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Ministry of the Environment,
Sustainability, Climate Change,
Heritage, Education and Culture

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BUDGET SPEECH 2021 - Prof John Cortes MBE, Minister for Education & Culture, Environment, Sustainability & Climate Change, Heritage and Public Health.

Note: Sections in Italics are included as additional information but were not read out in Parliament.

Mr Speaker

INTRODUCTION

The world is in crisis. The Climate has changed in our lifetime, and this change is accelerating. Only this month we have seen record temperatures around the world, leading to deaths from heat in countries we've always considered to be cold, and torrential rains, flooding and death across western Europe. Parts of the Earth will in a few decades become uninhabitable through heat. There will be thousands of climate refugees heading north from the tropics. We will be on the front line of that wave, and of the effects of sea level rise. A two metre rise will render our airfield unusable, while a rise of 3 metres will flood all the low lying areas inhabited areas of Gibraltar, including Laguna, Glacis, Westside and the tower Town. This is no joke. Those of us who are parents or grandparents need to realise that this is the world – the Gibraltar – facing those young people and children who we love. Indeed, with all the many obstacles we have overcome through the centuries, including the pandemic we are still navigating, the effects of Climate Change are the



ones most likely to see the end of Gibraltar as we know it. In my grandchildren's lifetime. Budget deficits will seem insignificant by comparison.

And while Gibraltar's contribution to global emissions is very small, absolutely every gram of Carbon we emit into the air is a gram too much. Let us ALL of us take it on the chin – as leaders and Parliamentarians, Government OR Opposition, as businessmen, as ordinary people in ordinary jobs, as rich residents of luxury accommodation, as family members, as you and as me, we are not doing enough. We *must* be bolder. We must embrace the necessary changes before those *other* changes destroy what we know, what we treasure, what we love.

So in reaction to an increase in the price of electricity, or when in the coming weeks we publish the Climate Change Strategy, don't anyone complain. Don't anyone say that our targets are too ambitious. Tell me instead that you want this and more, that you will all support and work to making it go even further, and that you will, in your work and in your personal lives, make the changes that you need to make. Follow our leadership.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr Speaker,

With my preamble over, let me say that I was determined that this year's would be a short speech, but I regret that in the end it will not be so. Not only do I have a wide range of responsibilities to which I need to do justice, but there has been so much activity around Covid.

The speech covers two years – a year of plenty, followed by a year of challenge and distress, and looks towards a lean year. While not purporting to be the Prince of Egypt, I like to think that despite this, the future is bright. We will have to do things differently, but things we will do. Because being in Government gives us an opportunity to serve. We have a duty to find ways of *achieving* for the benefit of the community, against all adversity.

But this requires that very community to re-set, to re-think, to accept the reality.



Mr Speaker,

In all my past budget speeches, Public Health has been but a small section. But for much of the past two years, Public Health has dominated my time, and my life.

When I look in deep frustration at all those things in my Ministry that I wanted to do but didn't, I ask myself, "How come we haven't done this" or "How is it this wasn't followed up"?

And then I remember.

I think back to the spring of 2020, to the days of lockdown, of driving down through silent streets to empty offices to deliver one of the daily press conferences, or to attend one of the strategic meetings. Did it really happen, or is my mind recalling a distant nightmare? How did I get through those days of worry for the community, as well as for my own family?

How easily I forget the many hours researching, listening to advice, considering what advice to give, monitoring what was happening in Gibraltar and comparing it against what was happening in the rest of the world. Being part of taking impossible decisions that went against everything I stood for.

Covid-19 took over our lives.

And then, so many people did so much. But I must single out the strong and effective leadership shown throughout by the Chief Minister through incredibly difficult days – with sensitivity and firmness, with heart and with soul. I cannot for one moment imagine how we could have pulled through like we did without Fabian.

And we have pulled through – though as we are seeing, we still have a way to go. But what we must never do is forget the lessons.

One of those lessons is, the importance of Public Health and how different it is from what we normally think of as health care.



The close link is clear. Indeed, I have worked closer with my friend and colleague the Minister for Health and Civil Contingencies during the pandemic than I ever have with any other colleague other than the CM and DCM.

But Covid has shown that those with underling health issues are particularly susceptible to the challenge of a new disease. Many of these underlying conditions – obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure – are preventable. Often they are related to lifestyle choice. And it is here that Public Health has a vital role.

Sadly, the small team at Public Health Gibraltar has over much of the past two years been working almost exclusively on Covid; but the latest health and lifestyle survey shortly to be published will confirm where our health problems lie and allow us to strategise and resource the public health function in order to make a real difference and so that our community is as healthy and as well prepared as possible for any future pandemic.

I must take this opportunity to thank all those in Public Health, including its Director Dr Sohail Bhatti, Angela Bula, the Health Promotion officers and all the staff, including those who have been redeployed there from different departments to carry out the vital role of contact tracing, for their outstanding work during all of this time – including right now.

Mr Speaker,

The effects of Covid ranged far and many of our projects have suffered significant setbacks. Works on one of the new parks was just weeks away from commencing, works on three new schools were a couple of *months* away, and work would have started this year on the Cultural Hub and National Theatre. Many other smaller projects, as well as large cultural events, have also sadly, disappointingly, had to be cancelled or postponed. All of these, in different ways, add value to our community, and I will refer to some of them later.



CULTURE

Mr Speaker

I had the honour of being given responsibility for Culture following the 2019 General Election. I immediately carried out a significant restructure of the administration of the Ministry as well as a full assessment of cultural premises, and I met with representatives of all of the many cultural groups. I commenced planning of the new style of the Gibraltar Music Festival, took the plans for the new Gibraltar National Theatre to an advanced stage, and started preparing for innovative and creative initiatives across all cultural disciplines.

And then Covid struck.

While many things now had to wait, what I was not prepared to do was allow Culture to be stopped in its tracks. It is of course, almost by definition, *impossible* to stop Culture, but there were many who felt that it was an irrelevance, unimportant and of low priority while we were struggling to cope with a crescendo of Covid concerns. The opposite, of course, was the case. Never before had keeping us entertained, hopeful and enriched been so important.

And the Cultural world of Gibraltar, a world that I love so much, and which I have often called the heart and soul of the community, rose to the occasion. While GHA, ERS, Public Health and the emergency services did their incredible work on the front line, Gibraltar Cultural Services and a myriad of groups and individuals, from singers and dancers, to writers and artists, musicians and even lone buglers, were there in support and holding up that most vital of elements that is morale.

Development

Mr Speaker, I was fortunate to have taken over the Culture portfolio from my friend and colleague Steven Linares, who did sterling work over the years. Indeed, leading on from his budget speech in 2019, I am happy to once again reiterate the Government's commitment to the development of Culture locally and exporting our arts at an international level in order to get Gibraltar known and respected even more in that world.



As Minister for Culture, I am delighted to confirm that since the Cultural Development Unit was established in Steven's time in November 2018, our cultural service is thriving and moving from strength to strength.

While sadly this coming year the level of grants to cultural organisations has had to be reduced, the Unit continues to introduce training programmes for cultural officials, groups, coaches, performers, administrators and cultural persons generally. *It is already supporting cultural organisations, it is developing generic cultural educational programmes, and it is promoting our art galleries and our public library.*

The Development Unit continues to work with Government Departments and Agencies, cultural organisations and other stakeholders to be able to provide more platforms for our cultural community. As the Minister for Culture, I believe it is imperative that we produce these programmes in order to invest in the cultural leaders of the future, in the same way we do in sports.

Events and Development Programmes

I am very pleased that in December 2019, we presented the first ever Cultural Awards. These Awards recognise potential, ability, talent and achievements of those in our community and who have supported our cultural development. The first two lifetime achievement awards, given to Cecil Gomez and Arthur Harper, show the calibre of those in our community who deserve recognition.

Mr Speaker, the Government greatly values our links with our southern neighbours, and relishes the day when our *travel* links will be restored. A cultural art exchange between Gibraltar and Morocco was organised together with the JM Memorial Foundation, with the first phase held in Gibraltar with an Art Exhibition in December 2019 and a visit by artists and musicians from Tangier and Asilah in January 2020.

