



**NATIONAL
CONVERSATION**

**NORTH
STAFFORDSHIRE
REPORT
MAY 2017**

CONTEXT

The National Conversation on Immigration visited Newcastle-under-Lyme, a town of 127,000 people. Its town centre is just over two miles from Stoke-on-Trent's railway station. Due to its proximity to Stoke, the stakeholder meeting and the citizens' panel invited representatives from both local authorities. While spanning two local authorities, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent could be considered to be part of the same North Staffordshire conurbation.

Stoke-on-Trent itself is made up of six town centres (Burslem, Fenton, Longton, Hanley, Stoke and Tunstall). The impact of Stoke-on-Trent's unique geography on community relations is considered later in this report.

However, there are significant contrasts between the two areas as Table 1 indicates. The six towns that make up Stoke-on-Trent are more deprived than Newcastle-under-Lyme, which is an attractive market town and shopping destination for those that live in the area.

Table 1.

	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Stoke-on-Trent	Great Britain
Population	127,000	251,000	63 million
In employment as percentage of working age population	79.3%	71.7%	74%
Unemployed as percentage of working age population	3.7%	5.5%	4.8%
Average gross weekly pay	£503.3	£445.6	£541
Percentage of working age population with higher level (level 4 and above) qualifications	37%	20.7%	38.2%

Source: Annual Population Survey 2016.

In both Stoke and Newcastle the industrial economy was traditionally based on coal mining, iron and steel, engineering and ceramics. In 1958, some 70,000 people were employed in North Staffordshire's potteries. The mines and foundries are now closed, and much engineering and ceramics production has been relocated abroad. Ten years ago, the North Staffordshire potteries typified post-industrial decline and when Wedgwood

Waterford went into administration in 2009 it was a major blow to the area. Nevertheless, some engineering and ceramics remain, and the Staffordshire pottery industry has experienced a recent renaissance. It now employs about 20,000 people directly and a further 20,000 people in associated industries such as glaze and kiln manufacturing.

This part of North Staffordshire has seen its population decline until recently. Stoke-on-Trent's population is on the rise for the first time in 80 years – but the increase is half the national average and among the slowest in the West Midlands. As well as increased longevity, international migration has contributed to this small rise in population in the area. The area is home to about 6,000 migrants from the EU, mostly from Poland and Romania, many of whom have settled in areas where there is significant amounts of affordable rented accommodation. Asylum-seekers are also dispersed to Stoke-on-Trent, with 853 supported by the Home Office as of 31 March 2017¹. Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent have also taken in 20 Syrian refugees each, through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.

Two universities – Keele and Staffordshire – educate over 2,500 international students between them. There is also a large British Pakistani community in this part of North Staffordshire, numbering about 20,000 people, although many of whom are the children and grandchildren of those who arrived in the 1950s.

Overall, estimates suggest that 13.2% of the population of Stoke-on-Trent and 2.5% of the population of Newcastle-under-Lyme were born abroad². While the rate of international migration into the Potteries has recently fallen and is lower than the UK as whole, this does not stop immigration from being a much talked-about issue. In last year's EU referendum 69% of votes were cast for Leave in Stoke and 63% were in Newcastle-under-Lyme, with immigration being a factor in many people's ballot box choices³.

WHAT WE DID

A citizens' panel was held with nine members of the public recruited to represent a range of views on immigration, with the very hostile and very pro-migration filtered out through a pre-interview screening question. All panel members came from Newcastle-under-Lyme or Stoke-on-Trent. Basing our conversation on a discussion guide, the panel was 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. This panel was held three days after the bombing of the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester.

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'. Their average score was 5.1 with a range from 3 to 7.

A discussion about the impact of EU migration on the local area took much of the citizens' panel discussion time. Most people balanced their views, acknowledging that skilled migrants had had a positive impact on the local area and the UK as whole, with cultural concerns about immigration and the impact of recent EU migration on the local area. At times, some panel members articulated views that were hostile towards EU migrants.

There was a distinct hierarchy of preferences for different types of migrants and a consensus that immigration had worked well until the EU expanded in 2004. Unlike all the other National Conversation panel visits, migrant workers from EU countries were not referred to by name, in personalised anecdotes, or by their national group, for example, Poles or Romanians. Instead, migrants from the EU's newest states were referred to as Eastern Europeans, suggesting limited social contact between panel members and EU migrants.

"I don't think Asian people are a problem full stop. The problem is.... when the borders are open to countries that now have free access, no reason to be here apart from using the facilities that are here, social or moral reason. The reason it affects me so much is that I spend 12 to 14 hours a day in an area that wasn't as bad as it is today. The area where I used to enjoy walking my dog has turned into an absolute pig tip, there are gangs of Eastern Europeans. I don't know where they come from but it doesn't really matter. There are gangs that hang around drinking, damaging the park, damaging, breaking bottles." (Citizens' panel participant).

