibility to allow me to ask the question and not be beholden to a six-month rule that actually makes it very difficult when one is meant to be asking pertinent and relevant questions precisely because the hon. Members introduced the policy of having monthly meetings of the House.

1015 **Mr Speaker:** In the future, in the Select Committee on Parliamentary Reform, that should be brought up, but as things stand at the moment, it is a six-month rule.

If the hon. Member wishes to write to the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister for answers to all his supplementaries, then I am sure the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister will be more happy to give the information.

1020 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, it is not a question of wishing to write. I would rather ask the question across the floor of the House.

Mr Speaker: I understand, but the hon. Member is a Member of the Opposition, he is a Member of this Parliament, and I am the Speaker and I decide, with respect.

1025 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, if I may ask a question in relation to the supermarket – I think he was talking about this being a commercial decision for the entities. Indeed, I suppose everything is a commercial decision, including the height of buildings and things like that. Is he able to say whether the Government has any condition in relation to this? The design statement talks about a new major supermarket in very specific terms. Is he not able to provide ...? I ask this question because I was asked by somebody to ask it, in the street, because there is interest to know what supermarket is going to be placed there. Does he have any information in relation to that, or indeed, does the Government have any conditions in relation to that issue?

1035 **Hon. Dr J J Garcia:** Mr Speaker, the prospective developers have shared the information with the Government confidentially. The question really asks *which* supermarket is it, and that is not really a question that the Government can answer.

1040 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So he does have the information. Were there any conditions imposed by the Government in relation to the identity of the supermarket? For example, does it have to be a British supermarket, a British chain, or are they not particularly concerned about that?

1045 **Hon. Dr J J Garcia:** Mr Speaker, it is a commercial decision for the operator or the intended or proposed developer. They shared their view, their vision of the project with the Government, and I am sure announcements will be made. He will have seen the planning statement.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, I understand that fully, but is the answer, therefore, that the Government has no particular preference or, indeed, condition imposed in relation to this issue?

1050 **Hon. Dr J J Garcia:** Mr Speaker, the Government published an expression of interest, and if I recall, it was quite wide. It said the Government, at this stage, is not restricting the future use of the site and is open to ideas and proposals. Entities came forward with those ideas and proposals to the Government. The Government went through the different lists of entities and the different interested parties and determined on this particular one, which has now put forward the application for planning permission. That included a supermarket, but it could not have included a supermarket. A supermarket was not a condition imposed by the Government, but a condition imposed by the expression of interest.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q137/2023
Old GBC site –
Update re expressions of interest

1060 **Clerk:** Question 137/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide an update in respect of the expressions of interest issued in connection with the old GBC site.

1065 Before the hon. Member answers the question, Mr Speaker, simply to say, out of an abundance of caution, that I have an interest because I live in the area, but I have been asked to pose this question by residents of the area ... in relation to this question and the other one in respect of Mount Pleasant. I am not sure if the hon. Member is answering the question.

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

1070 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Mr Speaker, the Government continues in discussion with a preferred bidder for the site.

1075 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, when I asked this question on 17th May last year, 2022, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister said he was currently reviewing four applications, which I think was the total number of applications that had been received. Is he telling this House that that number has been reduced to one, that he is looking at one, almost successful, applicant?

Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, that is correct. The Government has now centred on one particular application, and that is the proposed developer that we are dealing with.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Is he able to give any information in relation to what type of project that is going to be? I know he has set out some conditions, which are that it should not be a high rise, that I think, if memory serves – I have the *Hansard* here – they would have to provide a number of – I think 40 – public parking spaces, but other than that, is he able to provide any information? I understand that he is currently in negotiations, so there may be an element of restriction in relation to that.

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Yes, Mr Speaker, there is a live negotiation going on, so I would not like to say too much, but I would remind the hon. Member, as he has reminded the House, that the proposed scheme was for a low-rise residential development, for a use which was compatible with the area and had to provide a minimum of 40 public car parking spaces and a green area. The other element was if the developer chose to increase the footprint of the site, they were also obliged to pay for and relocate a number of cultural entities that are, at the moment, on the site, either completely somewhere else and they paid for it, or temporarily and then bring them back to the site. That provides a flavour of the kind of thing that we are trying to achieve there.

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Hon. D J Bossino: The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister talks about the extent of the site and he is absolutely correct, that was the subject of the expressions of interest and is not necessarily new information which he is giving to the House, but is he able to confirm that the extent of the site is as shaded in red and blue, subject to the point that he made? I think blue is the one that is optional. If the successful applicant is able to move those sites where there are cultural activities currently taking place, is he able to confirm that that is the extent of the site?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, that is precisely the new information that I provided to the House, that the developer is looking at the entire site, which is option 2, and not only at the area shaded in red, which is the first option.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, Mr Speaker, I was just trying to be helpful by way of my preamble, but he is saying that it is new information, in that ... I understand what he is saying, that the applicant is minded to include, as part of the development, the area shaded in blue, but my question was slightly different. Is he telling the House that the extent of the area does not go beyond the red and the blue, as set out in the expression of interest?

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, the extent of the area in terms of Government ownership, Government land, is the red and blue. The Government is not free to sell or negotiate with other people's property.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Is it a possibility that part of the development is to consider an area that is adjacent to the red one, which is, I understand, currently in private ownership? Is it going to be extending to that particular property? I think it is one family that lives there.

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Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Mr Speaker, part of the proposal the Government has received includes extending it to private land to the south of the Government plot. So there is the option of extending it or not extending it. There are two options being looked at.

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Hon. D J Bossino: This is with the one potential applicant that he talked about earlier?

Hon. Dr J J Garcia: Yes.

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Mr Speaker: Next question.

ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY, CLIMATE CHANGE AND EDUCATION

Q138/2023

**St Martin's School hydrotherapy pool –
Whether fully operational**

Clerk: Question 138/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government confirm that the hydrotherapy pool at St Martin's School is now fully operational?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, no, sir. There have been complex design problems which have affected drainage and so I have not approved its use until these are resolved. I am sure that faced with the same issue, all hon. Members would have acted as I have and in the same timescale.

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The works for the resolution of the problems are ongoing and I expect them to be completed in a matter of weeks.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Can the Minister expand further on what problems are causing these delays? I think he said something generally, but I did not quite capture it.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, there are issues related to the drainage of the pool and the ability of the pipe taking the water away from the area to deal with that amount, which has led to backflow. I was not comfortable that that was acceptable, and therefore I have requested – in fact, more than requested – that these be rectified before we are able to do it. I have been told only in the last few weeks that they have now come up with an engineering solution, which will involve some changes and also a regular maintenance programme that will check the system regularly, and I am confident that in a matter of weeks we will be able to have it up and running.

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Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q139/2023

**St Martin's School –
Life skills and vocational courses**

Clerk: Question 139/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Is Government planning any future life skills or vocational courses for pupils of Saint Martin's School to follow once they complete their compulsory educational years at said school?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, the Gibraltar College has offered life skills and vocational courses since 2013. Young people who have been able to access these courses have always been able to enrol on these, regardless of the educational setting in which they completed their compulsory education.

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1170 Our plans for the new Gibraltar College include a dedicated learning zone for young people with additional needs. This will offer opportunities for expansion of the present curriculum. Further life skills and vocational courses are currently being explored.

1175 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I welcome the news, Mr Speaker, for the future, for the College, but can the Minister confirm, as we stand today, despite whatever the College is offering, are they able to cater for students who may have additional needs as we speak, or is this something that is in the pipeline for future implementation within the College?

1180 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Mr Speaker, as I think I have explained, the College offers opportunity. The College at the moment I believe has a number of pupils who were formerly at St Martin's. It does really depend on the disability of each particular student, to see whether the College is able to cater and support them with learning support assistants, for example. This is considered on a case-by-case basis and it does depend on the level of disability, but the panel and the teachers who have experience in this will be the ones to determine what they can offer.

1185 I do know that the courses being offered at present are the ASDAN programme and there are a number of subjects covered, ranging from managing social behaviour to preparing for work, functional skills, healthy eating, food safety and one or two others.

1190 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The hon. Member says that further life skills and vocational courses are currently being explored. Is he able to provide some detail in relation to that?

1195 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Not detail as such, but the current College site is obviously limited. The new College that is in the process of being designed – in fact, the designs are pretty advanced, or at least the requirements set – will be able to offer more facilities. I would not be able to detail which specific courses, but I am happy to look at this and offer it and write to the hon. Member. I would appreciate being reminded, to ensure that I do not omit ... I usually do remember to write back and copy the Clerk, but if he wants to remind me, I can get those details for him.

1200 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And in relation to the ASDAN programme, is he able to enlighten this House as to what specific special needs that is geared for? I am not familiar with it.

1205 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Mr Speaker, I would not be able to give the details. I can imagine what they are, but I think it would be unfair for me to do that. I can tell the House what subjects are covered, like I have said, which really focuses on allowing these young people to progress in matters like good health, independent living, community inclusion and employment, but the specific details of the requirements and so on, I would need notice of that question.

1210 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful for your indulgence in relation to this. Just one final question. He talks about the body which in effect decides whether an individual can access these courses or not, and he talks about the teachers – presumably the teachers at St Martin's School – as to whether an individual is capable of having a sufficient level of understanding to be able to follow those courses. Presumably those are the factors which go into the mix. And then he talks about a panel. Which panel is he referring to?

1215 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** I am referring to the Special Needs Panel, which I have referred to in the past, and the teachers not just of St Martin's but also of the College, who would be the receiving institution. But I can say – and I do not have the figures here, but I think I have given them in the past – that there is an increasing number of young people from St Martin's now receiving a higher level of education at the College, and the intention is that we will continue to do that.

1220 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, the hon. Member has spoken about the College site and the designs for it. Does he have a fixed site in mind for this area?

1225 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Mr Speaker, this is well known. The site that is being worked on at the moment is the one behind the Cross of Sacrifice.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q140-41/2023

**Bayside and Westside music departments–
Bayside performance room; damage to equipment**

Clerk: Question 140/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

1230 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can the Minister for Education provide details of how long the performance room at Bayside’s music department has been out of use and the estimated date by when this facility will once again be available for use by pupils and staff?

1235 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 141.

1240 **Clerk:** Question 141/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can the Minister for Education provide details of any damage caused to music equipment and related apparatus, inclusive of costs to repair or replace these, at both secondary schools?

1245 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

1250 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Mr Speaker, the performance room at Bayside suffered water ingress in the last week of term in December 2022, the week commencing 19th December. All equipment and resources were moved at the time to avoid any damage. The only item which was not moved and became damaged as a result was a very old amplifier that had already been deemed obsolete.

At the start of term, on 10th January 2023, a works order was raised by Bayside School and reported to the facilities management contractor. On 12th January, the contractor checked all the electrics and the performance room was deemed to be safe for staff and pupils. The performance room has been available for use since 13th January.

1255 Westside School has had very minor water ingress in the music area and no equipment has been damaged.

Other than the damage caused to the obsolete amplifier referred to above, no equipment was damaged. The Department of Education does not expect to incur any costs for the repairs caused by water ingress damage.

1260 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

Q142/2023

**Water ingress and construction defects in schools –
Damage to classrooms and equipment**

Clerk: Question 142/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

1265 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government provide full details of the damage caused to classrooms and equipment at any of our schools as a result of water ingress or construction defects, together with estimated costs to repair or replace damaged fixtures and/or equipment?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

1270 **Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Mr Speaker, I have just handed over a schedule with the information requested. It is on its way to the hon. Member.

Answer to Q142/2023

Answer to Question 142

School	Water Ingress Location	Damages to Fixtures/Equipment	Action	Estimated cost
St. Joseph's Upper	Top classroom/activity room	Light fittings	GIBS is undertaking major works (re-roofing) to the Clock Tower roof due to recurrent water ingress issues.	£52,473.74 is cost of roof relining. Resulting damages at Nil cost
St. Joseph's Lower	top classroom	Light fittings	GIBS is undertaking major works (re-roofing) to the Clock Tower roof due to recurrent water ingress issues.	
St. Anne's Upper Primary	Sports Hall Gym store Library	ceiling tiles and water stained wall Light fittings, ceiling tiles & plasterboard some light fittings & ceiling tiles/2 blinds	Repairs undertaken unsuccessfully - ongoing investigation Repairs undertaken unsuccessfully - ongoing investigation affected light fittings disconnected - partial lighting available - ongoing investigation	Related to defects and liability period. The Department does not expect to incur costs for repairs
Governor's Meadow	LSF - through skylight	none	repaired	£50.00
St. Paul's	Nursery	none	ongoing investigation	Unknown at this stage
St. Bernards Lower Primary	Sports Hall and adjacent areas Various locations Various locations School entrance lobby/SA Store	Historical issues from inception that have caused considerable damage to the building interior Intruder alarm callout and subsequent repairs Fire Alarm callout and subsequent repairs recurrent damp/water filtration causing damage to wall plaster	Repairs undertaken by contractor include waterproofing/relining of Playground surface and works to Green Roof Repairs by contractor Repairs by contractor Currently under investigation	Related to defects and liability period - Managed through Chief Technical Officer £523.00 £1,215.15 Unknown at this stage
St. Bernards Upper Primary	Various locations Various locations	Intruder alarm callout and subsequent repairs Fire Alarm callout and subsequent repairs	Repairs by contractor Repairs by contractor	£415.00 £2,137.25
Westside	Computer suite 130 - Level 2 playground through staircase 4 wall Room 304 - Level 4 playground down through staircase wall Room 318 - Level 4 playground through an unknown path Staircase 2 lift shaft - Level 4 playground through the main wall Lab 115 - Ceiling. Music Rooms - Water coming in through the window Staircase 3 - Podium Level - Water coming from the external podium/upper floors through the windows	None as this area had been secured from previous year Ceiling tiles collapsed. Staining of the walls. Damage to posters etc on the wall Ceiling tiles collapsed. Water stains on the wall Residue build on the doors and shaft. Rust evident in the level 3 lift door Superficial water damage to the middle pod. New observation Water staining on the wall. Area of the room has been cordoned off after the rains Water damage, stairs having to be cordoned off	Works report issued to Facilities Management contractor Works report issued to Facilities Management contractor Works report issued to Facilities Management contractor Works report issued to Facilities Management contractor Works report issued to Facilities Management contractor	Education Department does not expect to incur costs related to water ingress issues at the two secondary schools
Bayside	Room 226 - music area	Amplifier, ceiling tiles, flooring & other minor issues	Works report issued to Facilities Management contractor	

1275 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, going through this list, in St Joseph's, both the upper and the lower primary schools, in the column of damages the Minister has kindly put in light fittings. Does this entail a danger to electrical installation? Is that what is meant by it, or is it just a physical lampshade that has been damaged?

