



PRESS RELEASE

No: 544/2026

Date: 09 July 2026

BUDGET SPEECH 2026 - The Hon Professor John Cortes MBE

BUDGET SPEECH 2026

The Hon Professor John Cortes MBE

Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability & Climate Change, Heritage, Transport & Technical Services and developing relations with the Kingdom of Morocco.

Note: Sections in red italics provide additional information but were not read out in Parliament

PREAMBLE

It is indeed for me a rare opportunity Madam Speaker, to deliver my contribution to this debate after the Hon Mr Bossino, and I welcome it, at the same time that I wish his wonderful mother a very happy birthday.

Indeed, yesterday as I was listening to the Leader of the Opposition I was preparing some words in response, but the temptation of dedicating more time to Mr Bossino was simply too much.

One theme was common to both though, but in particular to Mr Bossino, and that is the clear indication that the GSD has absolutely no idea of what it is to govern. Essentially, Madam Speaker, they don't have a clue.

They say things as if it was all so easy, clearly showing a total lack of understanding of the complexity of government, of the need to be nimble and responsive, of being able to adjust direction while always having your destination in mind, particularly when the adjustment will lead to a better outcome. As with the College Madam Speaker, where the new site is a much better one than the original. It takes the confidence of a responsible Government to respond to changing situations and not be bogged down in a mire of intransigence.

It is truly frightening that they tout themselves as a possible government, when the speeches we have heard from that side so far can only be described as fantasy.

The GSLP that they describe does not exist, it is a figment of their biased imagination, perhaps fuelled by a few disaffected individuals with a sense of entitlement that hasn't been satisfied precisely because we do things well. They are fabricating a reality that simply does not exist.



Madam Speaker, Mr Bossino's reference to our manifesto is brazen, coming from a party whose past leader called manifestos wish lists and who have published embarrassing pamphlets as apologies for manifestos.

It is déjà vu, Madam Speaker, certainly for someone who fought (and won) the 2011 election, to hear Mr Bossino saying, falsely, about us the same things we said, truthfully, about them. To use my second-favourite Spanish word, Madam Speaker, *inverosimil*.

My favourite Spanish word is *perspicacia*, but that certainly does not apply to him!

The Gibraltar electorate will see through it, Madam Speaker, of that I am certain.

What is even more unbelievable is the audacity to criticise our school programme!

St Martin's most certainly was fit for purpose at the time it was designed. More fit for purpose than the old school, remember that one? The one that their newly appointed life member the Hon Danny Feetham said they would not replace? Remember that?

Madam Speaker, Mr Bossino questioned the value of St Mary's School, probably the best one we've built. Would the GSD not have built it? He questioned the £20 million investment in St Joseph's schools – would he stop that project if he was in office? Would the GSD still have Bayside at the old, tired, site, still single gender? Or Governor's Meadow and Bishop Fitzgerald in 1960s prefabs where you couldn't hang up a picture on the wall because if you drilled you'd release asbestos. Seriously?

It's classic double think. They complain if we haven't done something and when we've done something they complain that we've done it ! Not surprising, as the GSD's world would be as dystopian as Orwell's.

That is the GSD that is wanting to be our Government? Que horror Dios Mio! Es que no tienen ni idea.

It's classic double-think. They complain if we haven't done something and when we do, they complain that we've done it. Not surprising, as the GSD's world would be as dystopian as George Orwell's.

Mr Bossino goes on and on about the Upper Rock, clearly jealous of what we are achieving, and seems not to respect the important principle of commercial confidentiality, not something I am sure that the businesses that he wants to woo as he criticises my colleague the Hon Minister Gemma Arias Vasquez, would like to hear.

And then he ends with his alleged messages of hope.

He criticises what he calls a concrete jungle, even though we have more trees and green areas than we ever have before, and he wants to be the champion of supply teachers, many of whom have qualified in the University WE created, through the PGCE courses WE set up on the scholarships WE provide, and who have more opportunities than ever as we have increased the complement of teachers by over 200, with more opportunities coming soon, as we will see later. We value our supply teachers, and we will NOT allow them to be used in this way. We will certainly not let them down.

Madam Speaker, Mr Bossino really enjoys having a go at me, but he has nothing, nothing at all to offer. And that's fine. He can criticise me all that he likes because, to paraphrase Denis Healey when he referred to Geoffrey Howe, "Being criticised by Damon Bossino is like being savaged by a dead sheep".



Madam Speaker, in now turning to my *prepared* speech, I refer to another quote, this time from George W Bush, who once said, "*It's clearly a budget - it's got a lot of numbers in it*".

It clearly has, but this one's also got a lot of *words* in it, and, given the breadth of my responsibilities, my speech, I'm afraid will have a lot of words in it too.

Madam Speaker, running through the speech today will be the theme of how our community has evolved – changed for the better over the past 15 years, which was central to the Chief Minister's address yesterday, and how this process will continue with the GSLP/Liberals.

For as we look to the future, we know that we are entering a new era for Gibraltar. An era in which we will see new and better ways of living.

A successful Gibraltar is a Gibraltar that evolves, evolving into a new status within the wider region, as the frontier fence becomes, simply, a border, and possibilities widen.

Evolution, by definition, always leads to better, because those who do not adapt and embrace the change, are doomed to extinction.

I must repeat my thanks and admiration of the work of the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister, and their teams. Ten years of tireless and relentless negotiations with just one goal in mind, that of safeguarding our community.

I have no doubt Madam Speaker, that they have led us to the best outcome for Gibraltar. This Government has kept us safe from *several* existential threats and has safeguarded our community for generations to come.

Regardless of political affiliations Madam Speaker, I know that any historian who in the future reviews the situation objectively will quickly see the immense value of what has been achieved.

Those of us who are old enough to remember the closed frontier can naturally understand the uncertainty and fear that may exist as we move to a way of living with a border but without a fence, but we will as always retain our identity as a people. The frontier does not define us as a people, any more than our valuable fluency in the Spanish language does.

We are the only ones who can and will define ourselves as a community and a people.

Madam Speaker, under the continued leadership of a GSLP/Liberal Government, the community at large can be sure that, to quote the familiar adage, "British we are and British we stay".

Madam Speaker, we govern with one overriding purpose, to leave a lasting legacy for Gibraltar.

And I say this, proud of the legacy that already exists, as someone who has the privilege today of delivering his 15th consecutive budget speech in this Parliament; a speech which, Madam Speaker, I assure you will *not* be the penultimate one that I deliver from *this side* of the House.

INTRODUCTION

Madam Speaker, we have seen 15 years of transformational change in Gibraltar; the benchmark has been set, our record proven, and just as evolution is critical for continued survival, we too are evolving and renewing as a government, a government that is poised and ready to continue to deliver for our people, now more than ever, riding the new challenges like a wave of continuing positive change. And



despite recent developments on a global scale, we have the combination of new blood and generational experience necessary to keep us safe.

ENVIRONMENT

Madam Speaker, I will begin my review proper with Environment, given that it is the portfolio that I have held the longest.

In fact, in order to give myself some light relief during the serious matter of drafting the speech, I asked Chat GPT, who was the longest-serving environment Minister in the world, and this is what the AI tool had to say:

"While there is no official Guinness World Record or UN-maintained ranking for this, John Cortes is a strong candidate for the world's longest-serving current environment minister. His longevity is unusual because most environment ministers change every few years, even in stable governments."

I have every intention of extending this record even further!

Madam Speaker, As our climate changes, our resolve to protect our Environment must not.

And as we move into the new relationship with the EU, the Department has worked tirelessly on a massive task, to review and set up systems which will ensure we comply with EU legislation. While we have always maintained that we would keep dynamic alignment on environmental standards, this was a voluntary position of the Government and there is no denying that the Environment will be better protected under more focused legislative alignment with the EU.

Thankfully Madam Speaker, we were already in a good position as a result of our work in particular on our much acclaimed 25 Year Environment Plan and our Climate Change Strategy.

The 25 Year Plan was published at the end of 2025. Based on the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals and built around 6 key themes, the Plan aligns strategically with the EU-UK Agreement as it sets out to ensure that Gibraltar's environmental commitments mirror, or improve on those of the EU. *The Department is now working on the monitoring and reporting mechanism for the Plan to ensure progress is tracked.*

EU-UK Agreement

Much of my team's work this year has indeed been devoted to the Agreement and to what it means for the stewardship of our environment. Working closely with colleagues in the Gibraltar Law Offices, and with private drafting counsel, we have already published over 10 new pieces of legislation, with more than the same number again due to be published imminently. Gibraltar will now stand fully aligned with the EU on environmental matters, and we will ensure that we deliver on these manifold commitments.

The Treaty brings with it environmental obligations to both sides, and we will be vigilant to ensure that everyone in the region, on both sides of the border, complies. We look forward to working together towards a better environment for all the species that inhabit the whole of our region.



Eastside and other developments

Madam Speaker, I want to record the work the Department of Environment and Climate Change undertakes in monitoring and controlling construction across Gibraltar. The Eastside reclamation project receives daily visits from the team, as well as being continuously monitored with direct camera links to ensure that mitigation measures and construction management plans are observed.

Madam Speaker, this monitoring includes the issuing of strict instructions, which are complied with, to halt works when environmental or weather conditions so require. I am very clear that my responsibility to the environment transcends any other.

Otherwise, Madam Speaker, as American writer Kurt Vonnegut wrote, “We’ll go down in history as the first society that wouldn’t save itself because it wasn’t cost-effective”.

This project must proceed quickly and will bring long-term environmental benefits as well as finally removing that unsightly rubble mountain, and my team will ensure that any potential negative impact during the process is neutralised.

Other major projects – Europa Walks, and the developments around the Bayside area among them – receive regular intervention from our technical section, ensuring that planning conditions are met at the proper stage: *conditions such as governing groundwater abstraction, the protection or replanting of trees, and the installation of swift and bat boxes.*

Renewables

In order to increase the contribution of renewable energy, Madam Speaker, following a competitive process, we only last week signed an MoU for a substantial solar installation and we will this week publish a further call for expressions of interest to expand the solar power network.

The Government wants the benefits of clean energy transition to be shared across our whole community, not only those with the means and the roof space to install their own solar panels. We will bring forward an enabling framework for renewable energy communities, so that residents and small businesses can share in the energy generated on the buildings around them. We will establish the law that defines these communities, and bring forward pilot schemes on suitable buildings. In doing so, Gibraltar will give effect to the standards set out in the Renewable Energy Regulations, keeping our environmental commitments and putting clean, locally-owned energy within reach of those who might otherwise be left behind.

Waste and Wastewater management

The new waste management contract has resulted in an increase in the amount of paper/cardboard and plastics sorted and sent for recycling. The application for the expanded sorting facility will soon be considered by the DPC with the energy from waste element of the plant to be submitted once the technical details have been considered.

We will also be trialling changes to organic waste collection, introducing a specific restaurant-collection service in order to maximise the quantity and quality of the organic matter collected.



Madam Speaker, in relation to the Waste Water (Sewage) Treatment Plant, this has now obtained Outline Planning Permission. A full planning application is expected by the end of August with the project expected to break ground by September.

In addition to the progress on the Plant, there is an ongoing major project to lay new sewage mains in phases: a huge investment in Gibraltar's sewer infrastructure. This clearly indicates Government's commitment to renovating the sewage system to cope with growth and ensuring that wastewater is dealt with in an environmentally sound manner.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The Environmental Agency (EA) and its team of dedicated staff continues to deliver across their full breath of responsibilities.

Further details to those I deliver here will be provided in the published version of the speech.

In 2025, they responded to 1848 public complaints. Their commitment to service extends beyond regular working hours where the EA's after-hours service responded to 308 urgent callouts in 2024 and has already undertaken 122 callouts this year.

Abatement notices and prosecutions

As was the case in the previous year, most of the complaints received were in relation to nuisances, food safety, pest infestations and housing conditions.

In 2025, the EA issued 55 abatement notices. As of May 2026, 20 abatement notices have already been served, a number expected to increase as current investigations progress.

As a result of their work and perseverance Madam Speaker, there have been successful prosecutions, resulting in meaningful penalties.

For example:

In 2025:

2 x £270 fines for non-payment of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for dog related offences

11 x £250 fines for non-payment of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for dog related offences

£2000 fine for emissions of dark smoke from a vessel

£275 fine for non-payment of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for a dog related offence

2 x £500 fines for non-payment of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for dog related offences



£300 fine for non-payment of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for a dog related offence

£6000 fine for various food hygiene offences

In 2026 so far:

£3500 fine for various food hygiene offences

2 x £250 fines for non-payment of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for dog related offences

6 x £300 fines for non-payment of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for dog related offences

2 x £350 fines for non-payment of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for dog related offences

£600 fine for non-payment of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for a dog related offence

Food Hygiene and Safety

The Agency is working in close consultation with the Government Law Offices to review and modernise the Food Hygiene Regulations, including efforts to finalise legislation relating to food allergens, a critical step toward strengthening consumer rights and improving food labelling standards in Gibraltar.

This will include our version of the UK's Benedict's law, which will overhaul school allergy training, following the untimely death of Benedict Blythe after an accidental exposure to an allergen in school in the UK in 2021.

Ship Sanitation

Ship sanitation inspections continue with 262 ship sanitation inspections in 2025 and 96 ship sanitations have been conducted to date in 2026.

Air Quality

Gibraltar's air quality and emissions inventory programmes continue to provide real-time public access to pollutant data online.

The 2024 results, the latest to have been fully validated, show that Gibraltar complied with all major pollutant limit values. This would have been unimaginable when we came into Government when the GSD had had to obtain air quality derogations and even then didn't comply with EU standards.

