



**NATIONAL
CONVERSATION**

CAMBRIDGE REPORT

JULY 2017

CONTEXT

The National Conversation on Immigration visited Cambridge, a metropolitan area of about 280,000 people. This is the second National Conversation visit to Cambridgeshire; previously, we visited March, a town of 23,000 people in the Fens about 35 miles north of Cambridge.

Cambridge is the administrative centre of Cambridgeshire County Council, which now has a three tier local government structure. Cambridge City Council is one of the five district councils within Cambridgeshire, although the metropolitan area also extends into other district councils. Above the County Council sits Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority whose voters have recently elected a Mayor, who has powers over the housing and planning, transport, post-16 education, adult skills, apprenticeships, health and social care integration.

Cambridge is dominated by its ancient university, whose presence is associated with many jobs, both directly and indirectly. The city is prosperous, with a diverse economy, particularly in bioscience, pharmaceuticals, high value engineering and tourism. Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin University between them employ 12,000 staff. The food and farming sector also employs a significant number of workers.

Cambridge's diverse and successful economy means that unemployment is very low in the city, with 3.5% of the population who live in the Cambridge City Council areas unemployed¹. Full-time median weekly earnings in the same area were £589.10 per week², above the regional and national averages. The Cambridge metropolitan area's suburbs extends into South Cambridgeshire district, where median weekly wages (£671.50) are even higher and unemployment (at 2.2%) is among the lowest in the country³. Despite its wealth, analysis of its income distribution suggested that in 2013 Cambridge was the most unequal city in Britain⁴. Housing costs are high in Cambridge, forcing many workers – of all nationalities - to commute in by car from the surrounding towns and villages into the city.

The prosperity of Cambridge, low levels of unemployment and the structure of its economy means that it has always been an attractive destination for migrant workers. International migrants into the city include entrepreneurs and academics coming to work in the university or in IT, pharmaceuticals and bioscience. Cambridge's economy also relies on EU nationals to fill low-skilled jobs, particularly in the hospitality sector. In this respect, international migrants into Cambridge reflect the city's divides between the highly-educated and prosperous and those who are struggling.

Some 33% of the working age population of the city were estimated to have been born outside the EU in 2015, with about a third of this population having been born in the European Union. Other migrants come to study, with 9,500 international students enrolled at Anglia Ruskin and Cambridge universities.

As well as migrants who have come to Cambridge to work or study, Cambridge has a long history of offering sanctuary to refugees. But in recent years, the high cost of housing has meant that Cambridge is not a dispersal area for asylum-seekers. Cambridge City Council has, however decided to take in 100 Syrians brought to the UK through the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme.

WHAT WE DID

A stakeholder meeting was held with nine representatives from civil society organisations and one of the city's universities. They were asked questions about attitudes to migration in the local area, and the future policy approaches they wanted to see in relation to EU migration and non-EU migration. Questions also probed the changes that would be needed to achieve a consensus on immigration. The stakeholder group was also asked about the impact of migration in the local area and about integration issues that had arisen. We also received written feedback from an organisation working to promote the integration of migrants and refugees in the city.

Later, a citizens' panel was held with nine members of the public recruited to represent a range of views on immigration, with the very sceptical and very pro-migration filtered out through a pre-interview screening question. All panel members came from Cambridge and two members of the group were migrants themselves, from France and South Africa. While this was a well-educated and articulate panel, it was 'town' rather than 'gown' and few people had close connections with Cambridge University. Further demographic information about the panel is given at the end of this report.

Basing our conversation on a discussion guide, the panels were asked questions about their views on the impact of immigration on the UK and their local area, EU and non-EU migration flows and on their opinions about integration. The citizens' panel also looked at securing a consensus, with participants asked about what needs to change in order to gain their trust and broad support for how the Government handles immigration and integration.

KEY FINDINGS

Attitudes to immigration

The citizens' panel were asked *'on a scale of 1-10 do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, nationally and in your local community'*. The average score for the panel was 5.7, with a range from 3 to 8. There was a range of views in this group, and those with more sceptical views, with a number of younger panel members having largely positive views about immigration. Overall, the views that were articulated by members of this panel were more polarised than in most other groups.

