



**NATIONAL
CONVERSATION**

**CHESTERFIELD
REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2017**

CONTEXT

The National Conversation on Immigration visited Chesterfield, a market town and borough council in Derbyshire, lying between Derby and Sheffield. The town itself has a population of 70,000 although 104,000 people live within the boundaries of the district council.

Chesterfield sits in the Derbyshire coalfield and until the 1980s, the mines provided many jobs. But in the last 40 years, the town's economy has seen many changes, following the closure of the pits and many of its large factories. Royal Mail is now the biggest employer in Chesterfield and the retail chain Sports Direct has its main base just outside the town at Shirebook. While unemployment was a significant problem in the 1980s and early 1990s, just 4.9% of the working-age population are now unemployed and looking for work in Chesterfield, a little above the GB average of 4.7%.

An improving economy and unfilled jobs have brought migrant workers to the area, mostly from Poland, with some of this employment arranged by agencies. When Sports Direct set up its distribution centre in Shirebook it promised jobs to local people. However, the company used an employment agency to recruit many of its staff who were largely migrant workers from Poland. At the time this move caused considerable anger in the area.

Later, an under-cover TV programme exposed poor working conditions in the Sports Direct distribution. This, and further adverse publicity prompted an inquiry by Parliament's Business, Innovation and Skills Committee which deemed working conditions in the warehouse 'appalling¹.'

Sports Direct still employs significant numbers of eastern European migrant workers. Some 4.9% of the population of Chesterfield is estimated to have been born abroad, significantly lower than the East Midlands average of 11.4%². There is a small south Asian Muslim community in the town as well as a number of overseas-born staff working in health and social care.

WHAT WE DID

A stakeholder meeting was held with those who represented a business organisation, the council and a local Muslim community association. The stakeholder meeting was 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 any integration issues that had arisen.

Later, a citizens' panel was held with ten 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 the panel members came from Chesterfield. Further demographic information about the two panels is given at the end of this report. Basing our conversation on a discussion guide, the panels were asked questions about their views on how immigration had affected 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 5.5 with a range from 2 to 8.

Many participants were 'balancers', explaining that immigration had been beneficial, but they also had some major concerns: about the impact of migration on the labour market, security concerns which they related to refugee arrivals, as well as the pressures that it put on schools and the NHS. Some participants also felt that some migrants came to the UK specifically to claim benefits. For many participants, the negative impacts of migration outweighed the benefits.

"I think it has a negative effect on people that are already here. They don't know what's going on, they feel insecure. I think that it has an effect on our infrastructure, housing, everything, the doctors. I mean how long do you have to wait for a doctor's appointment now...We are an island and we can only take so much. I'm not saying for one minute that we should ignore people in need, I certainly could not walk past a child that was starving, I'm sure none of us could. But at the same time, you know, we need to know who's here, why they're here..., And regardless of, you know, colour or creed, we have to support the people who were born and bred in this country" (Citizens' panel participant)

A large part of this discussion focused on the labour market impact of migration on jobs, wages and working conditions. Many participants felt that migration had depressed wages, although some of them qualified their comments by apportioning the blame for this on employers, with Sports Direct explicitly mentioned multiple times.

- *"We've got more of a Polish community than Sheffield. They have just opened a car wash. Or they work at Sports Direct. But there are nowhere near as many as there was four or six years ago."*

- *"Why do you think that is?"*

- *"Well it's the pound isn't it, they're probably working for next to nothing, barely the minimum wage. That's the problem, though isn't it? They [migrants] are prepared to work for low wages at Sports Direct"* (Citizens' panel participants).

Participants also felt that migration, particularly from the EU, acted as a disincentive for employers to train UK residents. The panel felt that more needed to be done to upskill young British people.

“It [migration] doesn’t encourage the government to do anything for our youngsters... it encourages the government not to help our own kids to go to university to study” (Citizens’ panel participant)

This panel largely felt that immigration was a salient issue in Chesterfield, with the exception of the two youngest and least politically engaged panel members. However, for everyone else it was something that came up in conversation fairly frequently, particularly when prompted by media stories. Many participants also felt that discussions about immigration were often shut down by some of their friends and colleagues, for fear of causing offence.