There was also discussion about the Manchester bombing at different times in the evening. Several panel members said that the bombing had negatively impacted their views about immigration. There was a short discussion as to whether Salman Abedi, the Manchester bomber, was a migrant or a home-grown terrorist. Some members of the panel explicitly linked Abedi to the exodus of migrants and refugees across the Mediterranean. Violent religious extremism was seen as an outcome of accepting migrants from certain countries in North Africa and the Middle East and of residential segregation in cities such as Birmingham, London and Manchester.

The citizens' panel also discussed the role of different sources of information in forming views on immigration. Most of our panel formed their views from a range of sources, which included

everyday experiences where they worked or live.

Few panel members worked with migrants or had migrants as friends. In this respect, the views of panel members were not being informed or mediated by close personal contact. Social media and print media had informed some panel members, alongside the opinions of family, friends and acquaintances. As with citizens' panels elsewhere, a few people had tried to research immigration online, but had been unable to find trusted and accessible sources of information.

Hate speech on social media was seen as something that had recently worsened. Panel members were able to draw boundaries between a decent online discussion on immigration, and one which crossed boundaries and constituted hate speech. Most people seemed able to identify reliable and genuine views on immigration from those that were not, with one panel member humorously noting:

"Don't we all have a mate called Dave in the pub who knows everything? Have a word with Dave, get him a pint, he'll tell you." (Citizens' panel member).

But many people admitted feeling confused. They recognised that some media coverage of immigration was inaccurate or sensationalist. Some social media comments were seen as inciting hatred. At the same time, panel members had mixed views about what they saw around them in the Potteries, balancing the contribution that migrants were making to the NHS, against concerns about neighbourhood decline.

"It's not the actual article [in the media] it's the actual interpretation. I think immigration is difficult personally because the only thing you hear about immigration is from the media, and I don't necessarily trust what the media is saying on immigration. I don't really know what goes on, what checks they actually carry out."

"Immigration has got an image problem. What I see in the media is men aged 18-40 coming through Calais. That is what I see on a day-to-day basis." (Citizens' panel members).

EU migration

As noted, concerns about the impact of EU migration on parts of Stoke-on-Trent dominated the discussion. There was an expectation that the numbers of EU migrants would level off when the UK left the EU. The panel voted in favour of an annual cap on low skilled migrants by a narrow majority to wanting to treat EU and non-EU migrants the same after the UK leaves the EU. As in many other panels, some panel members referred to the Australian points based system as a policy that they would like after Brexit. It was viewed as a well-controlled system that barred those who did not have the necessary qualifications or language skills.

Some members of the panel wanted different and greater restrictions on EU migrants from eastern Europe, compared with those coming from pre-2004 EU member states, even though it was pointed out that this would not be politically possible. There was a consensus that EU migrants who came to the UK after Brexit needed to have job and should be barred from receiving benefits for a period of time.

Non-EU Migration

There was a consensus that non-EU work migration over the last 50 years had mainly been of benefit to the UK, including the local area. Panel members made extensive reference to the NHS, and how it had benefitted from migrant doctors.

There are two universities in the area (Keele and Staffordshire). International students were not perceived as migrants, as they largely returned home after their studies. As in other panels there was a view from some people that family migrants were dependent on welfare. Without exception, no-one knew of the requirements that family migrants had to fulfil to come to the UK in relation to the minimum income threshold, English language tests and restrictions on benefits. As with many other panels, this suggests that policy changes alone will not build confidence in the immigration system, as many people will not hear of them.

Asylum seekers and refugees

There was some underlying sympathy for refugees, but also a view that the numbers of refugees coming to the UK should be capped and that ‘charity begins at home’.

“I do think as a wealthy country we do have a duty to help out a little bit but not to the extent where Saudi Arabia and the Arab gulf, the entire Arabian peninsula has so much money, and if you look at the statistics, places like Lebanon have taken in one million refugees, but it is the Saudi kings and queens who are living like gods and not helping their own people, well not their own people, but people who share a culture.”

Asylum-seekers are dispersed to Stoke-on-Trent by the Home Office and several panel members had come in contact with them through their work. One panel member referred to groups of young Afghan and Syrian men loitering in Hanley town centre and did not understand why they were not at work. Panel members did not know that asylum-seekers were not allowed to work.

Numbers

The panel voted on whether they wanted different types of migration to be increased, reduced or remain about the same. The overwhelming majority of the panel wanted the numbers of low-skilled migrants from the EU to be reduced, although they were happy that the number of high-skilled workers from inside

and outside the EU be increased or remain the same. Almost all panel members wanted the numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees and family migrants to be reduced. There was no clear majority on student migration, although just one person wanted the numbers of students to be reduced. Just one panel member had heard of the net migration target.

The questions about numbers prompted a debate about the economic consequences of restricting the number of low-skilled workers. Unlike many of the other panels, this panel did see that there were economic effects and trade-offs in adopting different courses of action. The presence of a number of people who were or had previously been self-employed on the panel may have influenced the discussion about trade-offs as panel members made reference to their own experiences running businesses.