The second phase of the project will see artists from Gibraltar going to Tangier this Autumn, to exhibit their work, Covid permitting.



Cross frontier and international exhibitions also continue to be held, as is the Youth Arts Jamboree, with projects including

- Technical Theatre workshops
- Creative writing and poetry workshops
- A voluntary scheme offering students work experience opportunities within the Development Unit and at the John Mackintosh Hall and Library.
- *Clay crafting, yoga, guitar maintenance, drama therapy, capoeira sessions, poetry, drama, song writing, photography, art and live drawing workshops for young people of different ages*
- *Videography opportunities, recording the sessions of the Jamboree and producing (editing etc.) promotional videos of the event, at no expense to our youth*
- *Opportunities for young people to participate in the Gibraltar Photographic Society's induction 10-week course at no expense to them, 3 young people signed on in 2020*

At this point I want to recognise the work of all the many cultural groups that enrich our community. GAMPA continued its training in music and performing arts online and was involved in many of the Cultural initiatives during Covid. Many dance and drama groups continued their activities online also, despite the frustration of not being able to perform to live audiences.

This spring we were able to hold the Drama Festival once again – the first such festival anywhere in the world for over a year; and the Gibraltar International Dance Festival, the Festival for Young Musicians, the Young Art Competitive Exhibition and the ever-popular World Book Day celebrations.

- *World Book Day saw an online offering in 2021 with storytelling, reviews and 'meet the author' profiles all part of the occasion. Radio Gibraltar interviews and special reviews and extra content for the Gibraltar Chronicle also featured to maximise impact and reach.*



- *We combined School Visits to the Mayor's Parlour with tours of the Mario Finlayson National Gallery, with this opportunity available to schools at their convenience, not limited to the Jamboree Programme time frame.*

Gibraltar Cultural Services, as ever on behalf of the Ministry of Culture also introduced the Development Scholarship Award, in collaboration with GAMPAs and linked to the Festival of Young Musicians.

In November 2020, my team at GCS produced a successful Literature Week dedicated to local authors. We will build on its success as we promote and encourage Gibraltarian literature.

Three Street Art murals were completed with more planned. *These were Prince Edward's Gate Tunnel, the Education Department façade and the GAMPAs building façade. We are currently working on a mural at the Ragged Staff façade depicting the Battle of Trafalgar and a John Lennon mural at Landport tunnel.* The Street Art Committee also approved more Gustavo Bacarissa works in other areas of Main Street, as a continuation of the Castle Street Bacarissa Street Art project. The team also created promotional flyers to promote 'The Street Art Walk' and highlight this artistic contribution by many local artists.

One of the most significant cultural events for me was the Retrospective Exhibition that celebrated the life and legacy of Gibraltarian Elio Cruz. We felt Elio deserved this recognition with the exhibition celebrating his talent as an artist, playwright, poet, musician, and designer. This was organised together with Alice Mascarenhas. You will recall Mr Speaker that this Parliament awarded the Gibraltar Medallion of Honour to Elio Cruz, posthumously.

In September 2020 we launched a new video archives portal, 'Culture TV'. The portal was one of GCS' many 'Covid projects' planned and produced during lockdown, but the platform continues to be relevant today. The portal provides local entertainment and the public will be able to access a variety of shows and other performances staged in Gibraltar over the years. It is a tribute to



Gibraltar's richness in Culture, and forms an important part of our social Heritage. If you watch carefully you may see a number of performances by a certain Minister for Culture that, if you didn't know that side of him, may well leave you in shock.

The Art in Gibraltar social media platform continues to provide the perfect platform to promote exhibitions and projects, anything related to local artists and artworks, and work being produced at our Galleries.

In our continued bid to promote the art galleries and local art and artists, we have conducted several prize giving ceremonies and book launches at the Mario Finlayson National Art Gallery to make the gallery more accessible to the community (Poetry Competition, Young Artists People's Choice Award, YAJ workshops).

We continue to promote the use of our Art Galleries and have also opened one of the vaults at GEMA to local artists and groups, with several successful exhibitions and other events taking place in this culture-and-heritage space over the last year.

Two rededications have also been organised this June, both at the National Gallery and at GEMA promoting newly acquired works, and we continue to work with The Gibraltar Tourist Board to run a Visit Gibraltar campaign of our national contemporary galleries on their social media platforms promoting the Government's art collection.

1st February 2020 saw GCS organising the 6th edition of GibTalks, an event along the lines of the famous Ted Talks, which has proved to be extremely popular. We hope to be able to see the return of Gib Talks for February 2022.

In 2020 and within Covid guidelines, my team at Culture produced a Cultural Summer Programme for young people which provided for around 40 children. GCS will continue to support the Summer Sports and Leisure programme again this year.

GCS over the last two years, and with the exception of the Covid cancellations, also ran its usual annual programmes and festivals, including the Gibraltar Fair; National Celebrations; Autumn Programme; New Year's Celebrations; art competitions; Workers' Memorial; Christmas Festival of



Lights, and the Classical Concerts amongst others. Of course, many of these activities have been online.

Importantly, GCS has absorbed other cultural programmes, events and administrative duties, including the running of the Mayor's Office and organising events formerly co-ordinated by the Ministry, which has been significantly restructured and streamlined to become a smaller, but more efficient and highly effective team. This has eliminated duplication, and has allowed GCS to be better able to support the many groups and associations and to better co-ordinate and develop cultural activities.

The new Office of the Mayor supported His Worship John Goncalvez during his tenure, and is now providing similar support to the new Mayor, Christian Santos. Not surprisingly, His Worship's plans include a great deal of cultural use of the City Hall, and we are working together on a number of exciting initiatives. I want to thank John Goncalvez for his work during a most difficult two years and congratulate Christian and Deputy Mayor, Carmen Gomez, on their appointments.

Mr Speaker,

We are currently working on an information booklet to formally include all the Cultural Organisations registered locally. We are updating our procedures and ensuring we have up to date information all groups.

As ever, our team at the John Mackintosh Hall, was instrumental in supporting the Gibraltar Parliament and the Election teams with the European Election held in spring 2019 and the General Election of October 2019.

The 2019 Island Games were perhaps the highlight of Gibraltar's social calendar in the last financial year before Covid. GCS formed an integral part of the organising team and supported the Island Games Committee with all cultural aspects relating to the Games, which were many, including launching a set of stamps, a retrospective Island Games Exhibition, and an Art Residency.



Safety Advisory Group

The Government launched the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) early last year with the aim of bringing together key agencies, to ensure the safety of all events in our community. *SAG will support, guide and advise all event organisers, whilst ensuring that they maintain a high standard of safety when considering or planning a specific event. SAG will also be responsible for liaising with the relevant organisations to assist them in adhering to the Gibraltar Events Safety Guide.*

Government Art Collection

Eighty-seven new artworks have been acquired for the Government Art Collection over the last two years, including purchases at auction and from private collections. Special purchases include:

- Gustavo Bacarissa's *Bodegon de Frutas & Jugando con la Abuela*
- Christian Hook's *Arabian Collection*
- Rudesindo Mannia works depicting The Mount, Alameda Gardens and Castle Steps

John Mackintosh Hall Public Library

Mr Speaker,

The John Mackintosh Hall Library social media platform continues to generate and oversee content promoting related initiatives, storytelling sessions, school visits and literature.

Our Storytelling sessions at the Library for children under 4 continue.

Our Book Club was launched last September and managed to continue after lockdown, within relevant guidelines.

In 2019 we had our first Community Care worker joining us at the Library. We hope to continue providing this service to the community.

After tracking patterns of use, we introduced new opening hours at the Library, including Saturday mornings, which suit members better and with very positive feedback.



Several administrative projects to improve the service of our national lending library have been completed, including updating of member records and computerising logging processes. This has included reviewing and cataloguing the extensive Gibraltar collection.

The Library received its latest delivery of 295 new books during the lock down in April. A new area has been allocated for new books which is visible on entry to the Library and has a comfortable seating area for users to peruse the books at their leisure.

Cultural Facilities

Mr Speaker, we are proud of how we manage our cultural facilities. The refurbishment and maintenance of all our facilities plays an important part in allowing us to support all of culture, increasing potential and striving towards the best possible standard of artistic practice.

