



# PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

**MORNING SESSION: 10.33 a.m. – 1.12 p.m.**

**Gibraltar, Wednesday, 12th July 2023**

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# The Gibraltar Parliament

*The Parliament met at 10.33 a.m.*

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

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

## **Procedural – Removal of jackets**

**Clerk:** Meeting of Parliament, Wednesday, 12th July 2023.  
Mr Speaker.

5       **Mr Speaker:** During the time of the speakership of Speaker Alcantara, he made a ruling  
regarding the removal of jackets during particularly hot days in the Chamber. Of course, we now  
have air conditioning so it might not arise, but I would just like to quote and then offer that  
opportunity, if anybody desires to remove their jacket. I do not really need to go into the Standing  
Order – it is here, there is a ruling, and if everybody is content, we will take it as accepted. Thank  
10 you.

## **Appropriation Bill 2023 – Second Reading – Debate continued**

**Clerk:** We continue with the Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2023.

**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Prof. John Cortes.

15       **Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E  
Cortes):** Good morning, Mr Speaker. This will be a long speech given the tremendous work done  
and planned. To do all this justice, but to spare the time of this House, the version of my speech  
that will be circulated to the media and that I will publish in my social media will contain additional  
information.

20       This is my 12th and possibly my last Budget. As the Chief Minister said in his thoroughly inspired  
presentation yesterday, it is potentially the last speech here for all of us, something that, rightly  
so, is in the hands of the people of our beloved Gibraltar, whom I have had the honour to serve in  
this role for 12 years.

25       This job can be most unrewarding. Our adversarial system puts the party in government at a  
disadvantage, as the system is such that the expectation is to undermine even the good in order  
to try to usurp our position. The system has, of course, an inherent flaw, for it flies in the face of  
what society strives to be – considerate, understanding, encouraging, tolerant and accepting –  
and yet our system expects the very opposite. This, and the unforgiving social media that seem to  
30 like to play the very same game, will concentrate on the negatives, the things not done, giving  
very little credit to the positive. So here, today, I will concentrate on the positive.

Gibraltar has moved in huge strides from where we were when I started this journey nearly 12 years ago, including the last four years. But wait, has it really, effectively, been four? The human mind likes to play tricks on us, often in an autoprotective mode, and isn't it true that it tries to make us forget the two years plus of COVID, tries to package all that we went through in one little corner, rarely accessed, and pretend it never happened? But it did happen. We were confined, 35 unable to move freely, unable to work. Ministers and public servants had to freeze their usual activities, put aside their plans and projects, and concentrate on pulling our community through. It took up our time, our mental space, our money, drained us emotionally and socially and left some of us with long-lasting physical effects, and yet, incredibly, we sometimes forget it 40 happened. Oh, the tricks of the mind. We have to be so focused to not be fooled by them. But that is something that the Opposition has clearly not mastered, for they have been fooled and speak and act as if they had somehow been living elsewhere, like Peter Pan in some magical COVID-free Never-Never Land, while we were all here, day in and day out, dealing with the horrors of the pandemic ticking like the clock in the entrails of the crocodile.

45 With that I think important preamble, Mr Speaker, I launch into my introduction, which, as in the last few years, is a stark warning on the future of our world. Last week saw the three hottest days ever recorded on Earth. It is thought that it was the hottest week since records began. The effects of climate change continue to hit community after community, country after country. Parts of our planet are becoming uninhabitable. Drought, heat and hunger are forcing peoples to 50 migrate and wars to break out. Figures just released estimate that 62,000 people died in Europe from heat related causes in the summer of 2022. The future of our species is at risk, and yet we are seeing increasing support for extreme right-wing politicians – happily not in Gibraltar, but close – who are not just questioning this reality but actively working against the measures that we desperately need, against the progress that we have achieved. Even moderate governments are 55 failing to see that climate is the overriding priority that must govern policy, and are reversing decisions that future generations will not forget and will not forgive. Even in Gibraltar some sectors of our community are lagging behind. Happily, these are fewer and fewer, and I have seen tremendous progress, particularly in the private sector, some of which I will refer to later.

The Opposition however, do not seem to agree, as Mr Azopardi yesterday kept on saying he 60 wanted to clear the jungle, when the world desperately needs to keep its rainforests. I wish we did have a jungle here. The only jungle I know in Gibraltar is in the Northern Defences, and the Deputy Chief Minister is doing an excellent job in clearing that particular one up. (*Banging on desks*) I sincerely thank the Deputy Chief Minister, my friend the Hon. Dr Joseph Garcia, for his work in heritage-related projects and most especially in his leading from the front in promoting 65 the climate agenda, and not just as Chair of the Net Zero Delivery Body.

Mr Speaker, the Government will this month be publishing its 25-year plan for the environment. This high-level but critical document encompasses all areas of environmental responsibility and sets important standards as we embark on our goal of delivering a clean, green, 70 pleasant, safe and resilient Gibraltar. I trust that the Opposition will be able to embrace it and not criticise and undermine it, as they did with our Vision for Heritage, because these are visions for the whole of Gibraltar, and that includes them. Indeed, one of my greatest successes as Minister for the Environment has been to influence the policies of the GSD and turn them towards the environment. Of course, they do not do anywhere near as well as we do, but they no longer dare to publicly push for grimy, slimy diesel (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) or refuse to use the words 75 'sustainability' and 'energy efficiency' as they did just a dozen years ago. I am still waiting for them to thank me for having so significantly influenced their party's policies. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) Indeed, because of the then policy of the GSD, terms like 'climate change', 'renewable energy' and 'energy efficiency' were non-existent within the public service, and the Department of the Environment would struggle to be taken seriously. Now, 12 years later, not only have we provided 80 an ambitious Climate Change Act and strategy, but I am happy to report on progress in gearing up to delivering net zero, and once again must point out the work and leadership of the DCM.

85 The 2020 Greenhouse Gas Inventory saw a significant drop in emissions in line with what would be required to meet our net zero targets. While we do expect to see a bounce-back in emissions following COVID, it appears that the trend continues and we will not be going back to pre-COVID levels.

90 The very successful Aspire conference on sustainability in the built environment served to drive home the message about the scale of the problem and the challenging steps we need to take. Both the Deputy Chief Minister in his opening address and environmental celebrity Tony Juniper of Friends of the Earth as keynote speaker spoke of the need for revolution in the way we think and the way we act. That the message resonated equally from Government and the private sector as well as from environmentalists was a sign that the revolution may have begun. We will now be working with the recently established Gibraltar Sustainable Buildings Group to expand on ideas and to develop the necessary policy and legislative frameworks needed to deliver these essential changes.

95 The Net Zero Delivery Body has met four times in the last year. Members are currently working on their sectoral plans across energy, transport, finance, education and more, and we look forward to sharing this information in due course.

100 Accountability is of the essence and this is also brought by the independent Climate Change Committee, which recently fulfilled one of its statutory obligations in reporting on the state of play. I welcome their assessment, which recognises the significant amount of work that went into the Climate Change Strategy and also commends the level of ambition set by the Government. It correctly highlights that much work remains to be done in setting out detailed sectoral pathways to net zero and understanding the likely economic impacts of climate change to Gibraltar's economy.

105 The private sector continues to work on the environment and climate change agenda. Of particular note are two bunkering firms. GibOil have been providing carbon credits to marine customers in Gibraltar to offset their carbon emissions. Peninsula Petroleum, too, is making great strides internationally in reducing its carbon footprint by moving to new fuels and investing in new technology. These initiatives are significant in their scale and reach and I commend all companies taking similar steps. We will continue to work on developing green finance initiatives.

110 Mr Speaker, at long last, this year the World Health Organization declared the global public health emergency from COVID to be over. Therefore, Public Health Gibraltar has been able to start a programme to address the wider determinants of health. How we live our lives will affect our health more in the medium to long term in terms of the risk factors for developing cancer, diabetes and heart disease. It can be done, as I think I have been able to show, when after a diabetes scare last autumn I have lost 18 kg in weight and returned my blood count to within the normal range. *(Banging on desks and interjection)* And for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, I am pleased to say that I am feeling better than ever and neither tired nor, much less, jaded. *(Interjection)* He said that yesterday. **(A Member: Ah, right.)**

120 Later this year we will be publishing the first part of our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which will help us understand what affects how healthy we are and how long we live. *(Interjection)* We have undertaken a large-scale vaping survey in schools, the results of which we published last week. The study has provided information that will allow us better to address ways of preventing young people taking up the habit. Discussions have now commenced on carrying out a similar study on the use of mobile devices by young people.

125 Gibraltar now has an established research resource in the University that is being used to inform evidence-based policy development and decision making, yet another step in the growth in sophistication of our community brought about at this Government's initiative.

130 The Department of Environment continues to expand its marine surveillance and monitoring capabilities. From monitoring key habitats to the presence of invasive species, sampling water quality and rescuing wildlife, this work forms the backbone of marine biodiversity policy development. Crucially, enforcement at sea is something in which we take great interest and in which, despite ill-informed criticism, there has been great improvement. Our presence at sea

135 matters. The new assets that are being provided to the Department's Environmental Protection  
and Research Unit (EPRU) will ensure that our officers are suitably equipped to meet the  
challenging conditions they face in protecting the marine environment. I would like to take this  
opportunity to thank all the officers in EPRU and others in the Department of the Environment  
who assisted the Port and other services in responding to the OS35 collision, and all the volunteers  
who give up their time to protect our coastline.

140 Once again, the exceptional marine awareness and educational work of the Nautilus Project  
has to be recognised, along with the yearly awareness and clean-up work co-ordinated by the  
Environmental Safety Group and monitoring of seabird migration by GONHS. I thank the NGOs for  
their tremendous collaborative contribution in this and all other aspects of our common work on  
the Environment.

145 Mr Speaker, administrative delays continue to exist in relation to waste transfer licences post  
Brexit. I am grateful for the effort and work of staff at Environment, Technical Services and the  
Environmental Agency for always finding a workaround. To ensure greater efficiency and self-  
sufficiency in our waste management, we have published a tender for a waste sorting plant at  
Europa Advance Road. This will allow us to separate solid waste into recyclable streams and  
150 reduce the portion which might need to go to landfill. It will also allow us to ship waste to other  
European destinations if issues were to become overly complicated in future.

In relation to litter and cleanliness, we have recently increased litter fines to £250, and £1,000  
for dangerous litter, and have introduced offences for placing normal litter in recycling bins and  
littering from cars. Collection times have been modified with a new collection in the middle of the  
155 day, and we have increased cleaning frequency and enforcement effort. Improvements are  
already evident. We are increasing the capacity of bin stores, which are always a problem as no  
one wants them to be located near them. We all know that we need to clean because others litter.  
It is a matter of civic pride and changing habits. We can clean and clean, and fine and fine, but if  
we do not work together as a community we will not succeed. It is a collective responsibility.

160 I can confirm that a new and much-awaited tender process for a sewage plant closed on  
Monday. We expect a preferred bidder to be appointed before the end of summer and works to  
commence on the ground shortly after. I am determined to make this happen despite the many  
challenges that have had to be surmounted thus far. This project is one of the most critical in our  
environmental agenda and we will continue to ensure that it receives the priority and urgency  
165 that it deserves.

The Gibraltar air quality website was updated and modernised and continues to provide up-  
to-date measurements of pollutants. The new website now also provides climate change data to  
support the work of the Net Zero Delivery Body. The most recent fully ratified data, in 2021, from  
the air quality network shows stable levels or continued decline in key pollutants. All were below  
170 the limit values, something that was simply unachievable before 2012. We will now continue to  
focus on emissions from traffic and shipping. At this juncture I want to make special reference to  
the work of my hon. colleague and friend Paul Balban and his relentless energy and commitment  
to cleaning up the transport sector by promoting alternative forms of transport.

The new air quality instruments were installed last year to replace the existing. With these  
175 improvements Gibraltar now reports reference standard automatic measurements for PM10 and  
2.5 at both Rosia Road and Bleak House. Gibraltar now has five AQ mesh pods, with two new pods  
installed last year. The pods' mobility allows for them to be moved to locations near identified  
sources. One pod was installed on North Mole Road to try to better understand the impact of  
maritime activity and the second was installed at Governor's Lane to continue monitoring known  
180 major traffic routes. The website hosts up-to-date hourly measurements of pollutants from the  
five AQ mesh pods.

We will also be seeing more progress on solar power as both private initiatives and government  
projects progress. To date, Solar PVs have exported around seven million kilowatts to the grid.  
This has resulted in government subsidy savings of about £400,000. We currently have an installed  
185 capacity of nearly 4,000 kW over 14 sites, with the cruise liner terminal, St Joseph's School and

St Mary's School coming up soon. This constitutes just over 10% of Gibraltar's daily average peak power demand. Further projects will also be announced soon, so getting ever closer to our target, which suffered a setback during the years of industry inactivity due to COVID.

