



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Budget Address - The Hon Gilbert Licudi QC MP**

Mr Speaker, both the Chief Minister and the father of the House have spoken during their contributions of the excellent employment figures. We have record numbers employed. Record numbers of Gibraltarians employed. Consistently low records of Gibraltarian unemployment.

It is worth reminding the House of some of these figures.

Mr Speaker, as at October 2018, the total number of employee jobs in Gibraltar has once again risen to a new record high. We have experienced a 7.0% growth over the year, from 28,029 to 29,995. This is yet again the highest number ever recorded and twice the increased growth of jobs compared to the 3.5% increase recorded in 2017.

The average gross annual earnings in October 2018 was £30,496.79, another record high, an increase of 3.1%. Average salaries are therefore rising faster than inflation.

Private sector growth has risen by 1,940, from 22,029 to 23,969 in October 2018. The public sector has seen a marginal increase of 0.5% over the year to 5,522 when compared to figures in October 2017.

Mr Speaker, under this Government we continue to see record low unemployment like never before. In 2018, the yearly average was again a record low of 52. A reduction of 88% in unemployment since 2011.

In the last quarter of 2018, we again achieved a record-breaking figure with the last quarter average of unemployment at 44, the lowest level ever recorded in unemployment history since records began. In 2019, as the Chief Minister indicated, we have continued to maintain low unemployment levels.

Mr Speaker, none of this is a fluke. None of this has happened by accident.

The growth in number of employees generally is a reflection of the growth we continue to see in the economy. It is not an isolated event over a year or over a short period. This is growth which we have



seen consistently since 2011 – that is, almost eight years of growth.

The Government must be doing something right.

When it comes to unemployment, this is not a numbers game. It never has been for us. This is not about massaging or manipulating numbers to show a particular picture.

When unemployment used to be in GSD days 300 or 400, or in fact more than 1,000 as the Honourable Mr Feetham clearly admitted just before the 2011 elections, these were not just figures or statistics to be bandied around in press releases or during the budget debate, these were 300 or 400 or more than 1,000 people – with homes, with families, and above all with hope and expectation that the Government would do something to assist them in finding meaningful jobs.

That is what Sir Joe set out to do in 2011 when he devised a strategy to get all of these individuals into the employment market – to give them hope.

Honourable Members opposite will recall how much they criticised Sir Joe for the Future Job Strategy.

If ever there was a moment for Honourable Members to eat their words – this is it.

But this is not about scoring political points or saying to the Opposition you didn't know what you are talking about – even though that would be true.

This is about having been able to turn around the lives of hundreds and hundreds of individuals who were able to wake up each morning and think that they had something to look forward to – a job which would enable to lead normal family lives, to aspire to and to be able to purchase a home in one of Government's affordable housing schemes.

And yes we do take pride in what we have achieved.

And it is right to pay tribute to Sir Joe's vision, foresight and sheer hard work in implementing what he believed in. What he genuinely thought and felt was the right thing to do, was the right strategy to invest in.

Ultimately, we were investing in people, in individuals where each of them mattered.

And yes it worked. Boy did it work. The results are there for all to see.

So we have much to thank Sir Joe for.

And what Sir Joe started was ably continued by Neil Costa when he took over the employment portfolio with the implementation of new systems and schemes to assist those looking for work and the revamping of the Industrial Tribunal which was renamed the Employment Tribunal.

All I had to do was to pick up the baton and continue where they left off.



And of course it is true that politicians can devise strategies, schemes or systems – but it is the people on the ground that have to implement these. That have to do the hard graft.

It is a testament to the team at the Employment Service and their hard work that we are able to come to this House year after year and show how people's lives are being transformed.

Mr Speaker, the Employment Service has undergone significant internal change. Employment officials meet regularly with various business and sector representatives. The aim of this initiative is to determine how services can be improved. It also serves to obtain, first hand, an understanding of the current and future employment-related needs of the business community.