1280 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Mr Speaker, the water ingress did affect the electrics. That obviously was dealt with immediately, and during the period that the room was compromised, the children were moved to another class. I believe they are likely to have got back today; I need to confirm that. Clearly, whenever there is the slightest suggestion that there could be a danger due to water getting into the electrics, that classroom is not used and the works are carried out immediately.

1285 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker in respect of the Westside School, the Computer Suite 130 Level 2, under damages it says 'None as this area has been secured from previous year'. What exactly is

meant by that? I do not quite know. It says no damage because the area has been secured. It means what?

1290 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** I believe what that means is the solution happened last year and therefore there has been no damage this year, but for the fullness of record we have included it, as that was an area that was giving problems earlier on.

1295 **Hon. E J Reyes:** In the Minister explaining that it had been settled last year, on the estimated cost there is no indication of how much the cost was.

1300 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, Mr Speaker, because these are considered to be problems arising from the original construction. We would not be expected to pay for matters that have arisen as a result of pending faults, and therefore it has been absorbed by the contractor as part of the post-snagging process.

1305 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, if I go to Bayside, at the very bottom it says the damage was to an amplifier, ceiling tiles, flooring and other minor issues. Kindly, a student provided some footage taken with a mobile phone and showed it to his or her parents and I have seen big puddles of water accumulating in these classrooms, but the Minister puts it down as 'other minor issues'. Is that what is considered as a minor issue, very big puddles of water if it has rained overnight or the day before they come to school? It is a hazard and of course makes the whole area slippery. I do not know if he has any further information on what is happening there.

1310 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Mr Speaker, I suppose that 'minor' is a relative term. I think this is the area that I referred to in my previous question, which has now been dealt with, and, as in the other cases in Westside, because they were residual they have not cost the Department because it has been made good by the contractor.

1315 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I see, Mr Speaker, that in respect of Westside we have far more detailed, broken-down information than in respect of Bayside. I do not know if this is a question of the manner in which it has been reported to him or not, but I believe that, not for the first time, just a few days ago even whiteboards were coming off the wall when teachers were using them in classrooms. Is the Minister aware of that problem happening live in a classroom with pupils?

1320 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** No, Mr Speaker. This question refers to water-related problems. I do not know whether the hon. Member is suggesting that the whiteboards problem is related to water ingress. If there is another separate question on whiteboards, then obviously I would have to inquire, but I have no information in relation to any specific whiteboards. I think the hon. Member said in the last few days. It certainly has not come to me and it certainly did not arise when I last spoke to the senior team in the schools.

1330 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I appreciate, Mr Speaker, the Minister can only provide information as given to him. Just for clarification, my question does say 'as a result of water ingress or construction defects', so it is not just water ingress. I believe that there are some walls – I take it they are probably of plasterboard material, or whatever – that are completely warped and so on, so that I attribute as more as a construction defect, and normally logic tells you when these walls get warped it is because the plasterboard itself has got wet. I do not know if the Minister is aware of the cause of these problems.

1335 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, Mr Speaker, indeed, but I have no indication either as to whether the incident that he is referring to on the whiteboards is anything to do with construction defects. I have provided the information that has been provided to me. If the hon. Member is aware of

1340 anything further, then I would be happy to consider it. What I can say is that none of this would have happened in any new school made by the party opposite when they were in Government because they did not build any new schools.

1345 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, there are references in the description the hon. Member has provided under damages to fixtures and equipment which can be somewhat alarming. We are talking about a building full of people, not just children but teachers as well, and we are talking about ceiling tiles collapsing. That features on at least two occasions, and some of these issues have had to result in areas such as stairs being cordoned off. Is the hon. Member concerned about the state of the buildings?

1350 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** No, Mr Speaker, the hon. Member is not concerned about the state of the buildings. These types of problems do arise in new buildings. If it is in relation to water ingress, I can say that the ceiling tiles are not heavy tiles, they are soft, cardboard-type tiles, so they have not caused any injury, nor would they cause any injury. So absolutely no concern whatsoever.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q143/2023
University of Gibraltar –
PGCE courses

1355 **Clerk:** Question 143/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government update this House in respect of the international accreditation of Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses offered by the University of Gibraltar?

1360 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, I can provide the following information.

1365 The PGCE at the University of Gibraltar was designed with reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the UK Characteristics Statement for Masters Degrees and the UK Teachers' Standards. This postgraduate degree provides school experience and professional portfolio evidence that students need in order to apply for professional recognition of their qualification.

1370 In Gibraltar, no person can work as a teacher in a school operated by the Department of Education unless registered on the Gibraltar Qualified Teacher Status (GQTS) Register. Successful completion of the PGCE programme at the University of Gibraltar provides direct entry on to the GQTS Register as per the Education (Gibraltar Qualified Teacher Status) Regulations 2020.

1375 In the UK, no person can work as a teacher in a school that is part of the UK state-funded school system unless they hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Although QTS is not a legal requirement for all UK schools – for example, free and private schools – many schools still use QTS to assess the quality of candidates for teaching posts.

1380 Those with a University of Gibraltar PGCE degree and GQTS registration follow the same process as individuals from nations that include those in the EEA, Hong Kong, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland and the USA, namely, they can apply for direct online entry on to the UK QTS register. Each country has different requirements and regulatory organisations that deal with teacher qualification recognition. ENIC (previously NARIC) is a commercial information centre that provides the contact details for the appropriate

organisation in international countries and can assist individuals with the overseas process, for a fee.

1385 In general, most countries and international schools require overseas applicants to provide some form of professional recognition – for example, a jurisdictional government-issued teaching licence, such as the GQTS. In addition, most international schools and organisations will seek to ensure that the qualification awarding body, typically a university, meets internationally recognised standards for quality assurance in higher education. The University of Gibraltar, following a successful international quality review against all 10 higher education quality standards, was recently awarded international accreditation by the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This global accreditation provides trust and confidence for students and international education establishments.

1395 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, if I refer to the last couple of years, whenever the Minister or his predecessor have answered questions in respect of the PGCE, they have always informed this House of how hopeful they were and were leading us to believe it was only a question of time, that by obtaining a PGCE in Gibraltar this was somehow going to be fully acceptable within the UK qualification system. From the Minister's answer today, that does not seem to be the case. It now seems that the individual has to go through some sort of application process. So either the situation has changed since it was originally being promoted as a PGCE, or not. As it happens, a graduate who undertakes the Postgraduate Certificate in Education in Gibraltar does not now automatically qualify to be recognised as a QTS graduate to be able to teach in ordinary state schools in the UK, whereas those who choose to carry out their PGCE in the United Kingdom, instead of the University of Gibraltar, obtain the QTS. Unless things have changed since my day, 1400 you are even given a number on the register in the UK and you provide that to the local authorities, who require nothing further; maybe there is an internal exercise where they check the veracity of the number you have written down.

1405 It does not seem to be a reciprocal recognition, as we were being led to believe a couple of years ago. Can the Minister explain why what was hoped to be attained two years ago has not really materialised? 1410

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, there are a couple of points here. I do not know whether the hon. Member is questioning the quality and the rigour of the course at the University of Gibraltar, because there is absolutely no question that that is up to standard. I think if that is the case and the hon. Member fully accepts the quality and the rigour and the quality of teachers that emerge from the course at the University of Gibraltar, then the hon. Member is worried about a procedural matter which would also apply to those teachers who qualify in universities in Hong Kong, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland and the USA, where they apply for direct online entry. 1415

1420 I am not aware of any local teachers who have not been successful, have they applied. I think that this is something that in no way calls into question the validity of the courses at the University of Gibraltar and in no way can be seen as a serious obstacle to those teachers from Gibraltar who would seek a job in the UK.

1425 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, I am sorry the Minister got the impression that I was questioning at all the validity or the rigour of the contents of what is being delivered in the PGCE locally. Nothing like that ever crossed my mind and I do not think it crossed my lips. I think it may have been a misunderstanding.

1430 What I am questioning is that two years ago this House was being informed and we were equally with the Government side actually promoting to students the idea of undertaking a PGCE course registered at the University of Gibraltar so they did not have to leave their homeland. It saves money in grants and so on to Government and they were able to undertake a PGCE – and different Ministers have always assured this House that they would have no problems in getting ...

1435 it was just a question of time, we were going through paperwork and so on – that will carry an equal validity with the UK.

I am not interested because I do not represent anyone in Australia or Hong Kong today and have no intention of ever representing people in Australia or Hong Kong. Looking at Gibraltar's graduates, for those who have been encouraged to undertake a PGCE locally, it now seems that the validity of that accreditation with the UK has not transpired and they have to now go through some other process. Am I wrong in that there has been a shift in what was being sold to students two years ago?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, I do not think we need to encourage anyone to take their PGCE in Gibraltar; it is very well subscribed. The value of being able to undertake a degree course of this nature in your home town, particularly for those people who may be wanting to come into teaching later on in life ... As is the case at the moment with many of the PGCE students, all of whom I have met, they may have had other careers and feel that they have a vocation for teaching. Maybe they have always wanted to teach, and in the past, when they were at the school leaving age they were unable, for whatever reason, to leave Gibraltar. They are coming in and they are having this rigorous, high-quality course and they are qualifying. So I do not believe that the current situation is a problem.

Remember also that the logic continues because if they have chosen to study this course in Gibraltar rather than go to the UK, because for them going to the UK might be a problem, it is highly unlikely – not impossible – that they would now seek a job in the UK, and therefore their qualifications are perfectly okay for them to practise in Gibraltar. And if they do want to seek a job in the UK, then there is a simple process to be followed in order for them to be able to do that.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: I am not sure the hon. Member is specifically addressing the point that my hon. colleague is setting out. Is it that the Government is going to envisage achieving that accreditation of the equivalence of the course? There may be people who, yes, of course, wanted to do it here on the basis that they were going to get an equivalent certificate that would then be transportable, as it were, and now they find it is not transportable in that sense. That is the question. Is it going to be the equivalent of what my hon. colleague has said? In other words, will it then lead people to have the option, should they wish to in future, like they used to when they did it in England?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, yes, it is transportable. The only thing is there is a process to be followed for the UK to say, 'Yes, okay, we accept your qualification.' They are going to accept it, but there is a process to be followed. It is not as if there is an obstacle.

I am sorry, because the Hon. Mr Reyes seems to have been offended at the fact that his question could be taken as an implication that our course is not good enough, and I totally refute that. Our teachers are coming through, perhaps even with more rigorous requirements than there would be in the UK, but there is a process to be followed at this point in time. That is the fact, but I do not think it is an obstacle and I do not think it is a problem.

Hon. K Azopardi: I understand that, and no one is saying that on this side. It was unnecessary to clear it because, with all due respect, my hon. colleague to my right had already said that no one was questioning the rigour or the excellence of the course. The question that we are putting, given that there is a process to be followed, is: is this something that the Government is trying to clear up so that there will not be a process in future, so that there is acceptance of the quality of the course?

1485 **Hon. G H Licudi:** Mr Speaker, can I assist the House, given that there was a reference by the
Hon. Mr Reyes to assurances given in this House and elsewhere by former Ministers for
Education? That was clearly a direct reference to me, and perhaps I can explain my understanding.
Certainly I am not speaking for the Government, the Minister speaks for the Government, but
1490 given that there was a reference to me and to assurances given by me, let me tell the hon. Member
what my understanding was about the position.

There is a Gibraltar qualification which allows – and this was something that was introduced,
as I recall, when I was in office – by regulations a Gibraltar QTS status, and there is a requirement
to register. If anybody wants to practise in the UK as a teacher, they have to register and obtain
QTS status in the UK, and you have to show, in order to obtain QTS status in the UK, that you have
1495 an accreditation from an accredited university or teaching institution that allows you to obtain
that registration as QTS status in the UK. The fact that there is a process simply means that there
is an application to be made. Nobody in the UK, without there being an application, will know the
people who have done the course in Gibraltar and whether they want to practise in the UK and
obtain status in the UK, and therefore there has to be an application. When there is an application,
1500 there is a need to look at what qualification you have.

Gibraltar's qualification today now stands in exactly the same position as a qualification from
Scotland. A person who qualifies in Scotland as a teacher and wants to teach in England has to
apply for a number. The hon. Member referred to a QTS number. You have to apply and say, 'I
have qualified at Edinburgh University, please give me my QTS number,' and then you can teach
1505 in England. In the same way, somebody who does the same in Gibraltar goes to England and says,
'I have qualified in Gibraltar, this is my status, this is the university, please give me my QTS
number.'

It is exactly the same position my learned Friend experienced when he studied law in the UK
and was called to the Bar in the UK. That did not automatically allow him to practise law in
1510 Gibraltar. He needed to apply in Gibraltar to be called to the Bar on the back of a qualification
which he had obtained in the UK. So there was still a process to be followed. After having qualified
in the UK as a barrister and been called to the Bar in the UK, my learned Friend and myself, and
other members of the legal profession here, still had to come to Gibraltar and make an application,
and there followed that application and we were all called to the Bar and we can practise. That is
1515 exactly the same process that applies in relation to teachers.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, may I just thank my hon. Friend for assisting and essentially
making the point that there is no obstacle.

