



**NATIONAL
CONVERSATION**

**LEICESTER
REPORT
JULY 2017**

CONTEXT

The National Conversation on Immigration visited Leicester, a city and a unitary local authority which is the seat of two universities. Some 348,000 people are estimated to live within the local authority boundaries, but urban Leicester extends into the surrounding local authority and has a population of about 500,000 people.

Although it is one of the oldest cities in England, Leicester saw rapid development in Victorian times through the establishment of good transport links and the growth of its hosiery, textile and footwear industries. Today, Leicester is the largest industrial centre in the East Midlands. While some of its manufacturing industry has been relocated abroad, engineering, footwear, hosiery and textile manufacture still take place in Leicester. Financial services and the food industry are also important to the city's economy.

While Leicester has a diverse and healthy economy, not all of its residents have benefitted. Just 63.6% of the working age population are in employment, compared with 74.2% nationally. Female employment is much lower in Leicester (58% of the working-age population¹) than elsewhere in the UK (69.4%²). Just 24% of the working age population have higher level qualifications in Leicester, compared with 38% across the UK. Some 36% of children are living in poverty after housing costs are taken into account³. While Leicester's East African Asian population is generally doing well, other migrant and minority ethnic groups have poorer socio-economic outcomes, particularly those of South Asian Muslim or Somali ethnicity. The 2011 Census indicated that 7.5% of the population of the city of Leicester did not speak English well or at all, a higher proportion than Birmingham and most London boroughs.

As already indicated, many of Leicester's resident come from migrant and minority ethnic groups and the city has a long history of immigration. Leicester was the first city where those of White British ethnicity were in a minority – 45.1% of the population at the time of the 2011 Census. In the period after the Second World War, Polish ex-combatants settled in the city and were soon after joined by migrants from Ireland, South Asia and the Caribbean. When Idi Amin expelled Ugandan Asians in 1972, some 27,000 of the refugees came to the UK with about a quarter of them settling in Leicester where they joined a small existing community of East African Asian origin. This was despite a now infamous advertisement placed in the Ugandan press by Leicester City Council discouraging them from moving there. The advertisement was widely condemned at the time and within a short time, Leicester's East African Asians were making significant economic contributions to the city. Today, Leicester has a strong civic identity which embraces the contribution of its

East African Asians and other Commonwealth migrants. Festivals and celebrations once associated with particular ethnic or faith groups are now part of Leicester's calendar and the 'Golden Mile' of restaurants, jewellers and sari shops along the Belgrave Road is now a tourist destination.

More recently, Leicester has seen the arrival of asylum-seekers, international students and EU nationals. At the end of March 2017, there were 927 asylum-seekers accommodated by the Home Office living in Leicester. Leicester and Leicestershire councils have committed to taking 400 refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable persons Scheme. From the late 1990s, Dutch and Scandinavian Somalis moved to Leicester, drawn by the English language, better employment opportunities and better community relations. Nearly 4% of Leicester's population were of Black African ethnicity, mostly Somali, at the time of the last Census. After 2004, Leicester saw the arrival of EU migrants and the most recent data suggests that nearly 8% of the working age population are from EU8 and EU2 countries.

In many ways, Leicester is viewed as an integration success story. Far-right extremists have never gained much support and community relations are good. The Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, is seen as a positive voice for immigration and integration - most recently Syrian refugees. The council has shown leadership and has worked in partnership with inter-faith networks and other civil society groups to promote social and economic integration. The city has vibrant cultural and heritage sectors which have played roles in developing Leicester's civic identity as a diverse and welcoming city. The local paper, the Leicester Mercury, has also played a role in good community relations, for example, pledging to report migration and diversity in a responsible manner.

There are a number of projects to promote integration, and when tensions rose between young people of African-Caribbean and Somali origin in the central Highfields area, there was a rapid response to resolve this conflict⁴.

Nevertheless, there are still significant integration challenges. As already noted, female participation in the labour market is low among some migrant and minority ethnic groups and some Muslim women are discouraged from pursuing a career by male family members and religious leaders in certain mosques. There is some degree of residential segregation by ethnicity as well as a contested and inconclusive debate about the extent to which this is increasing or decreasing. Broadly, new arrivals such as Somalis and EU nationals tend to be clustered in central areas of the city, in areas such as Highfields, those of Asian British ethnicity are over-represented in the northern suburbs and under-represented in comparable areas south of the city centre.