A new online booking system has been developed for clients to book across all our facilities from one platform. We hope that this will help the user to book and pay more easily as we encourage paperless and sustainable methods of bookings.

During most of 2020, the John Mackintosh Hall and Ince's Hall were made available for community use for dance and drama groups who were lacking in space, always strictly adhering to Public Health advice.

We continued with the refurbishment and maintenance programme for all our facilities to ensure we extend opportunities for public participation in the arts.

Work at the Central Hall and the Ince's Hall are clear examples of our commitment to providing the best possible facilities for our cultural community and the public, and we were able to carry out important work before the impact of Covid hit.

Works included:



CENTRAL HALL

- Complete refurbishment works to main ballroom, exposing heritage walls and ceilings, plus the original ceiling and stonework, doing justice to its former use as a place of worship. The refurbishment also included the paving of the rear and exterior areas and the renovation of the entrance lobby.
- The stained glass window will shortly be replaced with a contemporary design – a stained glass window that no-one even remembered had ever been there.
- *Purchase of new tables*
- *New Sound system*
- *Blackout blinds*

Mr Speaker, this is one project that illustrates the close relationship between Culture and Heritage, one which my Ministry builds upon.

INCES HALL

We have made the Ince's Hall Theatre accessible to all for the first time ever. This has been long overdue, and monies were invested for this project prior to COVID. It includes a lift and disabled toilets, making the Theatre accessible for wheelchair users and persons with reduced mobility. We have also refurbished changing rooms and other areas of the facility, upgrading it in line with the Government's disability policy.

Additionally the south façade was underpinned in order to ensure its safety.

Other cultural facilities and venues have also seen upgrades and facelifts, many with environmental aims, including Recycle bins, bicycle racks and new hanging system, Installation of water fountain and purchase of technical theatre equipment;

plus

- *Purchase and installation of digital sign*
- *Covid-19 protection measures*
- *New portable speakers/microphones for meeting rooms*
- *Repair of roof above changing rooms*



This, together with other work at the GEMA Art Gallery, the Gustavo Bacarissa's Gallery, the Mario Finlayson Gallery, and of course the many premises that we manage and which are used by many clubs, associations and academies.

We are now having to curb spending in view of budget constraints, but we still have plans, and we hope to be able to fulfil them as things improve. This is important. We have thousands of members of our community using cultural premises that need work and investment. My Ministry carried out a survey of all of these just before Covid, and hopes to be able to work on these before long. Plans include refurbishment in

- NORTH JUMPERS BASTION;
- RECREATIONAL ROOMS IN SOUTH BARRACKS;
- SPORTS BUILDING IN EUROPA ROAD

I am well aware of the need for space, for rehearsals, studios, etc., and we are working on a plan to provide more. Among other things we are further opening up community use of premises such as in the new schools.

Cultural COVID Programme

As we have seen, Culture has played an important role during COVID-19 and the social lockdowns. GCS led a cultural initiative and programme that transformed the way our community interacted with cultural events.

These included:

- GCS and GAMPA working together on various cultural initiatives.
- As part of a daytime service, an online programming of shows, performances and other educational initiatives aired during weekdays.
- *These where dispersed throughout the day, Monday to Friday between 10am to 3pm and were streamed on websites and social media platforms linked to both entities.*



- *The programme varied daily and included;*
- *Storytelling for children on a daily basis to include live sessions and bi-lingual books*
- *Speakers from GibTalks archive*
- *Unseen art footage, photos and interviews of artists and exhibitions at GEMA and the Fine Arts Gallery*
- *GAMPA performances and recitals*
- *Operatic and zarzuela performances by a collaboration of classical singers*
- *Music videos by local musicians and groups*
- *A virtual reality tour of the Mario Finlayson Gallery, with details of our renowned art doyens and their artworks*
- *Footage from our Cultural Archives*

- *GCS donated a selection of books from our book crossing stock at the Library to all the elderly housing estates. It also delivered a selection of books on a number of occasions to the Cancer Relief Book stand at Morrison's Supermarket.*

- *In a bid to encourage reading and promote 'good reads' it run a series of book reviews on the JMH Library page on Facebook, featuring a wide selection of library members and local personalities to include children, teachers, journalists and others.*

- *GCS have launched a new video portal. This became more relevant during times of 'lockdown' and social distance, when people spent their time at home and would welcome additional local entertainment. Cultural organisations and entities, or individuals were invited to submit footage of their events, shows and performances, held in local cultural venues. This led to the creation of Culture TV, which I have already mentioned.*

- *Art and Short Story competitions for School Years 2 to 13.*



- Lego grew in popularity and relevance during the times of lockdown, and an exhibition, approved by LEGO HQ in Denmark, was held at the John Mackintosh Hall Gallery, proving to be one of the most popular in a long time, attracting many visitors.
- The Frontline Workers exhibition where Portraits of our frontline workers were exhibited in collaboration with the Fine Arts Association. 52 artists expressed an interest.
- *This initiative combined the promotion of Art with the recognition of those who are working hard to see us through. The works produced will form a significant part of our cultural heritage and of our social history and will see an exhibition at one of our galleries shortly.*
- *A programme of cultural activities for primary school children in years 3, 4 and 5 was held over four weeks, in collaboration with GAMPA and the Department of Education.*
- Online events included the National Week Classical Concerts, the National Day Variety Show, Political Rally and National Day Rock Concert, The Spirit of Christmas, New Year's Eve Celebrations, the New Years Classical Concert and the May Day Celebrations.
- Apart from senior support to CTB, GCS seconded 12 members of staff to the Vaccination Centre at the ICC, and their maintenance and facilities teams also redecorated the Centre prior to opening, with equipment and furniture provided from GCS stocks to help facilitate the quick opening of the centre.

In May 2021, the Chief Minister opened another major, landmark exhibition *Culture versus Covid*, which paid tribute to artists, performers and the public, displaying all the cultural events and work done throughout the pandemic.



Future

Mr Speaker,

Gibraltar needs a real Theatre. Many thousands of our people are, or have been involved in the performing arts – dance, acting, music – through the decades, at least as many as in sports, and at least as successful. So many Gibraltarian artists have become established around the world. Only this year we have heard of the success of two of our young dancers, Jonathan Lutwyche and Simon Anthony, now working in the West End, with Nolan Robba there too. Imagine where they would all be if they had had proper facilities here. A Gibraltarian Oscar would surely be within reach?

In present facilities we are unable to host professional productions, and we have to spend huge amounts on bringing in stages, lights and technicians when we do.

Add to that the need for studio and workshop space for the visual arts too, and the potential for expansion in our national lending library, and the case for the planned National Theatre and Cultural Hub is more than made. Work on this would have started already, but the pandemic stopped that particular performance too.

But for all the above reasons Mr Speaker, as recently announced, the Gibraltar National Theatre Foundation has been created to continue with the project, seeking alternative funding until better times come.

I wish to gratefully acknowledge already a significant contribution to this fund by the Kishin Alwani Foundation – more details will be released soon.

The plan is that with the Theatre will come facilities to create a larger cultural hub at the John Mackintosh Hall Complex, providing for additional venues which will allow for the introduction of new cultural activities and community use, refurbishment and extension to the John Mackintosh Hall Public Library with a new music library, and a significant extension of the children's section.



Mr Speaker, on the international front, Cultural Exchanges with the Diputacion de Cadiz will continue. We are planning to participate in an Art exchange in Andorra and we are in the process of exploring a Cultural residency and exchange with Edinburgh in collaboration with the Society of Scottish Arts.

There have been, and will be, a great many other events and initiatives, too many to mention here. But I must say that I am impressed by the work ethics and efficacy of the team at GCS. People often don't realise how much they do, often behind the scenes, supporting organisers, groups and societies, extending their support well beyond contractual requirements. During lockdown, they not only kept Culture very much alive. They expanded and extended its reach.

Mr Speaker,

While large events and performances from artists from outside Gibraltar are great to watch and attend, I believe that my main task as Minister for Culture is the reverse, to nurture our cultural offering and those who engender it, here, in Gibraltar, and to showcase our Culture abroad. Those will be the main thrust of our work in Culture in the coming year, Covid or not.

