

POLITICAL EDUCATION IN JERSEY

Developing tomorrow's leaders...

INTRODUCTION

Although there are differences of scale and structure, the problems faced by politics in Jersey are not dissimilar to those faced in many other parts of the world.

While it is clearly outside the remit of this review to comment on whether Jersey should have political parties, the lack of political parties makes it harder for the general public to establish a relationship with their political process and to become involved. It is suggested that this places a greater onus on “political education” to engender an interest in politics and a belief in its ability to bring about real change.

It would be unwise to embark on any study of political education and how it should be structured without an awareness of the level of cynicism towards politics on the island, or indeed politics in general.

The *Imagine Jersey* project, some years ago, showed a clear desire among the general public – including people of school age – to be involved in and to make submissions about the development of their society. Can the political education process be directed so as to encourage participation in a similar projects, with students being encouraged to research and formulate submissions and discuss them in the form of a class presentation.

Let’s define some objectives, at the outset. What should the objectives of “Political Education” be, in any democratic society:

1. To make young people aware of the political process in their society, how it works, how legislation is enacted, i.e. a general overview of the constitutional arrangements;
2. To engender curiosity, debate and the shaping of ideas and views about how society should develop and how the society addresses opportunities – and dangers – in society; this should cover local and international issues;
3. To develop potential leaders
4. To encourage participation at every level of politics.
5. To develop personal skills and qualities which will be important, not just in a political environment, but in the student’s career and personal life.

One of the problems for Jersey is that at the end of any such education, it is difficult for a young person to become actively involved, there being no political organisation with which to become involved, as there would be in other countries. What can be done to overcome this? Consider the feasibility of a long term project based on *Imagine Jersey*, which would encourage the sharing and debating of new ideas.

How does the process continue to engender the interest of young people in politics; how is the individual who has a wish to become involved in politics and to develop a relationship with the process – even at a peripheral level – encouraged or facilitated in doing so? All too often, it can be the case that while there is an official/stated policy of support, the reality “on the ground” is that participation is frustrated, discouraged or otherwise limited.

The solution to this is not necessarily to castigate or criticise departments or officials. Here, the “dovetailing” of political education with Personal, Social & Health education is particularly important in that a part of “political education” is to develop skills and qualities – such as perseverance and self-discipline – which will be important in becoming involved in politics. As with challenging cynicism, it does no favours for students to have a “rose tinted” view of politics; the development of personal skills and how these can be honed and improved should form part of the political education process.

It is particularly important to note that the teaching and management of a political education course should be evolutionary; it should be reviewed on a regular basis (for example, five years), to determine whether it has been successful in meeting its objectives. This must not only be a measurement of how the students have performed, but also how effectively government departments and other agencies have been in co-operating with the programme and what needs to be done to encourage participation.

Challenge cynicism through participation.

Discuss negative perceptions.

We know the negative perceptions ; one can list the dismissive comments made about politics and politicians; as mentioned above, it is important not to paint a “rose tinted” picture of politics; cynicism exists; many of the students involved in the programme may feel cynical about certain aspects of the process.

There is a danger of an “Elephant in the room” effect; we know that there is cynicism and we know it’s damaging; it’s better to tackle it head on. Discuss the level of cynicism in politics, what causes it and how it can be tackled – and in particular what individuals can do to tackle their cynicism towards politics.

It is important to emphasise that disappointment or negative attitudes to a particular decision must be set apart from cynicism about the process itself; this would present a good opportunity for (a) debate or (b) teacher-led discussion (if possible, with information provided by a particular department) about how a particular decision was reached. By explaining the mechanics of the decision making process and the particular requirements/needs which needed to be balanced, the student should have a better understanding of the process, even if this does not necessarily address dissatisfaction about the decision reached.

While it is important to develop knowledge of the constitutional arrangements, history, roles of various individuals (Bailiff, A.G., Lt. Governor etc), it is vitally important, as part of the political education syllabus, for there to be a practical approach. Democracy is participative; political education must be, too.

Project work should be encouraged; engaging with deputies/senators, various government departments, Q&A sessions with civil servants and/or ministers. “A day with a Deputy”, “a day with in a parish/government office”, etc. Consideration should also be given to encouraging elected

representatives to take interns. Similarly, government departments could consider whether there is scope for internships in their departments during school holidays.

Students should be encouraged to follow the development of an idea from inception to fruition; twofold goal:

(a) to see the process in action, and

(b) to identify how perceived flaws or failings can be addressed. (*Developing analytical skills*).

At the end of this, the objective should be a better knowledge and awareness of politics in Jersey and a better awareness of the need for people to take part. That needs to be a two way process; it is one thing for students to recognise the need to take part, but quite another for that need to be recognised and facilitated.

Conclusions:

A basic knowledge of the legal/constitutional arrangements of Jersey is very important, both for students and the island itself. While the political education programme should be participative as far as possible, this knowledge should form a core part of the programme.

The programme should recognise the realities of modern politics and address directly issues such as cynicism and why people feel mistrust/suspicion of politics.

The personal and social aspect should include a focus on skills and qualities which need to be developed by anyone becoming involved in politics; apart from debating skills, this should include personal skills such as perseverance, self-discipline, self-motivation, inter-personal skills.

In the absence of a party political structure, consideration needs to be given to how an interest in politics can be sustained and encouraged after the programme has been completed.

The programme should be reviewed on a periodic basis, to assess and improve its effectiveness in meeting its goals.

As the political process itself depends on participation, there should be an emphasis on encouraging participation in debate and discussion in class; government departments (as well as parish administrations) should be encouraged to facilitate "hands on" experience of how they work and how decisions are made. The involvement of elected representatives should also be strongly encouraged, with internships being facilitated.

1. Awareness of constitutional structure; relationship with UK, other international bodies. How is legislation enacted.

Role of Bailiff, Lt. Governor, Deputies, Senators, Scrutiny, ministers. Electoral process. Why doesn't Jersey have political parties; difference between parties and alliances.

2. How other countries/jurisdictions are governed; key differences. What is a constitution? Separation of Powers. An introduction to the EU.

Objective: a student should be aware of the roles of the major figures in the government; how bills/legislative proposals become law, conversant in differences between other jurisdictions. Should be able to debate/discuss differences between major forms of government

3. "Developing a relationship with their political process" ... how is this possible?

4. Challenging cynicism in politics; starts with school. Positive attitude; interactive politics; how can individuals improve their relationship ... cynicism as a choice. PSYCHOLOGY of politics ... How does it evolve;

How to counter this: debating? Participation in school programmes, such as "Model Parliament", "Model UN" and/or similar.