WHAT WE DID

A stakeholder meeting was held with nine representatives from civil society organisations and one of the city's universities. Many of those from civil society organisations were active in projects to bring faith communities together. Stakeholders 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.

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. The panel was recruited to reflect the population of Leicester. Further demographic information about the panel is given at the end of this report.

Basing our conversation on a discussion guide, the panel 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 4 to 8.

The majority of the panel were 'balancers' who cited benefits as well as disadvantages of migration. Perceptions about control and contribution dominated the discussion. Uncontrolled and unvetted migration flows were seen as undesirable. The benefits of migration, as well as the disadvantages were seen in terms of migrants' economic contribution, through work and paying taxes.

"I've given 5, again there are plus and minuses, and it depends what qualifications are coming in and are needed, it's a good thing. On the other side, can we cope with extra people?"

"I don't mind them coming here and working, but what I don't like is them coming here and taking the piss" (Citizens' panel participants).

Over half of the panel had direct experiences of migration, having moved to the UK themselves or had close family members who had done so. These experiences were brought up at various points in the discussion. Among the three panel members of Asian British ethnicity there was a view that immigration had worked better for everyone in the past, but more recent migrants included those who did not integrate or share British values.

Migration, and the presence of migrants in Leicester, were seen as a normal part of everyday life. While their experiences and media coverage prompted panel member to think or talk about immigration on occasions, it was not an issue that dominated the panel's concerns and thoughts.

"It's an issue that comes in conversation when you're talking to someone, but it does come up in conversation because it's in the media obviously, so it comes in conversation sometimes" (Citizens' panel participant).

As in many other places we visited, there were some gendered differences in attitudes to migration, with female panel members reporting that they felt intimidated by groups of men in the city centre and in areas such as Highfields.

EU migration

The panel was asked about the changes they would like to see the Government make after the UK leaves the EU. Some panel members wanted to see improved criminal record checks and a system to remove EU nationals who had committed crimes in the

UK. There was a consensus that the panel wanted EU migration to be brought under UK Government control, and a system put in place to make sure that would-be migrants were able to make an economic contribution. A number of panel members stated that they would like an Australian points based system.

“It should change, to get a points system like they have in Australia. They have to have qualifications, work experience, then everything gets rated up to a certain number of points so if you’re not going to be able to contribute to what this country needs, then you won’t be able to come in” (Citizens’ panel participant).

This has been a common theme on all our panels across the UK, but some members of the Leicester panel challenged the effectiveness or suitability of a points based system:

“A points system doesn’t work, because I don’t know, if I had £10,000 I could go get a green card to live in America tomorrow” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Other panel members felt that it was important to consider labour market needs in forming a post-Brexit immigration system.

The panel then voted on the options for dealing with EU migration after Brexit, with half of the panel voting for the same system for EU and non-EU nationals, three people wanting an annual cap on low-skilled EU migration and two people wanting to keep free movement (although qualified with comments on removing criminals) and three people wanting an annual quota on low-skilled migration.

“At the moment you’ve got to cap immigration into this country because of the housing shortage and shortages of everything else and obviously I’ve travelled around the EU, and if you look at the whole pack of Europe, UK’s obviously their first choice to come, you’ve got to ask the question why? Because it’s an easy pick here for them. Of course housing a big issue, and obviously we don’t have enough to go around” (Citizens’ panel participant).

The vast majority of the panel wanted EU migration brought under UK government control and there was a discussion about pressures that migration placed on the NHS and housing. Unlike many other panels, participants in Leicester felt that migrants were sometimes displacing UK residents from the labour market. Some members of the group made references to past experiences of migration, which they saw as better controlled. The idea that migration had worked better in the past was a recurrent theme in this panel.

“There were a lot of job opportunities in the 60s and 70s and now it’s like what the gentleman said here, it’s like everyone wants to come here to the UK. Back in the days, in the 60s, 70s more things were being manufactured, there were a lot more job

opportunities that you don't get now" (Citizens' panel participant).

Non-EU Migration

Participants were asked what they thought about the Government's approach to non-EU migration. Panel members had relatives and friends who had come to the UK with family visas and described their experiences to other participants. Non-EU migration was viewed as better controlled than that from the EU and the discussion mostly focussed on international students. While several panel members raised concerns about bogus colleges, International students were viewed as students, rather than migrants. The panel saw international students making a positive contribution to both Leicester itself and to the county of Leicestershire, although there was some disagreement about how much money had entered the local economy.

