



Justice and Home Affairs Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Settlement, citizenship and integration

Tuesday 27 January 2026

10.30 am

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Members present: Lord Foster of Bath (The Chair); Lord Bach; Baroness Bertin; Baroness Buscombe; Baroness Cash; Lord Filkin; Lord Henley; Baroness Hughes of Stretford; Baroness Prashar; Lord Tope.

Also present: Lord Anderson of Ipswich, Lord Hogan-Howe; Lord Moraes.

Evidence Session No. 8

Heard in Public

Questions 108 – 118

Witness

I: Dr Madeleine Sumption MBE, Director, Migration Observatory.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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Examination of witness

Dr Madeleine Sumption.

Q108 **The Chair:** Welcome to this eighth oral evidence session of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee on settlement, citizenship, and integration. We are delighted to have with us a really expert witness today; I would be very grateful if you could introduce yourself.

Dr Madeleine Sumption: I am the director of the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, and deputy chair of the Migration Advisory Committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We are going to kick off with Lord Filkin.

Q109 **Lord Filkin:** Good morning and thank you for coming. Could you summarise the role of the Migration Advisory Committee and the Migration Statistics User Forum for us, and tell us how they are able to respond to a changing immigration environment?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: The Migration Advisory Committee advises the Home Office on migration policy; this happens mostly via commissions. The Home Office commissions the MAC to look at a particular issue where it wants advice, but there is also an opportunity for the MAC to commission itself to do work on areas that it considers to be particularly important. It is purely advisory; it makes policy recommendations, but the Home Office does not have to accept any of those recommendations.

In terms of the Migration Statistics User Forum, there are various different fora within the Office for National Statistics, and Mary Gregory, who is coming after me, will probably be able to talk about this in more detail. The Migration Statistics User Forum is a relatively large forum that engages a wide range of people who use migration data, such as local authorities, charities, and various different policymakers. It is separate from the advisory panel to the National Statistician, which I chair, which advises the ONS on how it is producing its migration statistics, what the vision should be for the future, how to improve the statistics, and so forth.

In terms of responding to the changing immigration context, the MAC is certainly able to do this; the only barrier to responding tends to be the availability of data. Sometimes there is a new question that is very important in the debate, such as settlement and what happens to people after they become settled in the UK, but the data on settlement is not really good enough to look at all the questions that the MAC might like to look at, so that can be a barrier. Broadly speaking, however, these bodies are able to respond to changing circumstances.

Lord Filkin: The Migration Impacts Forum, which was ended in 2010, appeared to have a particular public interest role not only in looking at migrant numbers but at the integration of migrants and their effect on communities. It does not look as if its role has been absorbed by the

Migration Advisory Committee, which seems to concentrate essentially on the economic impact. That is greatly important, but the social impacts of migration are massively important to this country. That aspect looks highly neglected. Would you agree?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: It is true that there is no overarching framework or strategy for integration in the UK, and there is no systematic way of getting expert advice on that. The Migration Advisory Committee occasionally looks at elements of the social impacts, but you are right that it is not its main focus. The Home Office has carried out various ad hoc exercises; for example, a number of years ago it produced a set of indicators of integration. That was quite a big exercise, but as far as I am aware, it did not necessarily feed into any coherent strategy for how the UK should be thinking about integration. When I say the UK, obviously this is a devolved matter.

I do not have strong views on whether there should be a new body or precisely how that should be arranged. If you look at the Migration Advisory Committee case, there is a good argument that the MAC has helped to produce a more coherent way of using evidence in the Home Office to produce policy recommendations, which may create a more strategic approach. I know that some people have advocated for a similar body or structure that would allow either the Home Office or other parts of government to receive expert advice on integration. The integration area is obviously a little complicated because there are so many parts of government that have a role to play. Immigration policy is primarily made by the Home Office, and that is not the case with integration.

Lord Filkin: Without debating the structure of government—we could spend the whole day on that—your point is that the previous body involved local government, the effects on local health services, even communities themselves. Is it not pretty important that an expert body is analysing what is happening consequent to migration both nationally and in our communities? Migration is often beneficial, but obviously it has challenges.