All pollutants including the most dangerous, PM₁₀, and PM_{2.5}, as well as sulphur dioxide, ozone, and carbon monoxide — remained within legal limits, with drops in the levels of particles reflecting the positive impact of cleaner electricity generation and reduced road-transport emissions in general.



Emissions from electricity generation have fallen by 37% since 2015, largely due to the transition from diesel to LNG. Road-transport emissions have decreased by 28% since 2015, dipping below post-COVID rebound levels. These long-term reductions demonstrate that Gibraltar's climate and air-quality policies are delivering measurable benefits, even as targeted action is now required to address a few remaining NO₂ hotspots.

The latest 2025 dataset, soon to be validated, indicates that pollutant levels remain compliant.

Gibraltar is also preparing to align with the revised European Air Quality Directive, which introduces more stringent limit values and new metrics. This alignment reflects Gibraltar's continuing ambition to meet higher environmental standards and strengthen public health protection.

AQ Mesh pods

Five operational AQ mesh pods continue deployed across Gibraltar, enabling mobile air quality monitoring near high-risk emission sources such as major roads, industry, and maritime activity. This flexible approach allows targeted investigations and improves our overall understanding of Gibraltar's air quality.

- One pod at North Mole Road is tracking the influence of maritime emissions.
- The pod temporarily relocated from Governor's Lane to Secretary's Lane during refurbishment works has now returned to its original location.
- Additional pods at Devil's Tower Road, Rosia Road Clocktower, and Europort Road provide wider spatial coverage and valuable intercomparison data to support quality assurance.

All pod measurements are published online with hourly updates and downloadable historical data, ensuring transparency and enabling residents, researchers, and policymakers to access real-time environmental information.

Pest Control

Madam Speaker,

The dedicated pest control team investigates complaints and implements modern treatment methods using the latest, approved pesticides and integrated pest management techniques to reduce pest populations.

Mosquito control has become an increasingly important part of the Agency's work due to the growing regional presence of mosquito-borne diseases in southern Spain. Close links are maintained with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) mosquito team.

This collaboration helps assess Gibraltar's potential exposure to West Nile Virus, dengue fever and chikungunya and ensures our surveillance remains aligned with international best practice.

Locally, both the Culex mosquito and the Asian Tiger Mosquito (Aedes albopictus) are present. While the risk of mosquito-borne disease transmission in Gibraltar remains low, the Environmental Agency continues to take precautionary action.



Officers are now preparing to launch a targeted campaign to dose storm drains with Bti, a biological larvicide used to control mosquito larvae before they emerge as adults. This work will be carried out across known breeding hotspots during the warmer months.

Last year, the Environmental Agency and Public Health Gibraltar issued the “Fight the Bite” campaign, reminding residents of practical steps to reduce mosquito breeding and protect themselves from bites including removing standing water, using repellents, installing screens, and taking extra precautions when visiting wetlands and marshes in the neighbouring regions where mosquito activity is higher.

The Environmental Agency will continue to strengthen its surveillance, treatment and public-education efforts to ensure Gibraltar remains well-protected against emerging vector-borne risks.

Brexit preparedness and Treaty implementation

Madam Speaker,

The Agency has been working closely with HM Customs and other competent authorities to ensure that Gibraltar is fully prepared for the challenges that Treaty transition brings.

To address any challenges, the Environmental Agency is preparing a suite of enhanced operational measures, including:

- *Targeted checks at delivery points*
- *Increased warehouse inspections*
- *Rapid response to intelligence*
- *Strengthened monitoring for food fraud, cold-chain failures and non-compliant goods*

In parallel with operational planning, the Agency has also been involved in the legislative review and gap-analysis work required under the Agreement. They have been working with the Government Law Offices to ensure that Gibraltar’s regulatory system remains robust and fully aligned with the obligations and opportunities created by the Treaty.

Major Projects

Madam Speaker,

The Agency is also engaged in the permitting processes for Gibraltar’s new Wastewater Treatment Plant and Waste Management Facility, probably the most significant environmental infrastructure projects undertaken in Gibraltar in a generation. *This regulatory oversight is essential to ensure that both projects meet stringent environmental requirements, incorporate best-practice design and remain fully aligned with EU and UK standards.*

Once operational, these facilities will significantly strengthen Gibraltar’s capacity to manage waste, increase our self-sufficiency and help ensure that Gibraltar continues to meet its environmental responsibilities for decades to come.

Water Quality

Bathing Water:



This year Madam Speaker, Western Beach has been officially classified as 'Excellent' in the latest bathing water quality assessment. This is the first time Western Beach has achieved the highest possible rating under the Bathing Water Directive. All other Gibraltar beaches continue to maintain 'Excellent status', reflecting consistently high water quality.

All of our bathing waters are sampled regularly by the Environmental Agency throughout the year with increased sampling during the bathing season which goes beyond EU requirements.

Public Pools and Hydrotherapy Facilities:

Along with its statutory bathing water duties, the EA operates a routine sampling programme for public swimming pools, ensuring that recreational water remains safe and compliant with microbiological and chemical standards.

This programme includes the St Martin's Hydrotherapy Pool, where the regular water-quality testing and oversight are carried out to support the therapeutic work delivered. Hydrotherapy sessions have expanded significantly and ongoing monitoring ensures that the pool remains safe, well-maintained and fully compliant with health protection requirements as usage increases.

Potable Water:

In addition to its monthly sampling throughout the distribution network, the Environmental Agency is actively supporting the Government's work to update Gibraltar's potable water legislation to align it with the latest EU Drinking Water Directive. This modernisation will strengthen consumer protection, enhance monitoring requirements and ensure Gibraltar remains aligned with the highest international standards for drinking water safety.

The Agency continues to strengthen its expertise and network by participating in key international forums, including:

- Last October, the Environmental Agency proudly hosted The UK and Republic of Ireland Drinking Water Inspectorate Meeting in Gibraltar for the first time in over 10 years.
- They have worked to maintain Gibraltar's membership of the European Network of Drinking Water Regulators despite Gibraltar's exit from the EU and will be bidding to host the annual ENDWARE conference in Gibraltar.
- In April, Environmental Agency representatives maintained their presence in these forums by attending the UK and Republic of Ireland Drinking Water Inspectorate Meeting held in Edinburgh at the invitation of the Scottish Government.

The Environmental Agency works hard to represent Gibraltar's unique context amongst British and European counterparts.

Control of Major Accidents and Hazards (COMAH)

The EA continues to act as Gibraltar's Competent Authority for the Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH). Over the past year, the Agency maintained the annual inspection cycle of the LNG Terminal.



It also undertook a Lower Tier COMAH inspection at the GibOil Tank Farm, marking an important expansion of regulatory oversight across major-hazard establishments.

In partnership with the Office of Civil Contingencies, the EA is preparing for the triennial Live Exercise of the LNG Terminal which is planned to take place in October.

This exercise will test operational, tactical and strategic command arrangements which is designed to strengthen Gibraltar's preparedness for a major-hazard incident.

EA has additionally been formally consulted on a potential third COMAH establishment currently under consideration. Early engagement ensures that COMAH safety, land-use planning and emergency-response requirements are integrated from the outset, reinforcing Gibraltar's long-term resilience in major-hazard regulation.

Dog Fouling and Licensing

Officers are increasing patrols and enforcement against owners who fail to register or license their pets, or who allow fouling in public spaces.

In 2025, 349 DNA samples were taken, resulting in 77 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs). So far in 2026, 140 samples have led to 37 FPNs.

In 2025, 28 FPNs were issued for unlicensed or unregistered dogs and 3 FPNs have been issued so far in 2026.

In 2025, 17 successful prosecutions were brought against individuals who failed to pay their FPNs for fouling & licensing/registration. So far this year the Environmental Agency has successfully prosecuted 11 individuals.

These actions ensure accountability and strengthen the effectiveness of the overall campaign.

I want to thank the Environmental Agency for their highly technical and often unseen work across all areas.

REPPIR

Madam Speaker, last October, Gibraltar successfully completed Exercise Rocky Pigeon, the triennial multi-agency test of our radiation emergency plans. The exercise rigorously assessed every level of the response. Independent observers noted the professionalism of all teams involved, the coordination between operational and command structures and the overall robustness of Gibraltar's emergency arrangements. The Ministry of Defence's Nuclear Regulator has since confirmed Gibraltar's continued authorisation as an Operational Berth for nuclear-powered vessels.

Work now continues across Government to embed the lessons learned and further enhance public-facing preparedness. The Office of Civil Contingencies is leading the development of a new public preparedness website, modelled on the UK's "Prepare" campaign, to ensure that clear, accessible information is available to the public. The Environmental Agency, for its part, continues to review, amend and maintain the Off-Site Radiation Emergency Plan, ensuring that it remains current and operationally tested.



Although the likelihood of a radiation incident in Gibraltar remains extremely low, we do not take our preparedness for granted. The work undertaken this year demonstrates once again Gibraltar's commitment, and success in maintaining the highest standards of safety, coordination and resilience.

Beaches

Gibraltar's beach operation is a year-round endeavour. For the team, work continues throughout the entire year, with planning for one season beginning almost immediately after the previous one ends. In essence works commence with the "Winterisation" process, clearing and securing the beaches and bathing pavilions, vacating and removing temporary structures and posts, emptying pools and protecting infrastructure against the winter months ahead.

Madam Speaker,

The inclement weather this year, with its torrential rains and storms, created additional challenges to the team that prepares our beaches. Despite this, as I committed to last year, we brought forward the start of the Official Bathing Season to the 23rd May, extending the beach service to the community.

Works at Beaches

As is the case every season, remedial works were required at all our beaches.

Works carried out include the rendering and painting of flooring, walls, seating areas, stairs and public accesses, replacement of toilet furniture, repairing fixtures and retiling wherever necessary as well as repairs and/or replacements of beach facility doors, railings and balustrades, and most importantly disability equipment.

These works are extremely time sensitive, with a limited window of operation; the start of which is determined by the end of the late spring stormy season. Despite the new challenges, the Bathing Season is currently well underway.

A detailed list of the works done on the beaches this year will be provided in the Annex to the published version of this speech.

I would like to add at this point, that the Government will be carrying out a complete 'new look' overhaul of Little Bay ahead of next year's bathing season, and financial provision for this is being requested in this Bill.

Cemeteries

Madam speaker, the team at the North Front Cemetery continues to work hard on daily management and beautification.

A total of 292 interments have been performed since last year's budget speech. 59 of these were ashes interred either in Columbaria or vaults.



The team has also performed more than a dozen clearing of vaults and various transfers of remains at the request of families.

We have had great success in working with colleagues at the Ministry for Equality and now use the assistance of the Offenders Community Hours Scheme in maintenance works.

Further organisational improvements at the cemetery are planned.

Green areas

Madam Speaker,

American philosopher and naturalist Aldo Leopold wrote, "One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on nature is quite invisible to laymen."

And yes, the wounds hurt, Madam Speaker, which is why, as always, I remain committed to helping to heal them, including by planting more trees, creating greener public spaces and improving Gibraltar's environment for everyone.

The Lebanese-American poet Kalil Gibran wrote, "Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky", and so, despite the limited space available, we continue to identify opportunities wherever possible to increase Gibraltar's tree cover and replace trees that have died.

During the first five months of 2026, a total of 32 trees were planted across Gibraltar. *These were planted at Wellington Front, The Convent, North Front Cemetery, Trafalgar Cemetery and the Upper Rock. A variety of species were carefully selected to enhance both Gibraltar's urban landscape and biodiversity.* North Front Cemetery saw the largest number of new trees, 18.

During the year, a number of trees had to be removed due to severe storm damage. We however always ensure that every tree removed is replaced. *In fact, 26 approvals issued during the year included conditions requiring replacement planting, either with the same species, a more suitable alternative or as part of an agreed landscaping scheme.* This ensures that Gibraltar's urban forest continues to grow and improve.

We have also invested in improving the appearance of our streets and public spaces. No one can have failed to notice, and indeed to welcome, the decorative flower carts and troughs that have been placed and renewed along Main Street and elsewhere adding colour and character to Gibraltar's busiest pedestrian areas.

These projects are making a significant difference to the look and feel of our public spaces. They create a more welcoming environment for residents and visitors while bringing colour and life to some of Gibraltar's busiest locations. The displays are extremely popular, and we have been able to prove that they can last, being well maintained.

They are serving as an inspiration to others, and so we are planning new initiatives, working with the private sector and with the Horticultural Society, that will see and encourage more planting and the greening of urban areas. Soon we will have new leafy nooks appearing in different parts of Gibraltar.



Increasing vegetation not only improves the appearance of Gibraltar but also helps improve air quality, absorbs carbon dioxide, provides shade during the warmer months and creates valuable habitats for wildlife.

Botanic Gardens

Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens continue maintaining and beautifying the grounds and expanding their work in education, and researching the ecology and conservation of plants and animals, including Gibraltar's endemic plants, and ensuring that the Gibraltar Campion avoids extinction.

They are currently carrying out a thorough survey and assessment of all of our wild plants, as part of their important, wider advisory role to the Department of the Environment in ecology and landscaping.

The grounds staff work hard throughout the year and their efforts are obvious because the gardens are more beautiful year on year.

I've highlighted before that they coordinate a large group of volunteers who help to maintain the grounds. We should all be very grateful that there are people willing to dedicate their free time to keep one of Gibraltar's jewels looking better than ever.

Commonwealth & Campion Parks

The parks along Queensway have changed Gibraltar, and it is hard to understand now how it was that they attracted so much criticism from the benches opposite when announced and developed. It is no exaggeration to say that the parks have improved our quality of life. They are much needed and most popular green lungs in the urban environment, and important public leisure areas which provide valuable space for young and old and refuge for one's mental health.

Marine Protection and monitoring

Madam Speaker, Gibraltar's identity is inseparable from the sea that surrounds it, and the protection of our marine environment remains among our foremost responsibilities. British Gibraltar Territorial Waters are a living environment of real ecological value, which we are obliged – now more than ever – to manage to a high and demonstrable standard.