ENVIRONMENT

Mr Speaker,

The year 2020 was the year when everything changed. It challenged humanity in unimaginable ways. I am proud to say Mr Speaker, that officers in all other areas under my responsibility too, performed in an exemplary manner and rose to the occasion in assisting all areas of Government with this challenge.

Let me start with Environment. Over half the staff across all divisions were redeployed to support Covid work. The Department led in the development of COVID analytics, and contributed to the daily situation reports.

This seriously delayed much of our work.



However, work on *Brexit* continued, and ranged from pet passports to food imports to exportation of waste. Significantly, during 2020, the team oversaw the procurement, delivery, installation & ongoing maintenance of the Waste contingency equipment.

Mr Speaker, as always Gibraltar continues to work hard with our colleagues in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

Islands and other small territories largely surrounded by sea are important for the protection of the oceans, and are particularly susceptible to the impending sea level rise. There are now many important initiatives to deal with climate change adaptation as well as mitigation, and the Environment Department has recently embarked on a wide consultation process to ensure that we are prepared for the changes already hitting the planet.

I was proud to represent of the Overseas Territories to attend COP 25, the Climate Change Summit in Madrid in 2019, and I am proud too to continue to Chair the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies' Environmental Ministers' Council.

In this and other fora, we continue to press the UK to ensure Gibraltar's inclusion in international Agreements, including the Paris Agreement, the Barcelona Convention, the Ballast Water Convention, ICCAT and the extension of the Intercontinental Biosphere Reserve of the Mediterranean to include Gibraltar. I am pleased to report that the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats was extended to Gibraltar last December.

Marine Environment

Mr Speaker,

The Department has been active over the past two years on the marine front. For example Departmental officials have been accredited by British Divers Marine Life Rescue and has undertaken Marine Renewable Research with the University of Highlands and Islands



A lot of other work has been carried out in this area, including the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna sports fishing tagging programme. Additionally, the Department took part in the 2020 forum of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean.

Unfortunately, in February of this year, it had to deal with the oil spill ecological impact assessment and overseeing cleaning operations with drone deployment. They continue to work with colleagues in the Port Department on improving industry practices in this field.

Despite this, the state of our waters continues to improve, as can be seen in our updated Marine Strategy Framework monitoring report published just last week. An otter in our Port, a wintering osprey, healthy dolphin and tuna populations and increased occurrence of whales and other marine life do not happen by accident.

The exceptional awareness work of the Nautilus Project has to be recognised in this context.

Environmental Legislation

Mr Speaker,

This Government's term in office has seen an unprecedented level of environmental legislation with nearly 200 such instruments published. Recently added was legislation to:

- ban plastic bottles in the Upper Rock and banning the importation of most types of plastic bags;
- including Devil's Tooth Green Corridor as part of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve;
- create the Gibraltar National Trails;
- and making it illegal to interfere with the natural behaviour of macaques.

Sustainability

We continue to seek to ensure that the whole public service adheres to the Sustainable Development Goals (or SDGs).



Consistent with this we have prepared guidelines for sustainable catering and for sustainable events and carried our work in encouraging young people to pursue these vital goals.

Waste

As expected, the amount of waste produced dropped during last year. Recycling volumes were also down, possibly due partly to the persistent but unfounded 'word on the street' that recyclates are mixed after collection. We will be campaigning this year to get recycling back on track.

We will also be introducing measures to improve collection of refuse from the city centre in particular.

While on the subject of waste, I wish to once again acknowledge the work of the ESG – in general – but also specifically in this context relation to Clean up the World and litter.

Sewage treatment

Mr Speaker, the issue of sewage treatment is the one that disappoints me most. While the reasons for the slow progress were outside of Government control, as an environmentalist, I am still hugely disappointed. A large part of the original delay was the search for a suitable technology. But significantly, as I have explained publicly before now, we had advanced well on project funding from the European Investment Bank when the result of the Brexit Referendum led to them pulling out after two years' work. Despite this, the pre-works contract with the Joint Venture that had successfully tendered was signed, and work on design and site preparation commenced, when one of the two companies that made up the JV went into administration. This led to complicated legal issues which further delayed the project.

Mr Speaker, I am not happy with the situation and am immensely frustrated that administrative matters have interfered with a project that had full political support and makes tremendous environmental sense. We are however actively pursuing several other options and I have no intention of letting this go until it happens.



Air quality

Mr Speaker,

On air quality, over the last three years the fixed monitoring network, run by the Environmental Agency, working with UK Consultants Ricardo, has been supplemented with emerging technologies providing indicative monitoring in potential hotspot areas and adding to the overall understanding of our air quality.

Perhaps one of the ironies behind Covid is that whilst it came at an unacceptable human cost, we saw how Nature can recover. I say this solely in the context that it provided proof, if proof were needed, of the negative impact that humans, unregulated and unleashed, and unnecessarily, have on natural systems

The global lockdown response to COVID-19 caused an unprecedented reduction in global economic and transport activity which in turn reduced the concentration of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter levels.

In Gibraltar, reductions in air pollutants were quickly picked up by our monitoring stations and demonstrated very early on how even small reductions in traffic can greatly impact air quality.

It is important to note that some of the air quality indicators such as NO₂, CO and Benzene had improved markedly between 2018 and 2019, meaning that air quality was improving *before* Covid considerations came into play.

Mr Speaker the environmental statistic reports for 2018 and 2019 which clearly show this, are going live on the Government website now, as are our most recent Greenhouse Gas inventories.

In 2020, NO₂ levels were down again across all sites, Rosia Road and Witham's both showing compliant levels for the 3rd year running – Rosia Road levels down to 27 µg m⁻³, Witham's 23 µg m⁻³, a significant drop from 2019 (37 µg m⁻³ at both) reflective of the reduced traffic during lockdown as well as the shift to the new power station.



PM10 levels have also dropped again, down to $20 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ (micrograms per cubic metre) at Bleak House and $22 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ at Rosia Road. The EU target value is $40 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$.

PM2.5 has also dropped and in 2020 for the first time meets the more stringent WHO target of $10 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ (compared to 20 for the EU, which we have always complied with). This is so significant given that we have in the past been criticised for not achieving WHO target levels for this contaminant.

In general terms the picture across the board is of improved air quality and compliance across nearly all targets, which reflects the realities of the new power station and the reduced traffic during the lockdown periods.

But I am not complacent. It is clear that traffic is the greatest local contributor at the moment to reduced air quality and to our carbon footprint, with shipping also a significant contributor.

I take this opportunity to welcome my friend and colleague Paul Balban back to the portfolio of traffic and transport and I look forward to working with him on improving and greening transport across Gibraltar, while I looking forward too to continuing to work closely with another friend and colleague, Vijay Daryanani, in tackling issues to do with shipping, including of course, Gibdock.

Renewables

This brings me to renewables. The first phase of the Solar Framework agreement was assigned to successful candidates and we now have solar panels supplying clean energy across 13 different sites in Gibraltar. More will follow as we catch up with the backlog in deployment caused by Covid. While my colleague Albert Isola will provide more information as Minister for Utilities, I am pleased to say that solar power production is slowly but steadily increasing. And I predict a considerable jump in solar power production this coming year.

Environmental Health

Mr Speaker, the Environmental Agency continues to advise me in many areas and continue to operate a 24 hour on call service which saw Environmental Health Officers engage in 175 callouts last year.



Brexit

The Agency works closely with the Department on Brexit issues such as contingency planning on food imports and exports of waste in the event of a no deal scenario.

Covid-19

The Agency remained active during lockdown with measures put in place to protect staff whilst at the same time adapting to continue to deliver critical services to the public as well as ensuring that the administration of waste exports and food imports remained fluid, not easy tasks.

The Agency assisted in the disinfection of Government Estates, contact tracing and assisting the Director of Public Health in the enforcement of permit conditions imposed on the catering industry. This also involved a collaborative effort with the Royal Gibraltar Police in carrying out evening patrols to ensure that conditions are complied with to ensure an environment which is as safe as possible for both workers in the industry and for the public.

Water Quality

The Environmental Agency continues to monitor the quality of our bathing waters where standards have been improving over the past few years. Five of our bathing waters are now classed as “Excellent” with Western beach improving and now being classified as “Good” rather than “Sufficient”.

