



**NATIONAL
CONVERSATION**

**NORTHAMPTON
REPORT
APRIL 2017**

CONTEXT

Northampton has a population of 223,000 and is the administrative centre of Northamptonshire County Council. The county retains a two-tier local government structure, with Northampton being a district within the county of Northamptonshire. Its population grew in the 1960s and 1970s, as a consequence of new motorway links and being designed as a third wave new town. In recent years there has been further population increase due to international migration and London overspill.

Until recently, many people in Northampton were employed in the manufacturing industry, particularly in shoe-making and engineering. Over the last 20 years, several large employers have relocated their production abroad where labour costs are lower. Only a small number of specialist shoemakers remain and today financial services, drink manufacturing, and logistics and distribution are major employers in the town. Many of the new jobs that have been created – particularly in warehouses - are precarious and low paid, and are often taken up by migrant workers.

There is a long history of immigration to Northampton – a visible Black Caribbean presence dates back to 1950s, as well as a long-settled Bangladeshi and Zimbabwean community in the town. More recently, the town has seen a significant amount of migration from eastern Europe. Today, estimates from the Annual Population Survey suggest that 15% of Northampton's population was born overseas, with just under half of this group born in the ten newest member states of the European Union. Many new migrants are living in rental accommodation in the poorer parts of the town, with this residential clustering influencing perceptions of integration.

In-migration into Northampton has heightened the socio-economic divides in the town, between newcomers and long-settled residents and between the well-off and those who are struggling. There has been little action by the council to deal with the impacts of international migration. At the same time there has been a local authority investment to attract those who work in London. This includes a new university campus, a cultural quarter with gallery space and cafes. Northampton also has a new railway station with fast trains to London, but there have been criticisms that this investment has not benefitted low income families. Official labour market statistics encapsulate these divides: the average gross weekly earnings of men who **live** in Northampton is £565 per week, but those who **work** in Northampton it is £513.

What we did

A stakeholder meeting was held with local representatives. We 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 and how policy changes might address these two issues.

Later, a citizens' panel was held with ten 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 Northampton and the surrounding villages. Further demographic information about the group 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'. Their average score was 5.3, with a range of 1 to 8¹. Most people in the group were 'balancers', weighing up the benefits of immigration against what they saw as negative impacts. There were, however, a few members of panel who had more sceptical attitudes and felt that the pressures of migration outweighed the advantages, although in many cases their views were challenged.

The conversation in Northampton centred on EU migration. The view that EU migrants depressed wages and drove down working conditions came out strongly in this group, much more strongly than in most other areas visited by the National Conversation on Immigration. This may be due to changes in the local labour market: the loss of skilled and semi-skilled jobs in engineering and shoe-making followed by the growth of low paid and insecure work in the distribution sector.

"I worry about the low skilled ones, because that's cheap labour and it brings our wages down too...It's not that I have anything against people working cheaply, it's just that it keeps our wages down as well as theirs" (Citizens' panel participant).

Participants frequently linked their opinions on migration to broader comments about current employment practices, for example, under-employment and practices where employers did not offer full-time contracts to avoid paying employers National Insurance.

"I'm all for people who have got skills and bring something positive to the country. Lower skilled workers, it's different. It's something that could be back filled by people who are British. I think there's also some things that need to be changed, some tax laws. Some people that I manage are part timers but they can't do more hours- they're on their 16 hours and that's it, because of National Insurance. If we sort out those things, we may not have much of a cause for concern about people taking our jobs" (Citizens' panel participant).

Participants also voiced other concerns: undocumented migration, pressures on public services, a lack of criminal vetting of EU migrants, all featured prominently in the discussion. Some female participants – including those with more sympathetic views about migration – found street drinking by groups of eastern European men to be intimidating.

"Where's the policeman to do anything about it? There aren't any....When you've got any sort of opening of a border you're going to inherit not only the nice hard working people, you're going to inherit a slice of all the issues that has gone on in

that country. And if there is - we see it now on every corner [in Northampton]. We've inherited their drinking culture, drinking issues" (Citizens' panel participant).

Cultural concerns about immigration featured in the discussion, both generally and specifically about Muslims. The remarks of some participants were prejudiced, with generalisations made about Muslims as a security threat or for not wanting to integrate. These views were not always challenged.