190 The electrification of the vehicle fleet is part of the move to better air quality. We are already seeing an increase in the number of EVs and hybrids being purchased and there is strong pressure from the industry, which is moving in this direction globally. We are responding to this with an increase in the number of publicly available charging points.

Mr Speaker, the Environmental Agency continues to advise and enforce in many areas. It has participated in the review of legislation in areas of public health, littering, waste and food hygiene, and is working to introduce important allergen legislation.

195 The Agency received 1,853 complaints from the public in 2022, and 787, so far, in 2023, and continues to operate a 24-hour on-call service, which has seen environmental health officers and the pest control team engaged in 320 call-outs in 2022 and 86, so far, this year. Eighty four abatement notices have been served in 2022, with 20, so far, in 2023. Action resulted in fines issued to a total of £17,050 in 2022 and £10,060, so far, in 2023.

200 The Agency also continues to make a significant contribution to the Government's anti-dog-fouling campaign. In 2022 the Agency collected 173 DNA samples with 16 fixed penalty notices issued, and so far in 2023, 98 samples have been collected with nine notices issued to offenders. Officers also carry out patrols during which they check that dogs being walked on the public highway are licensed and registered. Last year, 55 patrols were carried out, with 150 dogs checked, which resulted in 15 notices being issued for no registration or licence. Thus far this year, there have been 61 patrols with 85 dogs checked and five notices being issued. Most dog owners are totally responsible and resent those who are not, who unfairly give them and dogs a bad name. They will be pleased to know that we are now working on detailed plans for setting up a dedicated dog park.

210 The Agency recently hosted HSE inspectors, who carried out a successful emergency planning and climate adaptability inspection as part of the bi-annual inspection regime of the LNG plant. This is the plant that the GSD said would blow up half of Gibraltar.

Like air quality, bathing water quality has been improving steadily over the past 12 years. *(Interjection)* Yes, indeed. That brings back memories, Mr Speaker. Five of our bathing waters continue to be classified as excellent, with Western Beach improving and now being classified as good.

Ongoing construction projects at Eastern Beach delayed preparation works leading up to the official bathing season. Our beaches were, however, with some work left to do at Eastern, well ready for the summer, thanks to the great efforts of sections of Environment, Technical Services and contractors. There were a number of key improvements at Camp Bay, for example, following representations from my friend and regular Camp Bay user, Adolfo Mor. This year we have carried out a far more extensive rock clearing and sand sifting operation than usual at both Eastern and Catalan Bay, including mechanical removal of rocks and debris beneath the water, from up to five metres in from the shore. At Little Bay, a new and improved access to the shore has been constructed which will facilitate access for beach users, especially the elderly and those with mobility restrictions. Little Bay has also seen an improvement to the internal shower facilities. At Camp Bay, the old wooden beach umbrella store and beach accessibility equipment store have been replaced. The problem of ponding, which used to occur in areas of flooring around the large pool at Camp Bay, potentially becoming a bacterial focal point, has been resolved. General yearly preparatory works at our beaches have also included much other work and are listed in the published version of the speech – just as well, as there are many pages there.

235 There have been improvements in the lifeguard service, thanks to enhanced training. We also now have round-the-clock supervision of the beach service to ensure that it is running up to expected standards for the safety of all beach users.

Major changes have been taking place in the cemetery in terms of administrative procedures, including recording and plotting of graves, staffing and the management of graves and vaults.

Works are ongoing to repair the niches, entrances, public toilets and staff offices. This will be followed by construction of a dedicated columbarium for the internment of ashes.

240 Nature-based approaches to tackling climate change are now recognised as essential. Indeed, it is also established that green areas in cities improve both physical and mental health. Relevant to this, I can report that there have been 240 trees planted since autumn 2022. Any trees removed in any project need to be either transplanted or replaced, and legal action will be taken against transgressors. New green areas have been created, such as the new roundabouts at both access  
245 points to Kingsway. There has also been additional removal of non-native invasive species, and habitat for native plants has increased. We will continue to provide better green spaces that improve our urban environment and increase the quality of life of our residents, also diversifying the wildlife in these spaces.

The Gibraltar Botanic Gardens continue with their core objectives of maintaining and  
250 beautifying the grounds, educating the public and researching the ecology, and conservation of plants and animals. Improvements to the Gardens' aesthetics continue and the very hard and enthusiastic work of the grounds staff is clear to see. The popular children's education programme continues to go from strength to strength, performing excellent outreach work as well. The new, bespoke education area is now ready and will be inaugurated this autumn, thanks entirely to the  
255 contributions of a number of very generous private donors. In the meantime, we continue to plant the very rare Gibraltar endemic, the Gibraltar Campion, back into the Gibraltar Nature Reserve. This relies on seed from the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, raised by the Gardens, where the species has been propagated successfully every year after it was rediscovered and rescued from certain extinction, and work also done by Greenarc.

260 We have recently seen the establishment of the Gibraltar National Park by Act of Parliament, sadly not supported by the Opposition. The first meetings of the newly established Park Co-ordinating Board have been held and plans are moving ahead to use this new entity to better co-ordinate the work of the constituent parts and to better promote Gibraltar abroad.

265 Visitor numbers to the Upper Rock have continued to increase. A recent small increase in the entrance fee for non-residents, which is still well below what you can expect to pay for similar experiences in many tourist destinations, has increased revenue. This has been helped by the new Nature Reserve website, which now allows visitors to buy tickets online and customise their visitor experience. Improvements continue. Sites are now controlled via speed gates, making it possible to have complete visibility of every ticket sold and to track individuals and groups throughout the  
270 Nature Reserve – important in case of an emergency. We have already been able to increase revenue by about £2 million per annum and we forecast that we will be able to increase this by a further £1 million in this financial year.

275 New, improved signage is being rolled out along with interpretation panels. This is being extended to areas of ecological and heritage interest throughout Gibraltar. We are investing in the improvement of our main attractions such as the World War II tunnels, soon to reopen after refurbishment; St Michael's Cave; Mediterranean Steps; and O'Hara's Battery, recently reopened. New picnic sites have being created and more are planned. This year has also seen a drastic improvement to the parking facilities available to visitors, who can now make use of Lathbury car park.

280 Building on the successful rewilding programme, which started with the reintroduction of Barbary partridges and wild rabbits, new species that once inhabited the Reserve are being brought back. I highlight the majestic Bonelli's eagle, which once nested in the Rock and which, I can reveal today, has nested here this year in captivity, raising two young, which are in the process of being released from a secret location. This is thanks to the undoubted world-class expertise of  
285 the team at GONHS, as well as the Upper Rock management team. The recently created Tovey Cottage interpretation centre is helping to raise awareness on this and all the habitat management and conservation work being carried out in the Reserve, and I take the opportunity to thank all those involved, many of them volunteers, in making this happen.

290 I highlighted last year that the long-term trend of yellow-legged gulls in Gibraltar is one of decline. The results of this year's breeding gull survey confirm this trend of continued decline. This is testament to the excellent work done by the Avian Control Unit, which ensures that the gulls will never again be as abundant as they were during the 1990s and early 2000s. The Avian Control Unit provides an excellent service which I believe is unique in the world.

295 The GONHS Bird of Prey Unit, already referred to, continues its excellent work in rescue, rehabilitation, release and tracking of injured and exhausted birds of prey. They do excellent conservation work and are also very involved in education on migrating birds of prey and their preservation.

300 The Nature Reserve is this year again receiving large numbers of tourists, which, as always, puts pressure on the macaques and their natural behaviour. There is now a full-time wildlife warden to help educate the public and reduce interactions between macaques and people. Macaque numbers have remained stable now for several years after a concerted effort to sterilise females through laparoscopy, so that numbers of births annually have fallen to a level that will sustain a stable population. This, and rapid deployment of staff when needed, has meant that incursions into urbanised areas are now the exception and not the rule, as they once were. 305 Macaque blood samples were tested last year for diseases and were found not to carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans. However, monkeys are always vulnerable to catching illnesses from humans and then spreading them back, so this further cements the point that contact between the macaques and people should be prevented.

310 Our work on the Environment is recognised beyond our shores, as I know from my work as Chair of the Environment Ministers' Council of the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. We are seen by many as a model in ambition, commitment and achievement. Indeed, I know from my meetings with ministers from the Territories and with UK government ministers and senior officials, some of whom have visited Gibraltar recently, that there is tremendous respect for our environmental stewardship.

315 I now turn to heritage. The Ministry for Heritage, together with other heritage stakeholders such as the National Museum, the Garrison Library and the Heritage Trust, have continued to work together in seamless collaboration, as never before. The Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council continues to advise me on all matters relating to our heritage and is proving an invaluable asset. A sub-committee of the Council produced a heritage vision for Gibraltar. Feedback from the 320 consultation draft has been analysed and required no significant changes, and so the vision is now formally adopted. This will guide us in developing and implementing management plans in order to protect not only our tangible heritage but also less tangible aspects of our cultural heritage, such as our languages.

325 A Bill before this House will amend the Heritage and Antiquities Act to incorporate greater protections and supervision in the importation and exportation of antiquities and on the use of metal detectors.

330 We have also declared our first ever scheduled archaeological area east of Arengo's Palace. We pursue the scheduling of other heritage-sensitive properties with all relevant parties and are working on a register of properties of historical value. The importance of scheduling buildings of historical importance has been well demonstrated given the recent sale of St Andrew's Church, as it will clearly ensure that its heritage value is conserved in whatever use it is put to.

335 As I highlighted last year, after 50 years of neglect, the 9.2-inch gun that was once at Levant Battery was removed from the Eco Park in Flint Road and transported to a holding and restoration area at Brewery Crusher. The plan is to return it to its original home at Levant Battery.

340 Restoration works continue on major sites such as the Convent Façade and the new St Mary's Lower Primary School. The restoration of Southport Gates will also be finalised by the end of the summer and we will finally have our medieval shields that have stood there for nearly 500 years brought back to life. We have undertaken heritage works through the removal of vegetation on the facade of the Tower of Homage and we restored the last whipping post, located outside the Shrine of our Lady of Europe. We are also well underway in the protection of graves of historical



interest, having listed a number of these in the schedule to the Act. These are all examples of the Government's unwavering support for heritage.

Another unseen but fundamental part of the work is archaeological supervision through watching briefs. All developments are regularly supervised by the Government Archaeologist. The close working relationship the Ministry for Heritage has with other heritage stakeholders as well as with other departments such Town Planning, and Technical Services, ensures that heritage-sensitive work is undertaken to the highest standards.

The close relationship with the Heritage Trust continues to go from strength to strength. The Trust's Heritage Awards continue to show that there is a desire and pride in the community for heritage. Indeed, one government-supported project, the restoration of Central Hall by GCS, proudly received a heritage award last year. Work at Witham's Cemetery by Trust volunteers continues and is now focused on the cottage and garage areas, which have been given over to the Trust following their request.

A lot has been said recently from one particular Opposition bench about the budget of the Gibraltar National Museum. A lot has also been said from the same bench about Government underspending on our heritage. Typical Opposition inconsistency, Mr Speaker – you cannot argue both ways.

The fee the Museum receives for its inspiring work in Gibraltar and beyond is just one way that the Government invests in heritage, including our World Heritage Site. There, the excavations at the Gorham's complex continue with students from Liverpool John Moores and Leiden Universities, together with local volunteers. As in previous years, the students are accommodated in the Museum's field centre in Parson's Lodge. The excavations follow a research and conservation strategy for the site which was approved by the International Research and Conservation Committee in March of this year. In addition to providing accommodation for students, Parson's Lodge also houses the sieving laboratory. The continuing use of this field laboratory, which has for some years now housed the popular summer programme of activities for children, allows access to a public that may not be able to go to the caves themselves. I am pleased to report that a wonderful stone monument, in the shape of the Rock with Gorham's Cave within, will soon be inaugurated at Europa Advance Road as part of a plan to attract visitors to the World Heritage Site viewing platform. We plan to develop a cliff-top path between the viewing platform and the monument, allowing for safe pedestrian access.

The World Heritage Site has just completed its first participation in the process of periodic reporting to UNESCO. The team at the World Heritage Office has worked closely with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in the United Kingdom, who represent the state party at UNESCO. The new management plan for the site, covering the period 2023-28, is now complete and will shortly be published online together with the research and conservation strategy and the risk preparedness plan. Worldwide media interest in the complex continues. During this field season alone, three major international crews have covered work at Gorham's Cave. There is interest from at least two other teams and a major production, filmed last year, is expected to be out by the end of the summer.

The development of the extension of the National Museum as a natural history museum in Parson's Lodge is a major step forward for our museum services. The transformation of the Museum into an international centre of excellence has been truly impressive and I am hugely excited about this next stage.