We have seen great success in reducing the number of persons unemployed year on year. The figures show this. This is a direct result of the work undertaken by experienced Employment Officers who provide advice, information and support to registered persons that are either unemployed or looking for alternative employment. The important thing Mr Speaker, is that the system works, and it works well.

The enhanced provisions at the Employment Service sees dedicated Employment Officers and Employment Coordinators working together in providing the best possible support and advice to service users. This also includes assessing individual needs and circumstances, matching skills, qualifications and experience to available vacancies and identifying possible future career opportunities.

The Department of Employment has again strengthened its relationships and avenues of communication with other departments and agencies with respect to employability. The Department provides support with interview skills, writing curriculum vitae and cover letters. This service is delivered in conjunction with the Youth Service and the Citizens Advice Bureau. This provides greater reach to cater for the broad spectrum of job seekers and their individual needs.

The Department of Employment, as from 1 April 2019 introduced a Registration of Vacancy Fee which covers, for a particular position, all administrative work and costs arising from the registration of a vacancy, the filing of notice of terms of engagement, variations of engagement (of which there can be more than one) and termination of engagement. As we said at the time, many employers were already paying the registration fee by not complying with the statutory requirement have a vacancy registered for ten day before it was filled. We also explained that the absence of a fee led to some employers registering vacancies which did not actually exist or have to fill at the time. This then allowed them to fill the vacancy at short notice without having to pay any fee at all. The result was that this distorted the job market. It was impossible to have a true picture at any particular time of the jobs which were available. Again, this was not just about being able to build a picture from a statistical point of view. It was about knowing what jobs were actually available so that those looking for work could be matched to those jobs and would not have to face the disappointment of being sent to an employer who had registered a vacancy only to find that the vacancy did not, in reality, exist.

The introduction of the very modest £17 fee assists to avoid the administrative waste which existed, creates a true picture of the vacancies available and assists those who require it the most, namely those individuals who are seeking employment. Initial figures since the introduction of the



fee show that the system is working and is having the desired effect. Having said that, following a meeting with the GFSB I agreed that this would be reviewed once the figures for six months after the introduction of the fee are available.

Mr Speaker, the Labour Inspectorate continues to operate diligently and effectively. This Government is committed to the eradication of illegal labour by ensuring that all businesses are compliant within the Employment Regulations. The new strategy and programme of inspections across the various industries commenced last year and has worked to further reinforce the relationship between the Department of Employment and the business community.

Regarding Health and Safety at work, the Inspectorate continues to provide an excellent level of service dealing with matters that often encompasses work in high risk areas. The Inspectorate not only works with the contractors and developers managing projects, but also opens its doors to anyone that requires best practice guidance and advice in respect of Health and Safety issues at work. I am pleased to say that Gibraltar has not seen a fatality at work for over 8 years now.

Finally on Employment, the Department of Employment is making great advancements towards meeting the Government's commitment on eGovernment. In fact, the Department will be the first Government organisation to have a fully digital interactive service for its users, allowing for direct administrative interaction with back office systems and the processing of applications and requests through the Government's new online portal. The system, now in its final stages of development and testing, will cater for a full range of employment eServices.

Mr Speaker, turning to Tourism, in the last year, the Gibraltar Tourist Board has been hard at work promoting and marketing Gibraltar, in order to position the destination as one of the most popular in the Western Mediterranean. The work of the Gibraltar Tourist Board is ably supported by the local tourism, retail and hospitality industry.

In 2018, total visitor numbers increased by 1.3% and tourist expenditure was up almost 8.6%. For a third year in a row, the total arrivals at hotels reached record highs, increasing by 6.4% over 2017, with tourist arrivals at hotels increasing by 4% over the previous year. The new Holiday Inn Express has been successful and we look forward to the opening of the Indigo Hotel in Corral Road. I am therefore encouraged, and happy to inform Parliament, that the Government's strategy for Tourism is producing results. Activity on the ground is seen and felt and has resulted in growth.