The panel saw the positives of migration mostly in terms of cultural richness, as well as the contribution that migrants had made to the university, local economy and the NHS. The biggest concerns that participants had about immigration were associated with population pressures on infrastructure, as well as security. Cambridge has a shortage of social and private rental accommodation, as well as high housing prices. High housing costs and shortages of social housing and school places was also an issue that was highlighted by those who attended the stakeholder meeting

High levels of migration were felt to have placed additional pressures on school places, already in short supply and on housing. Some members of the citizens' panel linked this directly to migration, while others felt these pressures were the result of wider economic inequality, not an impact of immigration.

"I think what people forget is that we're a tiny, tiny island. We're so small so I don't think it's about quantity, I think it's about being realistic...If you drive around still a few green places, but we still are a really, really small island, and I think that just has to be taken into account. It's not about how many people, it's about where we're going to put them. I want a house for my child, two children, I think when they grow up, it really, really worries me, the chances of that, people struggle to have houses now, it's not going to get better you know realistically it's just not."

"its not solely an issue because we have too much immigration, it could also be in Cambridge and London, be they British or foreign they buying houses... they'll get money and then those houses aren't there for people who want to live in a house"
Citizens' panel participants

In previous reports from previous visits we have noted that younger panel members are less likely to see pressures on housing and public services as a negative impact of migration. This was also the case with this citizens' panel. Both stakeholders and participants in the citizens' panels have felt that there are 'generational gaps' in attitudes to migration. There is some debate about the causes of such differences in attitudes:

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- age in itself
 - different levels of exposure to ethnic diversity at school or when young, or
 - other factors that might impact on attitudes and may differ across age groups, for example, perceptions about pressures on the NHS.

From the evidence we have seen so far, concerns about pressures on school places and housing seem acutely felt by those in their late twenties and thirties. These are people who are comfortable with cultural diversity and have often attended ethnically diverse schools, but may be looking for schools for their children or struggling to find affordable housing. Rather than generational differences, it appears that there may be some 'half generational' differences in attitudes. It is also an argument for some longitudinal research on attitudes to migration, tracking individuals for a number of years as their personal circumstances change.

As in many previous panels, we discussed the impact of the media, including social media on attitudes. They felt that comments posted on social media sites sometimes fanned prejudice and hatred. However, panel members did not feel confident in challenging these views. Nor did this group seem certain about what constituted a decent discussion about immigration and one that was prejudiced.

EU migration

The panel was asked about the changes they would like to see the Government make after the UK leaves the EU. There was a discussion about reducing the numbers of EU migrants, although the panel was divided about how desirable this was and no consensus was reached.

The panel then voted on the options for dealing with EU migration after Brexit, and there was a strong preference for treating migrants the same, irrespective of their nationality. Reciprocity of free movement for UK nationals had a stronger pull in Cambridge than on many other panels, suggesting a more internationalist outlook. However as in many other panels, participants spoke differently about free movement when presented with a selection of other policy options. This indicates some preferences but not necessarily concrete support.

All but one person voted that after Brexit they wanted the same restrictions applied to those coming from the EU, as from outside the EU, even if this meant tight rules for UK nationals who might want to work in Europe. Many participants' justified their views in terms of fairness: it would be unfair to give preference to some migrants on the basis of their nationality. An Australian-style

Points Based system was suggested as an approach that the Government should consider, but the panel were unclear about what this meant. Panel members also wanted greater vetting of would-be migrants from the EU, with a view to excluding those who had a criminal record.

“Freedom of movement allows anyone from the EU to come over whenever they want, at any time. That’s the thing, it does need to be controlled, because at the moment there is no control it’s just so free it’s not sustainable”. (Citizens’ panel participant)

The panel also discussed the impact of EU migration on Cambridge, with some panel members voicing the opinion that migrants put extra pressure on scarce housing stock and in some cases were prioritised for social housing. We suggested to the panel that most newly-arrived EU migrants were living in private rental accommodation, and then asked what they thought about the impacts of migration on Cambridgeshire towns of the Fens such as March or Wisbech. We were surprised that just one panel member had visited the Fens and that no-one had an opinion on the impacts of migration in these nearby towns.

The stakeholder panel discussed the contrast between Wisbech and Cambridge at length; *“just 43 miles yet it is another world”*. They felt that the isolation and of Wisbech and poor transport links in the area meant that EU migration had a more acute impact on local perceptions.