1520 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the hon. Member for his contribution. It has helped
to clarify it a little bit. He has given examples of other professions, like law and so on. As far as
teaching is concerned, a student who undergoes a PGCE in the UK and is granted a QTS number
in the UK automatically has that accepted within Gibraltar. He has explained to us the process that
you now have to apply for that in the UK and so on, so it is not completely reciprocal, but all right,
1525 there is a system.

Can I ask the Minister, is he aware of any PGCE holders graduating from the University of
Gibraltar who have encountered any problems in the UK? Or is he aware of those who have not
encountered any problems in the UK and therefore been able to obtain QTS? Does he happen to
have at hand any statistics that it is been an easy process or that it is been questioned? It is just
1530 to put the mind at ease for those who would consider undertaking PGCE courses at the University
of Gibraltar.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, I am not aware of any teacher who has applied to teach in
the UK and gone through the process and found that they have not been able to register. Should
1535 I be made aware, then I would immediately take that up with the Department for Education in the
UK.

Hon. E J Reyes: And likewise, Mr Speaker – I am grateful for that – is he aware of anyone who has applied and has had no problems and got the QTS registration?

1540

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

1545

Q144/2023

**Non-completion of further or higher education courses –
Details**

Clerk: Question 144/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide details in respect of the number of students who have returned to Gibraltar without fully completing their further or higher education studies since 1st September 2020, indicating the reasons why, together with details of the date and corresponding academic year in which the student left the course they were enrolled on?

1550

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

1555

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, a schedule with the information is making its way to the hon. Member as I speak.

Answer to Q144/2023

Answer to Question 144

Number	Status	Terminating Year	Reason for non-completion
1	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
2	FAILED	2019/2020	Failed academic year
3	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Did not like the course selected
4	DEFERRED	2019/2020	Deferred Year but resumed Jan 22
5	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Opted to take a gap year
6	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew from Course to pursue further A Level studies
7	Withdrawn - paid back in full	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
8	DEFERRED	2019/2020	Suspended studies and subsequently did not meet eligibility criteria due to residency
9	FAILED	2019/2020	Failed academic year
10	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
11	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
12	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Personal Medical Issues
13	FAILED	2019/2020	Failed academic year - self-funded repeat successfully
14	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Did not proceed with University course enrolment
15	FAILED	2019/2020	Failed academic year and repeat year
16	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Did not proceed with University course enrolment
17	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
18	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
19	FAILED	2019/2020	Failed academic year - self-funded repeat successfully
20	DEFERRED	2019/2020	Deferred studies 19/20 resumed 20/21
21	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
22	DEFERRED	2019/2020	Withdrew - Related family issues
23	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Failed academic year
24	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew from studies 19/20 but resumed 20/21
25	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Deferred studies 19/20 - Did student resume?????
26	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
27	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Related family issues
28	FAILED	2019/2020	Failed academic year
29	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
30	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Personal Medical Issues
31	Withdrawn - paid back in full	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
32	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Personal Medical Issues
33	FAILED	2019/2020	Failed academic year
34	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
35	DEFERRED	2019/2020	Interrupted progression - Self-funded failed modules from previous year
36	Withdrawn - paying back	2019/2020	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
37	WITHDRAWN	2019/2020	Withdrew from studies 19/20 but resumed 20/21

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GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT, MONDAY, 13th FEBRUARY 2023

Continued Answer to Question 144

Number	Status	Terminating Year	Reason for non-completion
1	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Self funded year 1
2	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Did not proceed with University course enrolment
3	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Continued with change of course
4	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons
5	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons. Continued at Different uni/course
6	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons.
7	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons. Returned at later date
8	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons.
9	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons.
10	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Personal Medical Issues
11	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons.
12	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Personal Medical Issues
13	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons.
14	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons.
15	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons.
16	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons. Returned at later date
17	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons. Continued at Different uni/course
18	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons.
19	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Did not like the course selected
20	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Personal Medical Issues
21	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons.
22	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Undisclosed personal reasons. Continued at Different uni/course
23	WITHDRAWN	2020/2021	Withdrew - Personal Medical Issues
24	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Intercalated Studies. Resumed at later date
25	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Personal Medical reasons. Returned at later date
26	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Self funded placement year. Resumed 21/22
27	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Opted to take a gap year
28	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Opted to take a gap year
29	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Self funded intercalated year. Resumed 21/22
30	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Opted to take a gap year
31	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Self funded intercalated year. Resumed 21/22
32	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Resumed 21/22
33	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Personal Medical reasons. Returned at later date and completed Successfully
34	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Personal Medical reasons - funded repeat year - Passed successfully
35	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Undisclosed personal reasons. Resumed 21/22
36	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Personal Medical reasons
37	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Resumed 21/22
38	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Resumed 22/23
39	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Resumed 22/23
40	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Resumed 22/23
41	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Resumed 21/22 and completed Successfully
42	DEFERRED	2020/2021	Opted to leave course
43	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
44	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year - self-funded repeat successfully
45	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
46	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year - self-funded repeat successfully
47	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year - self-funded repeat successfully
48	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
49	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year

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GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT, MONDAY, 13th FEBRUARY 2023

Continued Answer to Question 144

Number	Status	Terminating Year	Reason for non-completion
50	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
51	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
52	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year - self-funded repeat successfully
53	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
54	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
55	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
56	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
57	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year - self-funded repeat successfully
58	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
59	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year - self-funded repeat successfully
60	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
61	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year - self-funded repeat successfully
62	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
63	FAILED	2020/2021	Failed academic year
Number	Status	Terminating Year	Reason for non-completion
1	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
2	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
3	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
4	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
5	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
6	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
7	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
8	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
9	DEFERRED	2021/22	Opted to take gap year - accomodation reasons
10	DEFERRED	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
11	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
12	DEFERRED	2021/22	Gap year - wasn't sure about course
13	DEFERRED	2021/22	Placement year. Returned at later date
14	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
15	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
16	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
17	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
18	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
19	DEFERRED	2021/22	Year abroad. Returned at later date
20	DEFERRED	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
21	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
22	DEFERRED	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons - funded repeat year
23	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
24	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
25	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
26	DEFERRED	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
27	FAILED	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
28	FAILED	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
29	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
30	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
31	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year
32	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
33	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year
34	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year

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Continued Answer to Question 144

35	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year
36	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
37	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year
38	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year
39	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
40	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year
41	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
42	FAILED	2021/22	Failed academic year
43	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
44	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
45	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Did not proceed with University course enrolment
46	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
47	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Did not proceed with University course enrolment
48	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
49	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
50	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
51	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
52	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Change of course
53	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Change of course
54	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
55	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
56	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
57	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
58	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
59	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
60	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
61	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
62	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
63	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
64	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
65	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Did not proceed with University course enrolment
66	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
67	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
68	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
69	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Did not proceed with University course enrolment
70	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
71	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Change of course
72	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
73	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
74	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons. Returned at later date
75	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Personal Medical reasons
76	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Undisclosed Personal reasons
77	WITHDRAWN	2021/22	Eligibility
78	SELF FUNDED	2021/22	Self funded Placement year
79	SELF FUNDED	2021/22	Deffered - self funded year
80	SELF FUNDED	2021/22	Self funded year abroad

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Continued Answer to Question 144

Number	Status	Terminating Year	Reason for non-completion
1	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Not ready to pursue course
2	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Undisclosed Personal reasons
3	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Personal Medical reasons
4	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Did not proceed with University course enrolment
5	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Did not proceed with University course enrolment
6	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Did not proceed with University course enrolment
7	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Personal Medical reasons
8	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Undisclosed Personal reasons
9	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Undisclosed Personal reasons
10	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Was unsure about course
11	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Undisclosed Personal reasons
12	WITHDRAWN	2022/23	Undisclosed Personal reasons
13	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Self funding placement year
14	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
15	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
16	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
17	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
18	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Change of course - self-funding
19	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
20	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Self funding placement year
21	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Change of course - self-funding
22	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
23	SELF FUNDED	2022/23	Self funding placement year
24	DEFERRED	2022/23	Undisclosed Personal reasons
25	DEFERRED	2022/23	Self funding placement year
26	DEFERRED	2022/23	Failed academic year - self-funding repeat year
27	DEFERRED	2022/23	Opted to take gap year
28	DEFERRED	2022/23	Opted to take gap year

1560 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, sir, it is a long list with five or six pages of small print, which may take me a while. Would you like to proceed with other questions? If I have anything that arises, I can inform you.

Mr Speaker: I agree.

Q145/2023
Vessels discharging black or grey smoke –
Warnings and fines issued

1565 **Clerk:** Question 145/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, how many vessels have been warned or otherwise fined for discharge of black or grey smoke over the last 12 months?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

1570 **Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Mr Speaker, before I reply, I have just received information from my hon. Friend Mr Licudi that he is aware of one teacher who qualified at the University of Gibraltar and is now successfully employed in the UK without any hiccups.

1575 The Environmental Agency has not yet issued a fine or a formal warning to a vessel. The Agency investigated eight complaints of dark or black smoke from vessels in 2022. No complaints of dark or black smoke have been received, so far, in 2023.

1580 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, in relation to those eight complaints in 2022, can the Minister give more information about the duration? I suppose a warning or an investigation would have commenced in relation to a time period when these vessels were emitting black or grey smoke. Does he have any further information on the answer?

1585 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, Mr Speaker. There are several criteria that have to be met, including the darkness of the smoke, according to the Ringelmann chart, also the period of time. There are several defences regarding the reasons why the black smoke is emitted – if it is something that is reacting to an emergency, for example.

1590 I can go through, very briefly, the eight instances that have been referred to. There was one in February last year which did not meet the criteria, two in July last year that did not meet the criteria, and one in August that did not meet the criteria. There was one in August where the vessel was boarded and the master of the vessel was able to provide evidence that the emission was due to an unforeseen failure in connection with the boiler, and following this, as well as guidance from the GMA, it was determined that there were exceptional circumstances and the prosecution should not be pursued. There was then one further instance in August and one in
1595 November that did not meet the criteria, and there was one other where the smoke was intermittent and did not fit the time criteria either. Those are the details that I have on those eight instances.

1600 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Does the Minister have any view as to whether the criteria that are imposed by law are too flexible insofar as the damage that black smoke and grey smoke does to our environment? It is clear that of the eight incidences he has referred to – very helpfully, thank you for that – there has been not a single prosecution, and whilst I understand that the criteria were not met, there were possible defences available to the master of that particular vessel. Does the Minister have a view as to the flexibility, or otherwise inflexibility, of some of the criteria?
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1610 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Mr Speaker, it is very hard to really be less flexible, and certainly I would not be more flexible. As I said, the defences are that the emission of the dark smoke took place in circumstances affecting the safety or life of the vessel or a member of the crew or a passenger. Clearly that has to remain as a defence. The other defence is some unavoidable failure of apparatus. Clearly the consequences on the air quality in the immediate vicinity are not going to be acceptable, but the defence nevertheless is probably justifiable.

1615 Different jurisdictions – and I did quite a bit of research on this when we were drafting the Bill that we passed through the House not that long ago – have different criteria. This was done in close consultation with the Port Authority and the GMA, and now that we have just over a year of experience, I think it is something that we can always look at again and study to see whether any changes are necessary.

1620 I do think, Mr Speaker, if I may, that it does act as a deterrent. Certainly every instance is investigated, and more often than not the master of the vessel is actually tackled and explanations are requested, so it is nowhere near turning a blind eye. There is active investigation in every case.

1625 **Hon. E J Phillips:** I suppose the answer really is active investigation into these matters, because there could be an instance where machinery fails in the situation. That is the defence that is available to the master and the crew of this particular vessel. However, on close inspection by the investigators, if the machinery is not maintained to a certain standard that is acceptable, that defence may not be available to that master or that crew.

I think the other countries that the Hon. Minister has alluded to have strict liability offences in relation to black smoke, for instance, and therefore our position is slightly more flexible than that because defences are certainly available. Is it right, then, given the experience that we have had post the implementation of this legislation, that this matter is kept under review, particularly also to the extent to which we can fully manage an investigation in relation to these matters?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, I think it is a matter that we have to keep under constant review, and I think the shipping industry itself is constantly reviewing its own processes and is actually leading the way in a lot of this. So, yes, it is a matter that I am sure will be kept under review and in discussion between the Department of the Environment, the Port Authority and the GMA.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q146/2023
Energy saving targets –
Update re position

Clerk: Question 146/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Can the Government state where Gibraltar is in relation to meeting energy saving targets?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, it is not clear from the hon. Member's question exactly which targets he is referring to, and therefore I cannot answer the question specifically.

Hon. E J Phillips: I suppose the question was referring to the previous applicable directives that the Minister has talked about in this House previously in relation to Gibraltar's targets for energy saving across ... What I can do is, of course, put another question to him, but this arises in the context of those previously applicable directives that the Minister has referred to in this House.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Mr Speaker, I think it would be helpful if I had a more specific question, because the targets mainly are related to increasing the amount of renewables and not specifically targeted at energy saving. I would be happy to perhaps have another question, or if he wants to write to me asking for specific details, I would be very happy to supply him with all the information that I have.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q147/2023
Registered dogs –
Number in Gibraltar at 31st December 2022

Clerk: Question 147/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: How many registered dogs were there in Gibraltar at 31st December 2022?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

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Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, there were 4,494 dogs registered at 31st December 2022.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q148/2023

**Pupils with special needs in government schools –
Total numbers**

1670 **Clerk:** Question 148/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, what is the total number of pupils with special needs in government schools in 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22?