Mr Speaker, this summer, British Airways will increase the number of flights to Heathrow and Gatwick Airports. An extra three flights per week will operate to London Heathrow and a further six flights per week to London Gatwick. EasyJet has taken advantage of the slots left open by Monarch with the introduction of a twice-weekly service to London Luton Airport. EasyJet are also increasing their frequency to Manchester Airport to four flights per week during the summer and three per week during the winter. This increase in frequency is a positive move by EasyJet. We continue to pursue new UK regional opportunities, although these are restricted to a small pool of carriers with suitable aircraft types able to operate on Gibraltar's short runway.

Mr Speaker, thirteen cruise ships will be making inaugural calls to Gibraltar this year. Two hundred and eight ships are currently scheduled to call at Gibraltar in 2020, representing a slight increase



over 2019, and passenger numbers are expected to be 15.06% higher than in 2019. In 2018, we saw 407,000 passengers coming to Gibraltar on cruise ships. This represented a 3% increase over the previous year. It is, however, true that 2019 will see a slight dip in numbers. There are cyclical reasons that affect cruise calls. These include ships being taken out of service whilst cruise companies await delivery of new ships, the redeployment of ships due to new itineraries or the geographical redeployment of ships to new and emerging markets. The Government is satisfied that the reduction in cruise calls in 2019 is related to operational decisions by cruise companies, rather than reasons concerning Gibraltar as a destination. As I have already stated Mr Speaker, we are already showing positive growth for 2020.

We continue to engage with the cruise industry at the Seatrade Global events as members of MedCruise and Gibraltar will once again be represented at the International Cruise Summit in Madrid next November. Gibraltar is known for its consistent and proactive approach towards the industry. Gibraltar's place on the Board of Directors of MedCruise, representing large ports in the Western Mediterranean, goes a long way in ensuring that the destination is at the forefront of the cruise industry. It also allows us access to the most up-to-date information on the trends for the sector.

In our main market, the UK, the Year of Culture campaign continues apace. The campaign is once again being supported by an extensive online and offline media campaign in the UK with some emphasis being given to hosting the Gibraltar 2019 NatWest International Island Games XVIII.

As announced earlier this year, the Gibraltar Tourist Board is launching its biggest trade initiative in over a decade. Calling the scheme 'Gibraltar 2020', the Tourist Board will be running monthly familiarisation trips with the aim of bringing 200 agents from the UK to Gibraltar over the next 2 years. We will work with tour operators and airline companies in the UK and in Gibraltar with hoteliers, ground agents and tourist sites. Local agents wishing to participate in these events need to complete an online training programme. Departure points will alternate from each of Gibraltar's UK airport hubs. The campaign will be supported by a trade and consumer campaign, driving awareness of the destination and its key selling points to the UK market, particularly in a post-Brexit era.

Another market worth pursuing is MICE (i.e. Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions). The Gibraltar Tourist Board participated in the MICE Forum Europe, in Benidorm, an event which brought together Europe's leading MICE buyers and suppliers to meet, network and build new connections. The Board will also be represented at another event, organised by the same entity in Tenerife in December. The GTB will be present at the Meetings Show in London from 26th to 27th June and will be hosting a pre-dinner event for MICE agents on 25th June in London. The GTB's website now has a dedicated section for the MICE market, with specific information required by buyers in this industry.

The Gibraltar Tourist Board website is now available in five languages. Our activity on social media has increased and now includes very successful competitions, made possible, with the cooperation of our tourism partners. The ability to measure activity on social media and on our website is a great asset when planning strategies for marketing in the UK every year.

When it comes to promoting Gibraltar's tourism product to the Spanish market, the GTB was once again present in the FITUR travel exhibition in Madrid. In the surrounding areas, Gibraltar works with one of the largest tour excursion companies TUI, and their local agents, to promote the destination on all the coaches coming from the two coastal areas nearest to Gibraltar in Spain. In addition, Gibraltar is currently advertised on radio and in some publications in the nearby Spanish market.



