

Scrutiny Review: Lifelong Learning

Context

The Jersey International Centre of Advanced Studies (JICAS) is a postgraduate research centre that focuses on islands and island communities. Our flagship programme is an MSc / PhD Island Biodiversity and Conservation in partnership with BioSciences, University of Exeter. Additionally, JICAS offers field schools and short courses relating to island history and heritage; sustainable island governance and global change; island biodiversity and island archaeology with work undertaken on islands across the world, including the Channel Islands, the Caribbean and the Mediterranean.

NB: vocational = relating to an occupation or employment

1. In your view, are there adequate opportunities for lifelong vocational learning in Jersey?

SD: Although there is some (good) provision offered on island, it is scattered amongst several institutions and there is no attempt to centralise the offerings for the purpose of producing the necessary economies of scale that would, in turn, provide more opportunities. At last count, there are a dozen+ institutions based in Jersey that could be placed in the lifelong learning category, including half-dozen+ degree awarding organisations, of which none of them share an accrediting partner. Put simply, this makes it harder for islanders to identify what opportunities there are and for what purpose.

Not only would placing the main HE institutions and organisations under one roof prove beneficial for the purpose of equality of opportunity, the lack of centralisation of provision on island prevents the gathering of expertise and economies of scale. Promoting lifelong learning is all about capacity building; and a localised physical space would go a long way to ensure that we harness the full potential for islanders looking to upskill and gain new opportunities, but also for those islanders who have gained new skills and opportunities to then become the subsequent generation of experts and knowledge builders. This model would also include experts who visit the island to undertake formal or informal teaching and learning opportunities. Again, and in short, we are not yet the sum of our individual parts; and until we achieve this key aspect of gathering forces, we will continue to struggle to provide the necessary opportunities for vocational teaching and learning in Jersey.

2. How effectively do you think lifelong vocational learning in Jersey is funded to support career changes, upskilling, and workforce development?

SD: As noted, JICAS is a postgraduate research centre and therefore does not benefit from the very generous funding mechanisms that the Government of Jersey has in place for islanders undertaking undergraduate degrees at local, regional and international institutions of higher education. The Jersey Bursary Scheme (www.gov.je/Working/SkillsCareersHigherEducation/StudentFinance/pages/postgraduatecourses.aspx) aimed at providing ad hoc funding for islanders wishing to undertake postgraduate programmes falls short in several keyways, including:

- Capped at £10,000 per applicant
- Capped at £100,000 per cohort (often even less, as previous awards can eat into the current cohort allocation – ie three-year doctoral awards)
- Lack of criteria (indeed, I have sat on this panel in the past, and the only advice I was given, both verbally and after the fact, was that we had to be seen to be ‘supporting excellence’)
- No organising principle for which the bursary is awarded
- No preference given to students who undertake postgraduate programmes on island
- Lack of subject / industry specific expertise on the panel

The points outlined above are, in my view, the most obvious and the most pressing. Over the past eight academic years, JICAS has awarded well over £100,000 of bursaries to Jersey residents undertaking our MSc Island Biodiversity and Conservation to compensate for these shortcomings, of which many would not have been able to undertake the programme if JICAS had not covered these costs. The impact this has had on our bottom-line is staggering and we are not in a position to carry these Jersey resident bursaries forward.

3. Do you believe that existing vocational learning programmes, such as further education and apprenticeships, are well resourced and delivering high quality outcomes for learners? For example, are participants gaining employment or progressing in their careers after completing courses?

SD: N/A

4. How accessible and inclusive do you think lifelong vocational learning is in Jersey?

SD: The question of accessibility and inclusivity, again, in my view, suffers from a lack of centralised on-island provision and funding. The mantras of ‘widening participation’ and making learning ‘inclusive to all’ are doomed to fail unless there

is a strong organising principle in the first place. The various island-based lifelong educational institutions are, of course, in the best position to make these decisions for themselves. However, these opportunities will only be realised when the providers are grouped together to form the overarching principles of lifelong learning. At present, that does not exist.

a. Are there any particular groups facing barriers to participation?

Yes, islanders who are looking to undertake a career change or upskill for the purpose of promotion, and women specifically, face additional barriers to participation.

b. If yes, what do you think those barriers are?

- High-quality, on-island provision
- Funding

5. Do you think lifelong vocational learning opportunities in Jersey are meeting the needs of learners across different stages of life and career?

SD: One of the fundamental truths about living on an island is ‘smallness’, and it will always be difficult to capture all the needs of all the islanders without a guaranteed funding commitment for small cohorts, etc. Unfortunately, this model falls outside of the financial realities of lifelong learning. So, I suppose it comes down to identifying a small number of manageable programmes / opportunities that maximises the ‘incidental assets’ of the island. However, I do not think that this means subsidising private enterprises for the purpose of training, but rather providing opportunities and resources for enterprising islanders, especially if they are looking to use these new opportunities for the benefit of our collective island community.

a. Are there any gaps in skills or sectors that need addressing?

- Critical thinking and analysis
- Cultural intelligence
- Research mastery
- Team building and problem-solving
- Data handling and interpretation (both qualitative and quantitative)
- Effective communication

6. Do you think that lifelong vocational learning in Jersey is meeting the current needs of the local labour market and employers?

SD: I am not able to appropriately answer this question. Sorry.

b. Do you think the opportunities for lifelong learning in Jersey are responsive to emerging workforce demand?

SD: No, the current opportunities for lifelong learning in Jersey are driven almost completely by (captured) industry demands that focus on a specific mindset, not a skillset. There needs to be much more focus on transferable / facilitating skills that relate to critical thinking, analysis and effective communication, not private sector market requirements.

b. In your view, are current lifelong learning opportunities in Jersey keeping pace with emerging workforce developments and evolving sectors?

SD: I do not think that I am qualified to make a statement on the following, as I live largely within the academic world. However, I would say that the key for JICAS is to remain flexible and respond to opportunities, and that same line of thinking seems relevant to most small organisations, regardless of sector. If workforce developments, within whatever capacity this term is used, should complement lifelong opportunities, not compete with them.