Non-EU Migration

The panel felt that migration from outside the EU was generally better controlled than from within the EU. Initially, participants felt that the regulations governing non-EU work, student and family migration were quite restrictive, as well as fair, as the same type of rules applied to British nationals who might want to live in Australia, Canada or the US.

“I think you know if you chose to live here, you know, we’d be the same if we went anywhere else, you know, you take that on board you know that’s what’s going to happen that you have to be willing” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Two members of the panel had a personal experiences of family and friends who had come or where trying to come to UK though work visas or as non-EU family migrants, and they explained to the group these experiences of migration. A relative of one panel member was finding it difficult to bring his family to the UK because of the minimum income requirement for family migration.

Panel members had not heard about this requirement and most of them were surprised that the income requirement was so high. We then talked about the different views on this policy, and whether a minimum income requirement of £18,600 for a spouse

was fair. There was a consensus that family migrants and their sponsors should be able to support themselves, but £18,600 was felt to be too high. Instead, the panel suggested a bar to claiming benefits and the minimum wage for full-time work be set as the minimum income threshold.

“I’m not opposed to the setting of a figure, but it should be the minimum wage that you need to get someone to enter the country. I think that’s [£18,600 minimum income requirement] is an excessively high income” (Citizens’ panel participant).

There was a consensus that international students brought many benefits to the UK. Most participants did not see international students in Cambridge as migrants as they assumed they were in the UK for a limited period and then mostly returned to their home countries.

“if you see a foreign young person you think they’re here to study and contribute so it’s much more accepted” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Others did not consider international students returning, and felt that the university was a means of attracting skilled migrants to work.

Asylum seekers and refugees

Although this panel included a number of people with more liberal outlooks, there was limited sympathy for asylum-seekers and refugees. Instead, panel members referred to the movement of refugees across Europe which some felt was evidence that economic factors were a pull to the UK, not the desire for safety. Some felt that refugees from the Middle East should remain in Turkey and Greece, the first countries of asylum, and the UK aid budget should be used to support them in these countries. Concerns were also raised about the scale of the refugee crisis and that the UK was a small island. Some panel members also felt that asylum-seekers and refugees posed a security risk because little was known about their backgrounds.

“Greece and Italy should have to take everyone because they’re geographically closer to the crisis. I’m not saying we should take anyone at all, but look how small we are, compared to all of the European countries, all of them” (Citizens’ panel participant).

It was comparatively late in the discussion that one panel member offered an alternative opinion, and appealed to greater empathy:

“We all of us live in the benefit of a relatively brief period of history of peace when were not at war with our neighbours, and we don’t have the experience of war. I think, it’s always easy to other somebody, to make someone something else, essentially turn it into a case of us and them. I think it’s really easy to do that when you have the benefit of a really strong economy, one of the

largest in the world and a very strong military presence and the rest of the things you take for granted here, I think if I were living in Syria, I think I would find it hard that no one would want to help my family in that situation. I think there is a cold economic and political perspective and we must control immigration, and then there's a humanitarian concern" Citizens' panel participant

We then put the original question to the panel again, asking participants if there were any changes they wanted to see to the Government's approach to asylum-seekers and refugees. The panel put forward three sets of ideas (i) curbs on refugee numbers (ii) increased vetting and (iii) and more help for refugees to integrate into British society.

"I think breaking down barriers between people who have issues with refugees and refugees who have no idea how to integrate and I think talking is a good place to start. I think if someone struggles with English language, English language training should be made readily available. I think integration as much as possible. But I do think at the same time you do need robust security screening and I think there's no easy answer to that" (Citizens' panel participant).

Border control

Participants were generally satisfied with the procedures they saw at ports of entry, such as Heathrow, Gatwick and Dover. They were then given a case study of N, an undocumented migrant from New Zealand who had remained in the UK after overstaying his visa. They were asked to decide how the British Government should approach his case. A third of the group felt that immigration officers should make an attempt to locate him and remove him from the UK. The remainder felt that on balance, N should be allowed to stay and that there should be procedures that allowed case-by-case decisions on undocumented migrants. It was agreed that dealing with N's case posed a number of difficulties and competing policy priorities.

There was a debate about the financial costs of dealing with cases such as N, and at this point all but one member of the panel agreed they would be willing to pay a little more through taxation to increase the Home Office budget. This panel was the first where there were no objections to paying for a larger budget for immigration control.

