

THINK PIECE

Why are young people leaving Jersey?

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Introduction

Migration is a profoundly salient issue in Jersey, with a long history of debate regarding both immigration and emigration. Alongside significant historical context, there has also been regular discussion regarding the rising dependency ratio and the resulting social and economic outcomes.

The aim of this paper is to provide a broad perspective on the character of emigration across the crown dependencies and the impact this is having on the future of Jersey, with a particular focus on the emigration of those born or raised on the island.

The perspective of this paper is that an understanding of diverse evidence, views and policy, offers a route to encouraging young people to stay or return to the island. With the ultimate objective being to challenge a culture of isolation and develop Jersey's reputation as an island of opportunity.

Summary

The discussion begins with an analysis of the historical context regarding youth emigration, particularly the role longstanding impact of economic factors and educational opportunity.

To outline the interconnected factors behind youth emigration, analysis then focusses on the statistics of contemporary emigration from Jersey alongside a comparison with the situation in Guernsey and the Isle of Man. Although, emigration figures do not appear to be significantly increasing in any singular jurisdiction, the numbers remain significant in consideration of historical fluctuations, rising dependencies ratio and similar pressures.

These pressures are explored in the following section, with a focus on the way that a sense of dissatisfaction, mental health and wellbeing, opportunities and economic challenges are shaping the decisions of young islanders. Although considered separately, emphasis is placed on the connections between these factors and the resulting decisions of young islanders.

As a final component, this paper then explores various policy recommendations. These range from efforts to address concerns around social life and activity, towards a prioritisation of material concerns and ultimately the impact emigration and its risk factors have on the fabric of the island community.

Historical context

In considering the contemporary issues of young people leaving Jersey, it is important to note the historical context within which this discussion sits. Although framed in deeply problematic terms, the 1906 States Report on Immigration into Jersey¹ is useful for identifying that youth emigration has long been considered a significant issue on

the island; one that the report seems to reluctantly accept as a futile task. Mark Boleat's book within which this report is reproduced, *Jersey's Population – A History*², outlines the relevance of economic factors. Emphasis is placed on the role of growth, encouraging both immigration and emigration, dependent on a positive or negative direction, respectively. Boleat emphasises the role that increased demand for higher education has played in encouraging young people to look elsewhere for educational opportunities. As a final point of relevance, Boleat outlines several factors for why people may emigrate and then return, with an emphasis on the role of homesickness and family ties. The picture Boleat presents is of a migratory history shaped by both the progress of the island and the values and attitude of the population.

Furthering this work is the invaluable contribution of Jaine Beswick³ who outlines how emigration towards the end of the 19th century was predicated on a lack of work opportunities, particularly for those who had previously migrated to the island. Moving through Jersey's history, it is noted that in the late 20th century, lower-income families made the decision to leave as a result of soaring property prices and the premium cost of land for building. Applying language theory, Beswick's work explains that the emergence of global English is likely to have encouraged Jersey families to move to English speaking countries with opportunities for employment. This work also provides a useful note on the unmatched prominence of Jersey's financial services industry in recent decades.

The product of this research is that it contributes to an overarching view that emigration has been a longstanding point of discussion, and one which has endured despite fluctuations throughout the island's history. Importantly, research into the history of emigration and the changing shape of this phenomenon are also a vital component in developing measures to retain and return young talent.

The problem

In considering Jersey's population statistics, much has been made of the growth in Jersey's dependency ratio and the way that young people leaving the island may act as a contributing factor. The dependency ratio refers to the number of dependents (of non-working age) per 100 of the working age population; in 2024 this was estimated to be 52.5 dependents per 100 people of working age. Various population estimates published by Statistics Jersey outline how this figure will increase, with varying rates based on levels of immigration⁴.