Migration was a salient issue for all participants; it was something they discussed frequently and had risen in prominence since the referendum.

"I feel like it's more topical following the EU referendum- before that it wasn't really talked about so much" (Citizens' panel participant)

The citizens' panel formed their opinions on migration by drawing on their everyday experiences at work, in the town centre and from the media. Stakeholders stated that there had been a long run of negative stories about EU migration in the local media. Northampton was the location for the Daily Mail's story "Is there anyone left in Britain who can make a sandwich?"² In the discussion participants cited media stories relating to undocumented migration and migrants use of the benefits system. At the same time, they were sceptical about the reliability of online and print media stories on immigration.

EU migration

Participants were asked what changes to the regulations governing EU migration they would like to see made after Brexit. The discussion focussed on control and there were requests for a criminal vetting system. There have been some high profile cases of EU nationals who have served prison sentences coming to Northampton and re-offending. This may have provoked a desire for improved criminal vetting.

No-one expected the numbers of EU migrants to go down after Brexit, but there was a majority view that numbers would level off. Some panel members supported a registration system for EU nationals, as a means of curtailing undocumented migration.

"Germany has a very good way of keeping tabs on people where it is by your address and you have to go the police with your address and that's how they know where everyone is and it seems ludicrous that in this country that we have no proper means of knowing where they are" (Citizens' panel participant).

Participants then voted on the options for dealing with EU migration after Brexit. The overwhelming majority of this panel wanted the same rules applied to EU national as those from outside the EU. Participants felt such a system was fairer and would allow the UK to admit those with skills to offer.

“If there are more restrictions and you have to work to justify you being in the country, that is fairness. There will be fewer people coming in doing lower skilled work and give the opportunity for people who are already in the country to train and take up those jobs”.

There was no support for temporary visas for EU workers as participants had no confidence in the Government to enforce temporary visa regimes, although one participant made a case for using such an approach for seasonal workers in agriculture.

Despite the group’s concerns that migrants were undercutting wages and creating barriers to job opportunities for local young people, the group were unwilling to enter a trade-off between levels of EU migration and the price of UK-grown fruit and vegetables. Instead they suggested that if this happened, it would be the fault of supermarkets for profiteering and using Brexit as a pretext to put up prices.

Non-EU Migration

Non-EU migration had less salience with the Northampton citizens’ panel. They thought that international students made an important economic contribution through their fees. Participants also felt that migration from outside the EU was much better controlled. Indeed some members of the panel felt that some of the restrictions placed on non-EU migration could sometimes be too harsh, preventing highly-skilled workers from moving to the UK.

“I don’t think we had so much trouble with the doctors and nurses before we brought the visa system in. The visa system has stopped a lot of doctors coming in. I’m pretty sure about that”
(Citizens’ panel participant).

Asylum-seekers and refugees

There was an acknowledgement that people fleeing war and persecution deserve to be offered a place of safety. The majority of participants were also happy to keep the numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees at about the same level as long as other countries were *“doing their bit”*. However, this citizens’ panel had concerns about the age-disputed children who had been brought to the UK from Calais. They saw this event as illustrative of a lax vetting system and it had increased their concerns about the security risks posed by asylum migration. Participants also felt that the movement of refugees across Europe was evidence that the UK’s benefits system was a pull factor, causing people to move to the UK.

One participant came from Zimbabwe and she talked about the challenges that the Home Office faces in determining asylum cases. Overall, this citizens’ panel believed that as long as there were rigorous checks in place, genuine refugees must be offered protection.

“Irrespective of why people come here they’re obviously fleeing something. If I were one of them I would like the chance to have a start somewhere else, and we have to be compassionate about that if people are genuine. We come back to the same thing. How are we putting in checks to make sure people are genuine?”
(Citizens’ panel participant).

Border control

Control was a central theme of this discussion, with participants wanting the criminal vetting of would-be migrants, more checks on asylum-seekers and the registration of EU nationals after Brexit. This panel had some concerns about undocumented migration, an issue not all citizens’ panels raise spontaneously. This panel argued for improved technology to aid registration, curtail undocumented migration and to enable accurate and trustworthy statistics to be collected.