1675 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for the Environment and Education.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, the total numbers of pupils with special education needs in government schools are as follows: 2019-20, 1,612; 2020-21, 1,637; 2021-22, 1,880.

1680 If I may point out that these are the numbers of individuals. We had correspondence last time round because the adding up of the special needs did not add up to the number of individuals. I have specifically asked again, even today, and I am told these are the numbers of children with needs. Some of these may have more than one need, and therefore, if you tot up every single need from a table, you are going to end up with more than these numbers.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Well, I am grateful because that was going to be my question. He knows we have had exchanges about this, and my hon. colleague to my right, Mr Reyes, has asked him questions. He will remember across the floor of the House I said to him that the total ... There was a column in the statistics that the Government used to publish, which had a total number, which in around 2018-19 said something like 1,500. At the time, we said it might not be the total because of the explanation he has just given, that some people might have autism but may also have speech and language issues, and so 1,500 might not reflect the total. But what he is now saying is that these figures of between 1,600 and 1,880 do reflect the number of individual pupils, even though some of them may have more than one. That is how I understand his answer.

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1695 It seems like a very large number. When I had suggested that last time, when we were talking about the number of 1,500, it had been suggested to me that that would reflect not the real number, but rather it might be that there were pupils with more than one special need, and therefore it had bumped up the figure. Having now verified that in fact that is a real number, does he agree with me that it seems like quite a high number? How does it compare to numbers in other countries?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, I do not know what proportion, but obviously it is not comparing like with like. It would be possible to seek figures in other jurisdictions, but their assessments may be completely different to ours, so I do not think comparing it with other countries is necessarily going to be helpful. I think what we have to do is look at how the numbers have increased in Gibraltar through the years. But yes, had we totted up individual needs or types of needs rather than individuals, the numbers would be even higher than this. That was the subject

1705

of the correspondence, and I know there have been conversations with the Clerk today, which is why I have provided this answer.

1710 Certainly the numbers have increased. We have had this conversation before. Speculating as to the reasons is sometimes interesting, sometimes helpful, sometimes not helpful, but I can confirm that these numbers are high.

1715 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, I am being told that in England the correlation of special needs is around 16.5% of the pupils – but it is something that perhaps we can look at – and that it has been decreasing. Again, I am sure there are unique factors here. They seem to be increasing. I think it is something that bears reflection, and does the Hon. Minister agree with me that having now at least flushed out whether this was the real total or not, perhaps he can discuss that within the Department and understand the numbers a bit better in terms of the trends and
1720 proportionalities?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, I discuss this with the Department very frequently and we do not arrive at any absolute conclusion, but we do not doubt that these special needs exist. Certainly if the figure of 16.5% – I was not familiar with this, I will certainly look it up – is correct,
1725 I would suspect our percentage is higher than that, considerably higher, perhaps 20% to 30%. We would have to calculate exactly how many children there are in education. It is around ... I think it would come up to that. Again, we are speculating.

I do discuss this regularly with the Department and we are trying to do some work to find out what the professionals believe are the main reasons for this increase. Having said that, I do
1730 remember that it is not of the last few years. I do remember, when I was Minister for Health, having similar discussions from the health side as to the number of special needs children increasing at the time, and that is now 11 years ago, so it is not a new phenomenon.

Hon. K Azopardi: And given the explanation he has just given about the discussions that are
1735 ongoing within the Department and people considering what are the causes or reasons for it, can he illuminate us as to what sort of tentative conclusions there have been?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, I do not think that would be helpful. I am not a professional
1740 in this. I have my own views, but I do not think that would be helpful. What I do think is important is to establish and confirm that special needs are taken very seriously and every support possible is given to the children in question.

Hon. K Azopardi: Can I ask whether the discussions, if they had been ongoing for some time,
1745 had been factored in the planning of the capacity of St Martin's School?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, I go back to the fact that here the figures I have given are
1750 looking at special educational needs across the whole of the education system. The numbers of St Martin's have increased but took a jump, as I have explained. I do not have the figures in front of me, but I have explained before the average number for the previous 10 or so years – I am working from memory – had been six or seven a year and then they took a jump to about 19, and it stayed at 19 for the past few years. Therefore, the numbers for St Martin's School were calculated based on the average intake to St Martin's School because most of these children will not be attending St Martin's School, they will be fully mainstream but their special needs are attended to by additional support, perhaps from LSAs or in the learning support facilities, so it is
1755 not the same process that has gone into determining St Martin's School. It is a different process.

Q144/2023

**Non-completion of further or higher education courses –
Supplementary questions**

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to the next question, I believe the Hon. Edwin Reyes has a couple of supplementaries in relation to Question 144.

1760 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister for the schedule and I just want to raise a couple of little issues with him.

In the status column, there are some indicated, unfortunately – luckily, they are low in numbers – where it says that the status of the student is ‘failed’. But as we go down, we see in some cases ‘Failed academic year, self-funded repeat successfully’. That is understandable. You fail the year, you come to terms with the university and then you self-fund the year. But in some cases ... For example, student 2 failed in the academic year 2019-20, and it does not have the additional remark of ‘self-funded repeat’. Unless a student self-funds and is able to complete and qualify in the course, is it still the case that the Department of Education would ask for a full refund of all moneys granted in the scholarship? Can we start off with that?

1770 **Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Mr Speaker, when a student unfortunately fails, obviously if there are medical reasons then it is a different dynamic, but when they fail they have the option of paying back the years that they have studied and that they have failed, or to self-fund the repeat year, and then if they are successful we carry on funding them for the remaining one or two years. But obviously for that year, rather than having to pay us, they self-fund it and then they almost make up for having failed, and then we would pick up the next year. That is the process.

1780 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. That makes a lot of sense and clarifies it. If we may use as an example ... If we look towards the very end, for the academic year 2022-23 there is a list of students as self-funded. It means that they are students but during this academic year they have a self-funding repeat year. I am grateful for the Minister nodding yes.

1785 However, where a student has withdrawn himself or herself, if we look at, for example, number 7 and number 31 it says ‘paid back in full’, so they have settled completely there and then, whereas those who have withdrawn, like number 1 and so on, for personal reasons, we do not need to know those but there is no indication of whether any payment has been made back contrary to the other one of ‘paid back in full’. Or perhaps it is a question of being handled by another Department, whereby they have entered into an arrears repayment agreement with another Government Department. I do not know whether the Minister has any information to shed some light on that.

1790 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Mr Speaker, when they withdraw, it is the equivalent of failing because they have failed to complete, and therefore there is the expectation that unless they fund the year again, as in the case of failing, they would have to refund. The Department engages in the first instance and then the Central Arrears Unit might get involved. In most of these cases there will be a repayment plan. No two cases are the same, but the principle is that yes, they will have to pay back if they have withdrawn mid-course or mid-year.

Hon. E J Reyes: I understand.

1800 Mr Speaker, on the penultimate page, where we have number 77, a student seems to withdraw during the academic year 2021-22 and in the remarks column it says ‘eligibility’. I do not know what exactly has happened there. Is it a question that there was an error perhaps, or it came to light that the student was not eligible? There was someone else in eligibility, but at least that one there. Of course, I only asked for the date on which the withdrawal took place, and that happened

1805 during 2021-22. I do not know whether that was the first, second or third year of that individual and what happened to any payments that were made in the previous years in respect of eligibility.

1810 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Mr Speaker, I would have to check. There is a vast amount of information here. I know that the hon. Member does not expect me to have intimate details of every single one of them. 'Eligibility' could be that after they were deemed to be eligible it was found that there was a problem with eligibility and perhaps the offer was withdrawn. So the withdrawal may have come from the Department or by mutual agreement when it was pointed out that that student was not eligible. I am just speculating, but I undertake to find out and let him know.

1815 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, as we are moving on to the Hon. Minister for Digital Services, I wonder whether this might be a convenient moment to stop for 15 minutes and then continue.

1820 **Mr Speaker:** The House will now recess for 15 minutes.

The House recessed at 5.37 p.m. and resumed at 5.57 p.m.

DIGITAL, FINANCIAL SERVICES, HEALTH AUTHORITY AND PUBLIC UTILITIES

Q149/2023

School internet issues – Reasons for continuing problems

Clerk: We continue with answers to questions. Question 149/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

1825 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Further to the answer provided to Question 40/2023, can Government provide explanations as to why schools are still experiencing intranet problems despite the Minister's answer with assurances that these issues had now been resolved?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

1830 **Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):** Mr Speaker, further to the answer to Q40/2023, I have been actively involved, together with the Minister for Education, as well as IT&LD, in all the latest developments in connection with the school internet issues.

1835 IT&LD identified that the root cause at the time of this issue was a malfunctioning distribution switch which was reconfigured to restore connectivity. However, they continued to receive reports from the schools of a degradation of Wi-Fi services between the hours of 8.30 and 9.30. Upon further investigation, they identified that the Wi-Fi services across all schools were being overwhelmed by approximately 2,000 unauthorised devices connecting simultaneously to the system. This amounted to a total of approximately 3,500 devices connecting to the system, resulting in a denial of service.

1840 IT&LD has since carried out extensive configuration changes to the way the system operates, to ensure that only authorised devices can connect. This will make the service stable and secure. IT&LD envisages that the works will be completed by the end of next week. They have and continue to work closely with the Department of Education and its Ministry, who are fully supporting IT&LD in this matter.

1845 On Monday, 6th February a meeting was held where all issues were discussed and an update was provided. IT&LD is co-ordinating with all the schools on the necessary works and all stakeholders are constantly being kept abreast on the progress made.

Hon. E J Reyes: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. It is an interesting occurrence, to say the least. Like the Minister said, the feedback we were getting coincided with his timing: from 8.30 to 9.30 seems to have been the worst time of all.

The Minister has said that there seem to have been unauthorised connections. Any idea as to where these unauthorised connections were taking place? The first thing that comes to mind is maybe you have the normal intranet and the facilities provided to the teachers to carry out registration using the intranet, the access to certain learning resources, schemes of work and so on. Could it be that individual teachers, or maybe pupils, were logging on to the system? Has he been able to identify where the unauthorised access was coming from?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the information we have is that the unauthorised access was from students who obtain passwords and then just begin to use the Wi-Fi – there are very many students, particularly in the two larger schools – and that has been causing the problems. There is a separate system for teachers, with their own passwords.

Basically what is happening now is that all of the students' official work tools are being registered with their unique number and they will be given access, irrespective of the password. So there is not a password issue now. It is only the machines that are legitimately being used in schools that will have access to the internet and the Wi-Fi at the school, which avoids the problem. There will then be a separate feed for guest Wi-Fi, and if that goes fast or slow because it is oversubscribed, fine, but nothing will interfere with the teaching and the teaching tools at the schools. That is what we are working on at the moment.

Hon. E J Reyes: I thank the Minister for his answer and I wish him and the IT department the best of luck in sorting this out. I know, and I think he will agree with me, it is not necessarily an abuse by students, because there now seems to be a system – so my grandchildren tell me – that even homework and so on is communicated via social media services, which is extremely useful. The student is reminded of what homework they have pending and those communications come through. So it seems to be very much an essential item of day-to-day life for students. And yes, just looking at the numbers on roll, between teaching staff and pupils, if we take the two secondary schools alone we are talking of well over 2,500, close to 3,000.

The Minister has kindly identified and admitted that other schools are also having the problem, so I wish him the same luck in resolving the issues, and let's hope that this subject does not need to be asked about again in questions if all proceeds well.

Mr Speaker: What is the question?

1885 **Hon. E J Reyes:** *[Inaudible]*

Hon. A J Isola: Yes, Mr Speaker, I agree and I know the Minister for Education agrees because he has been breathing down my neck these past weeks to ensure that schools have what is no longer a luxury. This is now a critical part of learning, and of course that is why we have given it the urgency it requires and why we have worked and continue to work closely with ITLD to make sure that we can get this right, not just in the two secondary schools, as hon. Member has said, but across the entire network of schools.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q150/2023

**Cross-frontier movement of healthcare workers –
Contingency measures for non-negotiated outcome**

1895 **Clerk:** Question 150/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state the contingency measures for a non-negotiated outcome in respect to the movement of healthcare workers across the land frontier?

1900 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):
Mr Speaker, the GHA is working closely with the Brexit Contingency Committee to ensure that we can continue to provide a health service to the people of Gibraltar with minimum disruption. They are currently co-ordinating an updated in-depth analysis of potential impact issues and identified mitigation actions and contingency measures in each and every area of healthcare, as they are all impacted in different ways. Much of this work was done in the Brexit Contingency Committee and also refreshed during the pandemic. It is not prudent to say much more in public at this stage.

1910 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

Q151/2023

**Prescribed medicines –
Update on review**

Clerk: Question 151/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government update this House on its review of all medicines prescribed at the PCC and St Bernard's Hospital?

1915 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):
Mr Speaker, the GHA has now completed its first full version of the formulary of medicines and dressings approved for use within GHA facilities and/or which can be prescribed under the GPMS scheme. The process of developing this has included substantial periods of consultation with clinical staff. This formulary has been placed on the GHA public website. The formulary is embedded in the electronic prescribing system used within the GHA.

1920 The GHA has advised that this process, however, remains ongoing, as new medicines are placed on the market and the science and understanding of the value of existing medicines changes. The Drugs and Therapeutics Committee, made up of senior clinicians and pharmacists, is tasked with delivering this work. All of the work to review medication is in line with NICE guidelines.

1925 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Just one question arising from that. Is the Minister satisfied with the level of consultation, given that the number of appeals that have been transferred to the committee in respect of prescriptions and the number of appeals allowed stands at 50%?

1930 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, the number of appeals is negligible, so 50% of a negligible number is even less. I would not agree with the statements that the hon. Members made to the media in press releases over the past month. What the hon. Member needs to consider is that the only

people making these decisions are clinicians. There is nobody with a calculator working out the cost of medication; this is entirely in the hands of clinicians.