- *“English people won’t work for an illegal wage like £3. But if they did pay them the legal wage, we would be paying more in shops”*
- *“But you can’t do that, that’s breaking the law. You can’t have slave labour”*
- *“It’s not slave labour, it’s more than what you’re getting in your own country”*
- *“I think you have to look at the whole picture. If the minimum wage was paid to them, the prices that we would be paying in the shops would be a lot higher”*
- *“I just wanted to say, I’d pay a higher price in the shops.”*

(Conversation between two Citizens’ panel participants).

Impact of migration

As already noted, there were strong views that recent EU migration had had a negative impact on parts of Stoke-on-Trent. In particular, many recent EU migrants had settled in Stoke itself, near the main Staffordshire University buildings and were living in over-crowded and often poor-maintained private rental accommodation. As a consequence, it was felt that this area had become run down.

Integration

Panel members had little social contact with migrants and this affected their views on integration, which focussed on three issues: residential segregation, language barriers and cultural concerns about the arrival of people whose values and behaviour was seen as different.

Panel members made reference to the social segregation of Muslim communities in places such as Leicester and Birmingham. They also discussed social segregation in North

Staffordshire, where new EU migrants were concentrated in private rental accommodation in the area around the university in Stoke. In both cases, segregation was linked to the prevalence of values and behaviours which were not seen as British. Panel members were particularly concerned about street drinking among groups of young Eastern European men in Stoke.

The North Staffordshire conurbation is made up of seven town centres and the specific geography of the area may impact on immigration. Public transport is poor and most people depend on cars. Across the area, there are relatively few attractive public spaces that bring different sectors of society together. There is also some evidence to suggest that there is labour market segregation, with new EU migrants less likely to be employed in sought-after jobs in the ceramics industry.

There was a view that many new arrivals were unable or unwilling to speak English, with an impact on schools and the NHS which had to pay for translators. There was also an interesting discussion about how integration affected who was seen as an immigrant and who was not. Many panel members agreed that migrants who spoke very good English and were well integrated in their new homes were no longer viewed as migrants.

“People see the stereotypical immigrant. I went to school with a load of Filipino immigrants, they are immigrants, but because they all spoke English perfectly, and because they all had assimilated we didn’t see them as immigrants. The people we saw as immigrants were coming from Middle Eastern countries, not speaking much English, not integrating with the other kids. Most of my closest friends are Filipino immigrants. They [other immigrants] tended to stick together quite a lot and didn’t attempt to connect to the other kids.”

Points for Consensus

Dealing with the neighbourhood decline in areas where EU migrants live

Concerns about over-crowded and poorly maintained private rental accommodation had a major impact on attitudes to immigration in the area. Councils need to regulate this better, and receive earmarked funding to do this from central government. There is also a need to look more broadly at neighbourhood decline. Panel members felt strongly about street drinking by groups of eastern European men – dealing with this issue would do much to address concerns about immigration. Police, the local authority and civil society organisations need to learn from areas that have successfully dealt with this issue.

Spaces for integration

There is marked residential segregation in North Staffordshire with a concentration of EU migrants in a particular part of Stoke. The absence of public space and the specific geography of the area meant that panel members little social contact with migrants. This, too, impacted on attitudes. The three local authorities that cover the area may wish to consider how to promote better social integration.

CONCLUSIONS

This panel had strong opinions about immigration, with their views largely not mediated through personal contact, rather by narratives reproduced within communities, many of which had their origin in print and social media.

Although this part of North Staffordshire has experienced a number of waves of migration over the last 60 years, a large part of the discussion focused on recent EU migration.

Stoke-on-Trent has seen the arrival of EU migrants, many of whom live in private rental accommodation in the area around the university. Their arrival was strongly associated with neighbourhood decline in this area. Managing the private rental sector and preventing neighbourhood decline and anti-social behaviour would play a large part in securing greater public support for immigration policy.

Appendix

Demographics of citizens' panel

Gender	Age	Occupation and social grade	Ethnicity
Female	61 years old	Retired head mistress - A	Asian British
Female	20 years old	Student	Asian British
Male	20 years old	Student	White other
Male	48 years old	Garage owner - B	White British
Female	47 years old	Teacher - B	White British
Female	62 years old	Retired nurse – C1	White British
Male	61 years old	Retired police officer – C1	White British
Male	34 years old	Environmental health officer – C1	White British
Male	36 years old	Sales manager – C1	White British

Endnotes

- 1 Home Office Asylum Statistics, quarter 1, 2017, available online.
- 2 Annual Population Survey January – December 2015.
- 3 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2016/jun/14/labour-supporters-brexit-stoke-on-trent-eu-referendum-video>

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 uses research, education and public engagement to challenge mistrust and racism, and helps to build communities that are inclusive, celebrate shared identities and are resilient to hate.

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.