As a result, discussion has turned to levels of emigration by young people of working age, and the way this continued emigration contributes to the dependency ratio. Concerns around Jersey's dependency ratio and ageing population revolve around a fear that there is a potential for a decline in goods and services produced by the island, increased costs for Government; passed on to the public through taxes and an overall reshaping of the makeup of Jersey's society⁵. According to Population Statistics produced by Statistics Jersey (2017–2024), Jersey's population, from the ages of 0 to 39, was 47,710 in 2017, falling to 44,770 in 2024⁶. Counterintuitively the emigration of people aged 0 to 39, also appears to have fallen, going from 2,820 in 2017 to 2,250 in 2024. While the raw figures and percentage of young people emigrating has

decreased, the overarching trend towards an ageing population makes the issue of persistent youth emigration a viable concern. Of relevance, is also the decision by young people to take up opportunities abroad while temporarily retaining residence through family connections.

This paper aims to analyse the varying reasons for young people leaving the island, with a particular focus on those leaving for university and not returning; a figure estimated at nearly 60% according to the Policy Centre Brief University Education on Island⁷. The Jersey Children's and Young People's Survey Report, surveying Year 12's, reveals a desire by 42% of Females and 24% of Males to attend University off island and then seek a career off island, the largest group among both genders⁸. Settling abroad after university presents a challenge for the island, which is determined to keep and encourage workers with valuable skills sets, developed at university. In addition to concern around permanent emigration, demand for university is also a vital consideration in understanding the perspectives of young people who emigrate and return, and at which point they do so.

Comparing jurisdictions

In understanding why young people are leaving the island, this paper explores how the issue of emigration has developed as a priority in other jurisdictions of similar size, with a focus on Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

As within Jersey, discussion has developed in Guernsey around the emigration of young people, and the driving factors in such processes. Guernsey's population of young people (ages 20–28) decreased from the 7,590 recorded in the census of 2018 to the 7,212 recorded in 2023⁹. Living costs and affordable housing are often identified as key reasons why young people may be encouraged to leave the island. The 2025 Guernsey Quality of Life Report helps to provide a grounding for understanding this issue, with three-quarters of under-40's viewing finances as their biggest cause for dissatisfaction with life on the island. At the end of the report, commentary is also recorded demonstrating the significance of cost-of-living issue from the perspective of all ages, with the issue also being cited by multiple respondents as an influential reason for leaving the island.¹⁰

This sense that young people feel discouraged from remaining on the island is reinforced by a survey by OSA Recruitment, a Guernsey Recruitment Agency, which showed that among students and early career professionals aged 16–27, 44% intended to stay on the island, with 32% unsure and 24% determined to leave the island. 61% of those surveyed intended to attend university, were currently studying or had completed their education, compared to 32% who had no intention to pursue higher education¹¹.

The results of this survey are insightful for demonstrating the challenge of emigration, likely emboldened by a significant attendance at university off island. Although Guernsey's challenges cannot be directly translated to Jersey, concerns around costs and the availability of educational opportunities are valuable for understanding the

'Bean Drain' and reveal that further research across jurisdictions will be important for addressing the issue.

Understanding Guernsey's challenges with emigration is certainly critical considering the close relationship between the two jurisdictions, and similar position within the channel. Much like across the other Crown Dependencies, the Isle of Man is also facing the challenge of an emigration of young people as evidenced in the 2025 Isle of Man Population Report¹². 41% of those leaving the Isle of Man in 2024 were recorded as part of the 20–34 age range, a decrease from the 47% recorded in 2023, and identified as part of a continued trend since 2011 of a slight drop in this figure.

The report itself identifies the reason for young people leaving as potentially linked to taking up work after university or seeking a career change and progress that may not be available on the Isle of Man. These issues are not a new concern. In 2011 Canavan¹³ outlined some of the underlying factors determining why young people do not return to the Isle of Man, having applied research from a range of jurisdictions, including Jersey, and presenting the Isle of Man as a valuable case study. An overarching theme of this research, conducted using an open style of interviews, was to determine that property inflation is a substantial issue for the Isle of Man, with negative impacts on social cohesion being a particular concern. Fears of those interviewed were also exacerbated by a sense of limited opportunity and chance for progress, a feeling not aided by the inability of many to find housing independent from their parents.

As with Jersey, both Guernsey and the Isle of Man have faced fluctuations in the number of young people on the island, and the number of young people choosing to emigrate. As islands they offer strong family connections, well paid opportunities and often a strong quality of life. Nonetheless, youth emigration is notable across all three, with the relevant demand of a high cost of living alongside challenges related to mental health and overall wellbeing.