1940 If the hon. Member has seen the statement that the GHA issued in respect of the lidocaine patches, they will see that the use of those patches today is very limited and it not used for what it used to be used for in the past, and so one of the ways of updating whether those patches work or not is a case-by-case analysis by the team, looking on an application from the GP as to whether that particular medication is suitable today for that patient.

1945 So the issue of what the hon. Member has inferred in his public statements, that there is a huge disconnect in understanding between GPs, the Chief Pharmacist and pharmacists I do not believe is accurate at all, because if a GP is concerned about a patient not being able to be prescribed the medication they believe is necessary, because it is not on the formulary, they go to the clinicians at the appeal tribunal and discuss it there, and if the case is made they will reverse it; if not, they will not.

1950 In the same way as the hon. Members say 50% have been reversed and 50% have not, that means that the system is working. I have no issue whether the percentage is 70, 80 or 90. Either way, the system is working because GPs are referring medication to the board for review and they are then making a clinical decision as to whether it should go one way or another. So I believe the system is working. This review is long overdue and is keeping us up to date with the UK formulary, which we use as a benchmark in deciding what we should or should not be having in our own
1955 formulary.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, the Hon. Minister refers to public statements that we have made that effectively arose in the context of information being provided to members of the public during a session at City Hall, within which Prof. Geoghegan, indeed also the Chief Pharmacist,
1960 handed out this data relating to the percentages of those appeals brought to the committee that were allowed in the context of appeals by clinicians.

I do not agree, Mr Speaker, that he believes there is not a disconnect. That was the feeling in the room with the packed City Hall that certainly set out their views on the disconnect. And indeed it is not only the people who were in that hall, but also a doctor himself who came to give his
1965 views to the GHA and expressed his concerns about the disconnect. So it is not me regurgitating this; this is effectively my report of my engagement at that particular session with my hon. Friend Mr Clinton, who was also there.

What I would say to him is I do not think it is negligible and I do not think it is just restricted to lidocaine. I understand his answer in relation to lidocaine, but there are many other medicines, of
1970 course, that people do require. And whilst he is absolutely right about the clinical efficacy of certain drugs – and that is for the Chief Pharmacist, not for anyone in this House to decide – there are some genuine concerns, certainly there were in that packed hall that I attended, about the prescription policy and how drugs on this list are prescribed. Therefore, I would encourage him again to give that reassurance to the public in relation to those medications and that people
1975 receive them as and when they need them.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the GHA has around 1,300 people working within it. The hon. Member seems to place a lot of emphasis on one doctor who was in the public hall, but not on the words of the Director General, who dealt precisely with this point and explained precisely that
1980 the issues were clinically based. I do not understand how he can jump from one person and a feeling of a disconnect to say there is a fundamental breakdown in policy, which is what his press release said. That is very different to what the hon. Member has just said now, but even that, in my view, is wrong because the decisions are based on what clinicians are deciding. Full stop. If a clinician believes the treatment should be A or B, it is their choice and their decision. It is not for
1985 us, obviously, and I am sure the hon. Member will accept that, to make a contrary decision or take a contrary view. In that hall, there were people who had not been rejected any medicines opining on whether they should or should not, and this is precisely the problem. We need to deal with the

1990 facts. The facts are if your GP believes that you should be getting a medication that is not on the formulary, he can appeal, go to the clinical board and they will review it, and if the clinicians agree they will give, no issue. So I just do not understand what the problem is.

1995 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Just one question, with your leave, Mr Speaker. I think it was evident from ... Obviously the Hon. Minister was not there – I am sure he had other things to do in his Ministry – but I was there and I did listen to the disconnect. It centres around patient communication with
2000 doctors and indeed the GHA. In my respectful view, it is bringing patients along with you, which is what the GHA needs to do when it changes policy that affects people who have been prescribed drugs over a period of time. The policy has changed. There has been a review of medications. There has been an identification of abuse through the system. We all acknowledge that in this House. Everyone acknowledges that there has been an abuse of the system, and that is being
2005 tackled. But when medicines are changed that affect the lives of people who are prescribed those medicines, you need to bring along those patients with you so that you can say to them there are alternatives and we will treat you. That is not what has been happening. That is the level of disconnect and that is the level of disharmony between patients and doctors.

2010 Just in relation to the point that he raises in relation to one doctor, this doctor was vociferous in his views as to the change in policy. Whilst I do understand that it is only one doctor, that was one doctor within the GHA putting Prof. Geoghegan right in respect of that, quite frankly. Therefore, Mr Speaker, and I would ask him again to clarify what communication measures, or at least what patient collaborative measures are in place to ensure that people understand how this policy works.

2015 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I do not think he put Prof. Geoghegan right. I think, from what I understand and what I have seen and watched, the reverse is the case because I understand that doctor made reference to if the patient insists then it is just left, if the patient insists they will give the patient the medication they want – and that is precisely what Prof. Geoghegan responded on, saying that is absolutely not the case and he should not be doing that. I do not quite understand how that interchange has been interpreted in the way that you have described.

2020 Patient communication ... The GHA today has public meetings. It has never happened before, with a fully-fledged hall, with Prof. Geoghegan addressing them regularly, with data online and with specifics given to the people. But let's be clear, if the clinician decides to change the medication of a patient, then that is the clinician's decision. If the GHA decides what the formulary should or should not be, that is their decision. There is no political involvement or interference in that process *at all*, and so it is the GHA doing what they are meant to be doing. They are the experts and they are telling us what they should and should not be doing, and they are doing it, and for as long as that continues to be the case, I will obviously continue to support them in the
2025 work that they do.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Roy Clinton.

2030 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just heard what the Minister said, and would I like to make two points. There have been GHA public meetings in the past. I used to attend them, in fact, when the Hon. Prof. Cortes was Minister for Health, so it is not a new thing. I hear that it was a procedure that has been started in the past.

2035 I would encourage the Minister to go back to Prof. Geoghegan and ask him what he asked the doctor concerned, because he asked the doctor to confirm to the general public that they were not under pressure from management not to prescribe certain medicines and the answer was actually yes, we are. That is why there was this exchange with the doctor. So I encourage the Minister, if he would, to go back to the Professor and clarify that point, because the issue was about management. In fact, I remember very well the Professor taking umbrage at the fact that ...

2040 'Oh, now it is a management issue.' So I think there may be even miscommunications within the communications between Prof. Geoghegan and the Minister. I would encourage him to ask him.

2045 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, no, the decision taken, as I said before, is not by management, it is by the clinicians within management, so to suggest, as the hon. Member has just done, that the administrative team are involved is just not true. The position is that the clinicians within management, the Chief Pharmacist in his role, have reviewed the formulary and that has led to changes, but it is them deciding, no one else. That is the point. So I do not understand what miscommunication the hon. Member is talking about. It is perfectly clear, always has been and continues to be.

2050 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2055 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Can I just ask: in terms of the appeals mechanism, obviously there is some committee on which the Chief Pharmacist sits together with, presumably, some other clinician and they review the formulary, set the changes, and then doctors in the front line can appeal. Can patients also appeal directly?

2060 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I am not sure if they have. The board will look at any appeal that is made to it, but if a GP is not going to be supporting an appeal, I do not think it would have much prospect of success because the only basis of an appeal is if the clinician recommends it. And so for an individual to say, 'I like this medicine more than that one because I am addicted to this one or addicted to that one,' – or not, whatever the case may be – it has to be supported by the GP, obviously. Otherwise, I guess, just thinking logically, it would make it very difficult for the clinicians on the appeal board to change their earlier decision.

2065 **Hon. K Azopardi:** I understand that obviously it is more likely to be successful if a GP has endorsed the appeal, but is he saying that it is possible for patients to appeal directly to the committee, or is he saying that it is not possible? I am just trying to clarify the process because I am sure he will have seen, like I have seen, patients writing letters. I do not know if they are invoking rights of appeal or not, or whether they do have the right of appeal or not. I am asking a very precise question. Formalistically, is it possible for patients to appeal to the committee, or does it have to go through a GP?

2075 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I am not certain if they can formally, but I have no doubt that if an individual writes an appeal to the board, they would consider it. I do not think there is anything that prohibits them from doing that, but I am not certain, so I will have to come back to the hon. Member.

2080 I am aware of one letter that I have seen from a private person writing, complaining about it. That particular case has been referred three times and refused three times by the same clinical board. So, yes, I am sure it has been considered on a number of occasions already.

Hon. K Azopardi: And for me to understand the process again, does the appeal go to the same people who set the changes, or does it go to a separate body of people?

2085 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I understand that the team varies depending on the nature of the request, so there may be different specialities from which people will be brought in to consider different requests. Again, I am happy to get more of that detail as to exactly who and how and send that to him before the next sitting.

2090 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, obviously there is public concern expressed by some people and it would be important for this process to be known. Is there a process in writing that people could

see? Is there such a thing, or is this a devised policy but there is no written process for appeals that could be made public so that people are more aware of the mechanics of the process?

2095 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, my understanding is that on the website there is guidance on the process to be followed for those who wish to ... and how it works. I think it is all explained on the GHA website.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q152-53/2023
Opioid medicines –
Repeat prescriptions; imports

2100 **Clerk:** Question 152/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state the number of persons currently on repeat opioid prescriptions?

2105 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, I will answer this Question together with Question 153/2023.

2110 **Clerk:** Question 153/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state the number of opioid painkillers imported into Gibraltar for each year over the last five years?

2115 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, there are currently 281 patients on repeat opioid prescriptions. I will now hand over a schedule to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Answer to Question 153

Below is the data requested (2018 to 2022) of the number of opioid painkillers imported into Gibraltar, as reported to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

Drug	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 first quarter
					only
Diamorphine	15.2g	16.1g	20.8g	6.2g	8.2g
Morphine	38.8g	113.1g	53.2g	62.4g	Being Collated
Oxycodone	394.0g	561.8g	53.2g	62.4g	180.8g
Remifentanyl	0.0g	0.0g	3.6g	5.0g	Being Collated
Fentanyl	49.2g	102.4g	25.4g	81.1g	Being Collated
Pethidine	0.0g	0.0g	10.0g	0.0g	Being Collated
Methadone	0.0g	5.0g	5.0g	15.0g	5.0g
Buprenorphine	14.8g	7.6g	14.8g	10.5g	Being collated

The importation of schedule 2 drugs is reported in grams. This is because each of type of medication can be supported/administered in multiple formats.

2120 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, I will digest the answer to this question, but just insofar as these particular drugs are concerned – forgive my pronunciation – oxycodone and fentanyl are obviously the two larger amounts, certainly over the last five years, and morphine, of course, understandably. In relation to the other two large ones, of course there has been very significant criticism, particularly in the United States, in relation to those particular drugs, which I think are described as ‘oxy’. Fentanyl, I think, is the other one. Insofar as the amounts are concerned, are these just for prescription within the confines of the hospital building – for example, in the wards and in surgery?

2130 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, the question relates to ‘imported into Gibraltar’. I am not certain if this is global imports or this is just GHA imports. The question is ‘opioid painkillers imported into Gibraltar for each year over the last five years’. I would guess it was the GHA, but I cannot say it is definitely.

2135 **Hon. E J Phillips:** I will ask further questions in relation to this, but this is helpful data anyway. Insofar as the items that are being collated, is it possible that the Minister could write to me with the answer to those particular questions and possibly when he expects to receive them as well?

Hon. A J Isola: Yes, Mr Speaker, I am expecting them in the course of the next month, in the next five weeks, so I will happily write.

2140 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

**Q154/2023
Diabetes –
Incidence rate**

Clerk: Question 154/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

2145 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, can the Government state the incidence rate of diabetes in the community sorted by type 1 and type 2, ordered by sex and age groups over the past 10 years?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, I will now hand over a schedule to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Answer to Question 154/2023

Type 1 Males:

Age	2013*	2014*	2015*	2016*	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
0-9	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	1
10-19	1	0	5	5	2	1	1	0	2	0
20-29	0	0	5	1	2	0	2	0	1	0
30-39	0	1	4	3	1	4	2	0	3	0
40-49	1	0	6	1	0	2	0	1	1	0
50-59	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
60-69	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
70-79	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
80+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Type 2 Males:

Age	2013*	2014*	2015*	2016*	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
0-9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10-19	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0
20-29	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
30-39	1	0	5	8	2	2	4	3	7	5
40-49	2	5	30	13	13	13	13	12	5	11
50-59	13	18	53	48	36	23	24	20	27	30
60-69	15	21	85	60	37	28	29	27	40	26
70-79	2	1	49	40	19	15	10	14	23	17
80+	0	0	7	10	7	4	4	3	12	8

Type 1 Females:

Age	2013*	2014*	2015*	2016*	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
0-9	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	0
10-19	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	2	2
20-29	0	0	3	1	0	1	2	1	0	2
30-39	1	0	3	0	0	0	1	2	2	2
40-49	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
50-59	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	0
60-69	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
70-79	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
80+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Type 2 Females:

Age	2013*	2014*	2015*	2016*	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
0-9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10-19	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
20-29	1	0	2	1	1	2	2	0	1	0
30-39	0	0	8	2	1	0	2	2	3	7
40-49	4	6	20	13	7	10	12	5	7	10
50-59	7	11	47	28	26	17	14	14	21	23
60-69	5	6	56	43	23	20	19	18	28	31
70-79	3	4	36	34	23	11	11	14	19	24
80+	1	1	25	19	15	16	11	4	7	7

*Please note that the electronic primary care system was introduced in 2015 and therefore a large portion of patients who had been diagnosed previously were coded for the first time in 2015/2016. For this reason, there appears to be a spike in numbers between 2015 and 2016.