The Marine Strategy Regulations require us to assess the health of our waters against a comprehensive set of descriptors and to work towards Good Environmental Status across each. Madam Speaker, this is a substantial undertaking for a territory of our size, and the Department will be commissioning additional work on the monitoring programme on which sound marine policy must rest.

The Environmental Research and Protection Unit, which this Government created, is a clear example of our vision. The team works tirelessly, often behind the scenes, to protect our environment. They do incredible work on animal sightings, wildlife rescues and investigations.

NGOs

Madame Speaker, as a former NGO activist I will always pay tribute to the vital work done by our NGO's and to their passion in protecting our environment. I always will reassure them, and I do so



again, Madam Speaker, that despite my move away from this area 15 years ago, my own passion for the environment remains strong as ever.

The oldest of our environmental NGOs, the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS), this year celebrates its 50th Anniversary. I can well remember the early days back in the early 1970s, and how a group of young birdwatchers morphed into the internationally recognised organisation it is today. I wish them all a very happy and proud 50th anniversary, continuing their valuable work in research, advocacy and conservation.

The Environmental Safety Group continues to very actively and effectively pursue its environmental objectives, lobbying and advocacy.

They recently partnered with the Royal Commonwealth Society in their worldwide Plastic campaign during the World Baton Relay, carrying out a shoreline cleanup with the support of Bayside School, in addition to the annual Clean Up the World.

And yet another Anniversary is the Nautilus Project's 10th. This organisation's valuable work in the marine field is well known, and if I may highlight one project, it is seagrass re-introduction; but all the rest of their outstanding educational and research work must also be recognised and admired.

A great deal of work is going into the sea grass project, with a laboratory having been set up with 20 temperature-controlled tanks, showing survival and growth indicating positive signs of success. I am looking forward to seeing sea grass meadows once again in our waters.

Most recently the Gibraltar Horticultural Society has increased its activity in promoting green areas, such as the bus shelter initiative, as well taking an active part in encouraging all, especially the young to appreciate green spaces, often working with the new Whole Wild World charity.

Gibraltar National Park

Gibraltar Nature Reserve

Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Nature Reserve is one of the component limbs of the Gibraltar National Park. This year, one positive from all the rain, was the beautifully exuberant vegetation on the Upper Rock, and indeed throughout our natural areas.

The Moorish Castle, the Dungeons and the Discovery Trail are now very near successful completion and will be opening to the public soon, no doubt to the consternation of one member opposite. Subsequently, Madam Speaker, the Jungle Park and the Northern Defences are envisaged to be ready in early 2027.

The premises at the Moorish Castle are being extended to now include new site offices to accommodate the needs of Upper Rock staff and visitors.

Madam Speaker, heritage sites had been long neglected and revenue generated from the Nature Reserve was never properly reinvested into the sites themselves. We have taken a different approach. By increasing ticket prices for non-residents and introducing modern visitor management systems, revenue from the Nature Reserve has increased from around £3.7M in 2017/18 to over £16M in 2025/26. That revenue is now being reinvested directly into conservation, restoration, maintenance and improved visitor experiences.



Those who choose to criticise fail to see the value of this partnership, and probably will still not recognise it when they see all the new sites opened. 'Tis a shame.

But it is a successful *partnership*, not a privatisation, supervised always by our dedicated public servants, the Upper Rock officers and Upper Rock supervisors.

Together with the management teams based at Napier Battery and Tovey Cottage, they do incredible work in our natural and heritage areas.

Other areas of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve: Jews' Gate, Apes' Den, Devil's Gap and the lower section of Charles V Wall, O'Hara's Battery, and Tovey Cottage educational centre will be tackled next.

Among the further improvements coming to the Nature Reserve, the Butterfly Park at Lewis Battery, renovation of Princess Caroline's Battery, Princess Anne and Princess Amelia's batteries, and the restoration of Devil's Gap Battery are new projects that will form part of the next stage of improvements and development, which will see progress this year.

These new attractions will undoubtedly further provide tourist appeal and resident enjoyment to the Gibraltar Nature Reserve.

We continue, Madam Speaker, also to work very closely with Tour Operators to improve the Upper Rock experience. To this effect we have recently changed traffic arrangements, launched, in partnership with the GTA, the new electric shuttle bus service to the Upper Rock, providing accessible electric transport in response to the cable car closure. Since its start at the beginning of June, over 5000 passengers have used the shuttle.

Madam Speaker, this operation, which has been publicly welcome by the ESG, is setting the example for sustainable transport on the Upper Rock. It is a better and cleaner experience, and I will be encouraging Operators to follow suit in renewing their fleet of aging coaches.

Yellow-legged Gulls

Madam Speaker, back to the natural world.

Nesting Yellow-legged Gull numbers are the lowest since records began. The last census carried out this spring shows a steady decline since the early 2000s, with a total of 450 nests located in 2025 compared to 1,741 in 2002. The survey shows a 33% decrease compared to the last full survey in 2023, when 667 breeding pairs were recorded.

The likely causes of the decline include several main factors, such as the ongoing culling efforts and the disturbance and predation of eggs and young, the latter by both foxes and ravens.

Some areas have shown the almost total disappearance of nesting gulls, such as most of the Upper Rock and the East Side Sand Slopes.

Raptors

Madame Speaker,

The 2026 Nesting Bird of Prey Survey, led by the inimitable Vincent Robba recorded the following:

6 pairs of Peregrines raising 15 young;



9 pairs of Common Kestrels raising at least 26 young;

4 pairs of Little Owls;

likely nesting by eagle owls and tawny owls;

and a pair of ravens raising 3 young.

In addition, two Bonelli's eagles and two lesser kestrels were hatched in captivity and 22 birds were rehabilitated.

I thank the team for the tireless dedication.

Mr Bossino really enjoys having a go at me Madam Speaker. But that's fine. To paraphrase Denis Healey talking about Geoffrey Howe, "Being criticised by Damon Bossino is like being savaged by a dead sheep".

This reflects the healthy state of our natural environment.

Macaques

Madam Speaker, the macaque management team, led by the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic, continues to contribute to the wellbeing and preservation of our beloved macaques. Their work has ensured the population remains under control at approximately 200 individuals, and wandering into urban areas is at an all-time low. Urbanisation of monkeys is actively guarded against, with macaque management staff returning roaming monkeys to the Nature Reserve before they can settle.

The success of macaque management includes limiting births per pack while allowing for natural social interactions, and afternoon feeds which focus on re-establishing their foraging nature. Furthermore, as a direct result of improved enforcement of the ban on illegal feeding, there has been a marked reduction in macaque bite incidents this year, and further enforcement on site will soon be provided.

The Government will continue to invest in our macaques and safeguard their health, well-being and long-term future on our Rock, which as we all know is of legendary importance.

On research, the Department is working with the University of Gibraltar in a research project which is tracking the movement of individual macaques fitted with transmitters.

I am pleased to have authored the chapter on the Barbary macaque in the forthcoming Atlas of European Mammals, due out in a few months' time.

I can also announce now that next year's Calpe Conference will have several sessions dedicated to research into the Barbary macaque, in what will be a conference on the natural history of both shores of the Strait of Gibraltar.

Swifts

Madam Speaker, there was great acclaim some months ago (at least in some of my circles), when the Scottish Parliament introduced legislation to make it obligatory to provide swift nest sites in new buildings. I want to highlight that this is an area in which we are leading the world, with these provisions having become standard planning conditions decades ago, and we have been used as the



example in the growing campaign to make this law in the United Kingdom too. I have personally taken the opportunity of visits to Parliament to lobby in this regard, and will continue to do so, taking the campaign also to Brussels and the European Union, expecting the EU to do what they expect us to do, adopt the more positive environmental policies of the other partner.

Environment Ministers' Council

As DCM stated yesterday, I chair the Environment Ministers' Council of the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. In that capacity I have chaired two virtual meetings and have represented the OTs in a number of conferences and seminars.

I had the honour to write a Foreword to the UK Overseas Territories' Biodiversity strategy, launched in London last November and to give evidence in person to the UK Parliamentary Select Committee on Biodiversity in the Territories.

Legislation

Among the legislative instruments that we have seen this past year are improvements to the Animals Act, now including the five freedoms, defining the seriousness of pet theft, and introducing the concept of animal sentience.

The Keeping of Animals Act has also provided additional safeguards to the keeping of animals in captivity, and a Bill published just last week will give formal recognition to our National Species.

Wild Gibraltar

Madam Speaker, in 1785, Robert Burns wrote,

"I'm truly sorry man's dominion

Has broken Nature's social union."

He was so right even then, which is why it's vitally important that we spare no effort to protect and enhance our natural environment, which we are doing by protecting our natural areas, creating and rewilding new areas and by removing invasive species.

Madam Speaker, the richness of our natural environment, which is thriving under our protection, does not go unnoticed.

I am hugely proud to announce a partnership between the Government and Nigel Marven Productions to produce, for global distribution, a 50-minute documentary to be called *Wild Gibraltar*.

Nigel is a renowned presenter and director of prime wildlife documentaries, including the famous *Chased by Dinosaurs* and *Prehistoric Park* series and others such as *Wild Arabia* and *Wild Bangladesh*.

Wild Gibraltar will capture Gibraltar's wildlife on camera and promote us globally using the Nigel Marven brand, no doubt encouraging many nature lovers to visit us.

HERITAGE

Madam Speaker,



Heritage is not simply the conservation of old buildings or monuments. It is also about identity, memory, education, belonging and cultural continuity. It is about understanding who we are as a people, how we arrived here, and how we ensure that future generations continue to engage meaningfully with all of the different eras in Gibraltar's rich and layered history.

Heritage, Madam Speaker is also Utrecht, and Heritage will be the UK-EU Treaty.

Over the past year, the Ministry for Heritage has continued expanding its work in all these fields, *including conservation and restoration, but also in public engagement, education, digital heritage, interpretation, archaeological protection and international academic collaboration.*

One of the most significant achievements this year has been the continued development of Gibraltar's Historic Environment Record and wider digital heritage infrastructure.

The Ministry has continued expanding the public heritage website, which includes a growing and searchable body of information relating to listed buildings, sentry posts, memorials, interpretation panels, WWII defensive structures, street names, historic sites and more.

In parallel, work is progressing on the creation of Gibraltar's first publicly accessible Register of Heritage Buildings, a collaboration with the Gibraltar Heritage Trust. The register will include buildings, structures, gardens, and sites of historical, architectural and cultural interest, ensuring that planners, developers and the wider public have access to a clearer understanding of Gibraltar's historical environment.

Madam Speaker, this work is helping establish the foundations of a modern and accessible heritage management system for Gibraltar, integrating conservation, planning, research and public interpretation into a single evolving framework.

Another major achievement has been the completion of a substantial documentation initiative recording 85 World War II pillboxes, casemated positions and defensive structures. Work will now commence on restoration of those that need it.

These assets, many of which had never previously been systematically recorded or publicly interpreted, have now been surveyed, catalogued and organised into six geographical and operational defence sectors.

The project reflects Gibraltar's strategic importance during the Second World War and forms part of a broader effort to preserve and better understand its twentieth-century military landscape.

As we have seen, substantial progress has continued at the Moorish Castle Complex, including the restoration and interpretation of the Tower of Homage and Inner Keep and external cleaning of the Gatehouse.

As we know, extensive works have also continued within the Northern Defences, one of the most historically significant defensive systems in Gibraltar.

Conservation, interpretation and enhancement works have also progressed at the City Under Siege Exhibition, the WWII Tunnels and the final phase of restoration works to the Convent façade, as part of a wider programme of improvements to heritage infrastructure.



We are now embarking on new projects including the restoration of the Gun and Battery at O'Hara's, the Princess suite of batteries and the Great Siege tunnels to the highest of standards that we have already seen at World War II Tunnels.

We are also planning the restoration of the Medieval Round Tower at Line Wall, which is now formally listed, along with ongoing conservation works at sites such as St Andrew's Church, the Cathedral of St Mary the Crowned and the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity.

In addition, but relevant to Heritage is the work led by the Deputy Chief Minister, in the restoration of The Mount, the old Fortress Headquarters and Rosia Bay.

The Ministry has now completed and expanded a substantial programme of interpretation panels covering themes including Colonial Gibraltar, Castilian Gibraltar, Catalan Bay, Rosia Bay, Devil's Tower, North Front, the Royal Calpe Hunt, historical timelines and memorials to historical figures. These panels are transforming Gibraltar's urban environment into what has increasingly been described as an "open-air classroom", providing direct engagement with our history within the spaces where that history unfolded.

This forms part of a wider strategy aimed at embedding history and public education within Gibraltar's everyday spaces.

During the year, structured educational resources and history curricula were developed for Key Stages 1 and 2, including worksheets, lesson plans and learning materials.

The Ministry continues to work closely with schools to ensure that Gibraltar's history and identity remain accessible to younger generations. Plans are also progressing to develop illustrated and comic-style educational narratives designed to engage children and younger audiences with Gibraltar's past in new more accessible ways.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry's work in the field of intangible heritage and linguistic identity has also continued to expand.

Work to extend the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage to Gibraltar continues alongside wider work relating to the development of a future aimed at recognising and strengthening Gibraltar's unique linguistic and cultural identity.

This work has increasingly been complemented by international academic engagement and collaboration.

This year, the Ministry for Heritage was once again represented at the Gibraltar International Conference held at the University of Cádiz, which brought together academics, writers, linguists and researchers from universities across Europe to discuss Gibraltar's language, literature, identity and frontier spaces.

