



**NATIONAL
CONVERSATION**

**LINCOLN
REPORT
FEBRUARY 2018**

CONTEXT

The National Conversation on Immigration visited Lincoln, a cathedral city and county town of Lincolnshire, a two-tier local authority. Lincoln's population is estimated to be 97,000.

Lincoln's origins as a settlement date back to the Iron Age and it flourished in early medieval times when it was the third largest city in England. Its wealth was built on the export of cloth and wool, but by the 19th century it was a centre of heavy engineering. Although many of these factories have now closed and jobs have relocated abroad, some 7.3% of jobs in Lincoln are in manufacturing industry, mostly associated with engine production and food processing¹. Tourism also provides many jobs, with visitors coming to see the cathedral, castle and the Magna Carta. The two universities – the University of Lincoln and the smaller Bishop Grosseteste University - are also major employers and between them educate over 15,000 students.

Until recently, Lincoln's population was largely of white British ethnicity. But in the last 20 years, its migrant population has grown and today 10.4% of Lincoln's population are estimated to have been born overseas, although this figure excludes some international students who are considered to be short-term migrants. Similar to many other towns and cities in the area, Lincoln has seen the arrival of substantial numbers of EU nationals since 2004, many of whom are working in food processing and tourism.

However, Lincoln has not experienced the rapid immigration of the Fen towns further south in Lincolnshire, such as Boston and Wisbech, where the numbers of new migrants are much higher, and immigration has been rapid.

International students have also brought diversity to Lincoln, with over 1,400 international students at the two universities. Chinese students are the largest national group, although there are a growing number of international students from the Middle East.

WHAT WE DID

A stakeholder meeting was held with representatives from higher education. 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.

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 panel members came from Lincoln and its immediate environs. 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 5.1 with a range from 3 to 7.

All of the citizens' panel were 'balancers' who described positive and negative impacts of immigration, although a few participants thought that the pressures of migration outweighed the benefits.

"I have worked with a lot of immigrants and they do bring a very good wealth of knowledge and skills with them. I understand that they do put pressures on things like housing and the NHS but what they bring with them outweighs any negative impact that they have" (Citizens' panel participant).

Lincoln lies just north of the Fens, the UK's agricultural heartland. The citizens' panel felt that Lincolnshire's rural economy had benefitted from the contribution of migrant workers, who undertook agricultural work or were employed in the food packing and processing sector. Many participants felt that these migrant workers were doing jobs that British workers did not want to do and had a stronger work ethic than many young British people.

"Where I work the majority are immigrants. You'll never get immigrants going off sick, they just won't do it, whereas English young people do, there's constantly two or three missing" (Citizens' panel participant).

At the same time, the citizens' panel was concerned about the pressures that rapid migration had placed on schools and the NHS, both in the city and the county. Integration and language barriers were also a major theme of the citizens' panel discussion. Concerns about language barriers were more strongly voiced in Lincoln than anywhere else we have visited so far.

"I think the government should work harder on integration, because you start to see the polarisation of communities. If you go to the south of Lincoln, the St Andrews street area, you see a lot of Eastern European people and there is a huge problem down there. There has to be a bigger effort to integrate people" (Citizens' panel participant).

Immigration was a salient issue for most of the Lincoln citizens' panel and for some participants was a factor in their decision to vote Leave in the EU referendum. Both media coverage and rapid migration into Lincolnshire made immigration a high profile issue throughout the county, a finding which was confirmed by the stakeholders. Boston is 35 miles away by road from Lincoln

and participants' views about this town were brought up throughout the discussion. In the ten years between the 2001 and 2011 census, the percentage of migrants in Boston's population increased by 390%. In the EU referendum in 2016 the Leave vote in Boston – at 76% - was the highest in the country. There has been considerable media coverage of migration in Boston and in the national press the town has come to symbolise the Government's failure to deal with the local impacts of rapid migration.

"I used to work in the Boston area and I've seen the changes that have happened as the Eastern Europeans came in to work in the agricultural jobs... think that there is a great work ethic amongst foreign nationals and I think their moral pride is that they do want to work, they don't want to draw on society. But it's the lack of infrastructure in place that is exacerbating the situation"
(Citizens' panel participant).

While acknowledging there were positive and negative impacts, some participants felt media coverage of immigration was sensationalist and biased. They felt that this had an impact on how their friends and family viewed immigration and made an argument for more accurate and balanced media coverage.