Conservation and restoration of the Moorish Castle is progressing inside the castle walls. This has included test archaeological soundings and studies of the fabric. The result of this work is in the process of being put together into a monograph on the Moorish Castle, which will be part of a series covering our important monuments, based on original research.

Events organised by the Gibraltar National Museum continue. This year's Calpe Conference will commemorate three anniversaries: the end of the Great Siege 240 years ago, the discovery of the Gibraltar 1 skull 175 years ago, and the start of the construction of the Gibraltar Dockyard 130 years ago.

395 One wonderful event was the recent lecture by Mensun Bound on the discovery of Ernest Shackleton's *HMS Endurance* under the Antarctic ice in 2022. Those of us who attended the lecture – and I did notice that some of our new-born heritage gurus were missing – will know why he came. He described his past work with the Gibraltar Museum team as among the best of his entire career, and his friendship and association meant that when the call came there was only ever going to be one answer. This is a little cameo of what years and years of professional endeavour achieve in the promotion of Gibraltar and its unique heritage.

400 This is a greatly significant year for the Gibraltar Garrison Library, too, as it approaches its 230th anniversary, on 27th August. There is much to celebrate here as we have now come to believe that it was the first of the garrison libraries to have been established, with those that followed adopting the Gibraltar model. Also significant is that this year brings a real game changer, with the Library entering the digital age through the establishment of a digitisation lab, the first output of  
405 which will be the digitisation of the Gibraltar newsprint archive collection. These data will be fully searchable and available online, offering global access to Gibraltar's history. Digital access will offer greater protection to hard copies, which will be physically handled less often. This is being achieved with a generous donation from the Kusuma Trust. Over the last few years the Garrison Library has increased its projection on social media, with an Instagram page now also forming a  
410 part of its outreach, their first Instagram post, in March, being viewed over 5,000 times. My purpose continues to be to open the Garrison Library, with all its history and heritage, to the whole of the community and beyond.

Mr Speaker, the structural and systemic improvements introduced by the Government have allowed heritage to become central to government policy. We are the only ones with a vision, the  
415 only ones who have and are capable of protecting all aspects of our heritage, both tangible and intangible, allowing Gibraltar to develop into the future with the evidence of its past fully protected and enhanced. In the last 12 months my teams have worked on around 30 pieces of legislation, ranging from the creation of a National Park to environmental governance, a review of education, management of contaminated land and the regulation of fireworks. Later this week  
420 I will be publishing a Bill for an Act for the protection and enhancement of Gibraltar's culture.

Now to education. The education of our children and young people is one of the most important aspects of good government. This Government has done more for education than any other in our history to build on the critical changes in the scholarship system introduced by Sir Joe Bossano's GSLP Government. This is not just by providing new school buildings and facilities. The  
425 realignment of key stages has proved most successful, co-education now is firmly established and seen, even by those who had doubts, to have been the right step to take. We have revised the remuneration of the much-valued and hardworking teaching profession and increased the numbers of both teachers and special needs learning support assistants to reflect growing needs and diversification of the educational offer, now greater than ever, project based and,  
430 importantly, with equal opportunities in education for all. This was never the case before.

And still the Government continues to invest in making meaningful, real changes to the educational estate which will improve the quality of the learning environment for generations of children. The educational estate legacy of the already lived-in seven new school buildings – and I will list them: St Bernard's Lower and Upper Primary, Notre Dame, St Anne's, Bayside, Westside  
435 and St Martin's – together with the significantly upgraded St Paul's will be extended with the upcoming opening of three further magnificent schools, St Mary's, Governor's Meadow and Bishop Fitzgerald. These new buildings will provide bespoke high-quality learning environments for children, as well as transforming the working environment for staff. They include better and more extensive physical resources which will be enjoyed by pupils as from September, and we  
440 cannot wait to open these doors to the public so that all can see what amazing spaces we have created for the pupils.

This private-public partnership has worked extremely well. I want to thank everyone involved in the projects – the contractors and project managers, ITLD and especially the Department of Education team and the heads and deputy heads of all three schools for their hard, nay, exhausting

445 work in bringing these to completion. They have gone well beyond the call of duty, as have all the staff, especially in getting the schools ready for the new academic year just a couple of months away.

We have also commenced the upgrading of the two St Joseph's school buildings to a similar standard to our new schools. We are also well advanced in our plans to build a new Gibraltar College, which will ensure we create a bespoke series of learning spaces that both nurture the current subject offerings in specially designed areas and enable us to extend the subject offering with the provision of additional learning spaces. Plans for the construction of a new Hebrew Primary School at the old St Mary's School site are also progressing.

455 The number of children with special educational needs and disabilities – or SEND, as I will be referring to them in this speech – continues to increase year on year. I have commissioned a study into possible causes of this, being co-ordinated jointly by the Department of Education and Public Health Gibraltar, and calling in UK experts in the field. In order to cater for their needs, we have increased our learning support facility (LSF) provision across both lower primary settings – St Paul's, St Mary's and St Joseph's – and in the secondary sector in the Gibraltar College. For the first time ever, LSF provision was extended to the nursery year group, with such provision being offered in Notre Dame and Governor's Meadow. This provision is extended to five lower primary schools as from this coming September.

We are continuing to adapt our existing educational facilities to cater for the growing needs of children with additional needs and early intervention opportunities. For example, the new St Martin's school building has a number of resources to which children previously did not have access. This enables children to benefit from accessing therapeutic interventions within their school day, which will very much support their holistic development. Work continues in looking at options to increase the footprint of St Martin's to cater for the extending pupil cohort. The creation of the new Wessex campus with St Martin's, Governor's Meadow and Bishop Fitzgerald being interconnected, increases the flexibility and adaptability of provision, as it was meant to do. For example, this year the Early Birds Nursery provision will be housed in the Governor's Meadow footprint. It would be remiss of me not to mention the excellent work being done in relation to SEND by NGOs and I want particularly to congratulate PossAbilities for their new premises and forward-looking programmes.

475 Work is progressing on establishing full pre-emptive maintenance arrangements for all schools. In addition to the new schools, a great deal of improvement work has been carried out over the past year in existing schools. Some examples are re-roofing of the clock tower at St Joseph's, installation of air conditioning at St Bernard's and the completion of the woodland area at St Paul's, where a concreted patio is now an educational natural space and refuge for wildlife in the heart of an urban zone. Works planned for the coming months include our inhabited schools' refurbishment programme at St Joseph's and St Paul's, which will include air conditioning and a phased toilet refurbishment, and the provision of shading to the roof terraces at Notre Dame, St Anne's and St Martin's to increase use of these areas in the hotter months.

485 After a long period of research, discussion, consideration and drafting, necessary revisions to the Education Act before this House have been made, ensuring that the education section of the outdated legislation is brought up to date to reflect current practice. Some key changes have been made in regard to SEND. We have ensured the revised draft includes more appropriate language and terminology and a clearer outline regarding SEND processes, including the appeals process. I thank Opposition spokesman for education Edwin Reyes for his positive engagement and useful suggestions, many of which, as he knows, have been incorporated in the Bill.

495 We are working with Human Resources in reviewing selection procedures for Education staff and we have supported our staff who have had issues relating to their well-being, working very closely with the well-being team to offer a higher level of professional support whenever the need has arisen. I recognise that as rewarding as working with children and young people can be, it can also be tremendously challenging and draining. The Department of Education has worked very closely with school leadership teams to adopt a proactive approach to well-being. We are looking

at a revised structure within St Martin's School, given the much larger pupil and staff numbers, and we are also working on addressing structural inconsistencies in responsibility posts and reviewing the TLRs that have been held in an acting capacity pending the outcome of the paused TLR review.

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In other initiatives, we are continuing focus on training staff to develop skills in supporting children with social, emotional and mental health needs and reviewing our service-wide provision for vulnerable children. Given our concerns with attendance, and in the knowledge of the very much evidenced negative impact that poor attendance has on educational outcomes and positive life prospects, we are keen to give this an even more concerted effort next year. However, we also recognise the already high workloads of senior teams and pastoral leads, so are keen to develop an additional structure of support through pastoral support teams within the schools.

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We have invested in more CPD opportunities for teachers than ever before and have co-ordinated whole-service and whole-school training. We have introduced a formalised induction for new SNLSAs, who make a hugely important contribution to educating our children, which includes a core programme of essential training to better prepare them for their role in the classroom. I am well aware of the importance of the work done by all non-classroom-based staff, too, including technicians, industrial staff, caretakers and attendants, as well as the school secretaries, who so often work in the background, and we are looking at ways in which to improve their situation.

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There are many other developments in our provision for learners with special educational needs and disabilities, such as introducing the pupil profile for teachers to start using next academic year, to have a common framework to track pupil progress through the Early Years Curriculum; continued close liaison with the GHA to support pupils in the services that they provide; we have started our annual dyslexia screening for all year 4 pupils and have delivered dyslexia training in schools; ongoing educational psychology parent drop-in sessions so parents can reach out to discuss any concerns they have; continued support for pupils with SEND at key times of transition between sectors; enhancing, importantly, our offer of post-16 provision for young people with SEND and inclusion of some of the St Bernadette's users identified as individuals who will benefit from attending courses at the Gibraltar College. There continues to be close collaboration between Education staff and our colleagues in the GHA and the Care Agency to facilitate access and support to the children and young people with additional needs. This multi-agency work ensures that the children and young people's needs are clearly outlined, planned for and reviewed, in order to support their holistic development. The pandemic halted much of our projected work, as we had to focus on providing education for our children in a different way. Happily, we are now able to re-embark on our plans and I can confirm that we will be keeping our manifesto commitment of employing more school counsellors and educational psychologists and to review the allowances of both EPs and SENCOs, whose increasing workload deserves recognition.

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Contrary to repeated allegations from the Opposition, we are most definitely keeping to our commitment to provide wider vocational opportunities. For example, the Gibraltar College has worked closely with senior leaders in the Care Agency to develop a Social Services, Health and Social Care course for individuals employed by the Care Agency who wish to develop themselves professionally and acquire a qualification. The College is also exploring the possibility of offering the Cambridge National Certificate in Sports Studies. Other new vocational courses that will be starting this September in Bayside and Westside are a Level 2 Certificate in Design and Craft and Level 3 Food Science and Nutrition, and in the College a Level 2 E-Sports and a Level 3 Drama and Performing Arts BTEC in association with GAMPAs, adding to the existing subjects, which include Music Performance BTEC also with GAMPAs, and the hairdressing BTEC with Mayfair on Main. Never before have our young people had so many vocational courses available.

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There are also a number of workstreams that the Department of Education have been part of which develop the important ongoing work of the ClimACT working party and the Core Committee with the Net Zero Delivery Body work. A Learner Ambassador forum has been created in order to

550 seek the direct input of young people into this critical work. Our review of the Education Act has ensured that along with the other key changes mentioned earlier, it features a commitment to making learning about the climate emergency and climate justice a fundamental principle of education policy.

555 And so, Mr Speaker, to the University of Gibraltar, now so firmly established despite its young age. The University enrolled almost 560 students during the academic year ending 31st July 2023. Its portfolio of academic programmes continues to grow. Last year saw the University offering undergraduate degrees in computing and entrepreneurship, nursing, business and maritime science complemented by a range of access courses and postgraduate degrees in research, education, business and marine science. Students enrolled on these core academic programmes continue to increase, with 30 in the academic year 2018-19, 134 in 2020-21, 188 in 2022-22 and 560 203 as at the end of June 2023. The latter are of 41 different nationalities. Graduates of the University are also increasing, with 21 graduating in December 2020, 38 in 2021, 79 in 2022 and an anticipated 98, including three local PhDs, graduating this coming December.

565 Following extensive consultation with industry and successful completion of a rigorous UK validation process during this year, the University will offer a further three new degrees from September 2023: an MSc in Environmental Science and Climate Change, an MSc in Contemporary Healthcare and an MBA in Gaming. This year, the University will be working with industry to launch an MSc in Advanced Health Practice and a BSc Adult Nursing International Top-up and, in line with many UK universities, a range of micro-credentials to support lifelong learning will be launched in January. Also planned is the development of an MSc in Psychology (Addiction) and an MSc in 570 Sustainable Maritime Operations.

The University Centre of Excellence in Responsible Gaming has continued to grow its reputation both locally and globally. The University was recently awarded funding by the UK Darwin Plus scheme to undertake a biodiversity and conservation project in Gibraltar.

575 In addition to its academic programmes, the University has provided a range of professional, continuing education and short courses, all aimed at addressing local needs, in addition to acting as an exam centre for professional awards and providing a diverse range of English and Spanish courses to local and regional individuals and businesses via its Language Centre. During this academic year, the Professional Development department also completed its inaugural Professional Diploma of Competence in Financial Services. This very relevant qualification has 580 been endorsed by the Gibraltar Financial Services Commission and it saw 14 local students from six licensed industry sectors graduating this year. The course will be offered again this September.