When asked if they would be willing to pay more through taxation for improved border control, the panel was divided. Some participants argued that funding be taken from other areas, with others having no confidence in the Government to spend the money wisely. But about half the group would be happy to pay a little more through taxation so as to increase the Home Office budget for immigration control. They felt that by doing so, this contribution would have positive impacts or reduce other areas of public spending.

“I’d pay more. I think it would counterbalance what I already pay. If you enforce more border control, there are less migrants coming in and eventually less strain on the NHS and other areas where I pay tax. Yes, I’d pay more because it will help lower the cost in other areas” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Numbers

The panel voted on whether they wanted different types of migration to be increased, reduced or remain about the same. Most participants wanted to keep numbers at about the same level, except for low-skilled migration from the EU which all of them wanted to see reduced.

The discussion then moved on to the net migration target. In contrast to most citizen’s panels, the majority of the Northampton group had heard of the net migration target, and were frustrated at the government’s inability to meet it.

Impact of migration

This citizens’ panel saw the impact of migration mostly in relation to labour market issues. While participants felt that migrants brought skills and many were hard working, they also felt the arrival of EU migrants had depressed wages and driven down working conditions. This opinion was voiced much more strongly than in other citizens’ panels to date. Pressures

on housing, policing, the NHS and schools were also raised as issues, but not as strongly as labour market issues.

We felt that these strong concerns about the labour market impact of migration were linked to employment practices in Northampton's growing distribution sector. One participant worked in a warehouse and others had friends and relatives who worked in this sector, with the personal examples of work practices raised in the discussion.

There was also a perception that EU migration had made it more difficult for young people and those returning from parental leave to find jobs. Migrants were seen as being more flexible, compared with parents who may need to fit their jobs around childcare.

"I'm proudly working for a company which won an award for working mums. There's plenty of people out there in the market looking for jobs but employers, they don't want to have to deal with people's flexibility. 'You do as we tell you, you do it'. If you don't it's 'you go home'. They don't want to have to bend to our will" (Citizens' panel participant).

Stakeholders also felt that some employers had been exploitative, and that precarious and low paid employment was rife, particularly in the distribution sector.

Integration and community relations

Most participants knew migrants as friends, neighbours or work colleagues. Generally they felt that most people got on well with each other in Northampton, with its schools and workplaces playing an important role in promoting integration. However, participants felt that many new arrivals from eastern and central Europe spoke little English and this prevented their integration

"There's a positive you can take from looking at the kids as well, I know quite a few Eastern Europeans who have come into the country and their parents don't speak a word of English but the kids at school are completely integrated... Even our children, they know all the bad words in Polish and Lithuanian... But there is that problem where the parents and the adults are not speaking English. If you're not learning the language, not speaking, you become such a closed community" (Citizens' panel participant)

Much of the discussion on integration focused on Muslims. Sometimes participants named Muslims, but on other occasions they were not named and instead were described as "*them*", or "*some communities*". It was clear that participants were struggling to balance polite norms of behaviour with their views on Muslims.

"Some people will not conform. They will not do it because it's just not in them, it's not in their culture"

(Citizens' panel participant).

Participants in the Northampton discussion had had very little social contact with Muslims. In the absence of positive and everyday social contact, stereotyping and a fear of Muslims emerged. Of course, such views are not confined to Northampton and we are concerned about widespread fear and prejudice of Muslims. More optimistically, where there is positive social contact between Muslims and non-Muslims, discussions about integration tend to be more confident and thoughtful, with participants able to describe these encounters, rather than rely on stereotypes.

Those who had cultural concerns also felt that 'soft touch Britain' was doing too much to accommodate migrants and minority ethnic groups, who themselves should adopt British customs. However, this view was countered by others who felt there needed to be a mutual respect for different cultural traditions.

"We're too woolly, and we sit there and want to please everyone. And it should be a case of if you want to live in the UK you have to make an effort to learn English, appreciate our holidays and our customs just as we will also appreciate your holidays and customs" (Citizens' panel participant).

Despite stereotypes and cultural concerns voiced by one or two people, there was a considered and constructive discussion about integration. There was a consensus that everyone had a role: migrants themselves, receiving communities, employers, the council and central government. Most people saw integration as a two-way process.