We continue to promote niche market tourism and once again we will be represented at the Rutland Bird Fair from 16th -18th August. Event led tourism continues to be a priority for this Government from backgammon to darts, chess, music, food and literature.

Mr Speaker, I was delighted once again to introduce the Gibraltar Lecture at the FT Weekend Oxford Literary Festival earlier this year. The lecture was sponsored by the Gibunco Group of companies and is part of the yearly activities carried out to promote the Gibunco Gibraltar International Literary Festival. Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar sponsors the Green Room for the Festival at Oxford. We are already looking forward to another festival in Gibraltar in November and we are very grateful to the Gibunco Group for their continued support in sponsoring the event. The festival has led the way to becoming not only more accessible but also digital. Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal continues as Patron of the Festival and for this we are very honoured and grateful.

Mr Speaker, I turn to the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service. Last year, the organisation responded to 1,215 operational calls, which included actual fires, emergencies and false alarms. In addition, Fire Control Operators also mobilised the GHA Ambulance on 5,820 occasions.

The introduction of the Geographical Information System last year has substantially improved the deployment of resources attending emergency incidents and providing our officers on the ground with vital.

New to Gibraltar is the roll out of Telephone CPR, which provides our Fire Control Operators with the skills necessary to offer guidance to callers or members of the public that are willing to assist someone who has suffered a cardiac arrest. The service is in the final stages of development.

The GFRS Counsellor continues to work with partner agencies, on an initiative to introduce a multi-agency forum that will support the treatment of emergency services personnel suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The introduction of Traumatic Incident Management, as part of emergency services duty of care to its staff, is a vital support tool that is intended to enhance not just the prompt recovery of persons suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but also to mitigate the risk of long-term effects to emergency workers who have had abnormally negative experiences in the fulfilment of their duties.

Mr Speaker, the GFRS has completed the second phase of its fleet replacement program, with the purchase of two new fire appliances. Both these appliances are water tenders, primarily designed for fire-fighting operations. The combined value of these appliances is in excess of £290,000. Both these vehicles are fully operational and proving to be a successful investment. The ultimate beneficiary of the replacement program is our community and it is with this in mind that the Government has made the funding available. It will enable the GFRS to perform their duties in a more professional and efficient manner using the latest resources and technology available.

Mr Speaker, on the Airport Fire and Rescue Service, during the last nine months, the focus has been in bringing on line the new firefighting vehicles purchased in the last financial year. This has resulted in the introduction of different firefighting techniques, which together with the enhanced capabilities, offers a far more robust and safer response capability for the benefit of both firefighters and anyone involved in an incident.

Mr Speaker, Gibraltar Airport has recovered considerably since the collapse of Monarch Airlines in



October 2017, with existing partner airlines adding new routes and increasing frequencies on existing routes.

It is of course true that following the demise of Monarch, passenger numbers in 2018 were down. I am, however, pleased to report, that from January to April 2019, passenger numbers through the Terminal have shown an overall growth of 19.1% compared to the same period in 2018. This rate of growth is expected to continue for the rest of the year. In fact, anna.aero, a leading online airline network news and analysis website stated that Gibraltar was the fastest growing country market in the second quarter of 2019.

The Government is very pleased to see that Fonnafly, a Norwegian based helicopter operator, has already transported one of its helicopters to Gibraltar in order to offer tours and taxi flights to nearby destinations. The helicopter will be locally based permanently and the operator is seeking to expand its services, which will benefit both the tourist product and our current air travel services.

Mr Speaker, turning now to the Gibraltar Port Authority, throughout 2018 we saw positive growth in the GPA. However, in some areas, particularly in bunkering calls, there was a fall in activity of just over 7% on the previous year. Currently, there is a global downturn in bunkering activity. However, one of the key factors that has affected activity locally is that during the latter half of 2018, two bunkering companies encountered difficulties in maintaining normal operating levels in Gibraltar. On both occasions, the reasons behind the downturn were external to Gibraltar and due to other aspects of the businesses internationally. Nevertheless, Mr Speaker, I am pleased to report that one of these operators is already back to near normal operating levels. The other, is working hard to achieve the same. Given that there is no shortage of interest to develop new bunkering opportunities in Gibraltar from existing and new operators, I am entirely confident that the matter will be resolved very soon.