Unusual among citizens’ panels were the numerous historical references voiced by Chesterfield participants. These included references to their migrant forebears, as well to past migration waves to the UK. In response to comments criticising south Asians for their perceived unwillingness to integrate, one participant responded:

“People have a lot of short memories about Indians, it was only 55 or 60 years ago, India was part of the Empire with us. Six million fought in the First World War, and Muslims” (Citizens’ panel participant).

EU migration

Participants were asked about the changes they would like to see made to the systems governing EU migration after the UK leaves the EU. There was a consensus that EU migrants needed to be registered and documented, so that the Government knew who was in the UK. A number of participants suggested an Australian-style points based system. They liked how it matched immigration to Australia’s labour market needs and only let in those who could financially support themselves.

“Basically, it lets people in who they think are only going to benefit their country” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Some participants made comments about the referendum written on the voting packs: *“the view of the 52%”*. At times in the discussion, a number of participants let it be known that they had voted to leave the EU in the referendum, with the vocal Leave voters including the two people who had the most pro-migration opinions.

Participants then voted on the options for dealing with EU migration after Brexit. Six participants wanted the same system for both EU and non-EU nationals, with some of them feeling that this was a much fairer option. Three wanted an annual cap covering EU migrants in low-skilled jobs, but not for EU nationals in highly-skilled work. No-one favoured issuing temporary visas to EU nationals, because they had no confidence in the Home Office would enforce visas regimes.

The voting options set out reciprocity; a future immigration system that applies tight restrictions on EU nationals who might want to come to the UK may well mean that tight restrictions are also placed on UK nationals who might want to work in the EU. Unlike some other panels, the Chesterfield group was not concerned about British emigrants, with some of them having negative views about this group – because they were not seen as contributing by paying taxes but expected to use the NHS when they returned to the UK.

“At the end of the day, we are going to go through massive turmoil, coming out of EU, and if we’re going to do it, we have got to do it right. We’ve got to be strict because at the end of the day we are a small island with a massive population. You know if you compare us to France we are half the size of France but we’ve got the same population as France. So if it means a few high flying lads can’t go and work Düsseldorf or whatever in high finance, well it’s a big world out there, it’s not just Europe, there’s America, there’s Australia, New Zealand - lots of other places they can go and work” (Citizens panel participant).

Non-EU Migration

Small numbers of non-EU migrants have come to live in Chesterfield, most often as family migrants or to take up highly-skilled jobs, particularly in healthcare. But non-EU migrants do not form a visible group in the town, and immigration from outside the EU was something that participants rarely considered. Few understood policy detail regulating migration from outside of the EU, and migration from outside of the EU for work, study or as family members was not a salient issue for the panel.

Asylum seekers and refugees

Asylum-seekers who are housed by the Home Office are not accommodated in Chesterfield, although Derbyshire County Council has agreed to house six Syrian refugee families in the town. The mosque and local charities have appealed for volunteers and donations for the refugees. Despite positive stories about refugees appearing in the local media, the citizens’ panel discussion about refugees was polarised. Although nobody on the panel reported contact with asylum seekers and refugees, some participants were sympathetic to the plight of refugees and were prepared to challenge others. However many participants voiced strong opinions, at times hostile, many of which appeared to have been informed by social media. A lack of trust in the Government’s ability to vet asylum-seekers was a core concern of this citizens’ panel.

“The local church, they’re supporting refugees but it’s very hush hush... They’re getting things together, do you know what I mean. They have sort of been asked ‘have you got a spare bed, we’ve got some kids coming up to Chesterfield area’. And that’s good, but it becomes scary when it’s these so called 16 year olds” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Many participants doubted that many of those who came to the UK were genuinely fleeing war and persecution, with others anxious that terrorists be admitted to the UK by abusing the asylum process. While security concerns have been voiced in all citizens' panels held since the Manchester bombing of May 2017, Chesterfield participants had particularly strong views about the lack of vetting of asylum-seekers.

Border control

The citizens' panel also discussed border control. Participants were again, divided on their views about processes at ports of entry, with some thinking that security was good, while others disputed this, giving personal experiences of a lack of control. All but one person was willing to pay a little more through taxation for better immigration controls.

