

**Education, population, poverty, tax...getting views on topics like those in Jersey isn't the difficult part – but have you ever noticed how many people sound eminently credible when talking about them, even though they may actually be basing their views on conjecture, false facts and blind guesswork?**

There is a real danger in making the 'facts' fit the opinion, rather than the other way around – which is exactly the point at which someone with an eye on the latest buzzwords will smugly insert the phrase 'post-truth' into the conversation, imagining it's actually helpful.

So, we've asked the Jersey Policy Forum to add some robust material to those crucial local debates – the point is not to provoke agreement or acquiescence; it is to provide reliable material on which others can build their views.

This month sees the first in their series, written by the Forum's Director, Gailina Liew.

## Gailina Liew



I'd like to share my first year impressions to kick off a monthly column. "Who am I?", you might ask. Well, I'm the director of the Jersey Policy Forum, an independent think-tank and knowledge partnership, whose aim is to get facts out into the open, engage with people from all sectors to roll-up their sleeves and do some thinking and analysis to help shape Jersey going forward. The ultimate goal is to engage the private and third sectors to work together with and challenge government to seize opportunities and develop practical solutions for a strong future.

So, what has a year of probing, listening and observation revealed? Well, many things; but chief amongst them is that there are a number of questions that seem to energize people. In no particular order, these questions include: do we have a population crisis? Is there really poverty in Jersey? How are our kids really doing in our schools and what can they look forward to once they finish? Is the current tax structure the right one to take us into the future? Now that we've figured out where the new hospital will be built, what will it do? How are we

going to take care of our elderly and vulnerable people? Why is it so difficult to buy a house here, and why is decent rental housing so scarce? Is there a social divide in terms of income/opportunities/knowledge? Is our water safe to drink? Why are there so many cars here? Why don't more people vote in our elections? Why are there so many people in our States Assembly? Why do people confuse us with New Jersey and California? What does Jersey aspire to be...other than NOT being an offshore tax haven?

These questions (and more) are all somewhat uncomfortable, and we all have strong opinions - but maybe not all of us have the time to research and dig up the facts that are important to understand the broader context, and how so many of these questions are actually linked. Tackling specific questions in isolation may not be the best approach. The Jersey Policy Forum was set up to bring people together from a diverse range of experiences and sectors for thoughtful debate that is conducted respectfully around a table: face-to-face discussion amongst all participants, including politicians and civil servants, based on facts and the common desire to continuously improve, develop practical solutions and strive for excellence. We publish reports of these discussions that are held under Chatham House Rules so that everyone can understand what the facts are, what was debated and perspectives shared, but individuals are not linked to any particular view that is expressed to encourage more open and honest debate.

My strongest impression about this beautiful island is that there is a palpable feeling of community and pride in Jersey's rich heritage and natural attributes. There is also an incredible pool of talented people, some local and others from places near and far, all of whom care deeply about this place and would like to see Jersey continue to flourish; we are calling on this pool to actively engage in our knowledge partnership to advance the work of the Policy Forum. As a new Jersey resident, I marvel at the opportunities that Jersey has to take the lead in finding and testing innovative solutions to challenges that the rest of the world is grappling with. One of these challenges is how to ensure a fair and caring society where social justice and opportunity are available to all of its residents? Some recent statistics are striking: how is it that more than 100 shelter beds are full each night? Why are almost a quarter of Jersey households struggling to make ends meet?

Although Jersey has a minimum wage, the high cost of living in areas such as

housing, retail prices, transport costs and access to health services can cause problems for residents. Some industries fare worse than others: agriculture has 49% of its employees in low-paid jobs, and hospitality has 39%. Together, they account for 62% of low-paid jobs and for 57% of minimum wage jobs in Jersey.

What other options besides the minimum wage might we consider to reduce inequality? Ideas such as the Living Wage – a voluntary agreement by companies on the minimum they will pay their employees - or even a universal basic income guaranteed by the state, are in place or being explored on a trial basis, in a number of countries. Do these ideas work and what, if any, are the knock-on effects on competitiveness and sustainability?

On the global stage, why is Jersey still broadly referred to as a tax haven with all of the negative implications that label implies? A strong brand and reputation cannot be built on what something is not. Our competitors will define our brand

and reputation for us if there is a vacuum. We are starting to explore this important issue by catalyzing a new conversation. What is the basis of Jersey's identity? What are the intrinsic qualities and essence of this society that has allowed Jersey to "punch above its weight" in so many areas throughout its history?

The Jersey Policy Forum is asking these types of questions, to understand and define our needs and aspirations, digging into models, experiences and data generated elsewhere to understand if there are useful lessons for us. We are focused on public policy broadly, working in the areas of social policy, education, economic competitiveness, sustainability and the role of government. Each month, this column will highlight a particular aspect within these areas to spark debate and dialogue.

**We hope you will engage with our knowledge partnership, and look forward to hearing your perspectives at [contact@jerseypolicyforum.org](mailto:contact@jerseypolicyforum.org).**

THINK-TANK