"I'm not sure but doesn't there need to be a balance in the media? isn't that the law? I think showing more of the positive effects because then the actions might change as well"
(Citizens' panel participant).

EU migration

The citizens' panel was asked about the changes they wanted to see made to EU migration policy after Brexit. Some of the group wanted tighter controls on numbers through the introduction of a quota system. Other participants felt that EU migrants should be obliged to speak some English before they came, or show willingness to learn the language. As noted above, the integration of EU nationals was a major theme of the discussion, with many participants concerned that many EU nationals spoke little or no English.

A welfare system that was linked to prior contribution was another suggestion that was put forward by this citizens' panel, with migrants prevented from claiming benefits or using some services until they have contributed through taxation for a set period of time.

"You should have some kind of time schedule that they can't access these services until they've been in the country for quite a while and proved that they're, I don't want to use the word worthy, but have contributed to the country, then they can get access to those services" (Citizens' panel participant).

Currently, EU nationals cannot claim benefits until they are

judged to be habitually resident in the UK. A few members of the citizens' panel knew that there were restrictions on the ability of EU nationals to claim benefits, although most did not. Even when told such restrictions were in place, some participants did not trust the Government to enforce such a policy.

Participants then voted on the options for dealing with EU migration after Brexit. The most popular choice was an annual cap or quota covering EU migrants coming to do low-skilled jobs, but not for EU nationals in highly-skilled work.

Most participants were happy for the numbers of high-skilled migrants from the EU to be increased or to remain at about the same level, although a few people wanted more emphasis to be placed on training people already in the UK. The majority of this panel were also happy for the numbers of low-skilled and seasonal workers from the EU to remain at the same level.

The discussion then moved on to the Brexit negotiations. They were asked if they would be willing to accept less restriction on EU migration if it meant that British business would get greater access to the single market. Participants found this question abstract and hard to comprehend and did not relate it to key local industries.

"It depends what the restrictions are, and it also depends on the deal itself" (Citizens' panel participant).

Non-EU Migration

The discussion on migration from outside the EU focussed on international students. Participants felt that the presence of international students had brought benefits to Lincoln. They did not view this group as migrants, although some people thought students needed to be better integrated into the city. None of the participants wanted the numbers of international students to be reduced. But it is significant to note that most participants did not want student numbers to be increased, either.

"I went to university and I was friends with someone from Japan, and I was just friends with them I never thought of them as different or anything like that, he was just coming to study" (Citizens' panel participant).

The treatment of international students was also discussed in some depth during the stakeholder meeting. Like any other UK institution, Bishop Grosseteste and the University of Lincoln had to compete for students with countries such as Australia and the United States. Perceptions about the welcome afforded to international students have an impact on the ability of UK universities to recruit overseas. The Lincoln stakeholder group felt that the inclusion of students in the net migration target sent out the message that the UK did not welcome international students. Stakeholders also wanted the Tier 4 student

migration system to be more user friendly. International students who needed to extend their visas should be able to do so in the UK rather than return home to do so. Given that international students bring tangible benefits to local economies and there is public support for such migration, we feel the Government should consider these recommendations.

Asylum-seekers and refugees

The Lincoln citizens' panel was sympathetic to the plight of refugees, particularly women and children. Lincoln does not house asylum-seekers dispersed by the Home Office, nor has it agreed to accept Syrian refugees. As might be expected, refugee protection was not a particularly salient issue for this group and no-one could recollect meeting a refugee. Participants felt that the UK must help genuine refugees, although a few people questioned why the refugees they saw on TV were mostly male. At the same time, some participants voiced concerns about the movement of refugees across Europe. As with many other citizens' panels, they felt that refugees were moving across Europe attracted by the generosity of the UK benefits system.

“Under political asylum, whoever is fleeing from their country of conflict and then they all say they should apply for political asylum in the first country they arrive in. Yet you see a lot of people travelling across Europe to get to the UK. When they are in France and they are safe and could apply for political asylum there” (Citizens' panel participant)

Border control

The citizens' panel discussed border control. Immigration detention had recently been in the news and the group discussed whether there should be a time limit on detention. Currently the UK is one of the few OECD countries that has no such safeguard, with campaigners wanting a limit of 28 days. Apart from one participant, this group knew very little about immigration detention. It was clearly not an issue that they had previously considered. There was a consensus that people should be detained for a short a time period as possible.

“I think once you've detained someone then it should be very swift, if you have detained them then you have some reason to” (Citizens' panel participant).

