

“An Irresistible Transition”

‘Guernsey: *Proactive Innovator* or *Reactive Survivor*’ was the theme of this year’s IoD Annual debate. The exhilarating evening strongly encouraged and included audience participation not only conventionally, but also innovatively through text and twitter. James Sproule opened with a fascinating speech, giving an economic overview and focusing on the fiscal difficulties facing Europe as a whole, and articulated both the short-term and long-term economics of the situation. As a result of this, he vocalised that Guernsey is dependent on the financial services sector, and although it is a vital, successful and prosperous industry, it is necessary to diversify into other industries and innovate in order to provide Guernsey’s future security.

The topics discussed included: Guernsey’s potential growth and innovation, the reduction of regulations, Alderney as a free economic zone, modifying the political system and the lack of young people returning to Guernsey following higher education. The panellists: Zef Eisenberg, Graham Harrison, Deputy Jonathan Le Tocq, George Melhuish, Simon Milsted and Kathy Tracey enthusiastically debated throughout the evening, which was skilfully moderated by Sarah Montague.

The topic ‘innovation’ was widely discussed during the evening, with George Melhuish expressing the popular opinion that *‘potential innovation is not being met’*. Zef Eisenberg explored this issue in depth, articulating that the primary reason for the lack of innovation in Guernsey is high start-up costs, which could prevent Guernsey from becoming globally prominent in certain markets. He further put forward the innovative idea of Guernsey focusing on creating a prototyping industry, which could potentially lead to another major industry in addition to the financial services sector. I whole-heartedly agree with the views expressed regarding innovation and would like to see more of an emphasis being placed on turning Guernsey into a creative hub, as it is island with infinite potential.

Another topic discussed during the debate was the suggestion that young people in Guernsey are 'not hungry for work' and that they lack work ethic, which I strongly disagree with. Preparing students for employment following higher education is essential; however I am convinced that the issue strongly relates to the topic of innovation. The issue does not lie within the individuals, who are deemed to not possess a work ethic, but in the post-higher education employment opportunities available, which are mostly in the finance industry and will not fire up each individual, thus further rendering innovation a necessity.

The prominent issue of young people returning to Guernsey following university or remaining on island following higher education was also discussed during the debate. The panellists articulated that Guernsey is facing the potential issue of depopulation, which is predicted to increase over the next 2-3 years. Thus rendering it essential that young people either remain in Guernsey or return following off-island education. The general consensus from the students' table was that extortionate housing prices seriously affect the desire to remain on the island. When paired with the lack of innovation by young people on the island, it is not surprising that they are not mutually exclusive. It appears that one cannot afford the start-up costs necessary for innovation AND residential prices. Therefore, a choice is often made, and personally it seems the only way to encourage young people to innovate is to lower start-up costs, or as Zef Eisenberg suggested, a 0% tax for entrepreneurs, but also lower house prices for young people, particularly those returning from off-island education, who often face substantial student loans. Therefore, a system with regulations that encourages entrepreneurship is undoubtedly necessary.

Additionally, there was a suggestion from the students attending the debate that as an island there is a sufficient lack of opportunities following higher education, particularly if the party in question does not wish to attend university. It is generally assumed, that if one is not attending university, then they will enter the finance industry. But there is also a perception from students that to gain

respectable and sufficient employment on the island, a university degree is necessary, a luxury that simply not everyone can afford or wishes to experience.

The debate provided me with an insight into a fascinating discussion and as a result I strongly believe that it is essential to include the opinions' of students at such an event. During the debate, the notion of the 'Guernsey Dream' was discussed, and although undoubtedly everyone's version will differ, I am presented with the image of an island where creative and business industries can work side by side to become world players. Many expressed the view that Guernsey is merely 'reactive', albeit some believing it to be a 'reactive survivor'. However, I disagree; I believe that previously Guernsey was a 'proactive survivor', and that as an island we are halfway there to becoming a 'proactive innovator', referred to during the evening as, "an irresistible transition".