Particularly encouraging was the significant academic attention given to Gibraltarian literature and writers. It was extremely positive to see respected academics from universities across Europe analysing and discussing Gibraltarian literature in depth, demonstrating the growing international recognition of Gibraltar's literary contribution.

Gibraltar was also represented for the first time at the Congress of the European Federation of Fortified Sites, held in Diest, Belgium some weeks ago.



Madam Speaker, it is important that Gibraltar actively participates in these international discussions surrounding our history, identity and culture. Such engagement strengthens understanding of Gibraltar internationally whilst reinforcing our own cultural confidence.

The Ministry also continued collaborating with universities and institutions through conferences such as "Along the Frontiers" at the University of Cádiz and previous Gibraltar International Conferences held in Spain.

The Ministry and the Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council (HAAC) continue working closely with Town Planning on the revision of the Old Town Design Guide and the Development Plan, seeking to reinforce the protection of traditional architectural elements such as Genoese shutters, lime-rendered facades and clay roof tiles whilst addressing development pressures on Gibraltar's historic urban environment.

We also continue working to strengthen statutory protections through additional listings and amendments under the Heritage and Antiquities Act. This year included the protection of additional historic buildings and features across Gibraltar and the declaration of Europa Point Foreshore as an Archaeological Site.

Madam Speaker, the Government will shortly be proceeding with the designation of important surviving frontier infrastructure associated with Gibraltar's historic land frontier.

Madam Speaker,

Archaeological watching briefs are now standard practice on many sensitive development sites across Gibraltar, ensuring that buried heritage is appropriately monitored, recorded and protected while allowing development to proceed responsibly and sustainably.

Human remains, historic structures and archaeological deposits continue to be uncovered regularly, particularly within the Old Town and former cemetery zones, further reinforcing the extraordinary archaeological sensitivity of Gibraltar.

The Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council also continued processing heritage licences efficiently throughout the year, approving fourteen heritage licences relating to restoration, conservation and infrastructure projects affecting listed buildings and scheduled sites, whilst also overseeing extensive monitoring and licensing activity within the Northern Defences.

Work also continues regarding the future relocation and restoration of the historic 9.2-inch gun. Substantial progress has been made in assessing the preferred long-term location for the gun. This remains an extremely complex logistical and engineering challenge involving transport, structural assessment and conservation considerations, but the Government remains fully committed to progressing this important heritage project.

I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to the small but dedicated staff of the Ministry for Heritage, the Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council, the Gibraltar National Museum, the Gibraltar Garrison Library, the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, Friends of Gibraltar Heritage, Fortress of Gibraltar Group, Multilingual Gibraltar, and the many volunteers, researchers, educators and community partners who continue contributing towards the protection and promotion of Gibraltar's heritage.



I must give special mention here to the group of young people who have carried out outstanding conservation work in the once abandoned no-man's-land between Moorish Castle Estate and the Tower of Homage. The team is doing great work on heritage.

Heritage is not simply about preserving the past. It is about understanding ourselves, strengthening our identity, educating future generations and ensuring that the story of Gibraltar remains visible, accessible and valued within our society.

The Government remains fully committed to this vision.

Gibraltar National Museum

I now turn to the work of the Gibraltar National Museum.

In doing so, Madame Speaker, I want to pay tribute to Jouaquin Bensusan, the previous Curator of the Museum, who passed away recently and who was very much the creator of the Museum we have now, inspiring in his day many children and young people, including the present Director and myself.

Indeed, we have lost two heritage greats in recent months. Another mentor of mine, and the publisher of my first book back in 1980, Tito Benady, also passed away recently, leaving behind a wealth of publications and other contributions to the knowledge of our heritage. May they rest in peace.

This year marks the centenary of the discovery of the fragmented cranium of a four-year old Neanderthal child which was excavated by Dorothy Garrod in 1926. It is known to the scientific community as Gibraltar 2 (*Gibraltar 1 being the 1848 Neanderthal from Forbes's Quarry*) but to most of us now, by the popular name "Flint". A number of events have been organised to mark this special occasion in the global scientific calendar which will reach its zenith with a bumper Calpe Conference in September. It will include four full days of sessions followed by a visit to Gorham's Cave Complex UNESCO World Heritage Site.

So this year's special Calpe Conference is an extended one, designed to accommodate the world's leading scientists in the field of human origins. Just have a glance at the conference programme, which is now published, to see what I mean. No fewer than fifty academic institutions from fourteen countries are represented: *Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Ireland, Israel, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America*. This high-profile conference cements the work that the Gibraltar National Museum team has been carrying out for over three decades, in the process having become one of the world's centres of excellence in this field.

Madam Speaker, it seems that to some, the work and value of the Museum is only to be measured by the number of visitors, as if its sole function was to be a tourist site. These views, which would hold that any decrease in visitor numbers reflects a poor product, are easily dismissible by simply looking at the complimentary comments in the visitors' book.

The wider research and educational service that the museum does for Gibraltar is something of which we are rightly proud.

Madam Speaker, another anniversary! It is the tenth anniversary of the inscription of the Gorham's Cave Complex as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This was a major achievement for the Government, for Gibraltar, and for its heritage, one that put it on a list alongside such wonders as Machu Picchu, Taj Mahal, Memphis and the Giza Pyramids, and the Galapagos Islands. This thanks to the painstaking



and tireless work of the museum team, which brought to light the Outstanding Universal Value of a site that would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Yet another anniversary, Madam Speaker: The Calpe Conference reaches its thirtieth year. To have kept such a prominent position, bringing to Gibraltar top researchers and speakers in many diverse fields is indeed something to be acknowledged with pride...unless we only value the museum's work on the basis of visitor numbers ...!

Apart from the day-to-day functions expected from a museum, the team has been actively engaged in the development of the Moorish Castle, its conservation and restoration Madam Speaker. It is yet another achievement that combines research, interpretation and education, with stories that include a significant component of prime research by the museum team, who pioneered urban excavations in Gibraltar in 1995.

This year will see further expansion of projects with further improvements to the visitor experience at the Europa Advance Battery Viewing Platform.

Sensitive sites cannot be opened to mass tourism, so the Museum is carefully exploring the conservation of Stay Behind Cave in ways in which access might be improved and interpretation provided. As with Gorham's, visitor numbers have to be restricted here in order to conserve the site as best as possible.

Gibraltar Heritage Trust

I continue my engagement with the Heritage Trust, and greatly value our relationship. Their input is critical in our management of Heritage and I thank them for their tireless work and efforts. I am very much looking forward to their latest project at Europa Point Lighthouse coming to fruition.

We meet on a regular basis and I am very happy to support them in their various activities. They make a valuable contribution to promotion and conservation of heritage.

Gibraltar Garrison Library

Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Garrison Library continues to operate as a hub for visitors and researchers.

I am very pleased that we propose to increase the level of funding to this important historical institution, which will help support a much-needed conservation project to assess the environmental conditions within the library building.

The Library team is liaising with experienced conservators in the UK to use digital sensors to collect environmental data with the aim of commencing work towards the end of the year.

The collections held at the Gibraltar Garrison Library are not only unique but important to our Gibraltar story; *collections such as the Gibraltar Chronicle and the El Calpense not only tell the story of print media in Gibraltar but also contain a vast record of our history as a people.*

These funds will also support book conservation and the creation of infrastructure to speed-up the Library's digitisation project, and creating scope for their collections to be digitally conserved and made digitally accessible and searchable.



Tearooms in the front garden are imminent, with expressions of interest for operators recently advertised.

Not many know that ours is the first of such Garrison Libraries to have been established and the last remaining. That a 233-year-old library remains relevant in this 21st century is remarkable. The key here has been the prevailing relevance of this library across swathes of history, and the key for its longevity is to continue maintaining this relevance.

All this is a testament to how Gibraltar values its Heritage.

MOROCCO

Madam Speaker, my Morocco portfolio continues to build upon the ties that unite Gibraltar and our neighbouring Kingdom to the south. Through educational, cultural, environmental and professional exchanges, we are building relationships that promote mutual understanding, create opportunities for collaboration and further Gibraltar's presence and reputation across the Strait.

I want to acknowledge the dedication of my small but very active Morocco team and the valuable work of the many organisations and individuals who continue to support this relationship. In particular, I wish to recognise the contribution of the Gibraltar-Morocco Business Association, the Strait of Gibraltar Association, Tarourate Charity and Rifcom, whose efforts continue to foster meaningful links between our communities.

Diplomatic Engagement

During the year, our engagement with Morocco has continued at the highest levels. I was pleased to meet the recently appointed British Ambassador to Morocco, His Excellency Alex Pinfield, at the Remembrance Sunday Service in Tangier.

More recently, during a working visit to Rabat, my team and I were hosted by Ambassador Pinfield, providing a valuable opportunity to discuss Gibraltar-Morocco relations and identify further areas for cooperation. These exchanges have helped strengthen Gibraltar's links with the United Kingdom's diplomatic representation in Morocco and have opened further opportunities.

During the same visit to Rabat, I met with senior officials from Morocco's Ministry of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development. Discussions focused on compliance with international environmental conventions, energy transition and potential areas for cooperation.

I was honoured to visit the Apostolic Nuncio to Morocco, His Excellency Archbishop Alfred Xuereb, who I had met during the Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Charles Azzopardi. This provided an opportunity to discuss matters of mutual interest and collaboration.

I am delighted that Archbishop Xuereb will also be participating in this year's Gibraltar Literary Festival, further strengthening the links between Gibraltar and Morocco.

Education and Academic Cooperation

Education continues to be one of the strongest pillars of our engagement with Morocco.

Gibraltar participated in the National Forum of Teachers in Rabat, a major event that brought together thousands of educators, academics, school leaders and policy-makers from across Morocco,



providing an important opportunity to showcase Gibraltar's educational experience, exchange examples of good practice and establish valuable contacts within Morocco's educational sector.

Meetings were also held with representatives of Morocco's Ministry of National Education and the Mohammed VI Foundation for Education. *These discussions focused on educational reform, teacher development and opportunities for future cooperation between our respective institutions.*

I was pleased to meet with British Council Country Director Alexandra Balafrej, and discuss opportunities to promote Gibraltar as a destination for Moroccans participating in programmes supported by the Council.

Our engagement with Moroccan universities continues. Building on the MoU signed between the University of Gibraltar and Abdelmalek Essaadi University, with the Gibraltar National Museum also developing links with researchers in Morocco.

Following contacts with the Higher School of Technology in Tetouan, the University of Gibraltar participated in a study day on naval industry. The contribution by the Head of the Maritime Science School has opened the door to further academic collaboration in maritime education, sustainability and research.

Community and Social Development

Madam Speaker, it is equally important that we support initiatives which strengthen ties between our communities and improve opportunities for individuals.

During the year, visits were undertaken to educational and social projects in northern Morocco, including Houmar Primary School in the Rif and the APEA (L'Association des Parents d'Enfants Autistes) Centre in Chefchaouen, which supports autistic children and young people while also promoting women's education and empowerment.

At Houmar Primary School, I saw first-hand the positive impact of the work undertaken by Rifcom and its volunteers in improving educational opportunities for children in a remote mountain community. The resilience and commitment of both pupils and teachers were truly inspiring and demonstrated the importance of continued support for such initiatives.

At the APEA Centre in Chefchaouen, I witnessed the remarkable work being carried out to support autistic children and young adults through education, training and employment opportunities. I was also pleased to learn of the progress being made in programmes supporting women returning to education, pursuing university studies and developing income-generating initiatives. These projects demonstrate the positive impact that Gibraltar's charitable and community organisations continue to have in communities across the Strait.

Such initiatives demonstrate that the relationship between Gibraltar and Morocco is not confined to official exchanges but is increasingly reflected in meaningful cooperation between our respective communities.

Culture and People-to-People Links

Cultural cooperation continues to play an important role in strengthening these relations.

Initiatives include exhibitions, workshops and collaborative projects involving artists, photographers, educational institutions and cultural organisations from both sides of the Strait.



I was pleased to support the Gibraltar Photographic Society's 60th Anniversary exhibition in Tetouan as part of a programme of workshops and public engagement activities.

Preparatory work is also under way regarding Gibraltar's participation in future editions of the Festival de Cine Africano de Tarifa-Tánger, one of the most important cultural platforms linking Europe and Africa which will provide valuable opportunities to strengthen Gibraltar's cultural presence within the region and develop new partnerships within the creative industries.

Discussions are advancing on a cross-border exhibition centred on the Strait of Gibraltar, bringing together artists from Gibraltar, Morocco and neighbouring regions in a shared exploration of the Strait as a place of encounter, exchange and shared history.

I am also pleased to report that Gibraltar will participate in the 6th Edition of the Mediterranean Academy for Youth in Assilah, Morocco, a regional initiative, focused on "Youth Empowerment through Multidimensional Diplomacy". Through our participation, Gibraltar will engage in discussions on cultural diplomacy, media literacy, artificial intelligence, climate security, economic empowerment and public policy.

Environmental and Conservation Cooperation

The strong links developed between Gibraltar and our Moroccan partners continue to facilitate practical cooperation in the fields of biodiversity, conservation and environmental education, creating networks of collaboration which benefit both sides of the Strait and support our shared commitment to protecting the unique natural heritage of this region. Calpe 2027 will celebrate this.

The Future

Madam Speaker, the initiative of the Government to have the relationship with Morocco as a formal part of a Ministerial portfolio has clearly proved to be a resounding success.

I am encouraged by the progress that continues to be made in this relationship. The many links established over the past few years are producing tangible results and opening new avenues for cooperation and indeed, investment.

We will continue to build upon these foundations, promoting greater understanding between our communities and identifying new opportunities that benefit both Gibraltar and our Moroccan neighbours. Through these initiatives, Gibraltar continues to evolve, to strengthen its role as a bridge between Europe and Africa, fostering cooperation, friendship and mutual respect across the Strait.