One member of the citizens' panel was a retired police officer. His views added a different perspective to the discussion about immigration detention when he explained how difficult it could be to investigate crimes when there were time limits on how long the police could hold suspects. He argued that the Home Office needed to be sufficiently well-resourced to be able to assess asylum applications and to remove people where refugee status was refused. Partly as a result of this intervention there was a consensus among participants that the Home Office needed

an adequate budget so as to operate efficiently and everyone indicated that they were willing to pay a little more in tax, if this meant more immigration officers and better technology.

“I think there should definitely be time limits, and it [the immigration system] also needs to be sorted before those time limits come down. Because at the moment there are a few people doing an awful lot of jobs. Again it comes down to money and resources, but if we are going to properly assess if someone should be given political asylum and be allowed indefinite or temporary leave to remain then that should be properly assessed” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Participants were then given a case study of H, an undocumented migrant from New Zealand (see appendix). They were asked to decide whether H should remain in the UK. Two participants were unsure about this case, but the remainder of the group felt H should be removed to New Zealand. They felt that it was important to uphold regulations and there was no strong moral case for H to stay. The relationship between H and his child was not judged to be close enough to justify H remaining in the UK.

Numbers

The panel voted on whether they wanted different types of migration to be increased, reduced or remain about the same. This was a citizens’ panel that generally opted to keep the numbers of different migrant groups at about the same level, although a majority wanted to reduce the numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees. At this point in the discussion, one participant argued that there should be more resources to train people in the UK. Although, this issue was raised by one person, others in the group agreed.

“Can I just throw one in there, I would want to reduce the high skilled workers in this country because I think we don’t train up enough of our own people. Doctors and nurses, we tend to rely on foreign nationals coming in, a lot of foreign doctors and nurses. I think the way the universities are set up, we have all these fees....but if they made training to be a doctor, a medical degree free, then we would train our own doctors up and we wouldn’t have to be importing doctors in from foreign countries” (Citizens’ panel participant).

The discussion then moved on to the net migration target. Four of the citizens’ panel had heard of the net migration target, although just two people knew its details. There was no agreement whether the UK should retain one overall target, introduce different targets for different types of migration, or not use targets at all.

Impact of migration

This citizens' panel described positive economic impacts of migration, but had some concerns about the pressures that rapid migration placed on public services, particularly on schools, policing and the NHS. However, most participants did not directly blame migrants for such a situation, although they felt that migrants must 'pay into the system' for a certain period of time before they claim benefits and some other services.

Integration

As noted above, the integration of migrant workers from the EU was a major theme of the discussion. Most people knew migrants and felt that people generally got on well in Lincoln, but at the same time felt that there were parts of the UK where integration was not working, mentioning Luton and Manchester and talking about these places being "overwhelmed". While none of the participants named particular communities, it was clear from some comments that they were referring to Muslims who they perceived as not integrating. This stereotyping of Muslims was not challenged.

- *"I came from down south and it's very different up here [Lincoln] with the immigrants than it is down south. I went back home on Friday and I've been back a few times in the two years, and it was really apparent of how much it had changed, the number of immigrants to where I came from, to here."*
- **"Do you want to say where your home is?"**
- *"Luton. Really shocking, to the point where I was so glad I was out of it purely because of my little boy. It's just how much it's changed in two years with the immigrants."*

Some participants went on to describe residential clustering in Lincoln, with migrant workers and international students often living in particular parts of Lincoln where cheaper rental accommodation was located. When it was suggested by some participants that migrants from eastern Europe tended to socialise within their own national group, others felt that this was sometimes the outcome of unwelcoming behaviour from the host community. Most people agreed that integration was a two-way process.

"At the end of the day if you are not made to feel welcome, you will probably gravitate to the people who are like you"
(Citizens' panel participant).

This citizens' panel was sceptical that the Government could do much to encourage integration. Rather they felt that individuals, communities, schools and local councils had a much bigger role to play. They praised the activities of schools and sports clubs in promoting integration.

"I think it should be done from the bottom up, at the end of day,

it's very difficult to break the bigotry that the immigrants have got against ourselves as much as we have against them. You see with what happened in Ireland with the two polarised communities there and it got better when the children started to mix and I think more should be done in schools. I was a secretary of a swimming club and seeing the children mix together in the swimming clubs and in football clubs, and in cricket clubs, and those children become teenagers and then adults so that's where the integration comes. ...The language is the first once you've done that, then you can start with the children" (Citizens' panel participant).