Dr Madeleine Sumption: Yes, it is very important. As you say, the impact on public services was a main focus of the Migration Impacts Forum; the MAC does look at those issues, but usually it is by necessity because the MAC takes a data-driven approach in a relatively high-level way. Because the Migration Impacts Forum was designed to take in a large volume of local-level evidence, it was able to look in more detail at the specific pressures that might emerge in individual public services. The MAC does not tend to do that much.

Lord Filkin: As you implied, the MAC is fundamentally a commission-led organisation—although there are some philosophical edges—and the commissioner is the Home Office, so it is going to be less focused on issues that affect, say, MHCLG or other parts of the system, or even local government itself. Is that not a weakness?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: In general, for many potential reasons, the UK has never been particularly good at having an integration strategy. Obviously, it is a complex issue. Local authorities are on the front line, even more than MHCLG. I do not have a particular view on precisely how it should be done organisationally, but I agree that there is a gap.

The Chair: You talked about local evidence being used. Is that local evidence now being collected?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: It depends on precisely what that evidence is. It has always been the case that local-level statistics are less complete than national-level, partly due to technical issues about sufficient sample sizes in the relevant datasets at the local level, and that is a challenge. It is being collected; there are lots of new data sources that are coming on stream, such as linked administrative data, that allow us to have a much better sense than we would have had in the past about, for example, how people admitted on a particular immigration route are doing. All that is pretty much at the national level. There are quite a few technical challenges trying to get accurate data at the local level, partly because when someone arrives in the UK it is not always clear precisely where they are going to live. My colleague at the Migration Observatory produced a report late last year looking at gaps in the migration evidence base; one of the major gaps was evidence at the local level. There is some data and evidence, but there is more to be done particularly on local-level gaps.

Q110 **Baroness Prashar:** My question is about an annual migration plan, which has been called for by a number of organisations and bodies. Do you support the idea, and if so, what should it contain? Is an annual plan feasible, or should it be a three-year cycle?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: The argument made by the people who support this proposal is that policy decisions are often taken ad hoc in response to a specific event or specific statistics coming out, particularly when it comes to policies that affect the number of people coming to the UK. You can end up with a disconnect where policymakers say, for example, that numbers are going to come down but then make choices that do not actually have that effect.

The idea behind the proposal is that if there was a moment in the political calendar when the Government committed not only to saying, "This is what we want in the way of numbers", but also, "This is how we are going to get there and how we are going to resolve various trade-offs"—whether those were economic trade-offs, social impacts or what have you—then we would have a more strategic immigration policy.

There is certainly evidence that this has been a problem in the past. If you look at the post-Brexit immigration system, for example, when the Government opened the Ukraine scheme they said we could have 200,000-plus people coming through it, but seemed surprised nine months later when those 200,000-plus people showed up in the immigration statistics. If there had been more strategic planning and

honest reckoning with what the policies meant for the numbers, maybe it would have been less surprising.

The counterargument is that this does not necessarily solve all the problems. One of the issues is that it is really difficult for the Government to predict how many people are going to come, even if they know precisely what the policy is and they do not change it. The numbers of people who come in any given period can sometimes change quite dramatically, for example, in the case of student dependants. The boom in the number of people coming in as student dependants was genuinely unexpected; it had not happened in the past. So the question is, if the Government have a plan and have committed to bringing in a certain group and a certain number of people, and it all looks nice on paper but that is not what actually happens, is trust in the Government further eroded because they said, "We are going to do this" and they did not? Or does it lead to lurches in policy? If there is an unexpected increase in one group, such as student dependants—obviously they are no longer eligible—do the Government have to suddenly and unpredictably clamp down on another group in order to make the totals add up?

In general, the Migration Observatory does not make policy recommendations, so we do not have a position on whether a plan is a good idea. I suspect that in practice the impact would depend on how it was done and how flexible it was, but few people would disagree with the basic idea of having some process—whether this or something else—which gave a clear outline of how the Government plan to resolve trade-offs around migration and an overall strategy that was not just a response to whatever the issue is today.

Baroness Prashar: In terms of overall migration policy, it has been rather laissez-faire. How can we have a plan if we do not have a policy?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: What do you mean when you say you do not have a policy?