Numbers

The panel voted on whether they wanted different types of migration to be increased, reduced or remain about the same. The majority of the panel wanted levels of migration for work to remain about the same, whether migrants were low-skilled or high skilled. The majority were also content for family and student migration to remain the same, but half the panel wanted the numbers of asylum-seekers to be reduced.

This panel had a much more internationalist outlook than many of the panels we have held and it debated how the aid budget might be used to stabilise countries and reduce the flight of refugees. We had some panel members with liberal views on migration who argued for reductions in highly-skilled migration because such population movement led to brain drains.

“I actually think that we reduce the number of high skilled workers coming from the EU and outside the EU. It sounds counter-productive, but I think the high skilled workers should remain in the countries they come from, so they can contribute to the countries they come from. If they stayed there they would contribute to their own country, slowly and surely their country would be boosted” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Just two panel members had heard of the net migration target. There was scepticism about its value, as it was felt that the Government had limited power to influence migration flows. It could not control emigration, and the panel felt that refugee migration was outside the UK’s control, too.

Impact of migration

As already noted, most panel members voiced a number of cultural and economic benefits that migration had brought to Cambridge. The panel responded positively about the cultural diversity immigration had brought to the town, and many felt that the economic impacts of immigration as well as pressures immigration could have on public services were felt less acutely in Cambridge as a wealthy area:

“I don’t think the whole of the UK gets the education we do... there’s a lot of money in Cambridge” Citizens’ panel participant

The main concern about its negative impacts focussed on housing, although this was in the context of broader concerns about the high costs and housing shortages in Cambridge. We were told that landlords had bought up houses to rent out, often to migrant workers and students. This had pushed up prices for young families who wanted to get on the property ladder. Poor regulation and a shortage of decent, affordable private rental accommodation has been seen as a problem across the UK. Some panel members were at pains to point out that they felt that this situation was not the fault of migrants, but rather, the developers and landlords, over which they felt there should be more controls.

“If you control how many houses somebody can own and rent, it means there would be more houses on the market and [the price of] houses wouldn’t be increasing as dramatically as they are at the moment. Because you have 100 houses and a guy buys 50, as happened in a village when I went to buy a house – the whole row of two beds had been bought by a lady who was going to rent them out. The whole road now belongs to her. Why did they

do it? Why didn't they sell it to a first time buyer?" Citizens' panel participant

Social housing is the short supply, a situation that causes stress and resentment of those who do manage to secure it. As in other parts of the UK where there are severe housing shortages, some panellists felt that migrants were given preferential access to housing. One panellist described:

"It seems you can go down the road and see seven empty houses and you're on the waiting list for years and years and years, and suddenly there's a family in there and they have come from abroad and you think 'how did that happen?'" Citizens' panel participant

Housing issues were raised in our other Cambridgeshire panel, which was held in March in the Fens. Here, however, there was concern that large amounts of private rental accommodation for migrant workers had led to neighbourhood decline in some areas. Over-crowded rental accommodation had led to low level tensions over issues such as parking and rubbish bins. Again, panel participants wanted greater control over landlords and developers. We referred to our March visit, and asked the Cambridge panellists whether they thought that housing was a bigger challenge in Cambridge or the Fens. Despite towns such as Chatteris, Ely and March being less close to Cambridge - and in the same county - just one panel member was familiar with this area.

The election of a new Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority presents an opportunity to regulate landlords, and to consider housing supply in the region.

Integration

Both the panel and stakeholder meeting felt that community relations were generally good in Cambridge. Both saw immigration as a two way street in which receiving communities needed to share responsibility by learning about other cultures. Some panel members did have concerns about integration, but they felt that many of the migrants who moved to Cambridge were easily able to integrate because they had come to fill highly skilled jobs in the NHS and university.

However, stakeholders voiced concerns about the lack of resources for integration, which meant that migrants in lower skilled jobs who were less educated and those from poorer backgrounds did not get along as well.

"You can't talk about integration until you have equality. If the Government wants integration, they'll have to fund the resources" Stakeholder

It was felt that publicly funded English language provision should be broadened, a sentiment which some of the citizens' panel

agreed.

The panel felt there were generational differences in attitudes, and that Cambridge schools had now equipped children to grow up in a multicultural society.