Dog Fouling

The Agency continues to provide a significant contribution to the Government’s anti-dog fouling campaign. So far in 2021, 63 DNA samples have been collected with 11 FPNs issued to offenders. Officers from the Agency, and the Department, also carry out patrols during which they check that dogs being walked on the public highway are duly licenced and registered.

COMAH

The Agency is the competent authority for Control of Major Accident Hazards or COMAH. In conjunction with the Office of Civil Contingencies and the UK Health and Safety Executive, the



first LNG live exercise was organised in January 2020 and carried out with all emergency responders and stakeholders taking part.

Beaches

Mr Speaker, the Beaches division of the Department works hard to ensure our beaches are ready for enjoyment by all. Two new jellyfish nets – one for Eastern Beach south and one for Catalan Bay were installed in 2019. The usual Beach sand levelling and reprofiling of beach at Eastern Beach and Catalan Bay, was carried out on time in both years. Many don't realise just how much work goes into getting the beaches ready for the bathing season. There are too many examples for me to list, but they will appear in the version of this speech that will be released by the Press Office:

- *General repairs and wood preserving treatment to Catalan Bay wooden pedestrian access from car park to village*
- *Refurbishment of Little Bay accessible toilet facility*
- *Removal, repairs and re-installation of the Camp Bay sea stairs after having been damaged by stormy weather*
- *The Purchase of new concrete walkway units and shower bases for sandy beaches*
- *Refurbishment works of Camp Bay flooring, stairs, ramps, banisters and seating surfaces*
- *Painting of beach walls*
- *Protection works on bathing pier at the southernmost end of Camp Bay, filling voids in order to restore structural integrity*
- *New entire perimeter fencing for Camp Bay large pool*
- *New beach furniture for Europa Pool and Bathing Pavilion*
- *Replacement of pool filtering equipment at said pools*
- *New aluminium roller shutters for Eastern Beach premises*
- *New Lifeguard watch chairs for Catalan Bay, Bathing Pavilion and Europa Pool*



- *Clearing of rocks accumulated on shoreline by inclement weather (Eastern Beach & Catalan Bay)*
- *Addition of steps to sea stairs at Little Bay as a result of loss of ground cover*
- *Removal of seaweed from outlet adjacent to Western Beach car park and runway*
- *A full refurbishment of Camp Bay toilet, shower and changing room facilities; including the Changing Places facility.*
- *New drainage trench for external showers at Camp Bay promenade*
- *New marine grade stainless steel sea stairs for Camp Bay promenade*
- *Purchase of 4 new Lifeguard semi-rigid vessels*
- *Replacing of specific units for Camp Bay & Little Bay pools filtering and chlorination systems*
- *Purchase of 5 lifeguard rescue surf boards*
- *Repairs to Catalan Bay Lifeguard Post*
- *Repairs to vandalised stairs and replacement of vandalised concrete tables at Little Bay*
- *Setting up of bike racks at all beaches*
- *New Accessibility Service wooden beach pergolas for Western Beach, Catalan Bay and Eastern Beach*
- *Removal of seaweed accumulations*

Cemetery

Mr Speaker, the management of the Cemetery ensured that albeit with restrictions, families were still able to bury their loved ones in a timely manner.

January and February 2021 saw an unprecedented number of covid deaths in the community and I must thank the cemetery staff for their dedication and professionalism during this time. Despite the unparalleled emotional burden and stress on these individuals, they continued to



work diligently, on a half crew basis, to bury as many as 7 members of our community a day during this most difficult of times.

I must also pay tribute and thank for former cemetery superintendent, Alfred Ryan, who retired in August 2020 after 50 years of service and dedication to our community.

Green and Planted areas, urban wildlife

Mr. Speaker, planting trees and creating green areas remains a top priority for the Government. Such is the number of trees that we have planted that we now find ourselves struggling to find suitable new areas for tree planting. That said Mr Speaker, tree planting continued, with nearly 250 planted since autumn 2019.

This included those new trees in the refurbished and much improved Governor's Parade, and of course the completion of Midtown Park. It really is incredible how we have greened the heart of our City. This is all part of the way we can use nature-based solutions to improve our carbon performance.

Recently too we were able to dedicate the Juan Carlos Perez Promenade, a tribute to the life and work of Juan Carlos, a much loved member of the House and a former GSLP Minister.

Botanic Gardens

Botanic gardens never cease to evolve. The Alameda's collection in its nursery of plants from throughout the world continues to grow in size and international reputation, with new species being added to planted areas throughout the gardens. As ever, improvements to aesthetics are combined with the showcasing of plants that are increasingly valuable for education and conservation purposes. Large sections of path were repaired during the last-but-one financial year, alleviating the effects of root action and erosion.

Conservation of key *Gibraltar* species is one of the core roles of the Gardens, and it continues to propagate native and endemic species in ways that maximise genetic diversity of these important collections. Thus, the gardens' work is crucial to the conservation of species found only in Gibraltar,



as illustrated by the rescuing from certain extinction of the Gibraltar Campion in the 1990s. Hundreds of plants of this species are produced every year.

The extremely popular children's education programme continues to grow in scope and activity, including its outreach work with local schools. Most importantly for education work on site, construction work is now underway to develop an exciting new education area in the heart of the gardens, for outdoor learning about horticulture and the environment. The project has been made possible without any Government funding whatsoever, through the very generous contribution of donors, among which the Kusuma Trust, Casais, Gamma Architects and the Rupani family stand out.

Gibraltar Nature Reserve

Mr Speaker, the impact of the pandemic on the reserve was both good and bad. Sadly, tourism numbers plummeted as did our revenue, which had grown steadily since the fee system was revised in 2017/18. We are still a way from returning to pre Covid levels of tourism, although this has increased significantly in the last two months, but the Department has been working hard maintaining sites, clearing paths and cleaning up during this time.

Habitat management continues and has improved areas for wildlife. Speed Ramps were introduced, new picnic sites were prepared and work began on Tovey Cottage. I am delighted to report that Tovey Cottage field centre was completed and inaugurated this spring. Schools have wasted no time in visiting the centre which has been a complete success.

The Gibraltar Nature Reserve team ably manages the different parts of our reserve. I am convinced that Upper Rock is at its best in recent decades, both as a tourist asset and for wildlife.

Mr Speaker, the improvements continue, and more will be seen as soon as funds allow. Now, we have an obligation to maximise on the income that the Upper Rock can generate, while always ensuring that residents can continue to enjoy this, our only real bit of countryside, without charge. We will therefore, following discussion with stakeholders, be introducing an increase in the entry fee to non-residents no later than 1 April next year.



The recently launched St Michael's cave experience is a 'must watch' and is already awing audiences young and old. We will continue to search for modern, attractive and environmentally friendly ways to give Gibraltar a creative market edge which will ensure return visitors to the Rock.

Yellow-legged Gulls

Mr Speaker, the management of the yellow legged gull continued throughout the pandemic and as a result we have ensured the long-term trend in the breeding population of gulls in Gibraltar continues to be one of decline. As an example of evidence of this, GONHS recently reported to me that while up to about five years ago counts of young gulls on our beaches and at sea at this time of year reached 500 in a day, a count last week revealed just 38. I must thank the Avian Control Unit, for their efforts and dedication during this time.

Raptors

The GONHS Bird of Prey Unit continues its formidable work in rescue, rehabilitation and tracking, with extraordinary, success and continued to do so throughout the pandemic. A number of release and re-introduction programmes are ongoing, including the breeding and release of Barbary partridges, with others still planned.

Macaques

Mr Speaker, macaque management is another one of those areas of wildlife management which of necessity continued unabated this past year. For the second time in many years we have had zero growth of the monkey population *without mass culling*, as a result of the benign contraceptive measures that have been implemented.

Incursions into town were much less frequent, even during the pandemic. Lack of disturbance and illegal feeding by visitors which ensured that the animals did more natural foraging within the Upper Rock are likely to have contributed to this.



As they too are susceptible to Covid 19, special measures were introduced in law prohibiting human contact with the macaques as we aim to ensure that this disease is not transmitted to these animals – and then back to humans.