Gibraltar is and will continue to be one of the biggest bunkering ports in the Mediterranean. Allied to this is a whole range of activities and services to the shipping and maritime world from crew changes to underwater hull cleaning to provision of spare parts and food and lube oils. All the services which one would expect in a port of high repute are not only available but are being delivered in the customary Gibraltarian way – to a very high standard. That is why people keep coming back.

Mr Speaker, we continue to see positive figures in superyacht visits, with growth of just under 2% on last year. We continue to market Gibraltar as a destination of choice in this space and the Government, along with the GPA, Gibraltar Maritime Administration and Gibraltar Tourist Board, hosted a stand at the Monaco Yacht Show in 2018. Our presence at this prestigious event is an important component in promoting Gibraltar within the yachting world. Our strong marketing approach in this sector means that Gibraltar continues to be a popular destination for some of the biggest and newest super and mega yachts in the world. These visits range from calls due to the repositioning of vessel to making crew changes or taking advantage of the many other maritime services that are on offer in our Port.

Mr Speaker, the GPA's marketing strategy continues to produce good results. During last 12 months, the GPA has attended a variety of bunkering, cruising and general shipping events held in major maritime hubs – most notably Posidonia in Athens where the GPA hosted a stand with key



sponsors and partners.

Gibraltar's maritime profile will be given a huge boost with "Maritime Week Gibraltar" a new initiative scheduled to take place this year in late June. The Government, GPA, Gibraltar Maritime Administration and Petrosport have joined forces to create this new initiative, a major biennial event designed to showcase and promote Gibraltar's thriving maritime sector to a wider international audience. The aim of the initiative is to drive more maritime-related business to Gibraltar. Mr Speaker, I am delighted with the interest in Maritime Week Gibraltar and we anticipate strong international participation. My thanks go to the local sponsors without whom this event would not be possible.

Mr Speaker, the new LNG terminal is generating considerable interest worldwide. I am pleased to report that we have already finalised the legal framework for LNG Bunkering licencing as well the technical framework. LNG bunkering plans for Gibraltar will not include use of the terminal for the supply or storage of LNG for ships. This will be performed via ship to ship transfer. Gibraltar will be one of the leading wave of ports that stand ready to support the changeover to this type of fuel in the coming years. LNG is expected to significantly improve the environmental performance of shipping worldwide. We are delighted to be a part of this process and the keen interest that this investment is generating for our Port.

Mr Speaker, I am delighted to report that the new GPA offices were inaugurated in October 2018 and I am pleased to report that both staff and visitors alike have been very impressed with the facilities. The upgraded VTS system is working very well and provides much needed additional capacity in respect of surveillance of all operations in BGW, including enhanced night time surveillance and monitoring capabilities.

Regarding maritime assets, the Royal Gibraltar Police afforded the GPA the possibility of taking over one of their vessels, while the current Port launch was refitted with new engines. Initial tests carried out on the ex-RGP launch, re-named "Admiral Rooke", indicated that it was suitable for Port use. The vessel was then sent to Gibdock for maintenance and rebranding. During the refit process, a number of additional critical issues came to light, delaying the introduction of the Admiral Rooke into service. The launch should be ready for operations early this summer.

