

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 its 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.



Gailina Liew, Director, Jersey Policy Forum



Whose future is it anyway?

Some simple arithmetic might suggest that many of the people who will be living and working in Jersey 20, 30 or 50 years from now are presently going through school, or just embarking on their first jobs. Typically, this younger demographic is not turning out in high numbers to vote in elections, or may not yet be old enough to vote; but they are the people who will live the future that is being created by those who have the power now to make and influence policy decisions. So, how do we ensure that younger voices are heard and that their perspective is reflected in policy decisions?

A number of organizations in Jersey have launched initiatives to encourage more engagement from the younger set. Examples include Chamber Connect for young business leaders, JBA 2.0 for young banking leaders, Board

Apprentice's U25 'reverse mentoring' program, Jersey's Youth Service, all the work that the schools are doing to encourage civic engagement, and most recently, the appointment of a Children's Commissioner as a champion for children and youth in Jersey. The common thread running through all of these initiatives is the creation of structures and processes to make it easier and more comfortable for young people to engage, share their views and to have those views taken seriously by decision-makers.

But what about the wants and needs of the experienced workers, parents, grandparents and those heading into retirement? These are the people who have been contributing to our economy, paying taxes to fund our public services and who are more likely to vote. They have worked hard for themselves, their families and their communities and expect public services to provide support

when needed as they get older. Is it possible to balance the needs and wishes of the young and the aging?

Public consultations on policy, broadly speaking, tend to draw more responses from the older demographic. To shed more light on civic engagement, aspiration and the future from a youth perspective, the Jersey Policy Forum launched a survey before Christmas and invited students aged 14 and older to participate and share their views (the JPF Student Survey). Close to 700 students participated in the JPF Student Survey and more than 90% of respondents were 14 to 17 years old. A full report and analysis will be published soon, but a few highlights suggest that, between Jersey's youth and their older fellow residents, there may be more shared aspirations than differences.

When asked whether Jersey would be a good place to live and work in the future, roughly 50% of the students chose "maybe" with the remaining respondents evenly split between "yes" and "no." When asked why, the "yes" responders reflected key themes in their

reasons that included "safe for all ages", "potential", "want to work in finance or law", "good money and friendly people", "family here", "low crime" and "pretty." The "no" responders reflected themes that included "too small", "not enough jobs for what I want to do", "not enough good free schools", "not enough variety", "obsolete", "too expensive" and "boring", while the "maybe" responders referred to "family friendly but expensive", "depends on career choice", "depends on your partner", "depends on who runs the Island and their decisions", "terrorism and environment bad elsewhere."

Another question asked students to describe the one thing they would like to change about Jersey and the answers reflected the following themes: "price of things", "need better shops", "too many cars", "closed-mindedness", "more activities for young people", "more representation for young people on the Island" and "less overcrowding". Did you expect these themes to emerge from a survey of teenage students?

From a civic engagement perspective, 58% of students said they would vote in

the upcoming general election. When asked why, the "yes" respondents reflected themes that included: "shapes future and community", "no right to complain if you do not vote", "make Jersey better", "my parents encourage me", "because I can", "important everyone has say" and "want to be able to choose who runs Island." Those who answered "no" reflected themes that included "do not understand politics", "Senators do not listen to young people", "pointless", "planning to leave island soon", "not feel at 16 can make a difference or have view", "do not care", "no one else votes." The sentiments expressed by the respondents to the JPF Student Survey are certainly not new but are perhaps surprising to hear from teenagers and that is an important point. It appears that people living in Jersey, both older and younger, share many observations and concerns about this place so there is some common ground on "what" is important for the future.

Are there other factors besides age that might impact on defining what is important for our collective future? I

think there might be quite a few! How do we go about increasing and motivating more engagement from people with different perspectives? In an age of social media and decreasing attention spans (the 'attention deficit economy'), how can complex subjects be covered in short video clips and 10 second sound bites to encourage more informed voting and prioritization? Does civil discourse (respectful face-to-face debate and digital exchanges of contrasting views) still have a place in our societies? What role should technology and artificial intelligence play in our societies? How do we address rising mental illness and suicide rates caused by increasing social isolation? How do we ensure that the most vulnerable amongst us are supported? What attributes and mindsets are needed to help us work more collaboratively to create a better future together? We will explore these questions and many more as we continue to bring people together. Meanwhile, what do you think? **Please share your thoughts by email to contact@jerseypolicyforum.org.**