In addition to these practical factors, is the concept of a 'rite of passage'. This is the idea that leaving the crown dependencies, often for the UK, is a natural part of growing up and exploring life opportunities. In terms of context, Everett S. Lee's¹⁴ work on migration presented the view that the various pressures of migration include factors at the point of origin and destination but also intervening obstacles and personal factors. Understanding and addressing this 'rite of passage' involves assessing the social factors that shape the migratory relationships of these islands. Consideration should be paid to the interdependence between a lack of opportunities or perceived lack of opportunities and expectations from parents or other young people.

Contributory factors

Having offered an outline of the historical context, broader problem and evidence from the other Crown Dependencies, the objective of this paper is to outline and explore the range of factors contributing to the emigration of young people.

Dissatisfaction with island life

Although reports indicate high levels of satisfaction with life on the island, there is a very relevant proportion whose satisfaction is mitigated. Young people, in particular present a negative deviation from the overall levels of satisfaction. These statistics therefore have the potential to encourage serious discussion around the role of culture and community as important factors for youth emigration.

The 2024 Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey is the most recent survey from Statistics Jersey to focus on satisfaction with island life^{15,16}. This survey found that 81% of overall respondents were satisfied with Jersey as a place to live, with this figure sitting at a similar 77% for those aged 16-34. However, compared to the average of 31% of respondents who felt very satisfied with Jersey as a place to live, among those aged 16-34, only 19% considered themselves very satisfied. In reference to local neighbourhoods, the overall satisfaction sat at 91% compared to 83% for those aged 16-34.

Crucially, the percentage of those very satisfied with both island life, as a whole, and their neighbourhoods was much higher among those aged 55-64, and 65+ in particular. The overall trend thereby pointing to a significant increase in satisfaction towards later life.

While this does bode well for attracting young emigrants back in future, it still presents a significant problem in dealing with the current outflow and contribution to the dependency ratio issue. Perhaps most concerningly, the post-Covid 2022 Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey¹⁷, noted that overall, 41% were very satisfied with life in Jersey, with the proportion falling to 29% among those aged 16-34. While cumulative satisfaction sits above 80% in both reports, it is a worrying trend to see such a rapid decline in strong satisfaction, particularly among young people.

One potential issue with an impact on dissatisfaction is the feeling that there is a lack of focus on activities and engagement with young people. Although young people were the most likely to attend a cultural event according to the 2024 Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, they were also the least likely to view this provision as good or very good. Young people demonstrate an engagement with Jersey's cultural and activity provision but may not necessarily feel it works for them.

Of particular concern is the assertion that young people are not simply isolated from a provision of activities but also feel disconnected from the decision-making processes of the island. Christopher Pich's¹⁸ work on the island, reveals a sense that there has been an inadequate engagement with the perspectives of young people, particularly in terms of education surrounding democratic engagement. Involvement of young people in this process comes with the chance to advance their interests and develop an opportunity for greater trust across the island's communities.

Mental health and wellbeing

In addressing the challenges and perspectives that impact the decision by young islanders to emigrate, the role of mental health and wellbeing represent another critical consideration.

Evidence from across the island reveals that there has been an increasing demand for mental health services. The Mental Health JSNA Report 2025¹⁹ notes there has been a marked increase in the complexity of needs and a notable deterioration among girls; an important statistic considering the disproportionate level of young women considering leaving for university. Further evidence from the 2024 Mental Health Profile²⁰ demonstrates that young people are feeling pressure from various directions, with lower average life satisfaction, lower levels of happiness and higher rates of anxiety than older age groups.

The All-Ages Mental Health Strategy 2026–2030²¹, published in March 2026, identifies the multifaceted nature of this issue, with a wide variety of risk factors, such as sleep and activity alongside the challenges of care, gender and deprivation. The strategy report also notes the changing shape of Jersey's mental health landscape, with particular emphasis on the way that movement towards adolescence and stress factors are contributing to these pressures.

