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Policy Brief

University-level education in Jersey

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Introduction

Jersey currently has limited opportunities for university education on-Island. The vast majority of Jersey school leavers who study for a degree do so at UK universities.

This Brief describes what is available in the Island, analyses data on participation in higher education by Jersey school leavers and educational standards in the Island, discusses the case for a "University of Jersey" and

considers other options for increasing university education provision on-Island. The Brief draws heavily on the Policy Centre's research report University education on-Island.

It should be noted that the expression "higher education" means all qualifications and courses taken after age 18. This Brief is concerned primarily with degree level education at universities but some of the data refer to higher education more generally.

Existing university education provision in Jersey

Currently, four institutions in Jersey offer university education.

> University College Jersey (UCJ) is part of Highlands College, a further education college, similar to those in the UK. Highlands offers a wide range of vocational courses. UCJ offers degree-level courses validated by three UK universities: Sussex, Plymouth and London South Bank. It currently runs degree programmes in business accounting, childhood studies, social work, psychology with criminology, digital technologies, social sciences and sport coaching and development.
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> BPP International Finance, a private sector institution, offers a range of courses leading to qualifications with one of the professional bodies in the financial services industry. It operates from the Regus facility in Liberty Wharf.
>
> The Jersey International Centre of Advanced Studies (JICAS) offers a master's degree in island biodiversity and conservation in conjunction with the University of Exeter. It also offers a PhD programme. It operates from Highlands College.
>
> The Institute of Law Jersey offers the University of London University LLB law degree and a range of other courses. The Institute is also the leading centre for offshore legal research and learning. It operates from Highlands College.

In addition, the Health and Community Services Higher Education Department offers a three-year full-time nursing degree course. Robert Gordon University now runs this and other courses, having been appointed in 2022.

Statistics on university level education in Jersey

The 2021 census showed –

- 28% of all adults aged 16-64 had at least a degree level education.

- 42% had higher education or degree level education – an increase from 34% in 2011. The Census report commented that the increase is primarily due to inward migration.
- 61% of Jersey-born recent arrivals and 67% of those born outside Europe held a qualification at or above degree level.
- A breakdown by place of birth of adults with at least education at further level shows –
  - Jersey 39%
  - British Isles 53%
  - Outside Europe 64%.

However, these statistics do not accurately reflect the education system in Jersey given high levels of two-way migration. The relatively low proportion of Jersey-born people with at least further education partly reflects the high proportion, currently estimated at nearly 60%, of those who go to university outside the Island and who do not subsequently return.

Participation in higher education by Jersey school leavers

In the UK the overall Higher Education Initial Participation Rate in 2020/21 was just over 53%; 61% for women and 46% for men. There is substantial regional variation - the figure being much higher in London and much lower in Scotland and the North East. There are no published statistics on progression to higher education in Jersey. A response to a freedom of information request indicated that 45% of Jersey school leavers entered UK universities and Highlands College degree courses in the academic year 2021/2022. This figure is not directly comparable with any of the available data for England or the UK.

Three factors affect the progression rate to higher education in Jersey -

- Poor performance at A level. Jersey's performance is below that of each of the counties in South East England, and significantly so in respect of the best performing counties.
- Jersey school leavers probably have more opportunities to go into well-paid employment – in the finance industry – than their English counterparts.
- The "living at home" option is available only for a limited range of courses, which reduces the attractiveness of university education, particularly for some groups of students for whom living away from home is not a viable option.

The experience of other jurisdictions

It is sensible to draw on the experience of other small jurisdictions in any analysis of what is appropriate for Jersey.

In Guernsey, the GTA University Centre is affiliated with Bournemouth University and offers its MSc in corporate governance. The Centre is involved in the Guernsey Institute initiative, which is bringing the Guernsey College of Further Education, the GTA University Centre and the Institute of Health & Social Care Studies under one roof, to combine, and then by working collaboratively, extend their offerings.