2150 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, we will digest those and come back with supplementaries if we need to.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q155/2023
Death by heart attack –
Incidence of death over last five years

Clerk: Question 155/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

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Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state the incidence of death by heart attack over the last 10 years?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

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Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, the incidence of death by heart attack over the last 10 years is as follows: 2013, 13; 2014, 13; 2015, 19; 2016, 14; 2017, 25; 2018, 25; 2019, 24; 2020, 40; 2021, 30; and 2022, 26.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Minister perhaps – just identifying that very large number within the latter end of the statistics run that he was doing, of 40 – clarify why it appears to be a blip in the statistics, or was that just ...?

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Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, yes, there seems to be a spike in 2020 and then it drops down again in 2021 to closer to normal levels, as it is indeed in 2022. I do not have an explanation as to what that blip comes from. COVID and everything else, potentially. That is the logical one.

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Hon. E J Phillips: Just to speak to the point that he makes in relation to the normal years, there has been, I would probably hazard a guess to say, a steady increase of those dying as a result of cardiac arrest. Is he confident in the level of resource that we are putting into the GHA in terms of assisting cardiac patients with rehabilitation and certainly those who have conditions? Are we satisfied with the work that we are doing in relation to that?

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Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I think part of the problem with lawyers jumping to conclusions, like we often do, is that within the totality of our population ... In other words, are the vast majority living much longer than they have done before? Are more people dying from heart attacks as a percentage of the size of the population? These are all the other factors that one could look at.

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But in terms of what we are doing, the hon. Member will know, because we have made the announcement to this effect, we are setting up our own cath lab within St Bernard's, which will enable us to deal with cardiac patients here, rather than send them away. As the hon. Member will know, the provision of response times is critical to these patients, and consequently, to be able to do it in Gibraltar rather than send them, as we currently do, to Quieron Palmones. Sending them further away, like Xanit, is just too far, because time is of the essence, so a massive step forward is to be able to do this in Gibraltar in our own hospital.

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The second step is more education and more information in terms of first aid response, and hooked with that are defibrillators. We are in the process of replacing every single defibrillator around Gibraltar with the support of a charity, which will mean we will have a significant number of defibrillators around our community available to the public, again because of the length of time and how acting quickly can actually save lives.

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So the GHA is doing a lot in terms of dealing with how we can support people with cardiac issues, and I think by the time the cath labs are open we will be in a very much better place than we ever have been before.

Q154/2023

**Diabetes incidence rate –
Supplementary questions**

2195 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, I do not have a question on this. I wanted to go back to the incidence rate of diabetes, if that was fine, which was the previous question.

2200 **Mr Speaker:** Does the Hon. Minister wish to take that question. It is a supplementary. Yes?

Hon. K Azopardi: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. I think we had indicated that we wanted to look at the schedule, which was quite detailed, first, and –

2205 **Mr Speaker:** I accept that, but it was the Hon. Elliott Phillips who said that he might be in a position to ask a question, not you. That is why I asked.

Hon. K Azopardi: I thought he was speaking collectively for us, given the aside that I was having with him on it.

2210 Mr Speaker, looking at the type 2 diabetes figures, obviously all the years are different, but the rates of incidence, I would say, if you pick on any particular year, whether it is males or females, you are looking at 100-plus cases of males and 100-plus of females, maybe a couple of hundred in total. Of course, each year will be different, but over a spread of ... if that is a regular statistic ...
2215 The Minister has given us a 10-year view of things and, given life expectancy, that looks like there might be a figure of type 2 diabetes of a population of anything above 3,000 or 4,000 at any time, does the Hon. Minister have an in-house statistic, a verifiable one for the population, of people with type 2 diabetes? And would that be an accurate assessment?

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):
2220 No, Mr Speaker, I do not have any information other than what has been asked of me, and I am not going to make any conclusion as to the numbers, as to whether they are high or higher. I think that there is, again, a far more detailed discussion to be had, which I would be happy to have with the hon. Member, but not jumping to interpretations as to what these numbers mean in a community of our size.

2225 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, I was not inviting him to make a conclusion as to what it means. I was simply asking him whether he has a verifiable statistic internally on it. He has indicated he does not today. Would he be willing to write to me with that information, if indeed the GHA has a view as to the kind of type 2 population there is in Gibraltar? I am told with our own intelligence
2230 that it might be around that figure, but obviously that is not a verifiable official figure, and I would be interested to have an official figure if one is available.

Hon. A J Isola: Yes, Mr Speaker, I am happy to do that.

2235 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Elliott Phillips.

2240 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, just picking up on what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition was talking about so far as the figures are concerned, clearly if we look at 2013, if my maths is not wrong that is about 33 people across the age range, and in 2022 it is 98. I think that is right, isn't it, in terms of the numbers? I am sure the abacus next to me is able to work that out insofar as numbers are concerned. In terms of type 2 males the numbers from 2013, for instance ... So if we look broadly at 10 years plus, we are looking at a significant leap in numbers per year.

2245 Whilst none of us in this House are medical experts, it is clear that it is a recognised fact that unhealthy diets, lack of exercise, not moving our community around as it should, is one of the key areas which leads to diabetes. I wondered whether, given the previous answer to the questions about heart attacks particularly, he is concerned about the public health message that we should be pushing out in order to assist members of our community in getting to move more, more exercise, and eating more healthily, because these are obviously concerning statistics that there is an upward trend significantly since 2013, from the figures that we have, in those being
2250 diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, of course our people should lead healthier lives, because that will lead to less reliance on our Health Service and enable them to enjoy a longer and fitter life.

2255 The hon. Member has done what lawyers should never do, which is he has not read the small print, because if he reads the paragraph at the very end of all of the statistics, it will tell him that 'the electronic primary care system was introduced in 2015 and therefore a large portion of patients who had been diagnosed previously were coded for the first time in 2015/2016. For this reason, there appears to be a spike in numbers between 2015 and 2016', where in fact there is not one. So if you look at 2013, you are actually not looking at a comparable number, hence the
2260 footnote at the end, which says you cannot look at 2013, you cannot look at 2014, you can begin to look at it in 2016, which is when we begin to have some reliable data. And if you compare 2016 and 2017 to 2022, you will see that in fact there is not the spike that he refers to.

2265 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Just one further question about the small print. I would have thought, Mr Speaker, if you look at the figures for 2015 there appears to be a catch-up of diagnosis. Therefore, arguably, if they were tested in 2014 or 2013, then it may well have seen the natural curve that I am talking about and that is what ... It would appear from what you see from these numbers ... I just do not understand why there is such a significant spike in 2015.

2270 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, the hon. Member tries to dig himself out of the hole he has put himself into.

My view is no, not at all. As the footnote says, 2015-16 is the first year, and so there is not the spike that he is trying to draw attention to. If you look at 2017, it is 26 and today it is 23. So it really is there, or thereabouts. It is quite static.

2275 Could it be better? Of course it could, and we will continue to work to make it as low as we possibly can.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q156/2023
Cancer –
Stage 4 diagnoses

2280 **Clerk:** Question 156/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state the reason why up to 48% of all cancers diagnosed are at an advanced stage 4 of the disease?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

2285 **Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):**

Mr Speaker, the figure of 48% presented by Dr Ballesteros at the GHA public meeting made reference to those patients referred to the cancer unit and are those who require systemic cancer treatment, such as chemotherapy or immunotherapy. It is more likely for these patients to receive systemic treatment in advanced stage 4 than in early stages 1, 2 and 3. Therefore, this group of patients does not necessarily represent a delay in diagnosis. In the year 2022, 105 patients were referred to the cancer unit, which represents a slightly lower number than the previous year of 114. The percentage of advanced stage cases in 2021 was 37%. The hon. Member's question relating to 48% of all cancers therefore may have been a misunderstanding of Dr Ballesteros's presentation. Whilst 48% relates to those patients being referred to the cancer unit, the correct percentage relating to the hon. member's question regarding all cancers diagnosed is, in fact, 28%.

2290 Suspected cancers are discussed by a GHA multi-disciplinary team, who then decide on an appropriate course of treatment. Not all patients are referred to the oncology department for treatment at the time of initial diagnosis, as they may be referred for other forms of treatment first, i.e. surgery or radiotherapy.

2300 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful for the clarification. Certainly, I understood the answer to his presentation, and I think the general public did as well, and I think that is how it was printed in the press, which caused me some concern because, of course, in the United Kingdom I think 45% of all cancers diagnosed fit within stage 3 and stage 4. That is why I was pressing the question, just to ascertain what those figures were.

2305 As I understand the answer to this question, 28% of all cancer diagnoses in Gibraltar relate to advanced stage 4. Does the Minister, in his answer, have a breakdown backwards in terms of stage 3, stage 2 and stage 1 cancers? It would be helpful just to see how we are diagnosing how they fall within those particular groups.

2310 **Hon. A J Isola:** No, I do not have that number. I am happy to get it for him.

I understand exactly what he says when his impression was 48, but of course, as I have explained in the answer, if you understand the point of entry to all cancers and then some being referred on to this unit, by the time they get to this unit they are going to be the higher stages of cancer treated for that specific treatment by the oncology unit. So the 28% is the percentage of total cancers with grade 4.

2315 I will certainly get the numbers that the hon. Member is seeking. I would say that in the United Kingdom the numbers are very much higher in terms of at what stage they are being discovered, and obviously the wait for care is very much longer. The hon. Member may have read a report in *The Times* newspaper on 10th February, last Friday, where it says the wait for cancer care in the UK at the moment is the longest on record. Thankfully, we do not have that problem and we treat our patients efficiently and effectively.

2320 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, that information I have also read and I accept that there are some very significant difficulties with the NHS in the United Kingdom, and thankfully we do not have some of the problems that he has referred to. Ours are very different, of course, and have been ventilated in this House and argued before by various Members at various points in time.

2325 I just have one question. A common theme when I speak to constituents about cancer particularly is that there appears to be this view amongst certain members of our community that our cancer rates seem to be higher. What I am encouraging the Minister to do, and he might be able to give me an answer to this, is publish statistics around early detection of cancer, because I think it will allay any fears or misconceptions out there within our community, based on facts and data, to try to dissuade people from saying that we might have higher incidence of cancer particularly. So I would ask the Minister whether he would be able to publish material on a more

2335 regular basis on the Government website so that people can actually see the data. I know that the Hon. Chief Minister has previously, on our invitation, in respect of sick leave, for example, sought to publish those statistics, and it would be helpful if he might be able to do the same.

2340 **Hon. A J Isola:** Yes, Mr Speaker, I would be happy to look at that and engage with the GHA to see if we have that sort of data readily available, where it can be updated on a frequent basis. I have no issue with that.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q157-58/2023
New cancer unit –
Date when up and running; cost

2345 **Clerk:** Question 157/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state when it expects the new cancer unit to be up and running?

2350 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 158/2023.

2355 **Clerk:** Question 158/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government confirm the cost of the proposed new cancer unit, including new staff provision, on the fifth floor of St Bernard's Hospital?

2360 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

2365 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, the new location for the new cancer unit has been identified at St Bernard's Hospital and an outline plan has been developed for the unit and the associated aseptic dispensing facility, which is a feature of any cancer unit. The identified space will become available as soon as the current TSSU/CSSD moves to its new location in the hospital in April this year. In preparation for the development, the GHA is preparing detailed plans for the unit. Once plans are approved and the preliminary costings and findings are confirmed, the unit will take approximately 12 months to complete.

2370 The cost estimate for this building work is currently being finalised and will also be supported by donations from the public. Whilst talking about oncology and donations, I must specifically and publicly thank Margret Ayling, a firm supporter of our cancer services who has worked and continues to work with us to improve these new services. My sincere thanks to her.

2375 **Hon. E J Phillips:** I am grateful for the answer from the Minister. I must say – perhaps it was an impression – that my hon. Friend Mr Clinton and I left the public engagement with the view that this was a matter of months and not a year, but be that as it may, Mr Speaker, it is heartening to hear that we will have a new unit that deals specifically with this area.

Just one question arising from that, and that relates to the new staff provision. Does the Minister have a bit more information as to what level of provision will be required in terms of the human resource on the unit?

2380 **Hon. A J Isola:** No, Mr Speaker, I do not have that information with me. I think in dealing with
cancer, obviously there are different areas being worked on all the time. Recently opened, again
with the support of Margret Ayling, is one of the units for those patients seeking or requiring
chemotherapy. It is an improved and much more comfortable location for our patients. This is just
2385 the next step in that delivery. If the hon. Member is asking how many new people will be required
to work in the unit, I will find that information and get it sent to him.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q159-62/2023

Sandpits mental health facility –

Contract terms of care provider; payment re meals; budget holder; annual running costs

Clerk: Question 159/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

2390 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, can the Government state the contract terms in respect of the
entity engaged to make provision for care at the Sandpits mental health facility?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):
Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 160 to 162.

2395 **Clerk:** Question 160/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government confirm who pays for the provision of meals
at the Sandpits mental health facility?

2400 **Clerk:** Question 161/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Can the Government state under whose budget the Sandpits mental health
facility comes?

2405 **Clerk:** Question 162/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Can the Government state the annual running cost of the Sandpits mental
health facility?

2410 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, as has previously been discussed in this House, Sandpits House is
owned by Meddoc Ltd and they provide the number of carers according to the individual assessed
2415 needs of patients.

In line with the basic principles of mental health rehabilitation service, users at Sandpits have
full control of their moneys unless they are assessed not to have the capacity to manage their own
finances, in which case arrangements are put in place for their representative to oversee their
finances. Service users attend the Social Security Department to collect their disability allowance,
2420 accompanied by a social worker, carer or psychiatric nurse, and both identify and agree the budget
for the provision of meals.

The GHA reimburses Meddoc for the care and associated services provided to the service users at the Sandpits facility. This is provided from the GHA budget.

2425 The staffing costs for Sandpits supported living facility is approximately between £240,000 and £300,000 per annum, depending on the needs and number of patients.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, how many patients are ordinarily resident in any given month, if the Minister has any information about that?