585 The year also saw the official launch, in November last, of the University Maritime Academy. Building on its maritime shipping for local industry courses, and working with its collaborative partner Viking Maritime Group, this year has seen the Academy develop and launch a beyond compliance fire-fighting course targeting local and international shipping. The success of this course has drawn repeat business from operators that include Windstar and Virgin Cruises. Just recently, a significant agreement was signed with FRS for provision of ratings training for seafarers, Maritime English for a thousand crew, provision of cadet sea-time placements, sponsorships and graduate jobs. The Academy is also in talks for provision of customised maritime training for a 590 number of other large local and international operators such as Carnival, including P&O and Cunard. The Academy's strong ties with local bunkering companies has also ensured that despite a continued global shortage of sea placements, all the University's growing number of maritime cadets have been placed on board quality vessels.

595 In spite of extremely challenging targets, an increasingly competitive international market and the constraints posed by processing delays with visas for international students, recruitment of students continues to be successful with tuition fee income increasing from around £1.3 million in the university year ended July 2021 to £1.7 million in the year ended July 2022. Moreover, tuition income is estimated to reach £2.1 million by the end of this July. As a result, the University continues to work towards a much greater degree of self-financing with the proportion of income, 600 excluding donations, provided by the Government subvention steadily decreasing from 86% in the

year ending July 2017 to a forecast 30% in the year ending July this year. Drawing upon research by the London Economics Report on Costs and Benefits of International Higher Education Students to the UK Economy, it was estimated that international students studying at the University for the academic year 2022-23 will contribute approximately £5.7 million net to the Gibraltar economy. This figure will increase to £7.6 million net if international student targets are met for the upcoming academic year.

Finally in relation to the University, I can report that it was recently awarded membership of the prestigious and influential Universities UK.

Mr Speaker, moving on now to my responsibilities for culture, following from my speech last year I am delighted to confirm that our programme to develop culture and its appreciation, both in Gibraltar and abroad, remains at the heart of my agenda, as is evident with daily cultural activities and the increased services that are provided by my team at the Ministry and our executive arm, Gibraltar Cultural Services. Our cultural service is thriving and moving from strength to strength in events, development, cultural facilities and premises, cultural education, promoting our art galleries, our public library and more, together with all the stakeholders. Art exhibitions, book launches, music, dance and drama productions are all prolific, and long may that be so. Gibraltar is seeing a veritable cultural renaissance in every genre. The policy of concentrating on promoting our culture and exporting it is reaping benefits. People are sitting up and taking notice of our uniqueness. The importance of our culture cannot be overstated. It is the essence of our identity and is increasingly recognised as being unique and inimitable. The way we express ourselves through the arts, our established and growing Gibraltarian literature, our unique language, is what will see our identify through any challenges that may come our way. It is our culture that makes Gibraltar Gibraltar and Gibraltarians Gibraltarian. That reality will frustrate those who wish us to cease being who we are, and will defeat them every single time.

It is therefore imperative that we continue to produce these programmes, as we need to make sure we invest in the cultural leaders of the future, in those who will promote Gibraltar outside our shores. We must develop and promote our own. Events with international artists are very welcome, but it is more significant and much less expensive to promote the development of the arts within our community. To this end, there has this past year been a myriad of events organised, including, as part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations, the Jubilata gastronomic extravaganza. Last year saw the return of the Gibraltar Fair, the Cavalcade, the Christmas Festival of Lights and the Christmas attractions.

A cultural day was held in London in September, which saw a cultural soirée featuring Gibraltarian creatives performing and a networking breakfast, where ideas were exchanged and new working relationships forged, also paying tribute to the many Gibraltarians working in the arts and the cultural scene in the UK. We also held an art exhibition at the heart of the capital, at the Bermondsey Project Space. As examples of how we are taking our culture beyond our shores, the space of a month will have seen four plays written or performed by Gibraltarians being presented in the UK, including one in London's Soho and three in drama festivals, one of which, by Westside and Bayside, swept the major awards just a few days ago, and another by GAMPAs which will be staged in a fortnight, and I will not be surprised if they, too, succeed given their high standards.

The National Gallery celebrated the 150th anniversary of the birth of Gustavo Bacarissas. An extension was launched with new exhibition rooms created and the exhibition of new works curated to provide a more organic experience at the Gallery. A set of stamps was launched in collaboration with the Gibraltar Philatelic Bureau to commemorate the birth of Gustavo Bacarissas. The fourth Cultural Awards aired on GBCTV and cultural social media platforms. Gibraltar Literature Week was held at the John Mackintosh Hall, providing a platform and giving exposure to local authors.

The return leg of the cultural exchange with Morocco took place in Tangier in February. Events have included an art exhibition featuring nine Gibraltar artists and performances by the Gibraltar Sea Scouts Band; a visit to Donabo Botanic Gardens hosted by Lala Malika of the Moroccan Royal

655 Family and the donation of a sculpture to the Gardens by artist Mark Montovio as a symbol of the cultural links between both communities; and a presentation of books, creating a Gibraltar library at the Gibraltar Morocco Business Exchange offices, which I opened earlier in the year.

Once again in the spring we held the Gibraltar International Dance Festival, the Festival for Young Musicians, the Young Art Competitive Exhibition, the International Drama Festival and the ever popular World Book Day celebrations.

660 In May, with the University of Gibraltar we hosted a bilingual language study research project with the University of Vigo and the University of the Balearic Islands.

The GEMA Gallery continues to be a successful cultural heritage space, with several exhibitions and other events taking place over the last year.

We continue to support the Ministry for Sport in its summer and mid-term sports and leisure programmes, providing cultural initiatives and opportunities.

665 We have supported a retreat organised by Accord Literary and the Rock Retreat in Accra, Ghana. Two local artists, Gabriella Chipol and Beatrice Garcia, were selected to take part.

670 On to literature: there has been an increased interest in and awareness of Gibraltarian literature and our languages over the last year, with significant international recognition. In my last Budget speech I promised new ways of encouraging and consolidating recognition of our languages. This is being delivered in style. Very significantly, the Gibraltar National Book Council (GNBC) has been established to encourage writing and reading aimed at supporting writers, illustrators and publishers, and working to promote Gibraltarian literature internationally, be it in English, Spanish or Llanito. GNBC is already becoming a focal point in Gibraltar for all book and literature related activity. I want to thank Mark Sanchez, a heavyweight of Gibraltarian literature, for engendering the idea and agreeing, with other outstanding writers, to become part of the Council. The Bill that I will be publishing later this week will consolidate the GNBC within our statutes. Members of GNBC recently visited the London Book Fair to explore opportunities for Gibraltar and its authors, already making valuable contacts and establishing possible opportunities to promote the Rock and its literary culture. GNBC is currently working on a website, where it will have links and information for authors and illustrators, an author directory and present related events and opportunities.

A bookshop has been opened at the Ince's Hall, which will pay for itself, with all profits invested directly back into cultural development.

685 I want to emphasise the work that is being done in studying, promoting and protecting Gibraltarian language. We have for several years now been supporting research by the Universities of Vigo and the Balearic Islands. Now the University of Cambridge, led by Professor of English Laura Wright, is planning a full-scale research project into our language, which will include a symposium at Cambridge in September followed by several years of research, which could lead to Llanito becoming recognised as a language in itself. This makes its protection and use all the more important, and my teams at both Culture and Education, as well as Heritage, are working hard to ensure that this is so. To this end, I am pleased also to be working closely with a new NGO, Gibraltarians for a Multilingual Society. The use of Llanito, including Spanish Llanito, is not something that we should shy away from. *Todo lo contrario, es parte de nuestro heritage, de quienes somos, algo que nos distingue* from all other communities, not just in our way of combining English, Spanish and Genoese words, *pero también en el deje de nuestra pronunciación*, which is raising a great deal of academic interest as to its origins. *Lo dejo ahí por ahora*.

695 We have been working with stakeholders on a new Entertainments Act. Work on this continues as we work together towards encouraging musicians and businesses to entertain while at the same time showing consideration for those nearby.

700 During the course of the year, 49 new artworks have been acquired for the Government's art collection.

The John Mackintosh Hall Library social media platform continues to generate and oversee content promoting related initiatives, storytelling, school visits and literature. Further investments have been made in the purchase of new books and on Borrowbox, a popular platform for the

705 loaning of e-books and audiobooks. The online service this year has added e-magazines to its provision and has already attracted over 150 new members. The library prides itself on having an extensive collection of books written by Gibraltarian authors and books written on themes and subjects related to Gibraltar. This complete collection has been reviewed and catalogued to allow for ease of use.

710 We recognise the vital role that refurbishing and maintaining our existing cultural facilities plays in supporting a wide range of cultural entities, groups and individuals. By enhancing these spaces, we are better equipped to elevate the standard of artistic practice and foster the potential of all those involved in the arts. We have a challenge in such an active community to find suitable premises for all, and I apologise to those groups and associations still waiting patiently. We are,  
715 however, making full community use of our many top-class sports and education facilities and encouraging all developers to include cultural spaces in their projects. We are also developing our own plans to make new space available to organisations. We continue with the refurbishment and maintenance programme for all our facilities to ensure we extend public participation in the arts. Works over the past year have included significant improvements to the Central Hall, Ince's Hall  
720 and the art galleries.

The GCS Premises department continues to make significant progress in managing other premises, having undertaken various works in several locations such as Retrenchment Block, Recreational Rooms, Jumpers Bastion, Wellington Front, Prince Edwards Road and Town Range. An extended list of works will be included in the published version of my speech, and just as well  
725 because it goes to several pages. Many do not realise quite the extent of the work carried out by GCS on behalf of the very small team at the Ministry of Culture. Barely a day goes by without one, two or more articles or stories in the media related to the vast amount of work, and much more goes unreported. Activities already planned for this coming year, in addition to annual calendar of events include a street mural in Landport commemorating the 25th anniversary of the first album  
730 by Melon Diesel, an art residency in Tangier with artists from both cities taking part, and the creation of artists' studios at the Moorish Castle.

The New National Theatre and Cultural Hub at the John Mackintosh Hall remains a priority. The Ministry, GCS and the Gibraltar National Theatre Foundation, whose patron is His Excellency the Governor, remain committed to this, and the Foundation is working tirelessly to raise the  
735 necessary funds to complete this community project. The Foundation received donations from the Parasol Foundation, the Kishin Alwani Foundation, a significant donor who at this moment wishes to remain anonymous, and other smaller contributions from the Musicians Association of Gibraltar and private donors. It also launched the Buy a Seat scheme, which allows for individuals or entities to sponsor a theatre seat. The Theatre and Exhibition Hub will make a tremendous  
740 difference to the world of Gibraltarian Arts, mirroring the world-class facilities that sports are graced with in our community. The Foundation hopes to make a significant announcement on progress soon.

Before I conclude, I have to pay tribute to two friends and colleagues in my work in natural history, former colleagues from my time in GONHS who have passed away over the past year:  
745 Arthur Harper, an excellent photographer and botanist who, together with Leslie Linares and myself, re-discovered our very own Gibraltar Champion and saved it from extinction; and Eric Shaw, so well known for his lifetime work in particular on marine life and the Barbary macaque. They will long be remembered.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I wish to express my thanks to all the staff, including my personal staff for  
750 looking after me, and of course to my heads of department and CEOs, Liesl, Keri, Seamus, Catherine and Helen and their staff for their hard work every day and for their constant support. The administrative staff in my Departments, some of whom look after sections that are huge in terms of personnel and responsibility, are essential to the running of the Departments and keeping Gibraltar going. We have increased so much in outcomes and delivery that sometimes it  
755 appears that those in the offices doing the accounts, managing the leave and preparing the



salaries and wages are not appreciated. They most certainly are, and I am totally committed to recognising and responding to their needs.

My thanks, too, to all the schools, who make me feel so welcome on all my visits; to all the staff in the agencies and contractors that work to my Departments; to NASUWT, UNITE and GGCA for their constructive work; to the Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses; to all the NGOs, associations, schools and academies, environmental, cultural, educational – too many to list, who are so committed to what they believe in, often working as volunteers – for being committed, honest and reasonable in pursuing their aims; to all those many citizens appointed to voluntary boards, working groups and committees for which I am responsible; to the outgoing Mayor, Christian Santos, for all his work and friendship over the past few years; and to those in other Departments with whom I have regular contact, such as the staff at Gibraltar House in London, the team at Human Resources, and at No. 6, including the offices of the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary and his staff, the Financial Secretary and his staff, the Chief Technical Officer and his staff, the Civil Contingencies Co-ordinator and his staff, and the Attorney General and all at the Gibraltar Law Offices for always being there when I need them – I do give the GLO a lot of work, and I hope not too many headaches.