Guernsey commissioned a detailed analysis of the concept of a University of Guernsey from the consultancy Oxentia. Its report, published in 2021, International University of Guernsey Feasibility Report, considered the viability of an institution with 1,500 students. The Economic Development Committee decided that there was no case to take the project forward as it would require considerable capital investment from the Government, which would bear a significant risk.

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Gibraltar has its own University of Gibraltar, which offers a limited range of courses. The University is unsurprisingly small with around 200 new students a year. Gibraltar's rationale for the university stems from it being resented by the country it borders, that speaks a different language and has a different culture, and is far less integrated with Britain than is Jersey.

In the Faroe Islands, a self-governing nation within Denmark, the University of the Faroe Islands offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. In comparison with Jersey the key point is that the Faroe Islands are a very long way from Denmark (they are closer to Britain, Ireland and Norway) and far less connected to Denmark than Jersey is to Britain.

In the Isle of Man, University College Isle of Man is an associate college of the University of Chester, which is the degree awarding body. It offers a small number of undergraduate courses, covering nursing, health and social care, history and heritage, sport, business and technology.

Students living at home and social mobility

A significant proportion, about 20%, of UK university students choose to go to a university near their home and continue to live at home while they are studying. This has obvious advantages in term of costs and is therefore particularly attractive to students whose parents cannot help with meeting the cost of living away from home. It is also attractive to students with a disability or caring responsibilities and to some ethnic minority groups. This option is not available to most students from Jersey.

A useful source of information is a 2018 Sutton Trust report Home and Away. Key points made in this report include -

- Social class is a key factor which drives the mobility choices of young people, with disadvantaged students less likely to leave home and travel further. Over three times more students in the lowest social class group commute from home than do so from the highest group (44.9% compared with 13.1%). In contrast, leaving home and attending a distant university is too often the preserve of white, middle class, privately educated young people.
- Controlling for other factors including class, location and attainment, state school students are 2.6 times more likely to stay at home and study locally than their privately educated counterparts.

The importance of university education in promoting social mobility is analysed in a report by the Sutton Trust – Universities and Social Mobility: summary report. Its key conclusion is that –

> Higher education is a key driver of social mobility in this country. Young people from less well-off backgrounds who attend university are more likely to become socially mobile into higher income brackets, and income gaps are lower between graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers compared to non-graduates.

Previous reviews of high education provision

The narrow question of a "University of Jersey" and the wider issue of higher education provision have been the subject of a number of reviews and initiatives over the years. Much of the analysis in those reviews is still relevant today, and the political response merits noting.

In 2004 Dr Michael Goldstein, former Vice Chancellor of Coventry University, was commissioned to consider what provisions for higher education might be made on the Island. The key conclusions in his Review of Higher Education were -

- More opportunities to study full-time first degrees should be provided in Jersey.
- The potential number of students is not sufficient to sustain an academically and financially self-standing multi-Faculty University, given the spread of subjects and levels involved.
- A more gradual development towards creation of a "University of Jersey" by building upon the strengths of Highlands College is also discounted.
- Each of the Higher Education needs identified should be pursued as valid and necessary developments in their own right. There would, however, be advantage in refining this strategy by bringing together the various elements under a common structure and brand, perhaps

named “The Jersey Higher Education Academy” and possibly as a new legal entity.

A number of subsequent reports developed the concept of a “University Centre for Jersey”, to be the focus for all higher education delivery on-Island. However, despite agreements to do things in principle, little has happened. A 2017 report Skills Strategy 2017-2022 was silent on higher education but did refer to “plans under development such as the Higher Education Strategy”.

In July 2019 the Government published A post 16 strategy for Jersey. This identified a number of key objectives underlying the strategy including –

- Ensuring tertiary education on island is high quality and “fit for purpose”.
- Creating tertiary education on island which has international appeal.

A key objective was stated as “Creating an international offer in Jersey for post-16 education at undergraduate and postgraduate level”, including -

- Exploring ways to continue to support Jersey-domiciled students who wish to study abroad.
- Encouraging overseas institutions to establish provision on the island.
- Encouraging students from abroad to continue their further and higher-education studies in Jersey.