There was a consensus that migrants should learn English. Concerns about language barriers were more strongly voiced in Lincoln than anywhere else we have visited so far. There was a perception that those who could not speak English ended up working in particular sectors of the economy such as farming and food processing, or for certain employers. This exacerbated social segregation in Lincolnshire.

"I used to work at a recruitment agency in their accounts department and 90% of the workforce there were foreign and the majority of the work we offered was food factories. I know from this experience that foreign people are very qualified but the language barrier as well which restricts them from the jobs they could go for, they tend to settle for the lower jobs" (Citizens' panel participant).

The City of Lincoln Council and Lincolnshire County Council, together with universities and colleges have taken the initiative and considered how they should promote the integration of migrants. The city council has published a plan to encourage integration². With large numbers of students and migrant workers living in private rental accommodation, the district councils in Lincolnshire have introduced landlord licensing schemes in some areas to make sure that those renting property maintain it. This helps prevent neighbourhoods with large amounts of rental property going into a spiral of decline. In Lincoln, as we noted when we visited March in the Fens last year, badly maintained and over-crowded housing can contribute to tension and resentment and mundane conflicts over parking spaces and overflowing bins.

Our visit to Lincoln took place just before the Government published an integration green paper for England³. This promised an English language strategy. Clearly, fluency in English underpins integration, as we have seen in Lincoln and elsewhere. But too many new migrants cannot speak and write English well or at all – 8,500 in Lincolnshire at the time of the 2011 census. At the same time, breaking down language barriers is challenging. For many seasonal and short-term migrants from eastern Europe there may be few incentives to learn English, particularly if work colleagues come from the same linguistic group. The obligation to pass an English test to obtain British

citizenship or get a non-EU work, student or family visa provides an incentive for migrants from outside the EU, but less so for migrant workers in Lincolnshire who are mostly from the EU. While there are English language classes on offer in Lincoln, migrants who work long hours struggle to attend them.

There need to be incentives to encourage migrant workers to learn English, but also help for them to do so. While colleges offer classes, central government needs to provide stable funding for them. In England, regulations on the funding of adult education change almost every year, with budgets for English language introduced and later abolished. In some UK cities, charities run informal drop in classes, sometimes called language cafes, many of which are run by volunteers which can be more attractive than formal college classes. We need many more of these, particularly in smaller towns across the UK. Other counties also use Freeview channels to provide language classes on the TV, but this does not happen in the UK. These are issues that the Government needs to consider when developing its English language strategy.

Regaining trust in the immigration system

Participants were asked about the changes they would like to see brought in to enable them to have greater confidence in the immigration system. Some participants wanted more controls on EU migration, through quotas and criminal vetting. Others wanted the Government to follow through policy commitments. A few participants also argued for balanced media coverage, while for others, their answers related to a wider mistrust of politicians:

“Don’t just keep telling us what you are going to do and putting it off. Say what you are going to do and do it”

(Citizens’ panel participant).

CONCLUSIONS

Parts of Lincolnshire have experienced rapid migration, particularly to towns such as Boston and Spalding. The situation in Boston was brought up throughout the discussion and appeared symbolic of uncontrolled migration flows. Lincoln, too, has experienced significant amounts of recent migration through the arrival of EU nationals and international students.

This citizens' panel recognised the contribution that migrants made to the local economy. At the same time, they felt EU migration needed to be better controlled and the group voiced concerns about pressures on public services and about integration. Concerns about language barriers were more strongly voiced in Lincoln than anywhere else we have visited so far. Dealing with local issues, particularly language and housing, would help restore confidence in the immigration system in Lincoln.

Appendix

Demographics of citizens' panels

Gender	Age	Occupation	Ethnicity
Female	22 years	Homemaker	White British
Female	47 years	Nursery nurse – C1	White British
Female	43 years	Administrator – C1	White British
Female	49 years	Plasterer – C2	White British
Female	57 years	Agricultural merchant - B	White British
Female	50 years	Optical engineer - B	White British
Male	37 years	Teaching assistant – C1	White British
Male	50 years	Engineer - B	White British
Male	62 years	Retired senior police officer - A	White British
Male	22 years	Financial consultant – C1	White British

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?

End notes

1 Annual Population Survey, 2016.

2 Lincoln Community Cohesion Strategy 2013-2018 available at <https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allid=993>

3 HM Government (2018) Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, London: The Stationery Office.

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.