Thanks to you, Mr Speaker, and your staff, and to the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and all my colleagues, and of course to His Excellency the Governor, Sir David Steel, for the genuine interest that he shows in the work of the different parts of my Ministry, and for his constant encouragement.

Finally, I want to direct a few words to the children and young people of Gibraltar, for whose education I have been responsible for six of the last 12 years, and through them to their parents, grandparents and families. For most of your lives you have lived in a progressive Gibraltar under a caring, forward-looking Government dedicated to bettering your life and your homeland socially and environmentally – and economically, too, but to you that will be less relevant. In the only Gibraltar that you have known, you have grown up in excellent schools with new and exciting ways to learn, with new schools appearing almost every other year; with cleaner air and green areas that my generation never even dared to dream about; with better access to doctors when you need them, in your own health centre; with opportunities for your future wider and more accessible than ever before, allowing you to be yourself, no matter who you are, to dream bigger and achieve greater than certainly my generation ever could. Treasure this. Despite all the problems and the struggles, which you will remember, as you, more than most, suffered through COVID ... despite all of this, you are living in a golden age for Gibraltar. Long may it continue.

With this, Mr Speaker, I too commend this Bill to the House. (*Banging on desks*)

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**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Steven Linares.

**Minister for Industrial Relations, Employment, Housing and Sport (Hon. S E Linares):** Mr Speaker, this is my 23rd Budget speech and my 11th as a Government Minister. I will start by giving a synopsis of what has been achieved over the last year and explain some of the things we intend to do this coming year in relation to my areas of responsibility, these being industrial relations, housing, employment, youth and sport.

I begin with my portfolio as the Minister for Industrial Relations. Ever since I was appointed to this role, I have been working well with Unite the Union and the GGCA to resolve matters of concern within the public sector. We have been able to settle many issues which had been outstanding for some time and address new ones that had arisen in the past year. We have engaged positively with both unions and have established a good working relationship. I look forward to continuing this relationship in the same constructive spirit in the future.

The current financial climate still requires a degree of financial prudence and responsibility. This means the Government needs to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent with care on what is necessary. In that context, my Ministry has established routine meetings with the Human

Resources Department, where we systematically go through many issues appertaining to personal claims.

805 I turn to housing. It is now over a year since the Housing Department moved to its new premises at the ICC. The Housing Department adapted very quickly to COVID-19 restrictions during the pandemic at the old offices at New Harbours. They have also been able to adapt to new working practices after COVID-19 counter closures. The move to the ICC has proved to be a success. This has meant that our clients can now access the Department easier and the counters are open to the general public via an appointment system. This works very well, as clients can be  
810 seen to in an effective and efficient manner. A number of daily walk-ins are also seen, although the appointments system has provided the public with a much better service.

The Government fully understands the importance of the Housing Department to our community. It provides a service to applicants, to our tenants and to the community at large. The Housing Department continues to work closely with other government departments, agencies and  
815 authorities. The strong working relationship has improved considerably, after all the necessary data sharing agreements and memoranda of understanding were signed in order to safeguard GDPR concerns. Multi-agency meetings are conducted to ensure appropriate support is given to persons with vulnerabilities, mental health issues, disabilities etc., together with their families. Multi-agency meetings are also used in a safeguarding and management capacity, such as MAPPA  
820 and MARAC. This has provided efficient and improved working practices. All entities have a designated contact person, and this minimises the time taken to undertake tasks. Multi-agency forums are attended by the senior management of the Housing Department, which shows the high level of commitment that the Department has towards working together with others. The senior management team, led by the Principal Housing Officer, forms part of a number of fora. I  
825 will not go through them, just to mention that they include the Gibraltar National Mental Health Strategy, the National Dementia Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership, amongst others.

One of the important areas of the Housing Department is the Accounts section. They deal with the e-billing system, which sends out an electronic payment link. This link facilitates payment by  
830 taking the user automatically to step 2 of the payment platform, with all details prefilled. There are also many other payment methods accepted now from standing order, credit or debit card by telephone and payment in person at the counter with card, cash or cheque, which now is not used a lot. There are many more which I will not lay out, but they are all there. The introduction of direct debit mandates is in the final stages. The Housing Department has been working well with  
835 both the banks and the Treasury Department in order to set up this process. Unlike with standing orders, tenants will only be required to set up a direct debit once and will not have to amend their instruction to the bank every time there is a change. This new process will also reduce the foot traffic at our counter.

The Housing Department has signed a data sharing agreement with the Department of Social  
840 Security, as well as with other departments, agencies and authorities, to ensure proper cross-communication with the said entities. Information relevant to certain benefits applicable to tenants, like the processing and eligibility of rent relief, will be received by the Department of Housing directly from the DSS. Housing will then be able to assess the tenant in a timelier manner and, in turn, allow for more rapid reduction of housing rent arrears.

845 The Enforcement and Compliance section is tasked with the Department's litigation processes, anti-social behaviour, in-house complaints procedures, ombudsman's queries and recovery of arrears, amongst other enforceable action required in accordance with the Housing Act. Systems are in place and notifications are received to alert the Department of any tenant who may start to default on their rent. This process enables them to contact the tenant far sooner than ever  
850 before, to engage with them before any debt begins to build up and become a burden. The Department continues to assist tenants to arrange a repayment plan or adjust an existing repayment plan to meet both their needs. Since 1st April to date, 130 agreements have been secured to the value of £490,268.90. These meetings are very useful, as they help the Department

855 to identify those tenants who genuine are in hardship and are unable to pay their rent. All tenants  
are looked at on a case by case basis and careful consideration is given to those who may have a  
social and/or medical dimension. This helps the Department distinguish those who genuinely  
cannot pay from those who do not want to pay.

860 Despite all of the initiatives the Department has rolled out, and as much as they continue to  
strive to engage with all those in arrears, there is, regrettably, a minority of tenants who can pay  
but do not want to pay. These tenants have no social or economic hardship that would qualify  
them for rent relief, and yet they continue to default. For these people, the Department has  
therefore been left with no other option but to commence legal action to recover the unpaid debt.  
865 The Department, through the Central Arrears Unit, has engaged lawyers in order to proceed with  
taking those who do not want to pay to court. The Enforcement and Compliance section has  
already filed a good number of cases before court and is currently preparing the next batch of  
cases for processing. These actions are bearing fruit. There are many cases where the Department  
does not need to proceed to court since the tenants have subsequently agreed to pay the arrears  
or enter into a repayment plan. Should they default or not engage on their payments, the case  
will go directly to court. The Housing Department will not leave any stone unturned in the recovery  
870 of arrears. It is totally unacceptable that people who are earning good money do not pay their  
rent. This is despite the fact that rents in government properties continue to be extremely low.

Anti-social behaviour is another issue that the Housing Department has dealt with. On 1st April,  
90 complaints had been logged. The Housing Department follows a set procedure. This is in our  
policy document, which will be published and therefore I will not go reading through the whole  
875 policy now. At present, the Department, together with the Care Agency and the RGP, are in the  
process of decanting tenants due to their anti-social behaviour. This Government will not tolerate  
a minority making life a misery for other law-abiding citizens. Government have engaged the  
services of OSG, who have been providing security services to this effect. The RGP has confirmed  
that the level of complaints previously received by them is now dropping tremendously.

880 The Housing Department works closely with the Department of the Environment and the  
Environmental Agency with regard to the issues of dog fouling, litter control, bird feeding and  
noise pollution etc. Other areas which are closely monitored are the street and stairwell cleaning  
carried out by Britannia in all government estates and horticultural contractors to ensure all green  
areas are well maintained. The parks and playgrounds in different estates are the responsibility of  
885 the GSLA. I will come back to this later when I cover sport. It is important to note that although  
Britannia carries out all the cleaning in the estates, it is also incumbent on the tenants to exercise  
civic pride, try to keep them clean and call out those who do not.

The Allocation section of the Housing Department has been working closely with the  
Digitalisation team in order to have a number of services provided online. In April we announced  
890 the launch of a number of Housing e-services which can be accessed via the eGov.gi portal. The  
services provided are those most used by citizens, and these are now integrated to the Housing  
Department's back office system. This, too, will alleviate foot traffic at the counters. The Housing  
Department will continue to work on the development of future services via the eGov.gi portal.

895 Mr Speaker, the review of all tenancies held continues to be undertaken and all records are  
being updated in our system in order to provide a more efficient service. As announced by  
Government, all citizens are required by the Register of Occupation Act 2021 to register their  
occupation of a property in Gibraltar. A lot of work has been undertaken by our IT provider and  
staff in order to be able to validate records of those persons who reside in a government tenancy.  
This section has worked very closely with the Registrar in order to validate the submissions of  
900 government tenants. Many files have had to be checked and updated as some of our tenants had  
not updated records with the Department, so their submissions in the register were out of date.

It is very important for the Housing Department to ensure that its tenants fulfil the terms and  
conditions of their tenancy agreements as well as comply with the requirements under the  
Housing Act. This year the Housing Department has again initiated 24 legal proceedings against  
905 tenants in relation to the issuance of legal notices or pre-action letters. I will not go through all of

910 them, but I do have a breakdown of this. Six cases have appealed to the Housing Tribunal and five further claims for damages and personal injury have also been dealt with. In addition, the Housing Department has also been dealing with a judicial review filed by a constituent being represented by the Leader of the Opposition. This questions a long-standing housing policy which has been in place since the previous GSD Government was in power, which aims to safeguard Gibraltar as a whole.

915 Tenants wishing to make alterations to their tenancy are required to request permission in writing via the Housing Department Land Works Panel. This must include the appropriate paperwork such as plans, drawings, photos and specifications of the proposed works. If works are approved by the Land Works Panel, tenants are required to obtain permission from the DPC prior to undertaking them. The Housing Department works closely with Town Planning and Building Applications via the e-planning project programme, which links the Housing Department and all relevant departments with the Town Planning and Building Control section.

920 It is important for the Housing Department and the Housing Works Agency to engage closely with tenants. This they do by having regular meetings with the different tenants' associations. In these meetings they discuss issues relevant to individual estates. This has allowed them to handle matters in a faster and more efficient manner, thus ensuring the upkeep of our housing estates. Not all estates have a tenants' association. The Government is therefore encouraging tenants residing in housing estates to establish a committee. The aim will be to benefit and enhance the living environment of their particular estate in collaboration with Housing Departments officials. 925 The feedback received from the tenants' associations is generally positive, and by working together we have been able to enhance the service provided by the Housing Department. The Housing Department and Housing Works Agency staff will continue to support the tenants' associations on a day by day basis.

930 Mr Speaker, despite having well-known differences in policy with Action for Housing, I meet with them regularly. The Principal Housing Officer also meets regularly with members of Action for Housing in order to assist them with all their enquiries. I have recently gone with members of the committee and officials of the Housing Department to visit flats in the Town area in the private sector to ascertain living conditions. Private sector landlords must also take responsibility for maintaining their property in good living condition. 935

The Department has been working to update and review the Housing Act, the Housing Allocation Scheme, the tenancy agreement and all its policies. I am happy to announce that the Housing Act is now ready to be published as a Bill. The Housing Allocation Scheme has been completed and will, therefore, be made public after the Act passes through Parliament. Finally, 940 the revised tenancy agreement is also complete and this will come into place after the Act. I would, at this stage, like to thank all those who were involved in this work. It has been an intense and detailed piece of work, since we have gone through those documents section by section and word by word. This shows that there is considerable work and activity going on in the Housing Department behind the scenes. The Ministry for Housing, its departments and agency do much more than simply allocate flats to tenants. I am forever grateful to management and staff from top to bottom. 945

I just want to add that in relation to housing I am also responsible for affordable homes. I am happy to say that 380 flats at Hassan Centenary Terraces are now going through the snagging process. The reactions of most of the buyers are very positive and they have been very happy with the quality of the finish of the flats. We are working hard to have both Chatham Views and Bob Peliza Mews completed by the dates given. It is incredible to hear the Leader of the Opposition mention the delays, as if we are to blame for the COVID-19 pandemic. I am very happy to see, even belated due to the pandemic, these projects now being built. 950

Our Youth Service has moved in leaps and bounds from what it was before we came into government. They have evolved from a service that hardly opened its doors to cater for young children after school, to one that is now offering our youngsters many opportunities. The Youth Service opens four evenings a week, including Fridays until 9 p.m., and 10 p.m. during summer. 955

960 The club works mainly with young people aged 16 and over and hosts a variety of established projects that members are currently interested in. Further, the Youth Service has extended its service to younger ages and now engages 11-to-15-year-olds on Thursday evenings. Due to this, the Youth Service has experienced an increase in membership across the clubs. The projects offered include Going Green, the Youth Production Group, and the Mingle, which is in its fourth year and supports young adults from 18 to 30 with mild learning needs, with the aim of increasing their support networks and life skills. The Youth Café is an open environment for young people of 965 16 and over to relax and enjoy a safe place where they can share ideas, thoughts and opinions. The Youth Service not only works throughout the week but also holds weekend sessions throughout the year. This is rotated amongst the youth and community workers. Activities at these sessions range from in-house workshops to offsite activities both locally and abroad. These include Army outdoor team building, World War II Tunnels and a barbeque.