Madam Speaker, I extend this aspect of my portfolio to supporting Gibraltar's Moroccan community. I have held clinics and many meetings with members of the community and my team goes out of its way to assist them.

A number of guidance notes in English and Arabic in connection with forthcoming Treaty changes have been published by the Ministry, and work continues in this respect.

Madam Speaker, let me reassure you that despite the changes that the Treaty will bring to the old sea-links, new and exciting connections await.

-



CONSTITUENCY

Madam Speaker, I have continued to hold “Town Hall” meetings within my South District Constituency.

The level of participation continues to be encouraging, with residents demonstrating a strong interest in the future and well-being of the South District. A number of concerns raised at meetings have been addressed, while others continue to be pursued with the relevant departments and agencies.

The meetings provide a valuable forum for open discussion and constructive dialogue. They allow residents to seek information, offer suggestions and receive updates on matters of local importance. They also help ensure that Government remains aware of the priorities and concerns of those who live and work in the area.

I continue to find these meetings productive and rewarding. They reinforce the importance of maintaining close contact with the community and provide an effective means of ensuring that voices are heard and reflected in the work of Government. I am grateful to all those residents who continue to participate and contribute so positively to these discussions.

A dedicated email, southdistrict@gibraltar.gov.gi is available for South District Constituents to express their concerns.

TRANSPORT and TRAFFIC

Madam Speaker,

Turning to Traffic and Transport, the team from my Ministry continues to work hard on the difficult task of improving circulation, protecting parking, and at the same time encouraging alternative transport.

This is not easy, and people may not realise the lengths to which we go. Road works, for example, cause disruption, but if we did not do what we do I assure you that the disturbance and inconvenience during works would be much, much worse.

We continue to look at improvements and are considering a number of steps to improve traffic flow, and not just because of what might be expected from a more fluid border.

This may include an enhanced bus service from the border, park and ride in the border area, restricting large vehicles and introducing no-stop areas at certain times.

As part of our ongoing work to remove congestion and increase existing parking availability, we rolled out the Derelict Vehicle Cleaning Campaign, a coordinated effort to remove abandoned and non-roadworthy vehicles from Gibraltar’s streets and relieve pressure on parking areas.

Gibraltar currently has over 45,000 registered vehicles but only 14,654 public parking spaces, hence the importance of our zone parking scheme, a scheme that is being actively reviewed.

Enforcement teams also identified that 18 percent of vehicles were without a valid MOT, increasing the likelihood of them being left unused or abandoned in public areas.



To address these issues, the Ministry for Transport, DVLD, Gibraltar Car Parks, the Royal Gibraltar Police, and Britannia have been working together to identify, tag, and remove derelict vehicles across all parking zones.

Recent legislative changes now make it faster and easier to remove vehicles from the public highway.

A vehicle may now be removed if it:

- *Has no valid MOT, OR*
- *Appears derelict, OR*
- *Has remained in the same spot for more than 28 days.*

Additionally, following Britannia's established cleaning schedule, owners will receive the usual 48-hour notice to move their vehicles for street cleaning. Any remaining vehicles will be checked, and any meeting one or more of the three conditions above will be removed.

We continue urging all vehicle owners to “Book it or Scrap it” and so support the ongoing efforts.

Updates to Transport Legislation

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Transport has published a number of updates to legislation, including an update to the definition of cycle lanes allowing cyclists to use Saluting Battery, and Changes to red line zones.

The Bus service

The Ministry continues to review bus routes, usage and public feedback, with the bus service probably now at the best level it has ever been.

We have increased the frequency of buses for route 2, and we will next week be introducing a new route, combining routes 3 and 8 into a new Route 6, and increasing frequency to every 15 minutes.

Later this year we will be introducing a new shuttle linking St Joseph's school area to Europa Road, which will benefit residents and visitors to the South District.

We also now have a beach shuttle service for the second successive year.

The bus service's environmental profile continues to improve with the continued use of lower emission HVO fuel, and with the six new electric buses for the Upper Town route due in September.

Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil or HVO reduces carbon emissions by 90%, so in the past year the buses have reduced emissions by the equivalent of about 750 tonnes of CO₂e.

A tender will now issue for replacement of the larger buses also with electric vehicles. This will reduce emissions even more and help achieve our air quality targets.

A new and much improved ticketing system will go live in September, providing a better service to users and more accessible statistics.



The Bus Company is also investing in its drivers, with a large emphasis on customer care and an improved training scheme for new drivers.

Taxis

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Transport continues to work with the Gibraltar Taxi Association to improve the service. There is now a dedicated Airport Service with a minimum of five cars from the time of arrival of each 'plane up to, at least, 90 minutes thereafter.

As Gibraltar continues to grow and evolve into a bigger and better tourist destination, in addition to being a thriving International business hub, the need for reliable transport options has never been greater. These further improvements will go a long way to achieving the level expected by both local residents and visitors to Gibraltar.

The Association has established a Taxi Attendant service at the Airport to cover all arrivals.

Arrivals are greeted by the attendants, given information on the Taxi service and escorted to the next available Taxi.

Work continues on the taxi service itself, with the introduction of new City Service Taxi licences to increase the number of cars working as taxis and to improve customer service at the taxi ranks.

I must once again, thank the Gibraltar Taxi Association, so ably led by its President Luis Debono, for their collaboration as we jointly continue to improve the service.

New Electric London-Style Taxis

And perhaps one of the most exciting developments on the Traffic and Transport front has been the introduction of the new electric London Style Black Cabs.

The successful introduction of these vehicles, soon to be 21 in number, has delivered a number of important benefits. As electric vehicles, they will reduce emissions and improve air quality. Their classic London design will also enhance the distinctly British character of our town, strengthening Gibraltar's appeal as a unique tourist destination.

In addition, these taxis offer full wheelchair accessibility. This is a major step forward in improving transport inclusivity, and builds on the efforts of both the Government and the GTA to expand accessibility in our public transport network. From one or two taxis with wheelchair access just a year ago, we now have over twenty.

Working for Pedestrians

The Saluting Battery, La Bateria, has been designated as a shared use area, allowing pedestrians, cyclists and users of Personal Light Electric Transporters (PLETs) to travel freely along its full length. Some expressed concerns at the time, but it is working well.

This initiative is part of the Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan (STTPP) and the Gibraltar Active Travel Strategy, aiming to encourage more sustainable and inclusive modes of transport.



Shared spaces provide valuable recreational and commuting opportunities—particularly for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities — within a traffic-free environment. Whether it's learning to ride a bike or enjoying a peaceful walk, such areas support healthy and active lifestyles.

Cyclists and PLET users must prioritise pedestrian safety at all times, travelling at a responsible speed and being especially mindful of individuals with reduced mobility, hearing, or sight.

This year, we will concentrate efforts on pedestrians and on encouraging walking, or wheelchair use, over other modes of transport. This will build on other actions taken in the past few months, including two new light-controlled crossings at busy points, at Queensway and Line Wall Road, outside the Youth Centre.

The initiative follows stakeholder and public feedback and aligns with the objectives of both the Active Travel Strategy and STTPP, reaffirming the Government's commitment to a safer, more pedestrian-friendly Gibraltar.

We have introduced new speed calming measures at South Barrack Ramp, improving road and pedestrian safety, as well as having a new level crossing point, improving accessibility for users in the area.

We have also introduced further traffic and parking measures along Cemetery Road, enhancing accessibility, safety, and functionality in this part of Gibraltar.

The works have included a full resurfacing of Cemetery Road, new pay and display areas, free parking for short-term visitors, and bicycle racks.

Other initiatives include the installation of new demarcation and visibility bollards at Keightley Way Tunnel, and new road markings outside all schools, with the words "School Zone" clearly demarcated on approach roads.

All this forms part of the Government's wider programme to enhance road safety and promote sustainable modes of transport. It aligns with the objectives outlined in both the Active Travel Strategy and the STTPP, which is being reviewed to take account of Treaty related changes, reinforcing the commitment to creating a safer, more accessible, and pedestrian-friendly urban environment.

This year we will be introducing wayfinding signs to encourage walking, and improving pedestrian safety with more light-controlled crossings, such as at the bottom of Europa Road, and a new pedestrian walkway at Europa Advance Road, a popular but dangerous route for walkers and joggers.

Bicycles and Personal Light Electric Transporters (PLETs)

We will continue to ensure that drivers are aware of cyclists and will introduce new cycling infrastructure, with requirements for all new development schemes, public or private, to include this. New cycle lanes will extend the present ones and will include enhanced cycling infrastructure in Waterport and the frontier area, and promotion of alternative routes, as well as introducing pedal ready courses in cooperation with our schools.

I must here thank the Sustainable Transport Action Group for their positive engagement throughout.



PLETs seem to be controversial but are better for the urban environment than cars or motor cycles as they do not emit fumes. However, it is important that they are regulated.

We have introduced a registration process and in the few short months since we did so already over 800 have registered. We will now be further enforcing the 25 kph speed limit with new speed cameras and testing equipment, and reducing the speed limit further in some specific cases.

We will shortly be legislating to re-define PLETs taking into account throttle-controlled PLETs, in order to enhance safety, and we will be introducing powers to remove from the public highway

DVLD

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Department (DVLD) has been responding to changes and initiatives on which we are working. This includes dealing with more requests for vehicle tests and the wide ranging legislative changes being brought about as a result of the Treaty requiring us to align Transport with the EU.

In addition we have just introduced the new 'Polar Bear' IT System to improve the different licensing functions, a veritable digital transformation. We have also improved the CBT service, with more slots available and improved instruction.

The personalised number plate initiative has also proved very successful and raised important revenue.

Work will continue this year on reviewing legislation in order to improve services further.

Delivery Drivers

A new registration system for delivery drivers has been implemented.

All drivers must have a minimum standard of appearance and a box with appropriate markings. Drivers are issued with a registration card upon applying, and employment status is checked.

A new online system will go live in September which will check and be informed of all employment status changes along with logging further required standards such as Food Hygiene training.

This initiative has important regulatory, safety and public health implications.

Transport Inspectors



Madam Speaker, in order to keep up with all these unprecedented improvements in the management of Traffic and Transport, and in order to be able to meet new requirements following Treaty implementation, we are increasing the complement of Transport Inspectors who are now being managed directly under my Ministry.

To assist them in their work, they will have new CCTV cameras for enforcement of the Airport Taxi Service and other infringements of law. They will be provided with new tachograph equipment and training for Treaty compliance, and will have a new base by the border.

Other initiatives

Other traffic related initiatives have included intelligent cameras on Queensway to collate data on vehicles on the public highway, including checking for vehicles without MOT, which led to a record number of MOT bookings!

We have also acquired new speed cameras to allow the issuing of on-the-spot speeding fines to local and foreign vehicles.

In consultation with businesses in the area, new arrangements have been put in place at North Mole Road to resolve long standing issues with HGVs idling and blocking the road.

While electric vehicle registration is increasing in numbers while remaining at 2.8%, the registration of hybrids has increased by 5 points to 34.3% and of petrol and diesel vehicles together has decreased by 5 points. This is mildly encouraging, but we will redouble our efforts to increase these percentages, including by continuing to lead by example, as in the electric taxis and buses, and the Government fleet, and by providing more electric vehicle charging points, such as we have recently provided on the ground floor of Midtown Coach and Car Park, in Devil's Tower Car Park, and at Europa Point and Ragged Staff.

TECHNICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

-

Madam Speaker,

Moving onto the Technical Services Department or TSD, the Department has continued to provide technical support to Government Ministries and Departments on a wide range of construction and traffic related matters.

The highway maintenance programme has once again been successful with on-going repairs to roads, footpaths and retaining walls.

The more significant works carried out include disability ramps, speed bumps and pothole repairs in areas including the Upper Rock and are summarised in list form in the published version of my speech.

This year will also see the continuation of our comprehensive road resurfacing scheme. Over the last few years, a significant number of our roads have been resurfaced and this was progressed further during the last year, with over 7,250 m² of our roads resurfaced.



The Department is currently working on preparing the necessary technical documentation for this year's highways resurfacing programme.

Funding in the order of £1.5M has been proposed in this Bill for Highways Maintenance and Resurfacing projects, reflecting the Government's commitment to ensure our road network is kept to a high standard.

The Department also continues to successfully manage road closures and diversions on the Public Highway, both for its own in-house works and for other utility companies and contractors. Road closures are assessed and carried out in a manner that allows essential works to be undertaken whilst allowing vehicles and pedestrians to circulate in a safe manner with the minimum of disruption. In order to reduce the impact of road closures as much as possible these are avoided during peak times wherever possible, and after hours and weekend work is a condition that is normally imposed on contractors so as to minimise inconvenience to the public.

I regularly hold co-ordinating meetings with both public and private agencies to ensure greater cooperation and minimise disruption in all infrastructure works.

With regards to Coastal Engineering works, TSD continues to monitor and carry out maintenance and repair works as and when required. Most recently, works have been completed at Camp Bay following damage caused to the small pier following severe storms.

The Department also continues to provide advice to developers and the DPC on all aspects of coastal engineering and is currently working closely with the developers of the Eastside Project.

The Department has engaged on a major project to maintain the catch fences located on the Eastside to the south of Sandy Bay. This is a major scheme which followed the removal of rocks caught by the catch fences over the years. This latest phase, with a value in excess of £500,000, aims to repair and upgrade the catch fences located in this area to improve safety. While rock falls are unfortunately something that we have to live with

in Gibraltar – they will have been happening for at least 6 million years – the Department continues to monitor the risks and takes immediate action whenever necessary.

During the past year the Technical Services Department was also involved with works to a number of retaining walls. These have included works at Library Ramp and Shorthorn Estate. Additionally, the department has also had to deal with a significant collapse of an existing retaining wall in the Upper Rock by the area of Bruce's Farm.