Mr Speaker, with regard to the Gibraltar Maritime Administration, I am proud to say that the Gibraltar Shipping Registry is celebrating its 25th year anniversary. Against the backdrop of Brexit, the overall Gibraltar fleet, both ships and yachts, stands at 1,313 an increase of 4% on last year. This is a notable statistic that serves to demonstrate that quality of service and overall technical performance is valued above the continued uncertainty over Brexit and the slower than anticipated recovery in the world shipping markets. In part, our success as a registry is a result of a lot of hard work in visiting new and established shipowners/ managers and listening to their concerns in regards to Brexit and taking on board how the GMA can improve and adapt to changing circumstances. In support of this, the GMA is committed to travel to all "safe ports" to conduct inspections, surveys and audits to the highest standards in order to build a working rapport with our clients.

Mr Speaker, the GMA continues to work closely with the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency and





other members of the Red Ensign Group. This year, the Maritime Administrator visited the Red Ensign Group annual conference held in the British Overseas Territory of Monserrat. The GMA was able to report its progress on the implementation of the Triple I code under the IMO convention. During the conference, the GMA extended an invitation for training to REG Cat 2 members to share our expertise here in Gibraltar with regard to Port State Control inspections, which Gibraltar is regarded as leaders within the REG. This invitation has been accepted by Guernsey who will send a surveyor to Gibraltar in September.

As part of our modernisation and digitalisation process, the GMA's new seafarers' portal is now fully active. The GMA can now offer clients online registration and issuance of provisional and full-term certificates for seafarers.

HM Government's strategy for the GMA over the next two years is to continue maintaining its high quality of service, increase the fleet size by bringing in business from new geographic areas and further develop its position as a training hub.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to the University of Gibraltar. This, as honourable members know, is an autonomous educational institution established by the University of Gibraltar Act 2015. I am, however, happy to report on progress at the University.

There have been a number of changes at the University over the past year. There is a new Board of Governors led by Albert Langston as its Chairman. Professor Catherine Bachleda has been appointed as Vice-Chancellor after acting in this position for almost a year. I congratulate Professor Bachleda on her appointment.

Important progress has been made for the regulation of the University, which has involved the passing into law of the University of Gibraltar (Regulation and Accountability) Regulations 2018 in May 2018, whereby the GRA was appointed as the University's independent regulator. The University has subsequently completed its first regulatory reporting cycle with GRA in a satisfactory manner.

In September 2018, the University of Gibraltar (Academic Board) Regulations 2018 were published, formally establishing the University's Academic Board in line with the University of Gibraltar Act 2015.

Sadly, this year we will say goodbye to Lord Luce who is stepping down as Chancellor of the University after four years in office. Lord Luce has been a great friend of Gibraltar and has been an asset to the University as its first Chancellor. His experience and expertise has at all times been available to the University and this has been invaluable.

Recently, Lord Luce launched the Chancellor's lecture at the University. This is intended to be a yearly event. The inaugural Chancellor's lecture was delivered by Lord Geidt on the monarchy and the Commonwealth. This was illuminating and was well received by all present.

Following a launch in 2018, the University's undergraduate Bachelor of Business Administration (Hons) welcomed its first cohort of students, including the first two students funded by Parasol Scholarships. Developed in line with the UK Quality Assurance Agency Quality Code, and



commended by an external validation panel of experts, this industry-focused degree includes an important placement component that has been very well supported by local firms allowing students to gain first class industry experience.

September 2018 also saw the University welcome its first cohort to its Masters in Marine Science and Climate Change. Students following this programme benefit from the support of Government Departments including the Department of the Environment.

The Postgraduate Certificate in Education is on track to start in September of this year. Designed and developed by the University of Gibraltar in partnership with the Department of Education, and Kingston University, it is the first time that this qualification will be offered in Gibraltar.

Another first for Gibraltar, Mr Speaker, is the commencement also in September 2019 of the University's locally-delivered Master of Business Administration (MBA). This means Gibraltar's professionals and graduates now have the option of studying for this elite business qualification at our University rather than via distance learning.

There has been continued growth of the University's PhD research programme. There are now seventeen PhD research students, mainly local, who are conducting meaningful research that will benefit the wider community. October 2018 saw the enrolment of the first two full time Commonwealth Scholarship PhD students, supported by the University's Institute of Life & Earth Sciences and Institute for Gibraltar & Mediterranean Studies.