- *"You can try it, smile at people, smile at a stranger. That's the small step in integrating and encouraging them to integrate. Children do it, they don't have that barrier"*
- *"They haven't got that fear- that's what it is- I think the issue is with fear, fear of not understanding, fear of difference."* (Citizens' panel participants).

Fluency in English was crucial to achieving integration, as without communication fears and misconceptions about others can easily grow.

"That's one of the key big things with immigration, the language barrier. If you can't communicate with people, you can't hear what they're saying" (Citizens' panel participant).

There was also discussion about integration in the stakeholder meeting. There was very little English language provision for those who worked long hours and found it difficult to attend a college course. It was also felt that the county council had failed to show leadership on this issue and had no integration strategy. In Northampton, the workplace was an important place where

people from different backgrounds mix with each other. But some employers organised shift rotas by language group and others do not enforce English as the medium of workplace communication. The citizens' panel also confirmed these practices.

“You should learn the language. Language screens now are a bit of a joke. I picked up a second job at a warehouse over Christmas and to do the English test was so basic, anyone could have got it right. It did mean the working demographic was completely biased. I was one of five English speakers on a team night shift of 60 or 70 people. It’s lovely to learn about other cultures, to exchange experience and information, but it becomes really difficult for people to work”
(Citizens' panel participant).

Stakeholders voiced concerns about hate crime and casual racism in Northamptonshire which they felt had increased since the referendum. We were told *“there continues to be a very large and very vocal go home narrative”* with Northamptonshire MPs and other political leaders unwilling to put forward a counter narrative.

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. Most of their comments were directly linked to their overwhelming lack of trust in politicians and in the Government to deliver immigration policy. Many participants felt that the Government misrepresented what was happening or told lies about immigration, and that the adversarial nature of party politics encouraged them to do so. A key demand from most participants was for greater transparency and more information.

“We’d like a bit of honesty and not politicising it so much. It’ll be a sad day when they actually tell us the truth instead of what they want us to hear!” (Citizens' panel participant).

Other demands centred on the desire for better controls. Participants wanted more rigorous criminal vetting of would-be migrants and the greater use of technology at the borders.

CONCLUSIONS

EU migration dominated the debate in Northampton, where participants who attended the citizens' panel were most concerned about its impact on the labour market. While most people thought migrants brought skills, this citizens' panel thought they displaced local people from the labour market, depressed wages and enabled employers to enact changes to working conditions. These concerns were much more strongly voiced in Northampton than in other locations visited to date and we felt they were linked to the growth of precarious and low paid work in the town's distribution sector. An enforcement of employment rights, and ending exploitative practices such as bogus self-employment might offer a way to building bridges between communities and securing a consensus on immigration policy.

Appendix

Demographics of citizens' panel

Gender	Age	Occupation	Ethnic Group
Female	67 years old	Administration Assistant - C1	White British
Female	38 years old	Unemployed - E	Mixed Heritage
Female	51 years old	HR Assistant - C1	White British
Female	63 years old	Retired Head Teacher - B	White British
Female	60 years old	Retired sales assistant - C1	White British
Male	36 years old	Team Leader - C1	White British
Male	33 years old	Solicitor - B	White British
Male	28 years old	HR Manager - C1	White British
Male	37 years old	Lift Engineer - C2	White British
Male	28 years old	Self Employed - C2	White British

Endnotes

1. Although participants were screened so as to exclude those with more extreme positive or negative views, one person, an older woman scored 1 in response to this question. She wrote on the form: *“Negative cultural differences as well as financial impacts. They are not working and don’t live in British society. The cultural and religious beliefs are not the same. They tend to live in harmony with their own countries. What make us think they can live differently here? Cultural and religious cause anxiety and uncertainty.”*
2. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2827625/Factory-bosses-forced-recruit-Hungary-locals-not-apply.html>

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.

The logo for British Future, featuring the words "British Future..." in a blue sans-serif font. The word "British" is on the top line and "Future..." is on the bottom line. A blue L-shaped line is positioned to the left and below the text.The logo for HOPE not hate, featuring the word "HOPE" in a bold, black, sans-serif font centered within a yellow horizontal bar. Above and below this bar, the word "HATE" is written in a tall, thin, black, sans-serif font.