Baroness Prashar: I mean that we have a laissez-faire policy; at the moment, people come and go and that is where there is a fluctuation. My point would be that if you are going to have a policy that is tied to the skills you need and the people you want to come in, then you can have a broader strategy and within that you can have a plan. Is it possible to have a plan without an overall understanding, or are you just reacting to crises?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: It is probably possible to have an overall vision for migration without necessarily having a migration plan. If you look around the world, there are plenty of countries that have some planning process; the classic examples are Australia and Canada. They lay out a very formal plan.

Baroness Prashar: That is what I meant, yes.

Dr Madeleine Sumption: But that is probably not the norm. There are quite a lot of countries that have a high-level vision that are saying, “This is what we want to achieve economically, socially, et cetera”, but they deal with the different types of migration separately as and when they come up. I do not think it is essential. It can be helpful in a debate such as the one in the UK where the number of people coming has been very salient and is of interest both to the public and policymakers. It is striking that there has never been a clear realistic view of acceptable or desirable numbers, maybe because that is a very difficult question for politicians to deal with. It is hard for them to honestly admit what numbers they think are realistically likely in the future.

Baroness Prashar: You have carefully described the upsides and downsides of having a plan and said that your organisation does not have a policy recommendation on this. But if I were to push you personally, if there was to be a plan, what would you like to see in it?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: There are questions to be resolved about how such a plan would work. Would it cover all migration, including all types of migration? Would it be a purely quantitative plan which said, “We want X number of asylum seekers, and X number of other migrants”? The Government would like to be able to control the number of asylum seekers, but the last several years have shown us that this is a struggle.

If it is a purely quantitative plan, there is a risk that you put some arbitrary number on paper and then say, “Oops, well that didn’t happen”, and there is no clear benefit to having done it. A more sensible way might be to say something about numbers, but then—especially in the areas that the Government struggle to control—ensure that it would be more about laying out an overall strategy or vision for this type of immigration, saying, “This is what we are trying to achieve; this is how we think we are going to do it”. To me, that seems a perfectly sensible way of going about things. Where you potentially get drawbacks is if you make it very rigid; you could easily imagine that, as a result, the Government could end up being bounced into making policy decisions they did not want to make, in order to show that they were meeting their plan. So you would probably want to make sure that there was the right amount of flexibility.

The Chair: Just before we move on, you have talked about the problems that may occur in relation to numbers. If there was such a plan, should it also include integration so that we have a clear understanding of our integration policy?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: That is a good question. As I mentioned earlier, it is striking that the UK does not really have an integration strategy, so that could be part of an overall plan. The migration plan—or migration budget, as some people call it—is usually seen as a Home Office thing, but integration is obviously a big issue in its own right, so there would be a case for saying that it was separate and not just a matter for the Home Office. There are obviously some decisions the Home Office makes that affect integration—for example, about visa terms

and conditions—so it would be inevitable that there would be some integration-related content in there, but it is an open question as to whether it should all be one mega-plan or whether there should be a separate strategy for integration.

Q111 **Lord Hogan-Howe:** I will have to dip out in a minute. It is not through disrespect; I just have to grab something.

I am intrigued by your answers to both the previous questions. It is clearly difficult to get the data. There is a large group of people, such as visa overstayers, who—as was explained in the data produced for the committee—have fallen out of the system. We do not actually know if people leave the country or if they stay, so I am intrigued as to whether there is any indirect evidence about those people who might have overstayed. They may show up somewhere in the system, for example in the NHS, in births, deaths, or education; at some point, children need to be educated. Police should have some data about people they arrest and eventually identify by DNA, et cetera. My point is not to identify individuals and say, “That child should not be here because their parent should never have been here”. That is not really the point. It is whether that evidence is showing a trend or the dimensions of those who are not in the system.

Dr Madeleine Sumption: This is one of the big gaps; we have no great sense either of the total unauthorised population in the UK or even the specific components and particular groups within it. It is a very difficult statistical exercise to try to work out how many people are living here without permission. There are pieces of it where potentially we could have some data, and I suspect Mary Gregory may comment on this later because it is something that the ONS has been thinking about. It is possible to get some information on overstayers, for example. That is one of the main gaps in the overall migration statistics at the moment because the emigration statistics currently do not properly account for overstayers. There are other times when people show up in the system; as you say, some people claim asylum. The Home Office has just started to produce some very helpful data looking at how people arrived in the country when they claim asylum, including on visas; some will be visa overstayers. Hopefully in the future it will be possible to have some breakdown of the people who applied for asylum, how many were overstayers and the length of their overstay. That is one source of information.