2430 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, the unit has a bedsit and three bedrooms with shared bathroom, kitchen and living room, so I guess four.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, insofar as the £240,000 to £300,000, does that relate to the premises themselves and staffing?

2435 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, that is the cost of the provision of the services, so I assume it does.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Roy Clinton.

2440 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The hon. Member will remember he gave my hon. Friend Mr Phillips a schedule of mental health expenses – I cannot remember if was at the last session or the session before – which was an analysis of mental health costs that were not staff related, but I could not see these particular costs being itemised in there, and it is not immediately obvious to me, looking at the Gibraltar Health Authority budget estimates, where that £240,000 to £340,000 per annum would sit. It is not separately identified as this Sandpits facility. Does the Minister have an idea of where it would sit? Is it, in his view, perhaps ...? I am not going to ask him to speculate. Does he know where it would sit? Is it within salaries, or is it in some sort of contracted services? I cannot see anything in terms of contracted services where it would obviously fit. There is something called ‘other maintenance agreements’, but that would not really describe this. Does the Minister know where within the GHA budget, ideally which line item, it would come under? Obviously, if it is described as contracting for services, it might be that it is deemed to be some sort of personnel cost rather than the hiring of a facility, if the Minister understands me. If he could point me in the right direction, I would be grateful.

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2455 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, it certainly would not be labour because they are not employees. It is Meddoc providing their contracted service to us, which varies depending on the number of patients we have in the facility at any given time. I will find out where it is documented and inform the hon. Member, so that he can have a look at it, rather than me guesstimating as to where those services are detailed.

2460 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Can I just ask, if this facility is providing a service for four people and it costs £240,000 to £300,000, it is £60,000 to £80,000 per person – couldn’t this service be provided more cheaply within the existing mental health structure, given the average per-bed cost in a mental health facility? I think the daily cost is ... I do not know, anything like £150 probably, but it just seems to be ... Has that issue been looked at?

2470 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I think we need to understand what it is that we are talking about, because this care is about providing those people with a halfway house between being at, for example, Ocean Views and being at home. It is about trying to get people back into the community, and that is a lot of what the work that goes into the Sandpits property is. In fact, I was

2475 with the staff at Ocean Views last week and they were lauding the work that is done at this particular property and another one and saying that it would be ideal if the mental health services in Gibraltar could have more like this because it works so well.

But of course it comes at a cost. Some of the carers are one to one, so if you imagine ... 24/7 one-to-one caring is expensive. But then we need to make the decision as to – what the hon. Members criticised us for in past times – is it cost or is it care. We are approaching this on the basis of providing the best possible care that we can afford to provide those patients, and the halfway house I think works very well. The GHA are very happy with it. Ocean Views, in particular the staff there and the professional and qualified staff there, are very happy with how it works and they want to do more of this, which is to reintegrate users back into the community, and this is a big part of that. Teaching people budgetary disciplines, how to make sure they know what to spend, how much they can spend and how to spend it is a really big and important part of all of the work that goes into mental health patients reintegrating back into our community. Stigma ... All of these issues are what the halfway house seeks to improve and to help the users with.

2480 On that basis, I think it would be a retrograde step to go back into looking at increasing the size of Ocean Views and putting more people into those facilities. We want to see more and more of this outreach into the community. Having people living at home and helping them to live a normal life as far as is possible has to be the objective of any mental health plan.

Hon. K Azopardi: I accept that, of course. I accept that there is a need for these facilities to integrate mental health patients back into the community. I was really asking more precisely about whether, having looked at these figures – and it correlates to four people – the GHA had looked at the Meddoc costs and decided that these were costs that were being outlaid and the same thing could not be achievable at a more reduced cost. Really, that was what I was asking.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the GHA will always look at how they can provide the best service at the least cost, obviously. Whether we can do this service cheaper or not is something that I am sure has already been considered and was when they initially did this on a probationary basis. It has worked and they are happy with the results of it.

2500 We look every year to see what on the budget that we have in the GHA can do better or attract better value for money, and not just in this but in every other service where we contract services that is the first question they ask themselves at this time of the year, every year.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q163-64/2023
Power outages –
Number and causes

Clerk: Question 163/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

2510 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Can the Government state why Gibraltar continues to be plagued by power cuts?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

2515 **Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):** Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 164.

Clerk: Question 164/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

2520 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** How many power outages were there in 2022, and can Government list the reasons for each of those?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

2525 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I now hand over a schedule with the information requested.
Gibraltar has not been plagued by power cuts. A plague is a widespread affliction and we do not have that in respect of power cuts. Gibraltar suffers power outages, as do similar small territories that operate without the support of national grid power systems. These power grids have tens or hundreds of power stations generating power at any point in time and a problem with a particular generating unit is proportionally very insignificant and easily absorbed by the system without consumers noticing any glitches whatsoever.

2530 In Gibraltar's case, any single generating unit accounts for a big percentage of the total power demand and therefore any problems with a unit can affect a significant number of consumers. The GEA does operate with a margin of spinning reserve, but in order to cover for all eventualities it would mean running with a very large element of spinning reserve, which is very expensive and not good engineering practice. Although when events as described occur, inevitably some consumers are affected, these outages tend to be relatively short and are associated with the time it takes to start spare capacity, of which the GEA has plenty.

2535 Notwithstanding the above, what must be taken into account is that power stations are complex installations and the North Mole power station is no exception. Projects of this nature are not off the shelf, and it takes time to both integrate into existing distribution networks and fine tune, a process which the GEA is presently going through and is a process which occurs every 30 to 40 years at least for us here in Gibraltar. I think our new power station is Gibraltar's biggest capital investment project to date and is a key component of our critical national infrastructure. It ensures that we can maintain our energy independence.

2540 However, it is also true that not all power outages are as a result of problems at the power station. Many are as a result of faults or damage to our high- and low-voltage power distribution systems. Although the record of the location of underground cables is extremely accurate and this is provided to all applications for excavations, damage does occur and this can and has resulted in interruptions of less or greater severity, depending on the nature of the fault and the equipment affected.

2545 Our two most recent power outages have not been related to the power station at all. They have been related to interruptions to our fuel supply, and our supplier has publicly stated what the problems were. Their installation is also of a complex nature and they themselves are fine-tuning their processes and continue to work closely with the GEA to ensure the maximum levels of reliability, which also provides for a cleaner environment, as annual CO₂ emission figures have dropped from 147,309 tonnes in 2015 to 119,247 in 2021 and will continue to reduce as our processes become more efficient.

Answer to Q164/2023

YEAR 2022	Date and time	Duration	Feeders affected	Reasons for Power Cut
1	28.01.2022 11.11	36 mins.	Blackout within GMES/MoD network. Vineyards, Nelson's view.	Private contractor damaged cable by Fossway tunnel. The earth fault triggered a blackout at GMES network. Restored by 11.47 with assistance given to GMES by GEA and MoD contractors. GEA S20 tripped

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2	28.01.2022 16:00	7 mins.	Bedlam Court, Ocean Village Complex, Tradewinds, Casemates.	Operational switching at S61 WDC panel tripped causing power loss to Bedlam Ct, Casemates, Ocean Village, Tradewinds.
3	11.03.2022 00:48	2 - 11 mins.	Bayside, Varyl Begg West, Marina, Jetty Five, Watergardens, Ocean Village Complex, Waterport Terraces, William Jackson, New Harbours. King's Bastion, Cornwall's Lane, Governor's Parade. Alameda, Rosia Bay.	N MPS IFLS testing caused a trip of Set 1 causing feeders to open.
4	08.07.2022 07:04	48 mins.	GEA network suffered no loss of supply but local consumers suffered power outage due to supply from ex MoD network.	Cable from GMES power station to Norfolk House S/S tripped on load. Upon first restoration process, Norfolk House tripped all ex MoD network including local consumers.
5	20.07.2022 10:45	67 - 116 mins.	Western Arm. Approx. 80% Gib- wide power-outage.	Cable fault at S68 Western Arm to S36 North Mole caused WDC panel trip affecting supply to Gasnor Plant. Gas supply main valve shut down in safety protocol caused trip on NMPS engines.
6	02.08.2022 16:23	6 - 43 mins.	Marina, Watergardens, Ocean Village Complex, Bedlam Court, Waterport Terraces, William Jackson, Waterport Place. King's Bastion, Cornwall's Lane. JBDC Alameda, Rosia Bay, Sunnyside Steps, Little Bay, Europa Business Centre.	NMPS TX2 fault caused trips of engine-bay cooling-fans triggering safety-protocol shutdowns of 3 Gas Engines. Reference to PACIS lost at NM PS CR. S55, S63 and S65 restored manually.
7	12.08.2022 11:30	40 - 55 mins.	Alameda, Sandpits, Sunnyside Steps, Rosia Bay, Little Bay, Europa Business Centre.	Dual cable fault at S15 to S17 Willis's Road (spiked by contractor) and S19 to S67 Beach view Terraces.
8	28.10.2022 06:59	14 - 19 mins	Marina, Ocean Village, Waterport Terraces, Kings Bastion, Cornwall's Lane, Governor's Parade, Alameda, Rosia Bay.	Gasnor sensor fault caused gas shutdown resulting in sudden drop in gas-line pressure. Set 3 (Gas engine) initiated emergency shutdown due to fuel starvation. Set 6 (DF) QCO to diesel.
9	28.11.2022 16:10	5 - 27 mins	Marina, Water Gardens, Ocean Village, Bedlam Court, Waterport Terraces, William Jackson, Waterport Place, Kings Bastion, Cornwall's Lane, Gove4rnor's Parade, Alameda, Rosia Bay, Little Bay, Buena Vista.	Gasnor programming issue caused gas shutdown resulting in sudden drop in gas-line pressure. Set 1 and 3 (Gas engines) initiated emergency shutdown due to fuel starvation. Set 6 (DF) QCO to diesel.

2560 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, I characterised this question as a plague because in September 2019 when the power station was commissioned, with none other than the Chief Minister himself flicking the switch, declaring power to No. 6 in a huge step forward – as described by the hon. Gentleman – in energy security and the security of supply in our community ... How does the Minister reconcile that very flamboyant announcement in 2019 with what we have experienced in recent years and the impact it has had on business? At the end of the day, Members opposite are responsible for encouraging inward investment and encouraging big business to come to our shores. How realistically can we show the world that we are a modern, efficient, secure environment when we cannot even manage our power supply? I would ask him to answer that question.

2570 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, with enormous ease I can answer that question because when you contract with firms of the quality of Bouygues and MAN Engines, who are probably the largest producer of this style and size of power station, and you compare that to what the hon. Members proposed in previous years, it is beyond comparison and a power station that every Gibraltarian should be proud of, because to categorise ...

2575 It seems as if the hon. Members are waiting for the power cut to happen so they can tweet some ridiculous, sarcastic, stupid comment along their social media networks with pride. I say that because there have been a number of instances of it, which I have seen and commented on in the past, which I think is just wishing to put ourselves down.

2580 If we have made a mistake in respect of the power station, tell us. But what is the mistake? Contracting MAN Engines? Who would they have contracted? Is it contracting Bouygues? Who would they have contracted? You cannot expect Government Ministers to be responsible for a fault in a gas line from a Gasnor/Shell supply into the power station which results in a 15-minute power cut, or any of the other power cuts that are caused, for example, by private contractors digging a hole in the road and causing a power cut, or criticising and knocking the very hardworking team we have at the GEA who, from the minute there is an issue, spend the next hour trying to work safely to restore power at the first available possibility. I think they need to be commended for the work that they do because you certainly cannot blame them.

2585 So if you cannot blame the workforce and you cannot blame the specialists who advise Government which is the best power station to buy or which is the best contractor to buy it, then what is it that you can complain about? (**A Member:** The Government.) Well, the Government, yes, of course. If you want to play politics with the power station, by all means do so, but have the honesty to say so. If you get up and say, like you have just said, that there is an issue with the power station because we have got something wrong, no problem, let's have that discussion. But the hon. Members opposite know that is not true, they know it is not the case, but it does not matter because it is politics. Fine. If that is the case, that should be the prefix to the question. Who would they have contracted to design that smelly – (**Hon. Chief Minister:** Grimy, smelly.) grimy, smelly, diesel, GSD power station? Who would they have contracted? And did they receive a guarantee from that contractor when they were negotiating with them that they would have no power cuts? Well, of course not, because nobody in the world would agree to that condition. It would be absolutely ridiculous, although it did not stop them from agreeing with them the 5% increase in electricity costs every year for the next 20 years. So they were more concerned about electricity increases than providing power.

2600 We have gone to the best in the business to ensure that our power station can meet our demands. We are going to have a glitch when somebody digs a road, yes; we are going to have a glitch when the LNG supply has a problem through one of the feeds where safety is paramount, yes; and for that I am absolutely delighted to say that I am the chairman of the company that does that and it does it incredibly well. And are we going to continue to have issues like this whilst the teething problems go? Probably, yes. I hope not, but if we do, I will be the first to defend them for the work that they do to put things right. (*Banging on desks*)

2610 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, just one more supplementary. We know when we have got the Government on the ropes, and we have got them on the ropes in relation to energy security and energy supply for our community.

2615 To much fanfare in 2019 we were guaranteed supply of energy, guaranteed security. What we are trying to do is encourage confidence in our jurisdiction so business floods to our community to spend their money in our community and hire more people. That is the whole point. But the question I put to the Hon. Minister is about energy security, about energy supply and the guarantees that the Chief Minister gave, himself, in September 2019. Ultimately what they cannot do is guarantee that supply, and that policy has failed.

2620 **Mr Speaker:** What is the question?

Hon. E J Phillips: That is right, isn't it?

Mr Speaker: Okay.

2625 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, nothing makes me happier than to have the opportunity to deal with this issue with hon. Members in this House, especially in the way that the hon. Gentleman has framed the question.