Blockchain and the Environment

As we know, thanks to the work of my friend and colleague Albert Isola, Gibraltar already enjoys a reputation for leading in financial services and for robust regulation. During the past year, we have been developing legislation and working with relevant stakeholders around the world through virtual workshops for a new regulatory framework which will cater for Green Instruments. The framework will provide for Green Instruments to be issued and traded on regulated marketplaces in or from Gibraltar. The objective is to facilitate trade as widely as possible, but only of Green Instruments which demonstrate significant environmental integrity.

The international trading of environmental assets has an important role to play in achieving the targets set by the Paris Agreement. The issue preventing that market from reaching its full potential is the lack of trust on the part of investors. Our legislation will provide that assurance.

Mr Speaker, there is a dire need to re-assess the way that economies are run and assessed. Economists globally have so far failed to attribute real value to environmental assets, including biodiversity. I am hoping that Gibraltar will be among the first to do so, following the game changing review published last year by Sir Partha Dasgupta.

Heritage

Mr Speaker,

In respect of Heritage, the Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council (HAAC) has now consolidated its functions and is an efficient tool in ensuring that Heritage is protected and well managed.

Earlier this year I established a sub-committee of HAAC in order to produce a Heritage Management Plan for Gibraltar – a vision document that will ensure a future for our past.

The small Heritage team has been successful over the past two years in executing a number of small, low budget but important projects.



After so many years of neglect, Nun's Well Cistern was opened for the first time ever for all to enjoy. This included the beautification and natural landscaping of the external areas as well as the cleaning and restoration of the well itself. The Gibraltar Heritage Trust has kindly taken over the management of visitors to the site.

Another important milestone was the launching last week of the Ministry for Heritage Website. The website now provides the public and professionals with as accurate a summary of Gibraltar's many heritage assets as possible. *The information has been drawn from many sources and many have assisted, with special mention going to the small team at the Ministry for Heritage who have worked on the concept, research and compilation of the information.*

I would like to recognise the work of Marcello Sanguinetti, who retired this year, in steering through a total revision of how our Heritage is managed in the Ministry.

In other areas:

Phase II of the tampion and gun maintenance programme was completed and tampions were placed over twenty-three barrels. The work included the complete restoration of the iconic Koehler depression carriage at Grand Casemates Square.

Eleven other tampions were fitted to various other guns; four at Orange Bastion, four at Queensway Quay, two at the Naval Base entrance as well as the bronze naval cannon in front of the Wellington Memorial. The second phase of the project has seen new larger sized tampions fitted to some of the larger muzzled guns and mortars located at the Alameda Botanical Gardens. This has included re-painting of the 10-inch guns at Grand Parade and the two iron 13-inch mortars at the Wellington Memorial, as well as re-varnishing the gun carriage for the bronze cannon. The four Verbruggen howitzers located at the Elliot Memorial have also been fitted with new custom-sized tampions, thus completing the Botanical Gardens restoration programme entirely.

In addition, tampions have also now been fitted to the two 6-inch BL guns at Devil's Gap Battery and the 32-pounder carronade outside the premises of Grand Battery House.

The Upper Rock team has also cleaned and painted most of the guns on the Upper Rock. Restoration works are now nearly complete at the Convent.



We have also refurbished many of our City Plaques, repainted the names on our city walls, and restored and repainted our old street signs.

We have digitized maps and plans held at HM Dockyard in collaboration with the Gibraltar National Archives and the Heritage Trust.

Archaeological works throughout the area of the Europa Point sports complex are now finalised with the walking trail now open.

There have also been some interesting finds at the Garrison Library, including an intact wall, archway and steps leading into what was the Governor's garden from street level, dating from before 1800.

Works at the recently uncovered Genista Magazine at the Lathbury Sports Complex Area should commence in the not too distant future.

A WWII air raid shelter has been uncovered in the Naval Tower Complex. I would like to thank the MOD for their patience and understanding in allowing our heritage stakeholders to undertake their work and also Wastage Products Limited for their support.

Over the past year restorations have included restoring medieval vaults in the new Xapo Bank at Casemates and the Old Police Station in Irish Town, private projects under the combined supervision of our Archaeologist Dominic Lopez, the Heritage Trust and the National Museum, who have also provided expert advice at the North Gorge, the Old Casino and Orange Bastion.

All of this is only possible due to the close working relationship the Ministry for Heritage has with these heritage stakeholders as well as the Garrison Library and departments such Town Planning, and Technical Services. In all my years of involvement in Heritage, never before have all the players worked so closely and so much in support of each other – all to the benefit of Heritage.

Mr Speaker, the work of the **Gibraltar National Museum** continued throughout. While public areas were closed a highly successful Virtual Museum was created. The posts were put on standard social media and the response was huge. With the re-opening of the museum, the virtual museum's output was scaled down but not closed altogether.



I am pleased that the Calpe Conference programme was not halted. A very successful conference was held on a Gibraltar theme with an impressive panel of Gibraltarian speakers. This year subject is “Iberian Neanderthals” and the occasion will mark the 95th anniversary of the discovery of the Neanderthal remains at Devil’s Tower. All the leading Iberian scientists in this field will be coming to Gibraltar in September, showing, once again, how central Gibraltar has become in this field of study.

The work at Gorham’s Cave continues. Researchers are returning to the site and new and interesting discoveries will undoubtedly hit the headlines in the coming months. One recent publication was that of the Gorgoneion, the fragments of a ceramic item depicting the Gorgon Medusa. More recently a wonderful reconstruction of the entire Gorgoneion has been produced by the museum. It is pleasing to see that the necessary skills and expertise are available within the museum’s team for this kind of work to now be done in-house and at low cost. It is not that long ago that we contracted an international team to produce the sculptures of Nana and Flint, the Gibraltar Neanderthals. Now, reconstructions of Calpeia (a Neolithic woman who lived some 7.5 thousand years ago), the Gorgoneion and Yantar, have been produced exclusively by the museum team. Yantar was the reconstruction of a Bronze Age male who had been excavated from Bray’s Cave years ago. Genetic work showed special that he had come from the Russian steppe – so much of our ancient history remains to be discovered.

The museum continues to plan new displays and I am pleased to announce that Yantar, along with Calpeia and the Gorgoneion, will form part of a new gallery dedicated to the Pillars of Hercules.

Restoration is an important aspect of the museum’s work and their support to the Ministry for Heritage on many restoration projects such as the limekiln on Willis’s Road is a fundamental part of their work. There is a great deal more restoration to do, which we will have to strictly prioritise in view of the tight finances.

Mr Speaker,

The close working relationship with the **Gibraltar Heritage Trust** continues and is indeed going from strength to strength.



The mutual support that exists between the Trust and the Ministry on day-to-day work allows projects to continue unimpeded.

The Witham's Cemetery project, now in its 5th year is an example of the Trust's dedication. Among other work, the Trust has also taken on a voluntary project to restore Lord Airey's Battery - a 9.2" emplacement at the top of the Rock.

Challenging as the last financial year has been given Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns, the **Gibraltar Garrison Library** team remained in post throughout, and whilst footfall came to a dramatic halt, the Library saw a substantial increase in their online outreach. This is reflected in the level of electronic research support to our Gibraltar based community, including students, and to UK based university students. Digital copies of materials were produced for these purposes and the Library team are continuing in this endeavour.

Sensitive, heritage driven capital works were undertaken in the basement for the establishment of a digitisation studio, a conservation department, and a secure, climatized repository room.

It is also reassuring to know that members of our community are increasingly referring to the Garrison Library as a central repository for gifting their collections. These are special and often rare collections of great Gibraltar significance. An initiative I encourage.

The Library will now be looking to creating a friends of the Gibraltar Garrison Library with the aim of maximising the commercial potential of the Library.

EDUCATION

Mr Speaker,

In Education, the last two years have been years of exciting renewal and stressful reprofiling in rapid succession.

2019/20 was exciting: we saw the start of long overdue co-education in our comprehensives, the move to the fantastic new secondary schools, realignment of Keystages and the start of the move towards more vocational opportunities.