970 It is important for our youth and community workers to keep abreast of modern practices. They are, therefore, constantly participating in many training opportunities such as updating courses on health and safety, first-aid refresher courses and data protection awareness with the GRA, amongst others.

975 Due to the fact that in today's world we are very conscious of looking after our children, the Youth Service forms part of and contributes to the Child Protection Committee and the Sub-Training Committee. Their role is important in that there are many young people who show, when they attend sessions in the youth clubs, social, psychological and emotional issues which are then highlighted at the multi-agency forums. These can then be referred to the professionals, who will from thereon pick up the problem and be in a position to give the proper assistance required. This is an example of joined-up work.

980 The Voice of Young People is a very useful group. I often meet them in order discuss, report and explore issues that affect young people's lives. Recent areas of interest have included disability access, employment, mental health and LGTBQ+ topics. The group is currently gathering young people's thoughts via a survey which will then better inform them and the projects director when they reconvene in September.

985 Some young people have been deprived of things that we have often taken for granted when growing up. One example is travelling and going on trips abroad, so this year the Youth Service has been able to organise trips to Spain, as they used to do before the pandemic. A trip to the UK also took place in August of last year. A group of older members of the Dolphin Youth Club had a life-changing opportunity to venture abroad on a visit to London. This trip was made possible by Mr Paul Williams, who donated the funds for this remarkable journey. As part of their visit abroad, these young people focused their efforts on a 'giving back' project to the community, learning about families and vulnerable people in our community. They have welcomed various charities to talk about the work that they do for families and for Gibraltar as a whole. They worked tirelessly to fundraise and organise a heart-warming family and community barbeque event to support these local charities. Their hard work and community-focused events not only raised vital funds but also raised awareness about the community's efforts to bring about positive change.

995 The Youth Service has become a beacon of new and exciting initiatives as they reinvent themselves. They have recently started two new projects which will go a long way to aiding our young people. The first is the Prison project. This is a specialised project to provide support to young people under 25 who are currently in prison and at risk of reoffending on their release. The second is that of partnering with the CIPD Gibraltar branch. Together, they have designed a website full of career information to promote Gibraltar's emerging industries. This website will also have a toolkit section focusing on supporting young people whilst they are selecting a career and job hunting. The site was launched on 27th June. I ask hon. Members to visit the site, which will be constantly updated with new information. I am very pleased that the Youth Service came 1000 second in the Project Achievement Award, which is an initiative that was established by the Chief Secretary to recognise innovation within the Civil Service.

1010 The Annual Youth Day is going from strength to strength. This day is an opportunity to invite  
all communities to take part in a fun day of workshops and activity. In addition, it provides an  
information fair, together with many organisations which offer young people opportunities and  
skills.

1015 Mr Speaker, I now continue with another of my areas of responsibility as Minister for Sport  
and Leisure. Locally, league programmes and development initiatives were completed as  
brilliantly as always by the army of volunteers who organise and run them. These volunteers have  
supported and embraced the fact that they have to go through tier 1 and tier 2 in child protection  
or the bespoke training of their specific association on child protection. It must be recalled that  
when we came into government in 2011 there was not a single course, governmental committee  
or sporting association that considered child protection as a priority.

1020 Year on year participation levels seem to be increasing, with sporting facilities being a hub of  
positive activity. The Lathbury Sports Complex, which has been operational since 1st October  
2022, has been added to these facilities in its entirety. This will now mean that not only can we  
attract more events, we can also promote Gibraltar as a centre for training camps and warm  
weather training. The revenues that will hopefully be generating will not only offset running costs  
but will help to add to the already established economic activity.

1025 The Gibraltar Amateur Athletics Association (GAAA) now have the home they deserve and all  
their operations have been transferred to Lathbury. I would once again like to place on record my  
thanks and the thanks of the Government to the GAAA. They have endured uncomfortable times  
but have worked very closely with us and approached the situation in a very positive manner.  
1030 Their conduct throughout has been admirable, and for this they deserved heightened praise. I will  
now work with the GAAA to push athletics locally to the next level and will support them in helping  
to attract top European events to Gibraltar.

1035 The sports complex has been described by many from abroad who have visited here as world  
class. It is important to recall that we have used the multi-purpose hall for many different sports  
and events. They have ranged from a World Boxing bout, the ordination of an Archbishop, a  
hospital during the pandemic, Rhythmic Gymnastics Competitions, the Darts Junior World  
Championship, badminton when we hosted the Island Games, and many other sports. The main  
pitch was used for the Music Festival in 2019, rugby sevens, hosting the Royal Marines at rugby,  
an international cricket tournament and football training at all levels. Squash have already hosted  
1040 many tournaments in their new premises. This is why we receive interest from many sporting  
entities around the world to make use of them.

1045 Events-led tourism has been an important cornerstone to attract visitors to Gibraltar over the  
last 12 years. This policy is one that we continue to push at many levels, not least in the sports  
and leisure sectors. As a result of our vision, a whole host of international-standard events are  
now being held locally. European and world governing bodies entrust Gibraltar with the staging  
of events that are on their international calendars. This was the case with the Island Games. In  
2025 Gibraltar will host the Junior World Netball Tournament. The exact dates will be announced  
soon. Apart from the obvious benefits to our local sportspeople, this policy puts visitors into our  
hotels, promotes visitors eating and drinking in our bars and restaurants, shopping in Main Street  
1050 and visiting tourist sites. It creates economic activity and, more importantly, they are organised  
so efficiently that we get repeat business. Gibraltar will continue to be the standard bearer for  
such initiatives, and the hard work of our volunteers, as I mentioned above in this regard, cannot  
be underestimated. My thanks to them.

1055 There have also been a number of related businesses that have been set up by local  
entrepreneurs. These are linked to the sports industry and they thrive in providing services to  
them. An example of such are production companies which provide technical support, sound,  
lights and stage, and those that provide editing and cameras for streaming online, the selling of  
tickets and the hospitality aspect of events. The following list is not exhaustive but depicts the  
main events held locally. I have a whole list, but I will just mention a few: Rock Master's Bowling,  
1060 the Gibraltar Backgammon Tournament, the Darts Corporation Junior World Darts Championship,

the Squash International Open, the European Cricket Network T10 Tournament, the Europe Netball Under-18 Open Challenge. There are others which have been organised privately without direct government funding. They have all served to benefit our economy and we will continue to encourage them. Some events that we have traditionally supported have now come to their contractual end. They have, nonetheless, helped us put Gibraltar on the map.

1065 The unprecedented investment in sporting infrastructure has provided a plethora of top-class venues. What is being created is an industry in and for sport which could become yet another pillar of our economy. Participation in international events is crucial and we advocate the fact that all those who are full or affiliate members of their international governing bodies need to be active within their international frameworks. The Government will continue to support associations on many levels, not least financially. To this end the financial support received this year as sports grants was to the tune of £300,000. This figure depicts the expected increase in participation at international events given that the COVID-19 pandemic is thankfully now over. This support was afforded to our sportspeople in spite of the current economic climate. Competing in such events is not only important as it provides exposure to a higher level of competition, but it also means that Gibraltar continues to stand on its own two feet as a full member or as an affiliate of the 23 international governing bodies of sport. This is a considerable achievement.

1070 Aside from the already established local sporting bodies, I am glad to report that two applications were received and considered by the Gibraltar Sports Advisory Council. The popularity of padel tennis at a competitive and recreational level has meant that they have opted to go it alone, and they have now registered independently from tennis. The second is the Gibraltar E-Sports Association. E-sports, contrary to popular belief, is not standard gaming but has extremely strenuous elements which require physical fitness and mental strength. Such is the emergence of e-sports worldwide that it will be a full medal event at the next Commonwealth Games, in Victoria in 2026. I was fortunate enough to be invited to the e-event run parallel to the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham last summer. It was a real eye opener that apart from all the other positive aspects of Team Gibraltar, they reached the semi-finals. I am glad to also hear my colleague mention that e-sports is one of the subjects that will be starting in the College. I urge Members to look at e-sports in a different way. They had an extremely creditable performance. It always fills me with great pride to represent Gibraltar as a Minister at events such as the Commonwealth and the Island Games. Birmingham 2022 had something special about it. Team Gibraltar was exceptional throughout, with very strong performances across the board. It was confirmation, if it was needed, that we belong in the Commonwealth Games family.

1085 I cannot leave this section without mentioning our Special Olympics athletes who participated in the World Games in Berlin. They also make us very proud, not only because they participate but they also come back with well-deserved medals. Unfortunately, due to a private family commitment, I was not able to attend, but I will put my name down for the next one should I be the next Minister for Sport. The Government has invested in these, our proud athletes. Now they boast a magnificent Special Olympics Sports Complex which they can call their home.

1090 Finally, in respect of local sporting bodies, I feel it is only correct that I confirm the fact that after an enforced hiatus, the Gibraltar Boxing Association (GBA) has once again been registered with the GSLA via the GSAC process. They have finally worked through long-standing differences and issues and resolved these positively. The GBA have worked very closely with the GSLA and the association has now modernised its constitution and adjoining procedures that will now allow the sport to develop and expand. This has been a long-standing issue which many have not been wanting to tackle. I hope that we are able to attend boxing bouts locally very soon. My thanks go to the GBA for their engagement and particularly to my staff at the GSLA, who have been persistent in exploring solutions and common ground.

1100 Mr Speaker, parks and playgrounds continue to fall under the remit of the GSLA. In the last financial year, the maintenance programme has continued and the effects of the works undertaken by the GJBS crew in conjunction with the GSLA team are becoming very noticeable. Maintenance will now become more proactive than reactive, and when things do break, which is

1115 inevitable, reaction times for repair have decreased significantly. The rolling maintenance programme is seasonal and based on usage trends. However, all areas are checked as per the maintenance schedule to ensure they are all safe. In addition to the maintenance programme, the Mid Harbours playground has been relocated given the historical issues with water ingress on the podium. From a sustainable point of view, several items from Mid Harbours have been replaced, repainted and relocated to other facilities. This is done in the interest of efficiency.

1120 The GSLA is also responsible for the maintenance and upgrades of both the Europa pool and the bathing pavilion. It was a policy decision of our Government that the pool should be open to the public at certain times, in order for them to enjoy the summer period. As to the bathing pavilion, it must be recalled that it was also the GSLP Government that took the decision to build this amenity for the people of Gibraltar. These decisions have proved to be very popular. It is easy to forget with the passage of time that these have been progressive decisions taken by a  
1125 progressive Government.

Whilst on the subject of summer, the GSLA's flagship schemes were once again a resounding success last year, and this year the numbers are on the rise. Both the Summer Sports and Stay and Play programmes registered increases in numbers of participants last year. The Summer Sports programme recorded registration figures of 571 children, an increase of 134 from the previous  
1130 year, which was 437, and this year already we have 733 children registered. Whilst the Stay and Play programme increased by one to 36, this year already 35 have registered but the summer is not over. It is important at this stage to say how grateful we are to the GSLA staff for having started the early programme this year.

I would like to mention at this stage that, as my colleague mentioned about the new schools, these will have a positive impact on sports since the new schools have magnificent sports halls that will be used within our community for sporting associations.  
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For the first time, participants were able to register online. This saw a massive reduction in cumbersome administration procedures, allowing summer staff more time to concentrate on delivering the sessions instead. Further, the programme this year has had the timing extended from Monday to Friday from 9 to 12.30.  
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Sports Train saw a repeat of the now highly successful competition week that attracted the highest daily attendance of the entire summer. The highly popular fun evening has also returned and, as usual, attendance was excellent and many families availed themselves of the activities and equipment on offer.  
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The Stay and Play programme also saw technological advances with the implementation of an app similar to the one already used by St Martin's School. This was done to optimise communication between the staff and parents, aiming to improve the service provided. Through the app, parents were provided with a daily report of their child's day and the parents would, in turn, provide feedback and any relevant information that could be considered and implemented the following day. A new venue was also introduced into the Stay and Play activities rotation, namely the GSLA bathing pavilion. This was very well received by the staff and service users alike.  
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The summer programme does not only benefit the children but also enhances the programme of training to all the sports leaders and young volunteers themselves. The programme covered a whole range of items like the delivery of generic and sport-specific sessions, leadership training and first aid, amongst others.  
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As mentioned already in the Youth section, child protection is at the top of the list when it comes to employing or having volunteers working with children. Therefore, all prospective employees are RGP vetted initially during the recruitment stage and provided with safeguarding training. This is in keeping with the requirements introduced by our Government. It is now an obligation on any coach who is responsible for delivering sessions to any children or young adults in any facilities managed directly or in the control of the GSLA. The GSLA's Sports Development Unit delivers safeguarding workshops, with 111 new attendees. This now takes the total number of qualified coaches to 814. The process is a rolling one and, as explained above, those requiring  
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1165 refresher courses will now be able to undertake these online. This will streamline the process, allowing the database of qualified coaches to increase exponentially.