As well as strong development of the University's academic programmes, the University is also making progress with its professional courses portfolio. We have seen a continuation for Law and Taxation Professional Certificates, together with other professional courses that also link closely with industry including CILEx (law), CII (insurance), AAT (accounting), and short courses for i) Digital Innovation ii) Business Improvement iii) Financial & Management Accounting, and iv) Sports Coaching.

Moreover, in recognition of the quality of many of its industry focussed short courses, the University received full membership of the CPD Certification Service providing recognised independent Continuous Professional Development accreditation compatible with global CPD principles.

Mr Speaker, I am also pleased to report that:

1. The University has achieved Approved Learning Provider status for ELCAS (Enhanced Learning Credit Scheme) for those transitioning from MOD life to Civilian life.
2. The University's Europa Point Language Centre received Approved Provider Centre status for Cambridge Assessment English.
3. The University has also been licensed by ACCA as a computer based examination centre, allowing external examination candidates to sit their professional accountancy examinations online from the University.
4. In May 2019 the University launched its Professional Certificate of Competence in Blockchain and Smart Contracts. This is linked to the creation by the University in October 2018 of a Key Advisory Group for New Technologies in Education, involving sector experts drawn from local industry and commerce. One day Blockchain Educational workshops were held in Nov 2018



and Feb 2019.

Mr Speaker, the University's Strategic Plan for 2019-2022 has recently been published, following extensive consultations. The Strategic plan sets out a path to create 'An Institution of excellence in teaching, learning and research'.

Also of note, Mr Speaker:

1. The University has recently appointed a Director of Quality to ensure that all University of Gibraltar degrees continue to be aligned to UK quality standards and simultaneously support the University's efforts of continuously enhancing the student experience.
2. The University's standards are being recognised internationally, too. Speaking of the recent PGCE programme, the external validation panel of experts described the University's programme as "ambitious and imaginative", "innovative and high quality" and one that should "enhance the education of children in Gibraltar".
3. The UK Higher Education Representative body, 'GuildHE' recently described the University as "small by design, strong links to local business, and committed to high-quality provision", while influential Higher Education publication, 'Wonkhe', wrote the following; "the regulatory structures surrounding the University of Gibraltar are fascinating. It's like the English system drawn in miniature."

Mr Speaker, the international higher education sector is highly competitive and the University is keenly aware that it must market itself effectively. Its marketing efforts have included participation in student recruitment fairs and other promotional drives in countries as far afield as India and in South America, as well as efforts closer to home in UK, Spain and Morocco. This, alongside local and regional activity aims to pitch the University shoulder to shoulder with global educational institutions.

It would not be possible to attract international students without the availability of reasonably priced student accommodation and the completion of two residential student blocks, which will be available for the start of the next academic year in September 2019, are an important milestone for the University.

Equally important is the extra space that is needed to further expand its programme and this will be provided by the planned expansion to the adjacent St Christopher's School buildings.

This year has also seen the University's collaborative ClimACT project draw to a close. Over the past years, the local ClimACT tripartite has facilitated a series of workshops for teachers in order to discuss and exchange ideas around the topic of Education for Sustainable Development. As a result of these seminars, teachers themselves have shaped the aim, structure and operation of the framework for Gibraltar, this being the inception of Sustainable Schools Gibraltar.

The University has prioritised the development of international relationships that reinforce its international standing and provide opportunities for its students. These have included agreements and discussions with the Network of Universities of Small Countries and Territories, an MoU with the University of North Carolina (Wilmington), more recently, signing an agreement with Broward College, Florida, to facilitate the transfer of students from Broward to the University, and joining



the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) as an Educational Affiliate Member. Commonwealth universities are able to network extensively and effectively through the ACU, sharing problems, solutions, and good practice in a variety of higher education environments.