The continuous monitoring and repair of existing retaining walls is critical as many of these are old and border our Public Highways network. TSD will continue to monitor these walls and effect the necessary repairs as and when these are identified.

During the past year the Infrastructure Section of the department has continued to maintain the public sewerage network. With relining of the Main Trunk Sewer within the city walls now complete the Section focused its attention on the repair of pipe networks feeding in to the Main Trunk Sewer in order to improve the overall performance of the system. This included the repair and rerouting of lateral connections, the repair and refurbishment of defective manholes, and the replacement of defective pipework.



As part of its ongoing monitoring of the network, an area of defective sewer was identified in the area by Jumpers which was causing sink holes to develop in a localised area of Rosia Road. In order to deal with this, a new access shaft was constructed to intercept the Main Trunk Sewer. This access shaft was a challenging civil engineering project as the crown of the main sewer is close to 8 metres deep. The project was completed successfully and has provided an improved access point to carry out remedial works to the sewer.

Further works in the area are planned for this financial year as part of a long-term strategy to improve the structural condition and hydraulic capacity of the sewer in this area.

Beyond these main projects the department continued its ongoing programme of maintenance and repair.

These have included manhole repairs, manhole cover replacement, unlined general sewer repairs, as well as a number of other physical and structural improvements. In addition, the department installed specialist render materials to a number of manholes in order to remedy the damaging effect of corrosive gasses within the sewer network.

In addition to structural improvements the department also carried out a number of cleansing projects, removing material which compromises the hydraulic capacity of the network. This is particularly noticeable in the ongoing maintenance of road gullies which has seen a significant reduction in local flooding following periods of heavy rain.

The condition and upkeep of Gibraltar's main sewer and storm water drainage networks are a top priority and the Department will therefore this year be continuing its major desilting and cleansing works of the sewer network and will further upgrading works.

It must be noted that all the work being carried out by the Infrastructure Section of Technical Services is happening in parallel with the new Eastside Sewage Transfer Scheme which is a major project to future-proof Gibraltar's critical sewage infrastructure.

The maintenance and upkeep of the sewerage network are considered critical and given top priority, regardless of the allegations of the social media naysayers.

In the Garage & Workshop, which is currently under review in discussion with Unite, work continues to provide a service in the maintenance and upkeep of Government's vehicle fleet.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the TSD On-Call Officers for their hard work and commitment during those times in the past year where Gibraltar suffered from storms with high winds and very heavy rain. It is thanks to their hard work and dedication, while most of us are at home, that the impact of these storms is not greater on both our sewerage and road networks.

Madam Speaker, I repeat what I said last year, the Technical Services Department is one of those Government departments that is rarely in the limelight but whose officers work tirelessly behind the scenes to deliver on their responsibilities, maintaining public infrastructure and to supporting and providing technical advice across Government Ministries and Departments.

GIBRALTAR NATIONAL THEATRE



And so, Madam Speaker, before I take the attention of this House to Education, may I update you on the project to create a National Theatre for Gibraltar. While this is a project of the National Theatre Foundation, I can nevertheless share that the funding for the project has been all but secured, a preferred bidder for the tender nominated, and that work on the ground is expected to commence shortly. I will be working closely with my friend and colleague the Minister for Culture and with Gibraltar's incredible performing arts community to finally make this a most welcome reality.

EDUCATION

Introduction

Madam Speaker, John Major once said, "The first role of any Government... is to leave something better for the next generation than your generation inherited..."

In Education, this Government has succeeded; for a most significant legacy, undoubtedly, is the result of our Revolution in Education.

Actually, Madam Speaker this reminds me of something that one of my childhood heroes, Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise said in Season 2, Episode 4 of the Original Series,

"In every revolution there's a man with a vision".

Madam Speaker, the vision, and the Revolution, continue.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, Education remains one of the most significant investments that *any* Government can make in the future of its community.

Every day, thousands of children and young people enter our schools with different experiences, strengths, aspirations and needs.

Our ambition extends far beyond academic outcomes. We believe that education is about developing the whole child. It is about nurturing children's emotional, social and personal development alongside the development of knowledge, understanding, skills, independence, character and a lifelong love of learning. We believe that when children feel safe, valued, respected and supported, they are best placed to engage with learning, develop confidence and realise their potential.

This is where the money goes!

This is why we continue to invest in welcoming, safe and inclusive school communities in which every child feels valued, every voice is heard, every learner experiences a genuine sense of belonging, and everyone is given the

We know that children and young people thrive when they feel understood and encouraged; when they develop positive relationships with the adults around them; when they are supported through challenge; and when their individual strengths are recognised and nurtured. Educational success is therefore viewed not solely through examination results, but through the development of confident, resilient, compassionate and capable young people who are equipped with the knowledge, skills and values they need to flourish in life, contribute positively to their community, and become the parents, workforce and leaders upon whom Gibraltar's future will depend.



This philosophy continues to shape every aspect of my work in Education and of the work of the Department of Education.

Throughout the past year we have continued to strengthen support for children and families, invest in our workforce, modernise our education service, improve our school environments and further develop partnerships across Government and the wider community.

The initiatives I will now outline demonstrate not simply what has been achieved during the past year and our commitment for the next, but the education system that this Government continues to build. Worth every single penny.

This year we have continued to strengthen our proactive approach to promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing across all educational settings. Our focus remains on equipping staff with the knowledge, confidence and practical strategies required to support children and young people experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs, including those arising from adverse childhood experiences, trauma and other vulnerabilities.

A comprehensive programme of professional learning has been delivered throughout the year, equipping staff with the knowledge, understanding and practical strategies required to safely support children and young people across a wide range of circumstances.

Training has focused on strengthening understanding of trauma, bereavement, mental health and emotional wellbeing, while also developing expertise in low arousal approaches, nurture provision, safeguarding, including child sexual exploitation, and the impact of screen time and social media on children's wellbeing. *Together, these initiatives continue to strengthen our collective capacity to respond quickly, compassionately and effectively to the increasingly complex needs of children and young people.*

Our collaboration with the Royal Gibraltar Police through *Operation Encompass Gibraltar* continues to be an important element of our safeguarding arrangements. Timely information-sharing enables schools to provide discreet, sensitive and immediate support to children affected by incidents of domestic abuse, helping them to feel safe, understood and supported from the moment they arrive at school. This allows schools to respond sensitively and provide overt or discreet support as appropriate, recognising that children may arrive at school carrying experiences that are not immediately visible to those around them.

The Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) continues to play a vital role in supporting children and young people whose needs cannot currently be met within mainstream education. Strengthened through the addition of a senior teacher, the provision continues to evolve in response to need, supporting young people experiencing anxiety, trauma, emotional distress and other complex circumstances. Alongside the core provision, TLC Outreach continues to work successfully with pupils in mainstream schools, enabling many young people to access timely intervention whilst maintaining links with their own school communities.

Our Attendance Strategy has continued to develop. By strengthening attendance systems and introducing additional specialist support, we have enhanced our ability to support children experiencing emotionally based school avoidance and other attendance-related challenges.

This year also saw the incredibly successful launch of *Targeted Youth Support (TYS)*, a joint initiative between the Department of Education and the Gibraltar Youth Service. This programme provides personalised support for young people who have become disengaged from education or who require



additional guidance to overcome personal, social or emotional barriers and help young people reconnect positively with education and their future.

Alongside this, we have established a new pre-16 pathway based at the Gibraltar College for a small cohort of Year 11 learners whose education has been significantly affected by trauma, illness or other complex circumstances.

Through highly personalised programmes of learning and dedicated pastoral support, we aim to re-engage these young people with education, rebuild confidence and create meaningful pathways towards future learning and employment.

Safeguarding continues to remain central to the culture of every educational setting. We have strengthened safeguarding practice through ongoing training, professional dialogue and enhanced inter-agency working. A significant milestone has been the introduction of bespoke safeguarding training for all School and Nursery Learning Support Assistants (SNLSAs), recognising the important role these colleagues play in supporting and protecting children every day.

Our safeguarding arrangements continue to be strengthened through close partnership working with the Care Agency, the Royal Gibraltar Police and the Gibraltar Health Authority. Regular strategic meetings, participation in child protection processes, fostering and adoption panels, early intervention work and implementation of the Managing Allegations framework all contribute to ensuring that safeguarding remains everyone's responsibility and that children receive coordinated, timely and effective support whenever concerns arise.

Madam Speaker

There have been some press reports over the last couple of days that have misinterpreted the position of the Department of Education in relation to safeguarding following a recent conviction in our courts.

Our safeguarding has *already* been reviewed and approaches strengthened even before that conviction.

It must be remembered that these horrendous events happened quite some years ago and before a later case of grooming, which already led to internal review, leading to enhanced training and awareness, as I have described.

We are confident that as a result we are doing and will do everything possible to protect those in our care from such horrendous abuse. Even then, we will continue to raise awareness, act promptly, and to constantly question and review whether we are doing enough to safeguard the children and young people in our schools, which is our utmost priority.

The annual Gibraltar Schools Mental Health Festival continues to grow in both scale and impact. It brings together children, families, educators and professionals to promote positive mental health, challenge stigma and encourage open conversations about wellbeing. *This year's programme placed particular emphasis on the impact of screen time and social media, providing practical guidance and encouraging healthy, balanced approaches to technology use amongst children and young people.*

The Department remains committed to ensuring that appropriate provision exists for children and young people with the most complex needs. At present, its immediate focus is on strengthening, and relocating the TLC to expand its provision, while, in close discussion with the RGP, the Care Agency



and others, continuing to keep under review the range of alternative educational pathways and specialist interventions required to meet current and future needs.

Importantly, we will develop a more strategic approach to supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Many families will welcome the introduction of a comprehensive SEND framework that brings together education, health and social care through a coordinated, person-centred approach. Long-term plans that clearly identify needs, set agreed outcomes, allocate responsibilities and provide regular review will help ensure children and young people receive consistent support throughout their education and into adulthood.

Such a SEND framework will provide greater clarity for families, strengthen accountability across services, and give children and young people the best opportunity to reach their potential. I commit to this significant and lasting investment in Gibraltar's future.

Madam Speaker, the wellbeing of children is closely connected to the wellbeing of the adults who support them.

To quote Pope Leo XIV, "True teachers educate with a smile, and their goal is to awaken smiles in the depths of their students' souls."

We will therefore continue to invest in the vitally important matter of staff wellbeing, recognising that teachers and support staff are best placed to support others when they themselves feel safe, valued, supported and professionally equipped. Alongside training and professional development, more opportunity than ever will be provided that promote wellbeing, resilience and mutual support amongst colleagues across the education service.

It is imperative that teachers are, and feel, totally safe and protected in their working environment, with protocols and support in place always to ensure that this is so.

Developing an Inclusive Education System:

Creating opportunities for every learner to thrive

As in previous years, the number of children and young people presenting with additional needs has continued to increase. We have continued to work closely with schools and partner agencies to anticipate future demand, carefully planning our staffing, specialist provision and educational environments so that support evolves alongside these changing needs.

A significant milestone this year has been the opening of a new Learning Support Facility at St Bernard's Upper Primary School.

Learning Support Facilities are now established across all but one Government school, as this September will see the extension of our LSF provision to St Bernard's Lower Primary School.

We remain firmly committed to the principle of early intervention. Working closely with colleagues from the GHA, *including paediatric therapists and the Speech and Language Therapy Team*, we continue to identify children's needs at the earliest opportunity so that appropriate support can be planned from the beginning of their educational journey.



This commitment is reflected in the relocation of Early Birds Nursery to its newly refurbished premises, providing an enhanced learning environment for our youngest learners.

At St Martin's School, investment in strengthening senior leadership has strengthened capacity, enhanced communication with families, further improved home-school relationships and supported the continued development of high-quality specialist provision.

Alongside this, planning has continued for the next phase of the school's development, ensuring that future accommodation evolves in line with increasing pupil numbers and increasingly complex needs.

Our interactions with a number of special schools in the United Kingdom continue to provide valuable opportunities for professional collaboration.

As specialist provision has expanded across Gibraltar, our Outreach and Inreach arrangements have become increasingly well established. This collaborative approach has strengthened partnerships between schools, supported smoother transitions and enabled specialist expertise to be shared more effectively.

We have continued to strengthen specialist staffing across our schools through the recruitment and deployment of additional teachers and SNLSAs. *Comprehensive induction arrangements, together with ongoing professional learning within schools, continue to ensure that staff are well equipped to support children and young people with an increasingly diverse range of needs.*

Professional development remains central to our inclusive practice. Teachers, SNLSAs, SENCOs and other specialist staff have engaged in an extensive programme of learning focused on inclusive education, emotional wellbeing and evidence-informed practice.

Building on the success of Education 2025, which provided a wide range of targeted sessions for specialist staff, the Department of Education is now looking ahead to the next iteration of our biennial service-wide conference, planned for 2027.

This will provide an important opportunity to bring colleagues together across schools, sectors, roles and professional disciplines to learn, reflect and develop collectively.

We have continued to expand training in Low Arousal (LASER) approaches, Team Teach and HCEST, together with the further development of Nurture Group provision.

Recognising that successful partnerships with families are fundamental to children's success, we have also extended opportunities for parents to learn about low arousal approaches so that supportive strategies can be reinforced consistently between home and school.

The introduction of specialist training in supporting emotional regulation, self-awareness and wellbeing, has provided schools with additional practical approaches that can benefit a wide range of learners, including children with neurodiverse needs, those who have experienced trauma, and those who present with communication differences.

Our Educational Psychology Service continues to provide schools with its expertise. Two members of staff have commenced their Educational Psychology training in the United Kingdom, completing the first year of their doctorate course this summer. This represents an important investment in developing future expertise and ensuring the long-term sustainability of this highly specialised service.