In sharp contrast, 2020/21 saw the impact of lockdowns and isolation, with the need to re-invent the way we teach. Online teaching became the norm of necessity, markedly improving in content during the second lockdown and, while never the same as face to face teaching, it certainly ensured that our children kept learning.

Covid was an incredibly stressful time in Education, for children, parents, and of course teachers. They all had to change what they did and how they did it, and we saw a flexibility and an adaptation, at levels that we had never seen before. But we did it, and my strong view is that our children were much better taught during this time than their peers in UK, and that for the most part, they have been able to catch up on lost time.

I think that we are now much better equipped to continue online learning components and certainly using the internet to communicate with parents. More fundamentally, the fact that for two years we have not had formal GCSE or A level exams has presented to me the possibility of transforming our Education even further and looking at options such as are used in other countries where education is much less exam-orientated and more performance based.

Of course, Covid has meant that we have not as yet started work on three of our planned schools the Gibraltar College, Governor's Meadow and Bishop Fitzgerald. These are of course still planned, but sadly delayed. However, the start of work on the new St Mary's School is imminent, given that this will have other funding arrangements, and work is proceeding in important improvement in other schools, notably St Paul's.

We sadly had to deal with fire damage at Governor's Meadow and flooding at St Joseph's, but both were speedily repaired and refurbished. My thanks to all the staff, and to GEA and GJBS for their prompt and skilled work.

Special Educational Needs

One of the most important areas under my responsibility is of course Special Education.

I am pleased to say that one notable project that we have been able to continue is the new St Martin's School, delayed as it was by the difficulties the construction industry faced during Covid.



Happily, I can confirm that the new St. Martin's School will open for pupils this September. The school has additional facilities including a hydro-therapy pool, enhanced therapy areas and specialist classrooms. All staff have been and are working extremely hard planning for the migration to the new building.

Mr Speaker, the vitally important relationship between the Department and the Parents of St Martin's pupils has never been closer. During lockdown there was close communication and collaboration to discuss ways in which families could be supported and this positive relationship has continued as evidenced by the frequent meetings and close working together, which will soon result in much improved provision for pupils and former pupils of St Martin's and their families, details of which will emerge soon. I thank the Parents' Association and the Little Smiles Charity for all their work here.

Indeed, meetings with parents' groups are now a regular part of my agenda.

This September will see our 2 additional Learning Support Facilities that were created in Governor's Meadow and St. Anne's in 2019 fully populated.

Our SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) continue to have a full time role and are now able to dedicate their time on all SEN related issues. In addition there has been a great deal of training in special needs afforded to the staff including in such areas as autism and dyslexia.

School counsellors

The School Counselling Service was introduced in August 2019. I don't know how we'd managed without them. They deal with hundreds of cases, and they too were able to continue their work during lockdown through online platforms.

Some important initiatives have included the development of staff well-being. This had been Identified as an area of concern prior to COVID, and was of course exacerbated by pressures brought about by COVID. *After liaison with the Wellbeing team, a strategy for teachers was formulated to work in unison with the group's Frontline Resilience Management initiative. The strategy aimed to both support teachers' own mental well-being during COVID - very emotionally challenging times - and to also help teachers support children's emotional well-being.*



Development of TLC

Mr Speaker,

There is a growing number of children in our education system who have been impacted by trauma; children who have a high number of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences). Some of these children are in residential care, some still living at home and others spend time in and out of prison.

The school environment can be a challenging place for these children causing high levels of anxiety, frequent meltdowns, violent outbursts, depression or school avoidance.

Over the past few years we have had to find alternative provision for a number of our most vulnerable students for whom the school setting was not appropriate.

In September 2019 the old St Bernard's Nursery became available and it was renamed TLC (Teaching and Learning Centre with the acronym putting emphasis on nurture). In the past academic year the TLC has helped to fill the gap and provide a base and a life line for a number of our most vulnerable children. The flexibility outside the school setting has given these children a calmer, more flexible setting where they could access both academic and therapeutic activities.

Scholarships

Mr Speaker,

Scholarship Numbers in the 2020/2021 Academic Year were

- 811 Mandatory Undergraduate Scholarships,
- 211 Postgraduate Scholarships
- 83 Discretionary Scholarships

We Currently have 1105 students in Higher Education, something to make the community proud.

Mr Speaker, we will this year continue to provide for all the mandatory scholarships, and it is likely that we will have more students in Higher Education than ever.



Teaching and Learning with Digital Technologies

Mr Speaker

All our upper and lower primary schools have now embarked on our digital teaching and learning initiative. The roll out to secondary schools began prior to the disruption caused by COVID with some teachers receiving their initial training and subsequent professional development. We are targeting the coming academic year to complete the rollout. To date we have rolled out over 2000 devices in support of this initiative.

Curriculum

The KS4 curriculum in our secondary schools is now fully equitable with respect to the range of subjects that pupils can choose at the end of Year 9. The September 2021 Year 10 Cohort will be the first one ever in Gibraltar to benefit from this equalisation. This is so, so overdue, and I am very pleased that all our young people will now have equal opportunities at this stage.

We now have a hair and beauty Level 2 course at both secondary schools and the follow-up hairdressing course at the Gibraltar College which launched in September 2020.

Plans are advanced to introduce a vocational BTEC in Music Performance in association with GAMPA.

Both secondary schools have made great strides in offering a Digital Technology course at KS4 and will now launch GCSE Computer Science as from September 2021. This builds on the revamp of the IT curriculum at KS3 to deliver a greater emphasis on computational thinking skills and coding.

Our teaching and learning initiative has a huge focus on developing digital skills in young learners and some of the learning that is being demonstrated by our young learners is breath-taking.

Other developments in this area will be announced soon.



PGCE

The Department of Education worked in close collaboration with the University of Gibraltar to develop a bespoke Post Graduate Certificate in Education, aligned to the teaching standards in the UK. This exciting new programme has now seen two cohorts of students mentored and supported by the excellent practitioners in our schools.

Education.gov.gi

The Department of Education launched education.gov.gi in the midst of the pandemic as a way of providing stakeholders with information. This platform quickly developed as services were digitised and improved upon. To date the Enrolment processes into our schools and Scholarship processes and subsequent contract issuing have been fully digitised. The website also includes information on accessing the Educational Psychologists and other support mechanisms offered by the Department of Education. Over time we will see the rollout of other support mechanisms for students and parents appearing on the platform.

Working with NASUWT

Mr Speaker

The challenging period that was the review of Teachers' pay was successfully resolved in 2019. More recently, most of the posts that had been acted for a number of years, some pending a TLR review, have been discussed and agreed with the Union and advertised for interview. This will ensure that subjects and pastoral care are managed by teachers on a long term basis' which will result in much needed continuity for our schools and much needed consistency for pupils.

This year we have engaged with NASUWT with the aim of developing and completing a Zero Tolerance Policy for any aggressive, violent or anti-social behaviour in our schools, and we are a footstep away from completing an Acting Policy and a CPD Policy.

We discuss matters on an almost weekly basis, and the Social Partnership Forum has reconvened.



Other initiatives in Education have included:

- *A review of attendance policy and protocols via a working party to address attendance issues.*
- *Setting up/engagement with Inter agency working party re truancy and attendance. (RGP, CA & Education).*
- *Continued collaboration with schools and other agencies to address increased numbers of safeguarding issues.*
- *Review and up-dating of Safeguarding Policy & Guidance for Schools.*
- *Continued roll out of safeguarding training - 300+ members of education staff trained in previous 2 years. (Training carried out by members of CPC sub committee with education staff)*

Mr Speaker

There is so much I could say about the work at Education. We have been through a tough year and a half, and I cannot express enough gratitude to the professionals who have done so much. I thank them for that and for the way that they welcome me into their schools – I am pleased to say that I have been able to visit every single one of them this last term.

Mr Speaker,

I would like to pay tribute to a number of officers who have recently retired. To Derek Alman, who led my new school projects, after a long career in the civil service, and to six head teachers who have retired over the last two years – Rosanna Hitchcock from St Paul's, Gizelle Montegriffo from St Josph's Lower Primary, Leon Abecasis from the Gibraltar College, Annabelle Felipes from St Martin's, Fiona Ferro from Governor's Meadow, and Michael Tavares from Bayside, after lifetimes teaching our children and young people. I also wish to thank the outgoing Director of Education Jackie Mason. I wish them all a long and happy retirement.