The mental health picture of the island, particularly among young people, has raised continuing concern and encouraged action from various sectors of the island community. It is not a standalone issue, nor could it be considered a singular factor in pushing young people to leave the island. Jersey is a unique island with both opportunities and challenges, and this is no truer for addressing emigration than it is for tackling mental health problems.

Rather, the scope of mental health concerns, should encourage further thinking about the differences in the experiences of young people, the impact these can have on wellbeing and ultimately the decisions that young people are making at critical moments in their lives. Continuing efforts to develop an effective response to both challenges, could potentially consider the relationship between mental health and emigration, within a broad scope of analysis.

Lack of job diversity and opportunities

Related to the issues of dissatisfaction and wellbeing is the sense that young people feel squeezed by the job market and opportunities on island and taking the chance to emigrate as a potential route to diverse careers and livelihoods.

A particular concern within Jersey has been the dominant position of the financial sector, and the potential for young people with differing ambitions to feel excluded. The Jersey Labour Market report, December 2025²², showed that 22% of workforce jobs were in the sector of financial and legal activities. Opportunities for young people exist within a variety of sectors but there remains a possibility that financial sector prominence has encouraged those with alternative ambitions to look elsewhere. As shown by the most recent evidence from Statistics Jersey²³, the average weekly earnings of those across all sectors are not dissimilar to the most recent statistics from the UK²⁴, with a similar spread of pay across industries.

One reason for young people to look to the UK for opportunities in both education and work is a sense of greater experience, alongside the pressure of the 'rite of passage'. The continued promotion of the University College Jersey and on-island opportunities, in conjunction with partners in the UK, has the potential to benefit islanders looking



for expanded opportunities. A push towards the retaining of young workers, will also come with emphasis of the advantages within Jersey's education sector, including location and academic outcomes²⁵. Greater understanding of islanders demand for education is necessary, and a valuable step towards the promotion of education, job diversification and island experience.

Alongside discussion regarding the shape of education and diversification of Jersey's industry, a conversation has also developed regarding the changes that may be required to improve the competitiveness of the financial sector, as evidenced by the Government of Jersey's Time to Win Report²⁶. Balancing financial competitiveness while enabling sector diversification and the involvement of young islanders is a crucial economic challenge. How well the Government can balance these interests has potential repercussions for Jersey's migration pattern, particularly for those young islanders exploring diverse career opportunities.

The cost of housing and living

A general sense of dissatisfaction and lack of job opportunities are both factors which have the potential to continue encouraging the emigration of Jersey's young people, but no factor seems to have as much influence on young people's attitudes than the costs associated with living in Jersey. Although the cost of living and housing could be considered separately, for the purposes of understanding potential push factors, a general sense of high cost can be linked to both housing and general living. A 2026 survey of 1,422 respondents, conducted by 4Insight for the Policy Centre Jersey, showed that the cost of living and housing are viewed by the public as Jersey's most important issues. When asked for the single most important issue, 38% referred to the cost of living, while in second place 13% referred to housing²⁷. Considering the most important issue and other important issues, housing was pushed into third place by trust in Government, with 82% of respondents referring to the cost of living as an issue and 54% referring to housing.

Young people aged 17–34 were the only age group to identify the cost of living and housing as their top two issues. While the cost of living was viewed as similarly important to those aged 35 to 54, housing was viewed as important by over 75% of 17- to 34-year-olds, 20 percentage points more than the next closest age group of 35 to 54. In both cases, those aged 55+ found these issues to be less important. While the cost of living was first among this age group, housing was pushed to 5th among this group.

The issue of housing appears fundamentally tied to the potential emigration of young people from jurisdictions like Jersey, with reference to consistent criticism of high housing prices in Jersey. The 2007 work of Hampton and Christensen²⁸ critiqued policies which had directly and indirectly subsidised owner occupancy, reducing the overall supply and opportunity for renting. Hampton and Christensen also identified rising real income and a simple lack of space for housing as factors contributing to Jersey's inflated house prices. The process of entering such an expensive housing market is a strong challenge for young people, and one that will take much effort to address.