"I think any city which has a significant student population, those people do contribute. The only people I ever see spending the real money in town are the Chinese students in designer shops. so it may not be what we're traditionally but not look at them, and now Loughborough it's a dynamic place, with all of its new eateries, and without the university, it would really be a bit of a dead town" (Citizens' panel participant).

Asylum seekers and refugees

Panel members were asked for their opinions of the Government's approach to asylum-seekers and refugees. There was sympathy for those who were seen to be genuinely seeking safety, but this was qualified with concerns that not all asylum-seekers were fleeing war and persecution. The case of age-disputed children who were evacuated from Calais was raised in the discussion, as evidence that refugees were not being rigorously vetted.

"You see them coming in on the news, its all men and young boys. Where are all the women and children, if it's the families that are in desperate need for safety?" (Citizens' panel participant).

It was mostly female members of the panel who raised concerns about asylum-seekers, with reference made to feeling intimidated by young men who 'hung around' in the city centre.

"If you go into Leicester town you'll find there's a lot of males, you can tell they're from wherever, there a lot of males hanging around. And you think 'why you are all around here?' If you're here to do a job, why do you hang around Leicester town centre. You notice it a lot more now, when I walk around, there are lots of frightening men hanging around. And I thought brilliant, I'm going to get harassed. That slightly unnerves me" (Citizens' panel participant).

Border control

As undocumented migration had been raised in the discussion, participants were asked for their perceptions about border control. They were asked if they would be willing to pay £5 per year more in taxes for a better immigration system. A minority of the panel were willing to do this, with a range of different arguments advanced to support their view. Largely, it was felt that the Government should make savings from other areas of public spending if it wanted to increase the Home Office budget for border control. As in many panels there was a contradiction between participants' desire for higher levels of immigration control and their desire to resource it.

The group was then given a case study of N, an undocumented migrant from New Zealand who had remained in the UK after overstaying his visa (see appendix). They were asked to decide how the British Government should approach his case. The group was divided, with about a third - mostly those who thought migration had more brought more disadvantages than benefits - wanting N to be located and deported. The remainder of the panel wanted N to be allowed to remain and argued for case-by-case systems for those such as N. Arguments about N's economic contribution were used to support his right to stay.

“Let him stay, legalise him. He pays taxes, it will cost more to repatriate him. Sure there are probably hundreds of Ns, but it's a question of balances?” (Citizens' panel participant).

In contrast to some panels, participants in Leicester appeared to understand that there were trade-offs in immigration enforcement policy, between the need to uphold rules, the cost of enforcement and processes to deal with undocumented migrants who may have a legitimate case to remain in the UK.

Numbers

The panel voted on whether they wanted different types of migration to be increased, reduced or remain about the same. Overall, most panel members opted for levels of migration to remain at about the same level. The panel was equally divided between wanting highly-skilled migration to be increased and for levels to remain about the same. The overwhelming majority wanted the numbers of seasonal workers and international students to remain about the same. About half of the panel wanted the numbers of asylum-seekers to be reduced, and some of those who were happy for the numbers of asylum-seekers to remain the same qualified votes with requests for greater vetting.

Participants were then asked if they had heard of the net migration target. Only one of the participants knew what the net migration target was - and could cite the 'tens of thousands' level that the government had pledged but failed to deliver - while two

other participants had heard of the target but were unsure about specific nature of this pledge. The discussion then moved on to the value of having targets. The Leicester panel shared a preference for having an immigration system and targets which treated different types of immigration differently.

Impact of migration

This panel saw the impact of immigration mostly in terms of migrants' economic contribution and it was clear that the group saw the economic contribution made by those living and working in the city.

While competition for housing and school places have been major themes of other panels, such issues were not a major feature of the discussion in Leicester. Housing shortages were mentioned in passing, but there was no mention of pressures on school places (We were told by stakeholders that there was a shortage of school places in Leicester and this had contributed to resentment towards migrants). Obviously, the personal experiences of panel members informed their views, but we felt that it was important to report this divergence of views between the panel and the stakeholder meeting.