“Schools are extremely good, they are being taught as I was taught, RE and they’re fantastic I couldn’t fault it. And in the school [I went to] they have people from all different backgrounds they don’t question it. I don’t think it’s a young person’s problem. I definitely think, I’d be devastated if my children were prejudiced in every way shape or form because they haven’t been brought up like that” Citizens’ panel participant

Panel members then compared community relations in Cambridge to other parts in the UK, where residents were seen as poorer and less highly educated. This panel felt that in that in such deprived areas, it was easier for longer settled residents to feel anxious about cultural change or resentful of newcomers.

“There are areas in London where people aren’t so educated on the situation...In these areas people always tend to find people to blame. In poorer areas there might be more racist comments or it may be less easy to integrate. There’s always going to be someone that they look to blame so I think the wealth of the area is quite important. Cambridge is quite wealthy...but in areas of poverty if this is not alleviated people are naturally going to revert to ‘them’ and ‘us’” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Regaining trust in the immigration system

Participants were asked about the changes they would like to see brought in to enable greater confidence in the immigration system. One person wanted a reduction in numbers, and one person wanted increased vetting, but mostly their responses focussed on two issues. First, after the UK leaves the EU some panel members wanted migrants from the EU to be treated in the same way as those from outside the EU. They wanted EU migration flows to be controlled in the same manner, although they couched this request in terms of fairness and equality.

“Make everything absolutely equal. You don’t chose which country you’re born in so EU or non-EU you should be treated exactly the same” Citizens’ panel participant

Second, panel members wanted greater transparency, and for politicians to be held accountable for their actions. We discussed the difficulties of providing statistics at a time when many people had little trust in official statistics, with panel members suggesting an independent body provide such information. Reference was made to the EU referendum, with some participants feeling they were told lies during the campaign. Panel members in Cambridge had much of the same lack of trust in politicians and statistics as elsewhere in the UK, including

more deprived places we have visited.

“I think two things [need to change], willingness to be held accountable for mistakes happening in the system. Clear, transparent and concise representation of facts about the immigration system” Citizens’ panel participant

CONCLUSIONS

Cambridge is a prosperous city, albeit one with high levels of inequality and expensive housing. While many of the city's residents are doing well, others are struggling with the high cost of living. In many ways, the discussion we held with the citizens' panel reflected local conditions in Cambridge. Many panel members believed that the economic and cultural benefits of migration far outweighed any disadvantages. However, there were other panel members who had more sceptical views, and were particularly concerned about numbers and the impact of migration on the availability of affordable housing. Overall, the discussion in this panel was more polarised than in many places we have visited. Civil society organisations and local government need to consider how to bridge these divides and work towards a situation where a greater number of people accept population change and do not feel threatened or resentful.

Appendix

List of stakeholder organisations

Amnesty International (Cambridge)

Cambridge Stays

Cambridge Ethnic Communities Forum

Cambridge Refugee Resettlement

Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce

University of Cambridge

Demographics of citizens' panels

Gender	Age	Occupation	Ethnicity
Female	38 years	Chef – C2	White British
Female	42 years	Postman - D	White British
Female	21 years	Beautician – C1	White British
Female	50 years	Teacher - B	White European
Female	32 years	Distribution worker – C2	White British
Female	18 years	Sales manager/student	White British
Male	36 years	Teacher - B	White British
Male	18 years	Student	White other
Male	19 years	Student	White British

Endnotes

- 1 Annual Population Survey, March 2016 – April 2017.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 <http://www.centreforcities.org/reader/cities-outlook-2017/city-monitor-latest-data/13-gini-coefficient/>

About

The National Conversation on Immigration is a project run by British future and HOPE not hate.

British Future

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank seeking to involve people in an open conversation which addresses people's hopes and fears about identity and integration, migration and opportunity, so that we feel confident about Britain's Future.



We want to ensure that we engage those who are anxious about cultural identity and economic opportunity in Britain today, as well as those who already feel confident about our society, so that we can together identify workable solutions to make Britain the country we want to live in.

HOPE not hate

HOPE not hate exists to provide a positive antidote to the politics of hate. We combine first class research with community organising and grassroots actions to defeat hate groups and to build community resilience against extremism.



Hate is often the consequence of a loss of hope and an articulation of despair, but given an alternative, especially one that understands and addresses their anger, most people will choose HOPE over hate. Our job is to expose and undermine groups that preach hate, intolerance and division whilst uniting communities around what they have in common.

We aim to take a part in building a society that celebrates rather than scapegoats our differences.