We have continued to refine systems that support consistent practice across schools, including the review of SEN registers, timelines of SEN involvement and Individual Pupil Profiles, together with enhanced transition arrangements. *This work is helping to strengthen continuity as children move between educational settings.*

Support continues to be determined by individual need rather than diagnosis. Our approach remains firmly centred on understanding every child as an individual, recognising their strengths alongside the areas in which they require support, and providing personalised learning experiences that enable them to participate, progress and thrive.

Many well-established aspects of our provision continue to make a significant difference to children and families. These include annual dyslexia screening for all Year 4 pupils; Educational Psychology drop-in sessions for parents; continued investment in assistive technology and augmentative communication; Person-Centred Planning; and robust examination access arrangements. Close partnership working also continues through the SEN Assessment Panel and the Children's Disability Panel.

Through this continued investment in collaborative working, we are strengthening both the support available to children today and the long-term capacity of Gibraltar's education system to meet the needs of future generations.

No Government ever has done so much in this field as this GSLP/Liberal Government. That fact simply cannot be disputed.

Investing in Our People:

Supporting, developing and valuing the people who shape children's lives

The strength of any education system depends fundamentally on its people.

We remain committed to a culture in which staff feel valued, supported and encouraged to continue developing throughout their careers.

The needs of our workforce must continue to evolve positively alongside the changing needs of children, families and our wider community. Our investment in professional learning therefore seeks to strengthen individual expertise, build collective capacity and ensure that colleagues across the service are equipped to respond confidently and effectively to an increasingly complex educational landscape.

Alongside formal courses and qualifications, colleagues learn through school-based training, professional dialogue, coaching, mentoring, collaborative working, specialist workshops and opportunities to share effective practice.

This broad approach recognises that some of the most valuable professional learning takes place when colleagues learn with and from one another, reflect together on practice and use their collective expertise to improve the experiences of children and young people.

We will continue to invest in training that responds both to service-wide priorities and to the particular needs identified by individual schools and educational settings. *This will enable professional learning to remain relevant and purposeful, supporting schools in progressing their own development priorities while also strengthening shared practice across the wider education service.*



We seek to combine broad opportunities for learning and professional exchange with more targeted development for particular groups of staff, helping to ensure that key knowledge and expertise reach the colleagues best placed to apply them in their work.

We will continue to support Early Career Teachers through a structured two-year induction programme led by schools and strengthened through mentoring, professional learning and contributions from experienced colleagues across the service. This is fundamental to building confidence, developing strong professional practice and helping new teachers establish a lasting sense of belonging within the profession.

Our Placement Record system also continues to provide a centralised way to document the professional journey of new entrants, creating a mechanism through which their contributions to schools can be recorded, recognised and aligned with departmental development goals.

We will continue to explore opportunities to strengthen professional development, supporting schools to develop leadership capacity in ways that respond to their own contexts and needs.

Alongside professional development, staff wellbeing remains a vitally important part of our investment in people. The work undertaken across education is deeply rewarding, but it is also highly demanding and can be emotionally complex. Colleagues are often supporting children and families through challenging circumstances, managing competing responsibilities and responding to needs that continue to evolve. We recognise that those who care for and support others must themselves feel safe, supported, respected and valued.

Our approach to staff wellbeing therefore extends beyond individual initiatives. We will continue to encourage open professional dialogue, supportive leadership, opportunities for reflection and access to specialist support whenever required.

The Government Wellbeing Team continues to provide valuable support to colleagues across the education service, whilst professional learning in areas such as Mental Health First Aid further strengthens the capacity of staff to support one another.

We also recognise the importance of listening to our workforce. Constructive engagement with school leaders, staff and the trade unions that represent colleagues across our service helps us to understand concerns, identify opportunities for improvement and work through complex issues together.

We will continue to work closely with colleagues in the Industrial Relations team to respond to queries and claims, seek to anticipate and address potential issues where possible, understand different perspectives and work towards positive resolution. While agreement may not always be immediate, respectful dialogue, a willingness to listen and a shared commitment to constructive engagement remain fundamental to building trust and sustaining positive professional relationships.

The Department will continue to review and strengthen the systems and structures that support our workforce. This will include improving recruitment processes, developing clearer professional pathways, reviewing roles and responsibilities, and working with colleagues across Government and the trade unions on matters relating to pay, conditions and career development.

Our aim is to ensure that our structures are fair, sustainable and responsive to the needs of both the workforce and the children and young people we serve.



I want staff across our service to remain curious, reflective and willing to learn; to feel confident in sharing ideas and able to openly question and challenge established practice; and to know that their expertise and contribution are valued, because they most certainly are.

By investing in our staff, we invest directly in children and young people.

Developing Learning, Curriculum and Pathways:

Equipping every learner with the knowledge, skills and opportunities to shape their future

We will continue to review and develop our curriculum and qualification pathways so that learners are provided with a range of opportunities through which they can experience success, build confidence and prepare for the next stage of their lives.

Strong foundations in literacy and numeracy remain fundamental. We will continue to explore ways of strengthening the teaching and learning of Mathematics across all sectors, while our work with external expertise is informing the development of a service-wide approach to improving English.

Curriculum working parties will continue to provide important opportunities for teachers to collaborate across schools and sectors. Alongside the continuing work of our Mathematics and English groups, working parties in Spanish and Science have further strengthened opportunities for professional dialogue, shared planning and the development of greater coherence across the service.

We have also continued to refine the ways in which children's learning and development are recorded and communicated internally and in communication with families. *Our Pupil Profile mechanisms have been reviewed to make them more user-friendly, whilst reporting templates across the Lower and Upper Primary sectors have been further developed to reflect Science as a core subject.*

At the Gibraltar College, we continue to develop a curriculum that responds to the diverse interests, strengths and aspirations of young people and to the future needs of our community. The continued development of vocational and technical pathways is central. Our aim is to ensure that young people are able to access meaningful routes that enable them to build knowledge, develop practical and transferable skills and progress successfully into further study, training or employment.

The introduction of additional vocational qualifications continues to broaden the range of pathways available reflecting our commitment to recognising that learners have different strengths and aspirations, and that high-quality education must provide multiple routes through which young people can achieve, progress and flourish.

We continue to support vocational learning beyond our own schools and College through partnerships with specialist providers. This includes continued support for the Gibraltar Academy of Music and Performing Arts and for vocational opportunities in Hair and Beauty, helping to ensure that young people can access learning experiences that connect their interests and talents with recognised qualifications.

The Department has continued to strengthen its links with colleges in the United Kingdom, drawing on external expertise to inform the ongoing development of the Gibraltar College as we consider the future development of post-16 and further education in Gibraltar.

Our commitment to meaningful pathways also extends to those young people for whom conventional routes have not proved successful. I have already mentioned the new, focused pre-16 pathway into



the Gibraltar College to help young people rebuild confidence, restore engagement with learning and help them begin to see positive possibilities for their future.

This work complements the wider development of the Targeted Youth Support programme already mentioned.

While on the College I want to congratulate Julian Felice for just having been named International Exams Officer of the Year by the National Association of Exams Officers at their Summer Conference at The Oval. As he likes to say, “Este College es mucho College!”.

We continue to enhance opportunities for young people with additional needs beyond compulsory schooling. The positive partnership between the Gibraltar College and St Bernadette’s continues to extend access to appropriate College courses for young people who can benefit from them, further strengthening the range of post-16 opportunities available within our community.

The Department also continues to support inter-school sporting opportunities across the Upper Primary sector through collaboration with local Sports Associations. These experiences bring children together across school communities, promote teamwork, participation and physical wellbeing, and provide further opportunities for children to develop confidence, relationships and a sense of achievement beyond the classroom.

As technology and society continue to evolve, our curriculum must evolve with them. Artificial intelligence is already reshaping the way people learn, work and interact with information.

We are therefore carefully exploring and considering how AI can be used responsibly across our education service: as a strategic tool to help analyse data and inform planning; as a professional tool to support teachers in strengthening pedagogy and responding more effectively to individual learning needs; and as an increasingly important area of learning for children and young people themselves.

Our learners will need to understand not only how to use AI tools effectively, but also how to question their outputs, recognise their limitations and risks, think critically about the information they generate, and use emerging technologies ethically and responsibly.

We also want to create opportunities for young people to move beyond being users of technology and develop the knowledge and skills required to shape, create and innovate with it.

This work must be approached thoughtfully. The opportunities presented by artificial intelligence sit alongside important considerations relating to safeguarding, data protection, academic integrity, equity and the continuing importance of human relationships, professional judgement and independent thought.

Our aim is not to pursue technology for its own sake, but to explore how it can be used responsibly to strengthen learning, support our workforce and prepare young people for the world they will inherit.

Working Together Around Children and Families:

Strengthening partnerships to provide coordinated support when it is needed

Children and young people do not experience their lives through strict boundaries. Their needs are often interconnected, and the most effective support is therefore built around the child and family rather than around organisational structures.



Families are central to our work. Parents and carers know their children in ways that no professional can, and strong, respectful relationships between home and school can make a profound difference to a child's experience of education. We will continue to encourage schools to work closely with families, to listen carefully to their perspectives and to develop constructive relationships built on communication, trust and a shared commitment to the child.

The Department of Education continues to work closely with colleagues in many agencies, a multitude of charities and NGOs and other services and organisations that support children, young people and families. *These relationships enable expertise to be shared, concerns to be considered from different professional perspectives and support to be better coordinated around individual need.*

We will continue to work closely with colleagues in the GHA to strengthen coordinated support for children and young people. *The development of the Non-Urgent Pathway for Mental Health and Behavioural Concerns provides a clearer framework for collaboration between schools, School Counsellors, SENCos and health professionals.*

Our collaboration with Public Health also continues across a range of areas, including the National Height and Weight Measurement Programme, vaccination programmes and a screentime campaign.

The Department's partnership with the Gibraltar Youth Service continues to grow. This work reflects the importance of meeting young people where they are, building trust and helping them to identify their own strengths and possibilities.

Partnership working also strengthens the opportunities available to children and young people beyond the classroom. Our collaboration with local Sports Associations continues to support inter-school sporting opportunities, whilst relationships with specialist training providers, community organisations and other Government departments help to extend the range of educational, vocational and developmental experiences available to learners.

We will continuously review processes, strengthen protocols and explore opportunities to make joint working more coordinated and effective.

Strengthening the Systems That Support Education:

Investing in technology, information and infrastructure to support better practice

A strong education system depends not only on what happens in classrooms, but also on the systems, processes and infrastructure that support the people working within it. We will continue to invest in the technology, information systems and organisational processes that enable schools to work more effectively.

We have continued to invest in hardware that supports learning and teaching across our schools. This includes interactive technology, desktop computers, iPads and other digital resources that enable teachers to broaden learning experiences and provide children and young people with opportunities to develop confidence in using technology.

The effective use of technology depends on people as much as devices. We therefore continue to support professional learning that enables colleagues to use digital tools confidently and purposefully, ensuring that technology enhances rather than distracts from strong pedagogy, positive relationships and meaningful learning.



Relevant to the use of technology has been the successful introduction of phone pouches in Westside and Bayside.

The Department continues to work towards more coherent and consolidated data systems that will enable information to be accessed, managed and analysed more effectively across schools and the Main Office.

Work continues towards the implementation of a Management Information System across our schools. *A more integrated approach to pupil information will help to improve access to accurate data, strengthen collaboration between schools and the Department and provide a more consistent foundation for understanding trends and planning future provision.*

Alongside this, we continue to strengthen our approach to data protection and information governance. We continue to reinforce understanding of GDPR principles, map information flows and support greater consistency in the way data are handled across the service.

We have also continued to digitise administrative processes where doing so improves efficiency, security and record keeping. The digitalisation of applications for school visits and other departmental processes has streamlined submission and approval arrangements, whilst enabling supporting documentation to be stored and accessed more effectively.

We will continue to develop policies and procedures that provide greater clarity and consistency across our schools and the wider Department. This work helps colleagues understand expectations, supports fair and consistent decision-making and strengthens the organisational foundations upon which effective practice depends.

Investing in Our Educational Environments:

Creating safe, welcoming and inspiring spaces in which children and young people can flourish

The environments in which children learn and staff work matter. Our buildings must be safe, welcoming and inclusive places. We will continue to invest, as we have in an unprecedented manner, in maintaining, improving and developing the physical environments that support them.

Our investment in the education estate continues to include both major strategic developments and a wide programme of smaller improvements across individual schools. *These range from the creation and refurbishment of classrooms and specialist learning spaces to improvements in accessibility, air conditioning, shading, playgrounds, security, toilets, flooring and other essential facilities.*

While some projects are highly visible, many smaller interventions also make an important difference to the daily experiences of children and staff.

The continued development of St Martin's School remains a priority. Work is progressing to extend the existing site and increase the space available for classrooms, specialist therapy rooms, hygiene facilities, playground areas, staff facilities and other essential provision. This work will be completed in time for the start of term this September.

This expansion also includes the development of the rooftop area to increase the space available to pupils, together with the addition of a further lift shaft and staff facilities. Careful consideration has been given to shading and covered areas so that the additional space can be used effectively in different weather conditions.



The development has been undertaken in close consultation with the School, with learning from previous education projects informing the design and use of space.

The development of additional accommodation at St Joseph's schools is already well underway. This will be followed by the upgrading of existing learning spaces, with the overall programme designed to bring the accommodation into line with the upgrades and refurbishments already delivered across other schools.

The development of the new Gibraltar College at Europa Point represents one of the most significant strategic investments in the future of education and training in Gibraltar. Planning for the new College provides an opportunity to think beyond the replacement of an existing building and to consider how the physical environment can support the future development of further education, vocational learning, technical education and wider pathways for young people and adult learners. The new College will provide flexible, modern and purposeful spaces that support an evolving curriculum and create new possibilities.