Finally, I can inform this House that the GSLA has been piloting a booking application scheme so that users can book facilities online. The pilot scheme, which is finalising soon, has been undertaken at the swimming pool complex with a high degree of success. Feedback from users who have participated has been very positive. The next step is to roll out all of the GSLA's facilities available for the general public to book online by the end of the year. Whilst bookings will still be taken at the GSLA counters and over the phone, it is intended that the majority of allocations will be administered via the online portal.

1170 Mr Speaker, I now move on to another of my responsibilities, that of the Kings Bastion Leisure Centre (KBLC). It must be recalled that KBLC use to cost the Government a total of £2.6 million per annum and had revenues of a mere £50,000. This Government has worked hard to cut down the enormous deficit. It was done by rescinding lucrative contracts of OPEX plus 30% which had been awarded by the previous GSD administration. This was cut down to £1.4 million with current revenues this year of £648,014. KBLC continues to perform very well, providing a wide range of leisure activities that all families can enjoy. These include bowling, climbing in the boulder park, fitness gym facilities, a collectibles store and a well-equipped amusement arcade. It must be recalled that the ice-skating rink was replaced by the boulder park and this has become a very popular attraction. Last year, KBLC invested in replacing some of the older arcade machines with a selection of newer models, mostly for young children. They also added two of the latest pinball machines and a photo booth, which they expect to be very popular. From past experience, we know that the money spent on purchasing arcade machines is recoverable relatively quickly, whilst at the same time they will provide a consistent return for many years to come. Projects for this year include the installation of a remote-control boating area above the chiller pit in Commonwealth Park. It was proposed last year but has been carried forward to 2023 as more time was required to ensure that all the necessary preparations are in place. A new operator has also taken over the Bastion Restaurant, Boyd's and Just4kidz, and we hope to work closely with them as we jointly continue to develop and improve all the facilities offered.

1180 1185 1190 I move now to the Department of Employment, where I am happy to report that we continue to maintain record low levels of unemployment. As the Chief Minister mentioned, in 2022 the yearly average of Gibraltarians registered unemployed was 29, a staggering 93% reduction in unemployment since 2011. In 2023 we have continued to maintain low unemployment levels, where in the first quarter of 2023 the average number of registered unemployed stood at 30, a 98% reduction in unemployment since the first quarter of 2012. Hon. Members must recall that when the GSD was in government, the then Chief Minister and the Minister for Employment both considered the norm for persons unemployed to be around 300. They would say that was an acceptable number. It was not acceptable to us. This Government's proven employment record has been achieved by maintaining long-term close working relationships with our employers and the business community.

1200 1205 1210 Understanding and empathising with the specific individual continues to be a priority. The staff at the Department of Employment remain available to all members of the public who are registered with them. Registered persons unemployed or persons registered employed looking for alternative work are given guidance. They also have the opportunity to review all available registered vacancies and apply for those they find of interest. Our employment officers work very closely with individuals to provide support as a means of increasing the quality of their CVs, the interview outcome and the possibility of success of any given job application. This service continues to prove to be extremely beneficial, resulting in many successful individuals achieving gainful employment. Our officers at the Department of Employment, with the Youth Service and the CIPD, will soon be working together to see how they can join their expertise in order to enhance the website careers.gi.

1215 The Labour Inspectorate is tasked with the regulation and enforcement of our employment laws. As part of its ongoing commitment to eradicating illegal labour practices, the Inspectorate

continues to implement a comprehensive strategy and programme of inspections across various industries. It is also important that a level playing field is maintained and the Department of Employment's established close relationship with all sectors of the business community remains steadfast toward this aim. The Labour Inspectorate is, as always, available to both employers and employees to provide information and guidance on employment-related matters.

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I am happy to say that the reforms implemented by our Government in relation to the Employment Tribunal are now bearing fruit. The Tribunal is methodically addressing cases. Rules have been drafted to ensure that chairpersons and mediators are fully accountable for any shortcomings that may materialise. This will enhance the quality of the service for those who may seek to access it. Access to justice, particularly in the context of employment and labour-associated matters, is an important cornerstone of this administration's policy. This is fulfilled by ensuring that individuals have a fair and equitable opportunity to seek legal recourse, receive due process and have their rights protected. I look forward to working with the team at the Department of Employment and the Tribunal chairpersons to further enhance the provisions within the Employment Tribunal for the benefit of the working population of Gibraltar.

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I also look forward to completing the revision and modernisation of the Public Sector Code, which is commonly known as the General Orders. This was an outstanding manifesto commitment which will soon be fulfilled. Together with the staff at Human Resources, we have painstakingly gone through, section by section, the General Orders to amend it and bring it up to date. The current document is obsolete in many respects. It underpins the Civil Service and the Gibraltar Development Corporation, as well as other agencies, government-owned companies and authorities in one form or another. This rebranding and reinvigorating of the Public Service Code will be fit for purpose in the 21st-century public sector and will springboard it to future success. In tandem with this, my Ministry has been working closely with the Human Resources Department to review policies such as injury at work provisions for essential services.

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Mr Speaker, I now take the opportunity to draw your attention to the work I have undertaken in my capacity as Chair of the Health and Safety Advisory Council. Last November, we held the first Health and Safety Seminar since the pandemic. This saw the intervention of excellent local speakers, the heads of our public services and charities. It also included Unite the Union's National Officer on Health and Safety and the IOSH UK president. The seminar was a resounding success. It culminated in the completion of the public sector's policies A and B, which have enjoyed the input of all stakeholders within the HSAC, but principally moved by Unite the Union's National Officer Gillian Birkett. It is a testament to the strength of the relationship that this Government has with other organisations, particularly the trade unions, that despite temporary disagreements we can work for our community on issues that matter. This year we will work towards improving the Health and Safety Seminar and setting it on a path that will ensure its success for many years to come. I look forward to updating this House further on the matter when the opportunity arises.

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Mr Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff who work within the different Ministries and portfolios that I am responsible for. I would also like to thank you and your staff here in Parliament for the help and assistance given to fulfil my parliamentary obligations.

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I could not end my Budget speech without specifically mentioning my staff at the Ministry. Without them, I could not run the sometimes complex and difficult portfolios that I lead on today. They are the ones who guide me daily in all that I do and are also there for me, whatever time of day. I am forever grateful, so a wholehearted thank you goes to them all.

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Thank you. (*Banging on desks*)

**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Edwin Reyes.

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**Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, I wish to commence today with sports-related matters by repeating yet again that I remain a firm believer in unity, where possible, for the benefit of Gibraltar's greater interests. Therefore, I am glad to see that Government continues with the long-

1270 existing policy held by successive Governments to assist all local sporting bodies to overcome any  
foreign government's politically inspired attempts to block our membership of international  
sporting bodies. The antics and shameful actions taken, above all by our neighbours to the north,  
are wearing thin and each year that flies past I pray that, slowly but surely, other international  
sports governing bodies will judge Gibraltar's applications on their own merit and not shamefully  
allow themselves to be coerced by our neighbour's unjustified and often unscrupulous arguments.  
1275 Gibraltar's long-standing and cross-party policy of assisting sporting associations will certainly  
continue to receive the GSD's wholehearted support and I sincerely wish all our sporting  
associations all the very best in their continuing battles to obtain their respective international  
memberships, which are rightfully and legitimately theirs.

The Gibraltar Football Association has had a long-standing project towards refurbishment and  
upgrading of its own national stadium. We agree Gibraltar needs a new stadium, but have  
1280 expressed serious misgivings about the project as envisaged and the use of Savings Bank money  
towards it. Despite being supportive in principle of the National Stadium project, as previously  
stated by the GSD, we will not give the green light to using taxpayers' or savers' moneys, placed  
in deposits guaranteed by the Government of Gibraltar, for this purpose. For years the  
Government had promised that the construction of a new stadium would be at no cost to  
1285 taxpayers. Government sold the land to the GFA in 2017 without the payment by the GFA of a  
premium to develop the land, and also on the basis that UEFA moneys would pay for the  
construction of a new stadium. It is clear from answers given in Parliament that the Government  
is unsighted on the details of the proposed project. This is worrying given the size of the proposed  
commitment. It is also unsatisfactory that there are no clear answers why UEFA money is no longer  
1290 available for the upgrade of a national stadium to be owned solely by the Football Association,  
and there remain big questions as to why a stadium of this size is necessary. Additionally, there  
are concerns that the needs for development of the footballing community and youth football are  
not being met in this project. Even so, we are committed to working with the GFA in a positive  
way so Gibraltar can see a new stadium. If we are elected to government, we will discuss ways  
1295 forward with the GFA so that we can assist them in finding private sector third party interest  
following appropriate tendering or expressions of interest processes, so that neither public nor  
savers' moneys need to be used to fund the construction costs of this stadium development.

I must add that it is particularly gratifying to see the Victoria Stadium almost full to capacity  
whenever our national team plays a home game. The home venue, using Victoria Stadium as our  
1300 home ground albeit with necessary upgrades to be undertaken, was the location first promoted  
by the GSD. It seems that where there is a will there is a way, and therefore the GSD has proved  
it was not wrong from the outset in choosing the existing location of the Victoria Stadium as the  
best site for a UEFA and FIFA fully approved facility. It is, indeed, a far more viable and attractive  
option for local sport lovers to attend and support our teams within our home territory than  
1305 having to travel a few hours away to Faro, as is unfortunately the position we are in now. I am  
sure this House is unanimous in wishing our teams participating in international competitions all  
the very best, and I hope that once the necessary upgrades are completed the Victoria Stadium  
will be full to capacity with enthusiastic supporters. The other major point being discussed by  
football fans is, of course, what spectator capacity is the most sensible one for Gibraltar to aim  
1310 for. In this respect, affordability must play an important role and I hope this is very much taken  
into account.

Despite the ambitious projects undertaken in respect of sporting facilities across all disciplines,  
there is still a great need for further training facilities if our future generations are to aspire to  
improving their overall standards. It continues to break my heart to see so many Gibraltar-  
1315 registered teams, across several different sports, having to go into Spain in order to train and  
prepare for local and international competitions. Indeed, more facilities are needed if we are to  
continue to aspire to progressing beyond the qualification stages in respect of international  
competitions. The GSD continues to believe that alongside the new football facilities which could  
be enjoyed by the football fraternity, there is still a great need for extensive training facilities in

1320 Gibraltar to cater for participants in numerous other sports. These facilities should ensure that the introduction and development of our youngsters into the world of sports, very often arising from our schools' curriculum and sporting clubs' commitments, are equally catered for. It is the duty of the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority to make these facilities available for our public at large who wish to participate in sporting activities.

1325 The new facilities, which at long last have been completed despite originally programmed for full use at the 2019 Island Games, should contribute, to a certain extent, to ensure that Gibraltar continues to produce worthy local athletes and develop their wide-ranging sporting talents. Having made very substantial investments in the construction of new sporting facilities, I note that the estimate for the upkeep of GSLA facilities remains at £310,000 despite an estimated  
1330 expenditure of £385,000 recorded as forecast outturn for 2022-23. It will be interesting to see how the GSLA is expected to keep within budget now that they have more facilities to maintain and, in theory, greater numbers of users of their facilities being expected.

The Minister for Sports has previously informed this House that Europa Sports Centre will be run by a company type of set-up, primarily managed by three officially registered sporting  
1335 associations. The costs associated with manning levels and upkeep of the Europa facilities are something which should be accounted for in the Estimates Book, as the facilities have been built with ... and ultimately belong to the taxpayer. May we please have some guidance as to where exactly we may find the expenses and/or government contributions towards the Europa sports facilities? Is there any income expected to be generated? If so, as the Minister has previously  
1340 hinted, where can we find this in the Estimates Book?

Gibraltar often obtains results which make our neighbours and sporting opponents in official competitions envious of our rather good and consistent outcomes. I sincerely hope that the new constructions meet local requirements well beyond the next decade at least.