2630 The hon. Gentleman has said that we are unable to provide energy security. The Hon. Minister has already told him that we operate as an energy island. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been reading or watching what is happening around Europe, especially after Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. The United Kingdom has been within hours of losing power completely to the whole of the national grid. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman understands the severity of that. In other words, the United Kingdom was not likely to suffer a power cut, the United Kingdom has stood on the verge of not being able to produce energy for its people. The reason for that is that the United Kingdom has been importing gas and exporting gas to the European grid without the ability to take gas or electricity back as a guarantee. The United Kingdom has serious issues in respect of energy security. They have been all over the newspapers that I recommend the hon. Gentleman read. Spain has had a hugely difficult issue with its relationship with Algeria and its supply of gas, as a result of changing its position on the Western Sahara and the right of self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, to such an extent that it has had to renegotiate its contracts in respect of the supply of gas, which provides the lion's share of Spain's energy security. Germany has found itself, with the blowing up of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, potentially without sufficient gas to power the industrial heart of Europe and heat its people's homes. France has been receiving the gas that has been coming from the United Kingdom under established agreements and, because it has nuclear power and has had to reset when it decommissions its nuclear power stations as a result, is having to reset how it provides its energy. Indeed, the United Kingdom and Germany have had to go back on promises in respect of mining coal to produce energy as a result of the issues that have arisen in the past 14 months. That affects the energy security of some of the largest economies in the world. In Gibraltar we have had no such issues.

2640 When you talk about energy security, you are not talking about the fact that part of our grid was settled by the MoD. We do not have any plans for it, but it is all now interconnected and a contractor can go through a cable when they do not know that there is likely to be a cable there. No contractor, unless they were being remarkably negligent, would permit their workers to dig in a place where they are going to go through a cable, unless they do not know it is there. That is not about energy security, but that leads to a power cut.

2650 The security of the gas facility – that is to say all of the systems in the gas facility to ensure that there is no blowback of gas, no escape of gas – are about securing energy security, but they can lead to short power cuts. The supply of the gas for Gibraltar, which we have contracted through Shell, one of the biggest companies in the world, comes to us from any of the points from which

Shell can obtain gas, so we have no issues with the supply of the fuel that we need to generate electricity, which we might have had. And now – the hon. Gentleman might want to reflect – we have two sources of energy to produce electricity, gas or diesel, because we made the choice to have some of those dual-fired engines.

2665 So have we secured Gibraltar's energy security, although we might have power cuts? He has linked the two, we have not. I think in this year in particular we have demonstrated that the choices we made were the right choices to secure Gibraltar's energy security. To test that, I put it to him that he should compare the choices we made with the choices they made or were about to make. They were about to go with just one fuel, diesel. The price of diesel, as hon. Members
2670 know, has rocketed in the past year and our cost of fuel has rocketed in respect of that part of our supply which is diesel, although luckily part of our supply is gas, where the price has been lower. Which was the right choice: to go to gas and diesel or to stay with diesel? I put it to him that if he were to look at this objectively and make a choice not based on what is in his party's interest, he would say of course it was right to diversify the fuel that you rely on to gas and diesel and not just
2675 diesel. So we made the right choice for energy security. Was it right for us to contract with one of the largest companies in the world that can secure gas from many sources? I put it to him that if he were to objectively analyse that, he would say that we were right to do so. Again, the right choice for energy security. Was it right that we should agree a price with Shell for gas? Of course it was right, because it protected us against some of the increases that we have seen. Was it right
2680 that we should put the power station and the gas regasification facility in an area by the sea, rather than in an area at the entrance to the Nature Reserve, in a green corridor, and pipe the fuel from the sea to there? I put it to him that objectively – he also holds the brief for the environment – he would say it was right and more secure to have a shorter line and to choose the area that we chose and not blight the Upper Rock Nature Reserve.

2685 In each of the choices that fell to be made we made the right choice, not because we are the cleverest in the room but because we listened to the advice and we did not just allow ourselves to be led by the politics. For that reason, I believe we have discharged our obligation to deliver energy security to Gibraltar, even though we might sometimes have power cuts because of the systems we have set up to protect the power station from a catastrophic failure and because of
2690 the fact that contractors may go through cables, something that we are hoping to prevent in the future.

But the hon. Gentleman must remember where we come from. We inherited a power station so old that it literally blew up on Easter Sunday 2013. We were left without power for days, and potentially for weeks. We recovered that position. Gibraltar now has a reliable, diversified source
2695 of power, and that is complying with our obligation to deliver energy security. The hon. Gentleman must listen to himself. Don't stop believing. It is a journey and we are taking Gibraltar there.
(Banging on desks)

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

2700
Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, the Hon. Minister for Health and Energy answered the question by my hon. Friend here saying that we should not be politicising this and that the Opposition likes to tweet when something goes wrong, but from my research the tweets have been coming from the Government and the Chief Minister himself in 2014 saying that new plans
2705 must reflect lessons of such incidents so we never repeat. This is nine years ago. In 2016, another tweet guaranteeing our electricity supply, and then in the 2019 manifesto saying that now we have the security. The issue with Ukraine and Russia has only been in the last 10 months, but these issues ... and from this sheet we are having an average of 0.75 outages a month, which is almost one a week.

2710 So my question would be really it is about the people of Gibraltar, the businesses of Gibraltar, and how would the Government seek to regain their faith for our electricity supply when we have

had so many failures and so many unequivocal promises over the last seven to 10 years that this will not be happening again, by Government themselves?

2715 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, the Hon. Lady has not understood what I have said about energy security, and of course she has not, as she says from a sedentary position, because she has once again mixed the power cut with the security. It is very simple.

The hon. Lady is suggesting that because we have a power cut because somebody goes through a cable, or because we have a power cut because there is a problem in the regasification facility, 2720 which is a problem that the system is designed to identify to prevent a catastrophic fault, we are not providing energy security. Yes, we are providing energy security, because now that we have got to the Ukrainian problem we do not have a problem with supply of fuel. That is a question of energy security. That is what energy security is about. Will we have power cuts? We will have power cuts. Will they be less often? Of course, once we have broken in the power facility it will be 2725 less often because by then these sensors will have been got exactly right, so you should have none of the issues that arise between the supplier of the fuel and the power station. As the engines become run in, as you say in respect of an engine, you will have fewer issues in respect of that.

The hon. Lady has heard me say before in this House one of the things that we are looking at is a grid that will run in two directions, the upgrading of the grid. We have talked about why you 2730 cannot upgrade the grid in one year or in one term, because that means digging up every road in Gibraltar. You have not got enough guys to dig and you would have no flow of traffic. It is something that has to be staged, so that the process that we inherited, which was a grid that had not been touched in 16 years – and I know they do not like to go back, but they have to understand that we have to go back to analyse the problem – is one that cannot be repaired in one year and 2735 it cannot be repaired in 10 years. It is a process that has to be undertaken. When we have that better grid, we will have fewer issues even with contractors going through cables because the new grid will be properly mapped.

Those are the things that are giving rise to power cuts, not energy security. Gibraltar is now one of the most secure jurisdictions in the world in respect of the supply of the fuel necessary for 2740 the generation of electricity as a result of the choices that we made; indeed, as a result of the choices that the people of Gibraltar made, because in 2015 this was one of the key electoral issues. Their power station or our power station. Go back to the one that was going to be at the entrance to the Nature Reserve or stick with ours and the gas station that we were going to develop, dual fuel, down by North Mole. The contracts had not been signed. The people knew that they were 2745 voting for one or the other. I am not going to claim the credit for this. The people of Gibraltar chose, in 2015, to go with this power station and they were right because in 2015, as we all remember, the dalliances on the other side of this House were with a company called SPARC, a Russian company. So much for energy security, Mr Speaker.

2750 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Roy Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Turning to Gasnor, can the Minister confirm that Shell disposed of Gasnor? Did Shell discuss 2755 the disposal with the Government at the time, in terms of the continuation of provision of service by Gasnor, and what were the discussions at the time? It is a simple question.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, the Government is not answerable in this House for the decisions of Shell. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we were notified of the change of shareholder 2760 in Gasnor.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q165/2023

**Mask wearing at the Hospital –
Reason for reintroduction and where purchased**

Clerk: Question 165/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Why has the GHA reintroduced masks on entering the hospital facilities, and where have these masks been purchased?
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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, mask wearing was reintroduced for all areas at the GHA due to the increases in multiple respiratory infections, including COVID-19, seasonal influenza and RSV. This adds an extra preventative and precautionary layer of protection during the surge of infections.

As per my answer to Question 583/2022 to my hon. Friend Mr Phillips, the GHA have advised that the masks being used are from the existing stock purchased in July 2020 pertaining to the consignments which were not compliant with FFP3 standards for clinical use.
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Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, a couple of follow-ups. I noticed that the masks had been introduced myself when I went into the Hospital, but I would like to ask the Minister why they have been moved, because I have since been to the Hospital and they are no longer at the entrance, so has this policy changed? Or they were not last time I went, which was about a week or 10 days ago.
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Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I have been to the Hospital today, this morning, and as you walk in, on the right hand side there is a big box full of masks for public use, so they continue to be there.
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Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, can I ask the Hon. Minister if there is more equipment from the faulty COVID consignment that is waiting to be used?

Hon. A J Isola: Not that I am aware, Mr Speaker. What we are doing is using the masks that cannot be used clinically for use by the public. I am not aware of any other equipment that is not being used.
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Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q166-67/2023

**GHA Director General role –
Proposed interim arrangements; selection process**

Clerk: Question 166/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.
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Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Given the recent announcement that Prof. Geoghegan will be stepping back from his role as Director General, can Government confirm how the management team will be organising itself in the interim to provide leadership to the GHA?
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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 167/2023.

Clerk: Question 167/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

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Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Given that Prof. Geoghegan has indicated that he will be involved in selection process of his successor, can Government confirm what the selection process will entail and who else will be involved in the process?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

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Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the Director General works closely with his senior executive team, whereby each executive director has a portfolio of responsibilities. These responsibilities will not change and the Director General will continue to communicate with his team to continue to monitor, advise and support them at all times. Sandie Gracia, Director of Nursing Services, who is a very experienced member of the executive team, will take on the day-to-day co-ordinating role.

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The GHA has contracted a UK recruitment specialist, GatenbySanderson, who are experienced in public healthcare recruitment, to ensure that they have access to an appropriate pool of highly qualified candidates. The Chair of the GHA Board and the Director General will drive the selection process. The composition of the panel has yet to be decided. The vacancy will be advertised this month both locally and overseas and the GHA expects to conclude the recruitment process by mid-April 2023.

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Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for his answer. Is he saying that the recruitment process will finish, or that we will have an announcement by mid-May?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I said the GHA expects to conclude the recruitment process by mid-April 2023.

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Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: So does this mean that we will have an announcement by that time, or will they finish their process but we will not ...? Is everything going to be completed and by mid-April we should be having a new Director General?

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Hon. A J Isola: That is the intention and that is what we would like to see happen.

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Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, if I can just ask one final supplementary. The question that gets asked a lot by people who speak to me is the concern of bias in this process. Can the Minister give us any assurances that the composition of the board or the general process will be very well guarded from any potential bias?

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Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I am not sure what the hon. Lady is referring to. I do not know how there can be bias in respect of a process that has not even started.

As I have already said in my answer, the Chair of the GHA Board, Prof. Ian Cumming, will be in charge of the process, the Director General will be supporting and assisting him, and the rest of the selection panel has yet to be picked. If the hon. Lady is asking whether I will be on it, the answer is no, I will not be. It will be a board that will have one objective and that is to find the best possible person to drive the GHA forward after April 2023.

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Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Thank you, Mr Speaker, just one last question. Does the Minister mean that Prof. Geoghegan will stay in post until mid-April? There will not be a gap where he is not actually working for the system and we still do not have a new director general? Just to check.

2850 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, so long as his health permits, Prof. Geoghegan will be working closely with us to April 2023 and, if possible, thereafter in potentially a different role. He is developing a strategy which I have been promising hon. Members for some time and which he will deliver, and I would very much hope that, if his process with dealing with the cancer that he has enables him to, I will be keeping very close contact with him and he will continue to work with all of his colleagues at the GHA.

2855 We have not yet agreed with him a termination date in respect of his employment, and the longer we can keep that going, frankly, the better for the GHA and for all of us. So I am working closely with him in the hope that we will continue to work together to deliver the changes and the programme that he has set out for us.

2860 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Thank you for that answer.

Just because the hon. Member spoke about a possible different role for the current Director General, maybe I have missed it, but can he give us any more details, if he has not already, on what potential role the current Director General would have in the future, health permitting, of course?

2865 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, the Director General has built up a huge amount of knowledge and expertise in respect of how we run the Hospital. He is very acquainted with what we do well and what we do not so well, and he has developed and devised a plan in respect of most of these areas as to how we can improve that. So if we are able to retain him in whatever capacity ... I am not saying there is even an agreement to this extent. It is something that I have talked to him about, but I have not agreed anything with him, so I feel it is a bit premature having this discussion across the floor of this House, but for as long as we can have access to his incredible knowledge in respect of St Bernard's and the care services we provide, I would like to keep that.

2870 I am not able to say anything more at this stage. I wish him very well in his treatment and I hope that we will continue to be able to work with him for some time yet.

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Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

2880 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, can I join the Hon. Minister in wishing Patrick Geoghegan well? I know that he is going to go through a difficult process, like all those who go through prostate cancer diagnosis and treatment, and I know the whole House will want to wish him well, and indeed all of Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker, I propose that the House should now adjourn until tomorrow at 3 p.m.

2885 **Mr Speaker:** I now propose a question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday, 14th February at 3 p.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday, 14th February at 3 p.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Tuesday, 14th February at 3 p.m.

The House adjourned at 7.27 p.m.