Integration

This was a theme that was raised throughout the discussion. There was a consensus shared by all panel members as well as the stakeholders that Leicester was a place where people generally got on well. They felt that in the UK and abroad people looked to Leicester as a city that had made integration work. There was no criticism of the council, and no sense of any lack of action, from either panel members or stakeholders.

“Other cities have come to Leicester to see how it’s integrated and developed...when there’s been, there’s been race riots in the last decades not in Leicester, for many years far right organisation tried to organise in Leicester, they thought it would be easy picking, but they didn’t succeed. I’m not going to be naive, and nowhere is perfect, there is racism but I think that people get along well [in Leicester]” (Citizens’ panel participant).

While community relations were generally good, there was a consensus that a small minority held prejudiced views. Additionally, the views and actions of a tiny minority of religious extremists had caused Leicester’s Asians to be seen differently by the white population, irrespective of their religion.

“They can’t tell whether someone’s Muslim or Sikh. When a situation like terrorism occurs and is committed by one Islamic sect, everybody’s put in that category. It’s 000.1%, but as white society, they see all Asians as Muslims because they can’t tell the difference” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Panel members felt that Leicester had a civic identity and sense of local pride that connected those from different ethnicities and faith traditions. We were told that Leicester City's Premier League win had bridged ethnic divides and brought the city together. Universally, Leicester's many festivals – Diwali Lights, the Caribbean Carnival and the City Festival, for example - were celebrated by those from all faith communities.

“When Leicester City won the football, it was really fantastic that people who had come from all over the world were celebrating together, because Leicester had won something” (Citizens' panel participants).

Leicester participants showed us a strong sense of civic pride, in which immigration forms part. However, repeating a theme that was voiced earlier in the panel, participants felt that immigration and integration had worked better in the past. In Leicester the citizens' panel felt that new arrivals today did not want to integrate. There was now a risk that the city was becoming more segregated over time, rather than more integrated.

“My family has been here since the 1950s. We often say we were the third Asian family to come to Leicester. What happened was that people tend at first to go together to where they feel safe – so we did get a Sikh area, a Muslim area, a Punjabi area. So it takes time to people to integrate – but I also feel that the first generation and their children did then get more confident, to mix in the schools, and to want to spread out to other areas of the city too. My worry today is that people might start to feel more that it is enough to stick to your own group, and that we could start to have less mixing instead of more of it”. (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. The suggestions that were put forward were similar to many other panels and mostly focussed on:

- increased control and vetting of EU and refugee migration flows
- making sure that migrants who came to the UK made an economic contribution
- greater transparency, and for politicians to be accountable for their actions.

CONCLUSIONS

Leicester is a city that understands migration to be part of its past and present. It has developed a strong and inclusive civic identity as a diverse city. But we felt that there is more work to do to make sure that the progress that has been made continues. The view that immigration and integration was better in the past was the theme that was raised throughout the discussion.

Contributing and control were subjects that were raised throughout the discussion and framed the way different types of migration were seen. Addressing concerns about uncontrolled migration flows and perception about contribution are key to getting greater public support for post-Brexit migration policy.

Appendix

List of stakeholder organisations

Bahai Faith

Council of Faith in Leicester

Leicester Mammias

Leicester Progressive Jewish Congregation

Leicester Quaker Meeting

University of Leicester

Demographics of citizens' panels

Gender	Age	Occupation	Ethnicity
Female	39 years	Clothing buyer – C1	White British
Female	48 years	Educational administrator – C1	Asian British
Female	31 years	Distribution sector team leader – C2	White British
Female	47 years	School director - B	Asian British
Female	65 years	Retired builder/childminder – C2	White British
Male	44 years	Court clerk - B	White British
Male	62 years	Company director - A	Asian British
Male	50 years	Unemployed	White British
Male	19 years	Hospitality worker - D	White Other
Male	39 years	Personal banker – C1	White British

Case study of N

N 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.

N 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 N did not know what to do, and whether he and his girlfriend would have the child. They decided to have the baby and N 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, N 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 N 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 N?

Endnotes

1. Annual Population Survey April 2016-March 2017 estimates.
2. Ibid.
3. Valadez, L. and Hirsch, D. (2016) Child Poverty Map of the UK, 2016, London: End Child Poverty.
4. Hickman, M., Mai, N. And Crowley, H. (2012) Migration and Social Cohesion in the UK, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

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.