Many Gibraltarians are currently actively involved and proudly representing Gibraltar at the  
1345 2023 Island Games now taking place in Guernsey. I am sure I speak for the whole House as we offer our collective best wishes to all our participants who, through their committed efforts, have yet again made us proud of our sporting fraternity. We have already won some medals, the latest being a gold, but as the games are still not finished we collectively wish the best of Gibraltarian luck to all our national representatives.

1350 Mr Speaker, we should record a special mention in respect of the fantastic achievements attained by several sporting bodies throughout this past year. There is always a danger when you start to mention individual sporting teams or associations that you may accidentally leave somebody out. Therefore, and I think in keeping with the Hon. Minister, who just spoke before me, I will name only one body: Special Olympics Gibraltar. They always excel themselves across a  
1355 variety of sports and justifiably enjoy our collective congratulatory messages for their notable achievements. If other associations are able to match the enthusiasm and results obtained by Special Olympics Gibraltar, then all investments in sports are certainly worthwhile. Still in keeping with not singling out any particular team or association, I must also add that our female athletes have done extremely well in this past year and this has obviously led to their well-deserved  
1360 promotions within international rankings. At this rate our female sporting representatives will, sooner rather than later, be our national top pride and joy in sporting achievements.

I am glad to say that this year I do not have to repeat the offer I made last year, as well as continuously for a few years before that, during these Budget debate contributions. I am extremely glad to note that the Minister for Sports, more so in his capacity as Chairman of the  
1365 Sports and Leisure Authority, took a particular interest and appropriate action to ensure that publicly owned facilities are used in a fair manner for the benefit of all sports lovers. There is both a duty and obligation for the Sports Authority to ensure that, where desired by a club or individual citizen, membership in their relevant local governing body is open to all in an equal and fair manner. The dispute within the local boxing world which had been dragging on for far too long  
1370 now seems to have been, at long last, resolved. This outcome proves that solutions can and should be found, and I am glad that the Minister and I will be able to celebrate that final outcome.

1375 Mr Speaker, a recreational type of activity which is relatively popular in Gibraltar is fishing and the use of small pleasure boats by families. A specific facility which has been in need of investment for quite some time now is the Watergardens small boats marina. For the last few years the users of this marina have been told that major refurbishment works are imminent, yet so far nothing has ever happened. I note that once again this year there is no provision for this refurbishment made in the Estimates Book. Head 102 Projects, subhead (4) Boat Moorings caters for no expenditure whatsoever. May this House please now be informed how much is being estimated for expenditure towards the Minister's repeated promises that refurbishment projects at Watergardens marina will take place? And where exactly may this estimate be found in the Book for 2023-24?

1385 I now wish to reaffirm my personal conviction that through the collective celebration of social events, participating Gibraltarians contribute towards reinforcing our identity, culture and history as a people and a community. Both the performing and fine arts fraternities have always proved themselves to be very proactive within their own specialised areas and I take this opportunity to congratulate all the groups and individuals who have done Gibraltar extremely proud through their international participation and, in many cases, gaining top awards. It is always a personal and collective pleasure to be able to say how proud we are of the international achievements of our fellow Gibraltarians.

1390 During their last term in office, Government purchased both the Queen's Cinema and the Queen's Hotel sites for the development of a theatre and related activities. We now know that the National Theatre will not be built at the original earmarked site, as other developments have been announced for this location. With the development project in respect of a National Theatre now falling under the planning remit of a charitable trust or foundation, this House seems to have lost sight of projected costs and I am not even sure if the Government can be asked at Question Time for updates as to the project's progress. If Government is making any financial contributions to this project, I once again ask for guidance as to where this overall and general expenditure may be accounted for in the Estimates Book. This year's Estimates once again show a provision of £1,000 under the Improvement and Development Fund Expenditure set aside under head 102 Projects, subhead 4(l) Theatre, but given the appeal made to the general public and business community to sponsor particular items in the theatre such as seats, how far is this £1,000 expected to reach given the cost of materials nowadays? Locals may often be heard to say surely our home-grown performers, entertainers and audiences are entitled to ask for a theatre which is fit for purpose and available throughout the 365 days a year. Given that we are currently in an election year, will Government commit itself to a definitive date by when theatre lovers may enjoy performances at a new and much needed theatre?

1410 Moving on to educational matters, I wish to start by citing once again a passage I have used before in this Chamber: 'Children must be able to play, study and grow in a peaceful environment. Woe to anyone who stifles their joyful impulse to hope!' With this quote in mind, I cannot stress enough the need to ensure we get it absolutely right when planning and building facilities that will serve our children's educational purposes in preparation for adult life. Much has been said in respect of Government's projects for the re-provision and expansion of our schools. For our pupils' benefit I sincerely hope that decisions taken have been based, above all, upon feedback received from the professionals in the field, namely schoolteachers themselves. I hope, for our children's sake, that the new buildings which will come into use as from September prove to be a product conforming to the highest of standards. However, many parents, teachers and even ordinary citizens have expressed serious concerns about the inevitable high levels of congestion which are to be expected in the area around Europort as from September. I sincerely hope there will be a sensible and workable traffic plan in place before the schools open for the new academic year this September. The Minister for Transport sounds very enthusiastic when he announces new cycle lanes such as those he has planned for the Europort area in the immediate future. However, may I respectfully remind the Hon. Minister that, especially in Gibraltar, families depend greatly upon grandparents for the delivery and collection of children from both lower and upper primary

1425 schools? As a grandparent myself, I am often called upon to fulfil such family duties, and I must  
honestly confess that using a bicycle as an alternative form of transport is a total non-starter for  
me and my contemporaries at our age. Much as I would love to be able to support the Minister  
for Transport in encouraging healthier and more environmentally friendly methods of transport,  
his efforts so far only seem to have created bicycle lanes to benefit a great number of members  
of the cross-Frontier commuting community and, worse still, it seems to be to the detriment of  
1430 users of other traditional forms of transport.

Maintenance of existing school premises needs to be properly and promptly executed. It is  
embarrassing to see photographs posted on social media which show toilet facilities closed for  
weeks on end in our newly built comprehensive schools, with notices attached to the doors saying  
out of order. There can be no justified excuses why necessary repairs are not carried out quickly  
1435 and at least within a reasonable period of time, more so as these buildings are new constructions  
and should be a source of pride and not embarrassment.

Private schools have for years existed in Gibraltar and this practice is in keeping with many  
countries, including the British system upon which we base our schooling systems. However, there  
is a lack of detailed information in respect of what the plans are for the existing Hebrew School,  
1440 which is currently publicly funded and comes under the Department of Education. The teaching  
staff at the present Hebrew School have been told that future plans will see the school coming  
under the control and management of a board and therefore not directly under the Director of  
Education. Information provided is that those wishing to remain teaching in said school will be  
seconded by the Department of Education and now fall under the new management structure. I  
1445 feel this House should be fully updated as to Government's plans for the Hebrew School, together  
with details of the funding structure to be used. At present, existing private schools are entirely  
self-sufficient in respect of funding, but it seems this may not be the case in respect of the Hebrew  
School. Whatever plans Government may have for the provision and financial support of possibly  
a new private school, it should do so in a manner equal to the support it offers already-existing  
1450 private educational establishments. If equal support is not offered to all private schools, then this  
could lead to a perceived discrimination based upon religious practices. Gibraltar has always  
prided itself in respect of religious tolerances and this is something we wish to see continue for  
many years to come. However, unless there is a clear explanation as to how any potential new  
privately managed schools will be funded, there is always a risk that divisions will commence to  
1455 become a reality in educational matters. If there is nothing to hide, then details should be publicly  
announced and as soon as possible.

Last year I highlighted that the estimated expenditure of only £1,000 would be required for  
teachers' maternity/paternity leave and that this figure was unrealistic. We now see that the  
forecast outturn is £760,000 for 2022-23, so I still cannot comprehend how we are again  
1460 estimating an expenditure of only £1,000 for maternity/paternity cover for the coming year  
2023-24. We have a relatively high number of young teachers who are still within child-bearing  
age, so I wonder what, realistically, the actual expenditure will be once the financial year 2023-24  
is over. At present trends, the estimated provision for teachers' cover will once again fall way short  
by around £¾ million, at least. Likewise, temporary cover is also estimated at only £1,000 despite  
1465 the logical reality that the more teachers you have employed the higher the expenses for  
temporary cover could be when these teachers need to stay home due to contracting seasonal  
influenza or similar diseases. I also highlighted this last year, and I have been proved correct  
because the forecast outturn for 2022-23 stands at £1,930,000 ... Can we have an explanation as  
to why we have once again been provided with such a misleading estimated provision for  
1470 teachers' cover? The actual expenditure year upon year in respect of this subhead is way higher  
than the Estimates show, so is it the case that we are simply cooking the books and trying to show  
a fictitious rosy picture for the future as compared to reality when we look at what real  
expenditures are? **(A Member: Hear, hear.)**

As both a teacher and a past president of the Gibraltar Teachers' Association, and someone  
1475 who still has educational matters extremely close to his heart, I extend a recommendation to the

Minister for Education to listen and continue to work as closely as possible with classroom teachers, albeit alongside his senior management teams. Classroom teachers want to be part of any process that changes our educational system and want to be involved in meaningful consultation before final decisions are taken. Surely the way forward proposed by these professionals can only contribute to the well-being and best possible future of our children. This is something which I hope we can all agree is paramount.

The initiative already taken by one of our locally based private schools which now offers Computer Science at both GCSE and A-level is to be highly commended. It is courses like these which will serve to prepare today's pupils to become the skilled workforce that Gibraltar will need for tomorrow, as the future will be dominated by digital technology. Likewise, the GSD have raised the concept of modern apprenticeships in the past and we still believe we need to offer more in this field than we currently provide. Those pupils who do not wish to pursue an academic future need to be provided with the opportunity of a modern apprenticeship programme which, if properly structured, has the same standing as higher education. We need to create a gold standard for an apprenticeship programme so that employers have confidence in the system. The time for investment is now, not just in formal academic education heading towards entry into higher education establishments like universities, but also in the co-ordination of training and skills through vocational courses that carry international accreditation. We must not forget the ultimate aim of providing education for our future generations. It is our duty to ensure all pupils always achieve their maximum potential.

If a new building for the College of Further Education is to become a reality, then we have a golden opportunity to review the academic and vocational programmes offered at this College. It could be an ideal opportunity for us to offer accredited qualifications in respect of established technical and construction trades and thereby offer an opportunity to those students who are inclined to pursue a career that is based far greater upon practical rather than academic skills. Gibraltar should be ready for anything the future may throw at us. This includes us having the necessary craftsmen properly trained and qualified for any possible eventuality. It is extremely sad to note Gibraltar's loss of vocational skills and opportunities. The GSD commits itself to making provision for a College of Skills and Technology. We believe in guiding more students into engineering and digital skills and therefore commit ourselves in delivering vocational trades and technical skills.

There is no better formula for success than to cultivate a sense of ownership amongst all tasked with the education of our children. Furthermore, the GSD believes that schoolteachers are a priority that is both needed and from which society will receive huge benefits. The job that they do benefits everyone. Teachers are not a group prone to industrial action or making a fuss about anything. They do not crow the loudest. I concur with the views expressed in the past: teachers have for so long silently and diligently got on with their underappreciated and deeply challenging job of providing an education, formal and otherwise, to generation after generation of Gibraltarians. No one has been more critical of Government spending than the GSD have been over the last 12 years. We have advocated prudence and pointed to the dangers of uncontrolled spending. This does not, however, amount to austerity. It is about prioritising Government's spending in areas where it is needed or where, as a society, we are going to get the greatest benefit. Therefore, education and the teaching profession is but one area.

Mr Speaker, before I sit down, I must take this opportunity to thank you and your staff once again for the patient way in which you have always dealt with us. I know that all members of staff are always available to advise us on both sides of the House, but to see this being done in such an efficient and friendly manner makes life so much easier for all elected Members. Please allow me to highlight that Mr Clerk has personally proved himself of being worthy to hold this position in Parliament. I personally thank him for his organisational skills and support to all Gibraltar's delegates when we attend Commonwealth parliamentary conferences. It is by travelling with others that you get an opportunity to better know people, and Mr Clerk has deservedly obtained an A grade, in my opinion, in this respect.

1530 Having now completed 16 years as a Member of this House, I am conscious that this is an election year. We should bear in mind that no one knows for certain what the future will bring. With your leave, sir, I will end by quoting, as I did four years ago on the eve of the last General Election, from a song made famous by Doris Day. *Que será, será*. Whatever will be, will be, and we may or may not meet again in this Chamber.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. *(Banging on desks)*

1535 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** The future is ours, you see, Mr Speaker, and I therefore move that the House should now recess until 2 p.m.

**Mr Speaker:** The House will now recess to 2 p.m.

*The House recessed at 1.12 p.m.*