Construction is well underway, with close involvement by the school and regular meetings which I chair, with continued progress enabling the vision for the new College to become increasingly tangible.

The continued programme of air-conditioning installation has also progressed to practical completion. This has become particularly important given the rising temperatures across Europe and the changes to the academic calendar. This change, while initially controversial, will, I am certain, make for more efficient use of school time and will bring overall benefits to learners.

The value of this investment has been clearly demonstrated during recent periods of extreme heat in Europe. At a time when high temperatures have disrupted education and led to hundreds of school closures elsewhere in Europe, Gibraltar's schools have been able to remain open and continue functioning. Our investment in air conditioning has therefore provided us with an important level of resilience in the face of increasingly challenging climatic conditions.

Protocols for dealing with rising air temperatures should air-con fail are also being developed.

A range of additional works continues across our schools, including improvements to playground surfaces and specialist outdoor areas, additional shading and security enhancements. At Bayside and Westside, significant work has been undertaken to extend telephone infrastructure across both sites, strengthening internal communications, which will greatly assist staff, and supporting wider emergency response arrangements, and a new improved WiFi system, which I promised the senior students at the time of introducing the phone pouches, is being installed.

We continue to plan for the future development of St Paul's Lower Primary School, including improvements to classrooms, specialist spaces, accessibility, outdoor areas and other facilities.

Alongside major capital projects, the introduction and development of facilities management arrangements across parts of the education estate will also provide opportunities to strengthen coordination and oversight.

Particular attention continues to be given to specialist equipment used by children and young people with additional needs.



Procedures for the inspection, maintenance and repair of equipment such as hoists, specialist chairs and standing frames have been strengthened so that reviews take place in a timely manner, information is shared more effectively and necessary repairs and replacement parts can be progressed as efficiently as possible.

We will ensure that Gibraltar's educational environments continue to evolve, providing spaces in which children and young people feel that they belong and are given every opportunity to flourish.

Madam Speaker, the school population in Gibraltar continues to grow, with further growth predicted particularly in the north following the allocation of Hassan Centenary Terraces.

Therefore, I am pleased to announce that we are in the process of designing and planning for an additional floor on each of Notre Dame and St Anne's Schools in order to be able to accommodate more children.

We will also extend the scope, resources and size of our TLC provision to be able to cater for children who need to be taught in these facilities.

In relation to specialised supported needs education, as provided in St Martin's School, we are predicting an increase from just over a hundred children in recent years to around 250 in ten years' time.

Therefore, I can now further announce that planning and design work is advanced, with the intention of building a new Upper School to St Martin's to cater for pupils to the age of 18. More details will be announced in due course.

Celebrating Achievement and Supporting Future Aspirations:

Recognising success and enabling young people to pursue their next steps

We want every child and young person to experience success. That success will look different for different learners.

It may be reflected in academic achievement or the mastery of a practical skill; in growing confidence, independence or resilience; in overcoming a personal challenge; in developing a talent; or in discovering a sense of purpose and direction for the future. Our role is to recognise the breadth of that potential and to help every learner understand that their strengths, efforts and contributions matter.

We are rightly proud of the academic and vocational achievements of Gibraltar's young people. Each year, pupils work towards qualifications that open doors to further study, training and employment.

We also recognise that examination results represent only one moment within a much longer educational journey. Behind every set of results is an individual story, and we remain committed to supporting young people whose results may not initially enable them to progress as they had hoped, helping them to consider alternative pathways and continue moving forward.

Careers education, information, advice and guidance help young people understand the opportunities available to them, reflect on their strengths and interests and make informed and ambitious decisions about their futures. *Engagement with employers, professionals, training providers and community organisations further helps learners connect their education with the wider world and understand the many different possibilities available to them.*



Our annual Future Pathways event will continue to provide pupils with dedicated time to engage in meaningful conversations about their aspirations and consider the pathways best suited to their individual strengths and career objectives.

For many young people, the next stage of their journey will involve further or higher education. *Government's continued investment in scholarships represents a significant commitment to Gibraltar's young people and to the future of our community, enabling eligible learners to pursue a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate opportunities.* Residency requirements have been reviewed and increased to support the prudent allocation of funds to eligible individuals and the long-term sustainability of the scholarship system. I am grateful to the Gibraltar International Bank, which has stepped in with ways of providing alternative finance to support students where their residential status does not qualify for a scholarship.

Alongside the provision of financial support, we have introduced a feedback mechanism to actively seek the views of scholarship recipients about their experiences of studying away from Gibraltar and of the support and processes associated with their awards. *This will help us understand what is working well, identify opportunities for improvement and continue developing our provision in response to the experiences of the young people it is intended to support.*

The transition away from Gibraltar to pursue further study can be exciting, but it can also present new challenges as young people adapt to unfamiliar environments and manage new academic, financial and personal responsibilities. Our relationship with them does not end when they leave school or the College. Those who continue their education elsewhere remain part of our community, and the knowledge, skills and experiences they develop have the potential to contribute to Gibraltar in many different ways.

The return of the Washington Programme will open once again new opportunities for widening experience.

Further and higher education are, of course, not the only routes to successful and fulfilling futures. *Employment, apprenticeships, vocational and technical training, entrepreneurship and other forms of learning all provide valuable pathways.* Our ambition is not to direct every young person towards the same destination, but to help each of them identify and pursue a pathway that reflects their strengths, interests, circumstances and aspirations.

Continuing to Learn, Develop and Improve:

Building on progress while remaining ambitious for the future

Madam Speaker,

Education must never stand still, and with me, it never will.

We must remain open to new ideas, willing to reflect critically on our practice and prepared to adapt where change can improve the experiences and opportunities available.

Continuous improvement does not mean change for its own sake. It means listening carefully, drawing on evidence and professional expertise, learning from experience and being prepared to ask, and be asked, whether we can do things better. It also means recognising and building on the considerable strengths that already exist across our schools and wider education service.



Madam Speaker, I see these strengths during my many visits to the schools, where I see for myself the dedication, quality and enthusiasm of staff and the joy and engagement of the pupils, in their day to day or in the special activities such as school concerts and sporting events.

Madam Speaker, Our greatest expertise lies within our own service. By creating opportunities for colleagues to share effective practice, question and challenge, learn from one another and contribute to wider development, we build on our collective capacity and strengthen the education system as a whole.

We also continue to look beyond Gibraltar, engaging with external expertise and learning from other education systems, schools, colleges and specialist settings. Our aim is not to replicate what is done elsewhere, but to consider thoughtfully what can be learnt, adapted and developed in ways that respond to Gibraltar's own context, values and needs.

As we look ahead, we will continue to review our provision, strengthen the use of evidence and information, explore emerging opportunities and respond to areas of growing need. We will do so with ambition, but also with care: protecting what works well, investing where development is needed and ensuring that change remains purposeful and centred on the children, young people, families and colleagues it is intended to serve.

We will continue to ask questions, listen, reflect and develop, always seeking to make what is already a strong education service, stronger.

Investing in Education, Investing in Gibraltar's Future:

Supporting today's children and young people to shape tomorrow's community

Education is one of the most important investments any Government can make. *The experiences, knowledge, skills, relationships and values developed through education help shape the kind of community Gibraltar will become.*

Today's children and young people will become tomorrow's parents, workforce and leaders. They will inherit challenges and opportunities that we cannot yet fully anticipate.

Conclusion

Madam Speaker, in the published version of my speech I will include a list of statistics which will illustrate even further the commitment of the Government to continue to ensure that our education system is second to none.

Some of these are:

- 49 additional permanent teaching posts.
- Teaching establishment increasing from 472 to 521.
- 1,103 scholarship awards administered.
- 9 additional classrooms at St Martin's School.
- 15 staff undertaking the NPQ for SENCOs across 9 of 14 education settings.



- 11 AEDs available for public access out of hours.
- 3 new vocational courses introduced or planned at Gibraltar College.

And so, as I conclude this section, Madam Speaker, let me send my best wishes to those members of the education team who have retired over the past twelve months and welcome all those with new appointments, be they admin staff, SNLSAs, teachers, head teachers and deputies or education advisers.

Let me thank *all* of those who work in education. These professionals are a key element of our community. Many out there simply do not realise the work that goes into teaching, and the responsibilities it involves. I most certainly do, Madam Speaker, and I thank each and every one in the education community for all that they do.

Madam Speaker, I am excited, as I enter my 11th year as Minister for Education to continue to work with them as we continue our incredible progress in Education in our city. No one will stand in our way.

Because, Madam Speaker, my commitment to education is, above all, a commitment to people.

It is a commitment to every child and young person: to their wellbeing, their development, their learning and their future. It is a commitment to the families who trust us to support them, and to the dedicated colleagues whose skill, care and professionalism make our education service what it is.

My ambition remains clear: to continue developing an education service that is ambitious; that values achievement in its broadest sense; that supports its staff and invests in its people; and that never loses sight of the individual child or young person at the heart of every decision we make.

Because when we invest in our children and young people, we invest in the future of Gibraltar.

-

THANKS

Finally, Madam Speaker, as ever, I wish to express my thanks to the staff across all my portfolios, including and most especially my amazing personal Ministry staff, every single one of them. It is beyond doubt the best Ministry team that I have ever had. They look after me, they work hard in support of my many areas of responsibility – I simply could not do my job without them. For those out there who decry the work of public servants – think again.

Thanks too Madam Speaker to my Heads of Departments and CEOs, to Head Teachers, and the staff in every area in all my departments, my project managers, and so many more committed public servants, for their hard work every day, and for their constant support.

My thanks too to all the schools and all the staff who invariably make me feel so very welcome in all my visits; to all the staff in the Agencies, Companies, including the GEA and AquaGib, and contractors that work to my departments.

I want to once again thank the unions, NASUWT, Unite and GGCA. Over the past year I have been personally involved in constructive discussions with them on a wide range of issues, most of them positively resolved, and I consider that we have an excellent understanding of each other and an



excellent working relationship. To the Chamber of Commerce and the GFSB. To all the NGOs, environmental, heritage, transport – who are so committed to what they believe in.

To all those many citizens appointed to voluntary commissions, 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 including the Offices of the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary: who, as I said last year, continues to be a constant source of wisdom, pragmatic problem-solving and strength, and his staff, the Financial Secretary and his staff, the Chief Technical Officer and his, and the Civil Contingencies Co-ordinator and his, the Director of Employment and her team, the Director of Personnel and Development and his team, the whole team at Industrial Relations, as well as the Attorney-General, the Director of Public Prosecutions and all at the Gibraltar Law Offices, the Commissioner of Police and officers, the Gibraltar Office in London and Brussels, the Press Office, LPS and ITLD and Digital Services, for their constant support and for always being there when I need them.

I want to thank the Hon Mary Creagh, Minister for Nature in HMG, for always giving me time and supporting our work in Gibraltar, including her personal message on the launch of our 25 year Environment Plan.

Thanks also of course to the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and all my Ministerial colleagues, as well as to you, Madam Speaker, the Clerk and the staff of Parliament.

CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker,

Last year, close to the end of my speech, I said, and I quote:

“Madam Speaker, We are about to show the world just who we are”.

And you know what, Madam Speaker, I think that we have done just that.

In a world that seems to have receded into conflict, we have shown what it is like to negotiate with conviction but with a view to resolution. We have shown the world that we can stand firm on matters of principle and at the same time demolish anachronistic obstacles to conviviality.

Oh, that other nations were able to do the same.

And Madam Speaker, as many other countries continue to slide down the slippery slope to extreme right-wing policies, with their anti-immigrant stands, their climate change denial and their going back on environmental objectives, we in Gibraltar remain progressive and forward thinking.

Long may it be so.

I am a socialist, Madam Speaker, and proud to be one. I grew up in a generation that questioned the Establishment, and in many ways I still do.



As I look forward to many more years in this House, I remind us all that we are not isolated from world events, that changes in perception and views can often be influenced by fake and social media. But I assure you Madam Speaker, that I will remain a champion of the people and of these principles, wherever that may take me.

And with a further reminder, Madam Speaker, that the biggest threat to our community, and to the world, is not a Treaty, not the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, nor even a war; it is the *heating*, of our Planet. A process that, left unchecked, will make whole regions too hot to sustain human habitation.

Madam Speaker, that great British adventurer, Robert Swan once said, *"The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it"*.

While we will not in our small community ourselves save our planet, we must play our part. Because we can be an example, and because the children and young people to whom we are giving a strong educational grounding and environmental conscience today may influence decisions far beyond our shores in the future, for they will be influencers, writers, poets, environmentalists or philosophers who in the inter-connected world of the future will have their views heard and felt far and wide.

Madam Speaker, I see, every day, the achievements of our youth, within schools, in sports, in dance, music and acting, in tech, reflected in our rich community and in successes, individual and collective – like that magnificent third place in the UK Young Enterprise finals of the College's My Mind Matters team, and all those other young people, including those mentioned in the Deputy Chief Minister's speech. So our young people, the product of an amazing education system and of wonderful educators will thrive and make their mark well beyond our shores.

Madam Speaker, seeing the problems faced in many communities elsewhere, let us always remember how blessed and well we are in Gibraltar, how much has been achieved. Lo bien que vivimos, Madam Speaker, and, as my Mum used to say, por lo que hay que darle gracias a Dios.

People easily forget the gains of the recent past, shift their baseline, and demand more.

To quote CS Lewis, *"It's funny how day by day nothing changes, but when you look back, everything is different."*

Let Gibraltar realise that let us never ever forget who we are and where we have come, let us recognise and celebrate what we have achieved and build on all that we have, for there are huge possibilities very close on the horizon.

Let us continue evolving by embracing the future, the future that this Government has secured for our beloved nation.

And with that Madam Speaker, I too commend this Bill to the House.

ENDS