The University will also be awarded the presidency of The Mediterranean Studies Association (MSA) during this year's MSA meeting at the end of May. The MSA is an organization which promotes the scholarly study of the Mediterranean region in all aspects and disciplines. The presidency will be for a year, ending with Gibraltar hosting the MSA conference during the last week of May 2020.

There will, I am sure, be further and significant developments concerning the University which will be announced during the course of the current financial year.

Although still in its infancy, it is clear that the University is making excellent progress and is making its mark in global education. It is also supporting local businesses through its professional development programmes as had always been envisaged and planned. It is extensively used as a venue for conferences, seminars and lectures. The University is clearly an asset to the community and will, I have no doubt, continue to grow in its importance as a teaching and learning institution.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to Civil Contingencies.

The Office of Civil Contingencies works very closely with the Emergency Services and other first responders in addressing the increasing and diversifying threats that we face. Threats continue to intensify and evolve and we must therefore remain prepared to respond and recover from a range of complex challenges. In the last couple of years, we have seen how the UK has fallen victim to appalling terrorist attacks in Manchester and London as well as the audacious use of a nerve agent by State actors on the streets of Salisbury. Sadly, the threat from terror attacks continues to be all too familiar and it is a threat that knows no international boundaries. The barbaric events in Christchurch and Sri Lanka is such a reminder had we ever needed one.

In recent months, we have seen the effects of the emerging threat from drones and the large-scale disruption that these caused in both Gatwick and Heathrow Airports; disruption which was also felt in Gibraltar. We must also not forget the growing threat from cyber terrorism as nations become more reliant on technology. We have seen how the UK has had its critical national infrastructure threatened by attacks like the disruption at Bristol Airport in September as well as private information compromised in large-scale data breaches like Marriott and Equifax. Like the threat from international terrorism, these emerging threats are unaffected by international boundaries. Gibraltar must be alive to all these threats.

Mr Speaker, Gibraltar's National Risk Register has continued to evolve in line with the threat environment. It captures the most significant risks that we face as a community, based on how likely they are to happen and what their impacts might be. Some of the plans that have recently been reviewed include, the Major Incident Plan; BREXIT 'No-Deal' Planning; Cyber Security; Mass Casualty Plan; Refugee and Migrant Response Plan; CBRN(e) Response Framework; LNG Plan; and Marauding Terrorist Attack.



In terms of the threat from Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (explosives) (CBRN(e)), the events that took place in Salisbury last year serve to demonstrate the scale and impact that an incident of this nature will have on the community. CBRN(e) response is a very specialised operation and the Office of Civil Contingencies has been in close contact with the National CBRN Centre which is part of UK's Counter Terrorism Policing to ensure that Gibraltar is best prepared to respond to such a threat. In December 2018, 18 members of our Emergency Services and other first responders qualified as CBRN Operational and Tactical Commanders and we have also had two CBRN Strategic Commanders qualified in May 2019.

Multi-agency interoperability training lies at the heart of our preparedness. Throughout the past 12 months, a significant number of training events have been conducted, mainly aimed at those who are at the sharp-end of emergency response and recovery. Considerable effort and resources go into each training event. We can never be too prepared. We can, however, ensure that our organisations are as best prepared as possible to respond to any emergency or major incident.

Mr Speaker, finally, on Social Security, the total amount of benefits paid out by the Department in the financial year 2018-19 was £43,261,000 – over 80% in Old Age Pensions.

Mr Speaker, we continue to take positive steps to improve services and to position ourselves ahead of the competition, in order to secure a positive future for Gibraltar and face the challenges of the next few years, not least Brexit, if it ever happens.

Gibraltar is doing well. Whatever the challenges to come we will face them with the determination, hard work and commitment to our nation that Gibraltarians and all those who live in this special place which we call home have always shown and, as we always do, we will emerge stronger.

Lastly, Mr Speaker, but not least, my sincere thanks to all my staff and to everyone at the various departments which fall under my responsibility. I am grateful for their work, their continued support and their dedication.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.