Similarly, in the criminal justice statistics—which obviously relate to a very specific group of people—we have no data on immigration status, including whether people are on a visa, whether they arrived without a visa, overstayed, et cetera. There are ways of starting to produce that data, but it is at a very early stage at the moment.

The Chair: I should just point out that, unusually, the main Chamber of the House of Lords is starting business in a couple of minutes. A number of our colleagues here have amendments down, so they will be popping in and out to move amendments to existing Bills; I apologise if there is a

movement of people during the evidence session.

Thank you for saying what is increasingly very clear to this committee—that the data on which we are basing many decisions is woefully inadequate in so many ways. In terms of who is coming, et cetera, we can pick that up in a bit more detail now with Lord Tope.

Q112 Lord Tope: What cohorts are immigrating to the UK, and does that vary by the route they take?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: We have four main routes, or four main types of migrations: people coming for work, for study, as family members of British citizens, and then through either asylum or humanitarian routes. Those are the main categories. We see a huge variation in the characteristics and nationalities of people who come through those different routes. For example, India receives the largest number of visas, both in work and study, and it is very highly represented in family but, for obvious reasons, not much in the asylum system, whereas, if you look at China, Chinese people are primarily coming through the student route. So we see a lot of variation in how people are coming to the UK.

Lord Tope: You mentioned the Chinese. Can you give us any other examples of the principal cohorts?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: India is at the top for people coming on work visas. It varies a lot with the type of work visa: with seasonal workers, a lot of people are coming from Central Asia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, which have not traditionally been main source countries for the UK. If you look at the health and care visa, you have more people coming from Nigeria and the Philippines; Zimbabwe was, at one point, quite high in those statistics. Then we have a separate youth mobility scheme; Australia and Canada are big there. It really depends a lot on the specific routes. I mentioned international students. For family migrants—family members of British citizens—Pakistan is the No. 1 country of origin.

Asylum figures have varied quite a lot over time, although there are some countries, such as Iran, Syria, and Afghanistan, that have been relatively high in number all the way through. There are also temporary situations. There was a period, as I am sure you will remember, when Albanians were the top country of origin, and a brief period when a lot of Vietnamese people came. The asylum numbers are particularly unstable. The composition of the people coming through that route changes quite a lot over time.

Lord Tope: How do asylum seekers get here, principally?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: They come through various means, which fluctuate a little over time. The most recent figures show that currently just under 40% of people arrive on small boats. A similar number come on visas and either claim asylum while they are on the visa or after having overstayed. Others come through miscellaneous other routes, through the common travel area, on lorries, and so forth.

Lord Tope: Are those who are coming meeting the UK's work needs? Is there any correlation at all?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: Quite a significant share of immigration is not really about meeting needs, per se. Some is about perceived obligations; British citizens can bring their family members to the UK if they meet the income and language requirements and other criteria. Those people are not being admitted because the UK economy needs them but because they have a British partner. Similarly, refugee and asylum policy is not really about needs either; it is about complying with international obligations.

In theory, you could think about work and study in terms of needs, but it is actually more helpful, analytically, to think about it in terms of the benefits. It is quite difficult to objectively specify what we need. Do we need 2,000 engineers? Do we need 1,000? If we have more engineers, we will probably do more engineering, but there is no straightforward way to work out what the right number is, particularly in the private sector. Obviously, the public sector is a little different.

From an immigration policy perspective, it is sometimes more helpful to ask what would be beneficial, and you can then look at different types of impacts. Fiscal impacts are probably the ones that are easiest to quantify. Will someone pay a significant amount of tax compared to what it costs to provide them with public services and benefits over the course of their lifetime? Obviously, a lot of the impacts, including social impact, are very difficult to quantify.

Q113 **Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** I would like to touch on the Home Office concept of the migrant journey. Can you help us understand what data is not captured in this migrant journey dataset, and what are the advantages and disadvantages in capturing or trying to capture the data that is missing?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: I should say that the migrant journey dataset is really good, and it is delightful that we have it; a lot of countries would not have anything near this quality of understanding of how people move through the system.