And I look forward to taking on more and more challenges, and working with all in Education to continue to progress on things that have needed fixing for a long time, but more importantly to achieve new and better ways of helping our young people to be better than us.



UNIVERSITY OF GIBRALTAR

Mr Speaker, with regard to the University of Gibraltar, this, as honourable members know, is an autonomous educational institution established by the University of Gibraltar Act 2015, an achievement of my honourable friend Gilbert Licudi.

Since then, the University has continued to develop and grow as an institution, marking its fifth anniversary in September 2020, and I am pleased to be able to report on the following:

HMGOG Support

Tuition fee income has almost tripled in the past two years, increasing from £488,682 in 2019 (University year ended 31 July 2019) to an estimated £1,325,000 in 2021 (University year ending 31 July 2021), enabling the University to significantly progress towards self-sufficiency.

The proportion of income, excluding donations, provided by the HMGoG subvention has decreased from **86%** in 2017 (University year ended 31 July 2017) to an estimated **47%** in 2021.

This positive progress towards self-sufficiency is expected to continue, with the HMGoG's annual subvention being significantly reduced (by 1/6th) in this budget (to £1.25 million) and the University's continued efforts to increase its tuition fee income by providing an excellent product/service and use of targeted marketing.

Increased student numbers and programmes

- Students enrolled on core academic programmes (i.e. excluding students engaged on professional and short courses), have increased from **30** in 2018/19 to **134** in 2020/21.
- Since September 2019, new academic programmes have been launched *including the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), the BSc Adult Nursing, the MA in Leadership and Management, and the Masters of Business Administration (MBA). The new BSc Maritime Science will commence in September 2021.*
- The University welcomed over 200 students during its September 2020 enrolment week at the start of the 2020/21 academic year, *a significant increase once again on the previous year, reflecting the wider range of academic and professional programmes offered by the University as well as its attractiveness for those looking for UK-aligned standards and predominately face-to-face delivery.*



September 2020 also saw the University welcoming its largest number of international students since opening, from 10 countries as well as Gibraltar.

- The University was finally able to hold its first graduation ceremony in December 2020 and as such the University was one of very few Higher Education institutions anywhere able to celebrate a physical graduation ceremony. *The ceremony was split into three sections with physical or online participation from the Chief Minister, the University Chancellor Sir Lindsay Hoyle, Beacon Professors, and others as 21 graduate students were rewarded for their hard work and dedication. The ceremony was livestreamed internationally.*
- The University has recently established a Centre of Excellence in Responsible Gaming (CERG), led by its Chair Dr. Zolt Demtrovics, and its International Scientific Advisory Board.
- *In May 2020 the University launched an online, Gibraltar specific, Introduction to Responsible Gaming course, aimed primarily at those working within different sectors of gaming or gaming-related operations.*
- The University's Gibraltar Maritime Academy commenced operations just the week before last. *The Academy will support students undertaking the University BSc Maritime Science degree with cadetships as well as offering Maritime technical skills training to local public sector employees as well as the Maritime industry internationally. The University of Gibraltar is the first and only university in Europe, outside of the UK, to have obtained standalone direct approval from the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) to run the entire Maritime Science programme including all examinations.*

Impact of COVID-19

- Management of the Covid-19 pandemic required the entire University team to act quickly and decisively, with a smooth transition to staff and faculty working from home and the delivery of education online.
- The University laboratory, even though it caused significant disruption to PhD and Marine Science students, was made exclusively available as a Covid-19 screening laboratory, using equipment supplied by the GHA and by the University. The lab continues to provide this vital function to date.
- The nursing Simulation Suite was made available to GHA's ophthalmic clinic to allow it to temporarily relocate from St Bernard's Hospital.
- The University's ICT Director was seconded temporarily to GHA.



- University nursing students played a major role in administering the Covid-19 vaccine as part of their first-year placement.

International Recognition

The University, and its officials and academics continue to be involved in international initiatives and to host international events, thus contributing to the high profile and good name of Gibraltar in academic and specialist circles abroad.

LEGISLATION

Mr Speaker

I now turn to my legislative agenda for the coming year. While many of my projects are sadly delayed, I do however have a wide legislative programme that I plan to introduce.

Among the Bills that I intend to bring to this House are Bills for:

A fully revised and updated Education Act

A revised Entertainment and a Cultural Act

An Act to set up the Gibraltar National Park

An Environmental Governance Act

A revised Garrison Library Act

A number of Acts which subdivide and modernise the archaic and voluminous Public Health Act

And there is another important piece of legislation which we are about to publish.

Mr Speaker

This is an exciting initiative that Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has signalled in the past, but about which it has not up to now made any official announcement. I am, therefore, very pleased to be making a statement of this new potential industry for the first time in this House. It is important to explain that I am making this announcement in my capacity as the Minister for Public Health.



Mr Speaker, the new potential market to which I refer is medicinal cannabis. I am pleased to report that the draft of a Bill for an Act to make provision for the regulation of the production, import, export, marketing and supply of cannabis for medicinal purposes and for connected purposes is now ready.

The House will be interested to learn that the Government is supporting the efforts of the private sector to establish the appropriate legal and regulatory architecture in order to create a robustly regulated medicinal cannabis industry. This regime will be fully compliant with the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, as amended. Subject to final discussions with Her Majesty's Government in the UK, we very much expect to be in a position to publish the Command Paper soonest and certainly during the course of this year.

At this juncture, we foresee a number of potential outcomes including:

1. regulatory alignment with the United Kingdom Medicines and Health Care Products ('MHRA') in respect of certification of local licences;
2. engagement with HMG departments and agencies in respect of UN Single Convention reporting and related matters;
3. exploring product demand that may exist in the United Kingdom that Gibraltar's new economic sector may be well placed to supply; and
4. synergies arising in respect of research and the development of the sector more broadly.

Mr Speaker, we have spared no effort to ensure that the proposed new industry is regulated fully in accordance with Gibraltar's international obligations under the UN Single Convention. It will be the strictest policy of HMGoG that only the most reputable businesses will be able to be licensed under the draft Medicinal Cannabis Bill. Such businesses must conduct their operations fully in accordance with the proposed new statutory licensing regime.

Finally, Mr Speaker, in respect of this subject, it is important to note that we are of the view that this new, potential industry, comprehensively regulated to the highest standards, could well create an innovative and thriving sector of Gibraltar's economy. It could lead to new quality



employment and export opportunities to different jurisdictions. It is predicted that medicinal cannabis as a business globally will continue to expand for the foreseeable future. It is vital that we remain open to such new opportunities to maintain our economic growth. This has underpinned our firm commitment to private industry by establishing the relevant statutory and regulatory legal framework.

I trust that all Honourable Members will agree with us that we should seize the potentially positive economic prospects that a robustly regulated medicinal cannabis industry can deliver.

THANKS

Mr Speaker, as ever, I wish to express my thanks to my personal staff and of course to my Heads of Departments and CEOs, Liesl Mesilio, Seamus Byrne, acting Director of Education Keri Scott and Chris Segovia, Chief Environmental Health Officer, at all hours and every day, and to all their staff, for their constant support. To all the staff in those Agencies and contractors that work to them. To NASUWT, UNITE and GGCA for their constructive work. To all the NGOs, associations, schools and academies, environmental, cultural, educational – who are so committed to what they believe in, often working as volunteers, for being committed, honest and reasonable in pursuing their aims.

To sponsors, and to the Trusts and Foundations that support our work, support more appreciated now than ever. To all those many citizens appointed to voluntary boards, working groups, and committees for which I am responsible. And to those in other Departments with whom I have regular contact, such as the staff at No 6 and at the Gibraltar Law Offices, Gibraltar House in London and Brussels, and Land Property Services, for always being there when I need them. To you, Mr Speaker and your staff, and to the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister, always a source of advice, support and encouragement. And to all of my Cabinet colleagues for their own work and support over these two difficult years.

And finally, I would like to thank His Excellency the Governor, Sir David Steel, for the genuine and non-political interest that he shows in the work of the different parts of my Ministry.

And in doing all of this, I too commend the Bill to the House.