The citizens' panel were then presented with a case study of 'H' an undocumented migrant. Divisions in the group, between those with more authoritarian views and those leaning towards more liberal approaches, were again clear when asked how they would deal with this case. About half the group thought that H should be removed from the UK, with those voicing this opinion generally having the most sceptical views on migration. The other half thought that H should stay and used pragmatic moral and economic arguments to justify their decision.

"I think there's got to be an awareness on his part that he was breaking the law, an awareness that he wasn't paying taxes. However, I don't think he should be sent back either. However, is the real question the cost of him staying versus the cost of him leaving? If one is going to be greater than the other, then is it economics, or is it from the heart sort of thing. And the removal system as it is would cost an absolute fortune for that one individual. Is it right that we as a society pay that much money to get somebody out or give them the chance to contribute, even if that person is here illegally. I think that's the overall question, is it worth it or not?" (Citizens' panel participant).

Numbers

The panel voted on whether they wanted different types of migration to be increased, reduced or remain about the same. A majority wanted the numbers of low-skilled and seasonal workers to be reduced, as well asylum-seekers and family migrants. This was generally a preference reflecting concerns about the unemployment of British citizens, and a fear that low skilled migrants were more likely to rely on welfare benefits. However, a majority of participants were happy for the numbers of highly-skilled workers from inside and outside the EU to remain the same. This group took a more sceptical line on numbers compared with most other citizens' panels, with more votes to reduce numbers and fewer votes to increase them. For example, in Chesterfield, few participants wanted to increase the numbers of highly-skilled migrants, whereas in other locations

many participants are happy to increase the numbers of highly-skilled migrants.

Participants were then asked if they had heard of the net migration target, with just two people affirming that they had.

Impact of migration

As already noted, a large part of this discussion focused on the impact of migration on the labour market, with many participants believing that migration had depressed wages. Undoubtedly, the employment practices of Sports Direct were at the root of their concerns.

A representative of a business group attended the stakeholder meeting, as well as two people who ran their own businesses. Unemployment is at an historic low and the difficulties that employers faced in recruiting sufficient staff was an issue raised by the stakeholders. However, the citizens' panel did not recognise the problem of staff shortages and had a different view on the availability of labour. They thought that there were enough unemployed British workers to fill vacancies, but wage depression caused by migration had acted as a disincentive for them to find work.

"I actually think that people who haven't got a job should be paid to do the jobs like fruit picking and you know hotel work, not just given money that they can't exist on. Being given a proper wage for it, because if you're self-sufficient, it gives you a sense of pride you know. The kids we are bringing up today think the world owes them a living" (Citizens' panel participant).

The Chesterfield participants, like many other citizens' panels did not know that unemployment was very low and did not understand the difference between unemployment – where a person is looking for work - and economic inactivity. In many locations we have visited there has been a similar mismatch between employers' views and those held by the citizens' panels. This can lead to resentment of anyone receiving benefits, including migrants.

Integration and community relations

Participants in Chesterfield saw integration in cultural terms, more so than in many other locations we have visited. Generally, most of those who we meet see integration in relation to residential segregation and migrants' ability to speak English. While the Chesterfield panel mentioned these two issues, they also put a lot of emphasis on embracing British cultural practices. Participants believed that migrants should become 'like us' and some with more authoritarian views wanted migrants to adopt customs such as singing traditional songs and the National Anthem.

"If they were more adaptable, and people were more willing to take on board how we live in this country and how we behave in this country and what we celebrate, and what we are proud

of instead of making us feel that we're villains" (Citizens' panel participant).

The group had some cultural concerns and it was clear that some members of this citizens' panel had been influenced by media scare stories, for example, of nativity plays cancelled for fear of offending minority ethnic and faith communities. Some participants voiced resentment of what they saw as "*Political Correctness gone mad*".

All of the participants felt that community relations were generally good in Chesterfield and people generally got on well with those from different backgrounds. About half the participants had friends, neighbours and work colleagues who were migrants and thought that those from different backgrounds were generally well integrated in the town. Parents felt that children mixed well in schools, although there were some 'school gate' anecdotes about groups of parents not mixing, mostly due to language barriers. Although the Polish community had tended to cluster in the Shirebrook area at first, they were now better integrated in Chesterfield.