Statistics Jersey²⁹ has compared the current cost of housing to both the UK and Guernsey, with housing prices more than double those of the UK and roughly £97,000 more than Guernsey (using Guernsey's methodology) in the fourth quarter of 2025. While it is important to note that over the last year prices have declined, these prices have continued to sit far above other similar jurisdictions and the UK. Jersey is in a uniquely poor position in terms of housing costs, with the unhelpful effect of potentially pricing out young people, in comparison to much lower prices in the United Kingdom; at least one location for young people to emigrate to.

The significant issue of housing costs can certainly be presented as a strong contributory factor regarding the cost-of-living problem in Jersey. The Policy Centre Jersey's 2026 Brief³⁰ on the cost of living helps to illustrate the scope of the combined cost issue, with emphasis on the role that housing plays in increasing prices, alongside the small scope of the islands market. Although over a decade old, Statistics Jersey's comparison of Consumer Price Levels between the UK and Jersey³¹, provides an indication of the higher costs faced in Jersey; with prices roughly 9% higher than the average in the UK; excluding housing, health and education.

As evidence for the impact of these costs, survey evidence indicates that young people in families facing financial difficulties are much less likely to view Jersey as the place to build their life and career than those whose families are better off.

Data from the Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey 2024 outlines that 67% of adults viewed Jersey as the right place to build their career and life, with a similar figure of 65% for those aged 16-34. Importantly, while 29% of the overall figure agreed very strongly, only 22% of those aged 16-34 felt this way.

This report also identifies that 56% of those finding it quite difficult to cope financially, and 44% of those finding it very difficult, agreed that Jersey was the right place to build their career and life. Compared to the 67% average, this is a marked departure.

The cost of living, and the strongly associated factor of the high cost of housing, can certainly be viewed as substantial reasons why young people are choosing to leave Jersey. As Canavan identified through research and interviews, living independently is not only financially unattainable for many young people, but also has the potential to come with a sense of shame and social pressure; feelings which can be understood in the context of both the Isle of Man and Jersey.

Policy recommendations

As this paper has shown, the emigration of young people from the island is a long-standing issue which, despite some statistical changes, does not seem to be consistently improving. Recent decades have seen a compounding of the emigration issue with a salient conversation around the dependency ratio. As a result, steps must be taken to address the issues and opportunities such a challenge presents. While this will require continued research and experimentation, some core recommendations are provided below.

1. **Greater recognition of the needs and demands of young people:** Continued work is required to address the challenges of youth dissatisfaction, with potential for successes in the form of an expanded provision and scope of activities alongside structured engagement with the values and opinions of young people. Prospects exist for valuable events with global partners through sport, culture and democratic activities.
2. **Continued development of effective mental health and wellbeing strategies:** Addressing mental health problems and overall wellbeing, comes with the implementation of strategies which emphasise the pressures faced by young people. Providing support for young people is vital to helping address the stressors that make life difficult for young people making the decision to leave, remain or return to the island.
3. **Focus on the possibilities within Jersey's higher education system and job market:** The expansion of awareness and the overarching footprint of the UCJ, alongside engagement with other education partners and businesses, has the potential to contribute to the diversification of industry and the decisions young people can make about career direction. Opportunities for diversification also exist through sustainable and community-oriented business, that a small island is uniquely placed to explore.
4. **Challenging the costs of living on island:** Tackling inflated prices and investing in the financial position of those who are currently worse off, has the chance to pay dividends in encouraging young islanders to earn and build comfortable lives on the island, rather than contributing to social pressures around emigration. Crucially, any challenge to the cost of living will also require targeted support for young people looking for housing.
5. **Building a sustainable community:** Efforts to limit the emigration of young people, will ultimately require a significant investment in the communities that shape the decision to emigrate. Jersey's population is diverse and an effort should also be made to explore and address the pressures for emigration influenced by a range of factors including ethnicity, gender and economic circumstance.

Conclusion

While there are a significant number of available policy recommendations, there is no silver bullet to address a historic and ingrained issue. As an island the best steps will involve efforts to innovate, working alongside partners in the crown dependencies and further afield, and continuing to research the factors that encourage emigration. Emigration is a complex issue, and research which recognises the risk factors and diversity of perspectives, is likely to provide great benefit for policy makers and the island as a whole.

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