The Common Strategic Policy of the current Council of Ministers and the Proposed Government Plan 2024-2027 are silent on higher education. However, the Minister for Children and Education’s ministerial plan for 2024 does include “developing a strategy for on-island provision of Higher Education in partnership with local providers”.

The case for expanding university education on-Island

There are three principal reasons for seeking to expand university education on-Island –

- Expanding choice for Jersey students, particularly those from low-income households, with health issues or with caring responsibilities, by giving them the option of having university education while living at home.
- Enhancing Jersey’s competitive position by raising education standards generally and helping to keep entrepreneurs on-Island.
- Reversing the falling proportion of Jersey students who, after completing a degree course, stay in the Island.

The 2023 Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey demonstrated strong support for increasing higher education opportunities on-Island -

- 77% of adults think that the higher education opportunities in the island should be increased, 21% of people feel they are about right.
- 71% of those that find it very easy to cope financially think that the higher education opportunities on the island should be increased compared to 92% of those that find it very difficult.

Models for developing university education in Jersey

There are four options for expanding the provision of higher education on-Island –

- A "University of Jersey".
- A specialist university centre or centres in Jersey.
- Expanded provision by University College Jersey.
- A campus of a UK university.

The four options are not mutually exclusive, although it will be argued that a "University of Jersey" is not a realistic option until one or more of the other options has developed significantly.

A University of Jersey

A University of Jersey means a stand-alone educational body offering degree level education and awarding its own degrees, similar to those in Gibraltar and the Faroe Islands. To have any credibility such an institution would need to be accredited, most likely by the UK's Global Accreditation Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), so as to ensure that its degrees were generally recognised. Establishing such a university would be a lengthy, costly and risky process. More generally, Jersey is too small to have its own university, one of the conclusions in Dr Goldstein's report.

However, in the longer term a "University of Jersey" is possible, but it would have to be built on a significant and well-established local institution or institutions already offering university-level education.

A specialist centre

Jersey already has two specialist centres: the Institute of Law Jersey and the Jersey International Centre of Advanced Studies (JICAS). There is scope for JICAS in particular to expand and possibly for other centres to be attracted to the Island if the right environment can be created.

Expansion of University College Jersey (UCJ)

University College Jersey already offers a number of degree courses validated by UK universities, but the range of courses is inevitably limited.

There is clearly scope to build on what currently exists to offer a wider range of courses and more flexibility through offering part-time degree courses.

A campus of a UK university
A number of UK universities have established satellite campuses and it would be possible for one to be established in Jersey. This model differs from the University College Jersey model in that the UK university would be responsible for the whole concept. It is open to a UK, or indeed any other, university to open a campus in Jersey on its own initiative. However, Jersey's small size probably means that incentives would be needed to attract such a campus.

Co-ordinating higher education provision

The recommendations in the report of the Higher Education Development Group, chaired by Dr Goldstein, in July 2008 included –

> A "University Centre for Jersey" should be created to be the focus for all general higher education delivery on-Island. This should be maintained and administered by Highlands College, but available to all providers of higher education on-Island, as well as providing a base for those studying by distance learning.

Those arguments seem valid today, and perhaps have been strengthened by developments in the education world. The various higher education providers in Jersey already collaborate informally, helped by co-location at Highland College. UCJ, JICAS and the Institute of Law Jersey have established the Higher Education Advisory Board. It is understood that the Health and Community Services Higher Education Department will join this Board. With some seed funding this could lead to a more formalised arrangement to bring together the different providers into a "University Centre Jersey", with its own identity and a website.

There is in fact a Higher education courses in Jersey page on the Government website, but it is very basic and suffers the same problems as the whole of the Government's website.

Longer term, an option would be a physical building capable of providing facilities for all the higher education institutions. Ideally it would be in a central location, which itself would help promote the visibility of higher education. Digital Jersey is a good model in this respect.