This citizens' panel did not feel that Chesterfield was diverse, but was a largely white town, comparing their demographic profile to other places in the UK. They felt that a lack of work had meant that few migrants had settled in the town. At the same time, participants believed that most migrants wanted to live near to their co-nationals. Residential segregation by ethnicity and religion was an issue that came up a number of times in the discussion, with participants referring to other places – Birmingham, Bradford, London and Sheffield, where they felt this took place. Some participants felt that Muslims were a group who were not well-integrated in the UK, although few had direct contact with Muslims.

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. Largely what they wanted was greater transparency and greater control, with some participants suggesting ID cards to keep track of the population.

"If we could be sure about the levels of control that could give us an accuracy as to who is here and who is not, I think that would be a great start. As to what that level of control is, I don't know enough about it. But it needs to be a different level of control from what is there now" (Citizens' panel participant).

CONCLUSIONS

While many participants in Chesterfield believed that migration had brought benefits to the UK, this citizens' panel voiced some strong views about the impact of immigration on local communities. They had a number of concerns, the most marked of which were the impact of migration on wages and working conditions. The strength of their opinion may be partly due to the behavior of Sports Direct, one of the largest local employers.

Leaving the EU is going to result in changes to the UK's immigration system. What replaces freedom of movement has to work for employers. At the same time, the new system has to secure public consent – because public trust in the immigration system is so low. Meeting these two aims is going to be difficult where employers and the public have different views about the availability of labour and recruitment, as our Chesterfield visit indicated. It is going to require business to acknowledge the pressures of migration, as well as its gains, and to offer constructive solutions. It will also need employers to start a dialogue with their staff and local communities about their future recruitment needs and how they might meet them. This already happens in some workplaces, more often those that are smaller, more civic-minded and less hierarchical. If public consent for immigration is to be gained, such conversations need to be extended to Sports Direct, too.

Appendix

List of stakeholders

Derbyshire County Council

East Midlands Chamber of Commerce

Muslim Welfare Association

Office of Toby Perkins MP

Demographics of citizens' panels

Gender	Age	Occupation	Ethnicity
Female	43 years	Delivery driver - D	White British
Female	59 years	Healthcare worker – C2	White British
Female	45 years	Chef – C1	White British
Female	66 years	Retired	White British
Female	34 years	Care Assistance - D	White British
Male	48 years	Plasterer - D	White British
Male	56 year	Retired	White British
Male	52 years	Archaeologist - B	White British
Male	54 years	Unemployed	White British
Male	35 years	Handyman - D	White British

Endnotes

1. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cm-bis/219/21902.htm?utm_source=219&utm_medium=fullbullet&utm_campaign=modulereports
2. Annual Population Survey 2016

Case study used in voting packs

H is 35 years old and was born in New Zealand. He came here nine years ago with a British Ancestry Visa – this is a visa that anyone with a British grandparent can apply for, providing they are a citizen of a Commonwealth Country. A British Ancestry visa costs about £700, including an annual surcharge for using the NHS. It allows the visa holder to work in the UK, but they are not allowed any benefits or social housing.

H has worked at the bar of a small London pub since he arrived. Four years into his stay in the UK his landlord reported him to the police and he was fined for cultivating two cannabis plants.

When his visa expired in 2012 he did not renew it, because he thought he would return to New Zealand. But just before his planned flight he found out that his British girlfriend was pregnant. He delayed his flight and over-stayed his visa.

Initially H did not know what to do, and whether he and his girlfriend would have the child. They decided to have the baby and H remained in the UK, but without a visa. He went to work in the same pub as before, who took him back without any further checks. He continues to pay tax.

Two years ago, H split up with his girlfriend who now lives in Edinburgh. He sees his son (who is now five) three times a year. He remains in the UK as an undocumented migrant and was told by a solicitor that his 'bad' immigration history and criminal record means that he would not be granted another Ancestry visa. He wants to remain in the UK so he can see his son.

To remove H from the UK, immigration officers will have to locate him, detain him and arrange for him to be returned to New Zealand.

How should the UK government treat H?

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.