The dataset effectively tracks over time those who come in on a mainstream visa—for instance, as a student. We can work out how many see their visas expire, how many move on to work visas, how many marry British citizens and move on to those routes. That is incredibly helpful. It is less good on non-mainstream journeys through the immigration system. If people are granted refugee status, that is usually the point at which they will enter the dataset, but the data are much less clear on the journeys people take before they claim asylum.

We now have a separate dataset on the routes into the asylum system and how people originally arrived in the UK, but over the next few years my hope is that we will get better data on how people move from visas to asylum claims. For example, it would be helpful to understand how many

are refused asylum but then have a successful human rights claim. We do not currently get that information from the dataset, but in theory, it should be feasible to get those figures.

Obviously, the migrant journey data is really useful in telling us about people's visa status, but it does not tell us much about how they are doing in the UK; it would be helpful to link that data with, for example, HMRC, to find out how much people are being paid. You could then start to look at whether, if people come through different routes in the system, that affects their earnings. If we can link to DWP data, then we can discover the likelihood that people will receive benefits. So there is a lot more that could be done to get a comprehensive picture of how people fare after being admitted.

There are many gaps in the UK data, but I would say the migrant journey dataset is one of the high points.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: So once somebody comes in—perhaps on a student or work visa because those are the most substantial routes—does the data tell you whether they are continuing to work or continuing to study at any point in time? I understand that when the permission to stay has expired, the data does not actually tell us whether people are still in the country or not. Is that correct?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: That is correct. The migrant journey data is about someone's immigration status, not what they are doing. If they have a valid visa but they leave the country, they will still be in that dataset as if they are here. Similarly, if their visa expires and they do not leave, we have no way of telling whether they are here. It is very good for understanding which visas the Home Office is granting and to whom, and how people move through that system over time, but it does not give us a nuanced picture about what people are doing while they are here on the visa, and who leaves or stays, et cetera.

The Chair: I am sorry to interrupt, but I have real difficulty understanding how you can describe that as a very good picture when at the same time you say that, during that picture, if somebody has a work visa, they may or may not be working; if somebody is a student, they may or may not be studying; if somebody is doing either of those two, they may or may not have left the country; and if their visas run out, they may or may not have left the country. It strikes me that this is not very good data.

Dr Madeleine Sumption: It depends on what you are looking for. If you are looking for which visas the Home Office has granted and to whom, then it is very good data. There are lots of things it does not do, and I would hope that in the future we will start to fill the gaps I have mentioned. For example, I mentioned linking it to HMRC data so that you could get a picture of whether people are earning every month and how much they are earning. In theory, it may be possible to link it to records of people's actual departures from the UK. The challenge is not so much in the migrant journey dataset itself, but the fact that we do not have

great records of departures. The data are collected, but there are gaps which mean that if there is no record of someone leaving, often we cannot be confident that it is because they overstayed. There are people who leave without any record of their departure. You may say that my bar for saying it is a good dataset is too low, but it is an unusual dataset and a lot of countries would be very envious to have it; not the Scandinavians, for they, of course, have everything. But yes, there is a lot more that we still need.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Can I just follow up, Chair?

The Chair: If you would not mind, I would like to move to Baroness Cash because this is an area of real concern for her.

Q114 **Baroness Cash:** I was going to ask how confident you were in the Home Office measurement of people leaving, but the answer is pretty clear already from a few of the questions that have been put to you.

Following on from what you have said, how could and should we be capturing the data? One part of your evidence is that we have no idea of the total number of overstayers and the number leaving the country. As a committee we have been very interested in the pressure on resources. Have you looked at this? What data could we collect? Where should we be understanding not just the journey, as you call it, but the real journey, the actual journey all the way to the end, even if it is living here for ever? How could we capture that?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: When you say people leaving, are you talking specifically about overstayers—about whether people leave at the end of their visa—or are you talking more broadly about immigration?

Baroness Cash: It sounds as if there is no data on any of it, so I welcome your views on both.

Dr Madeleine Sumption: We have estimates of emigration, which can be divided between British citizens and people who have come on visas or who came before Brexit and have status under the EU settlement scheme. There are limitations to both of those. At a high level, we have a pretty decent sense of who is leaving, but there is a specific challenge with overstayers. The reason we have a reasonably good sense at a high level is because most people do not overstay their visas. One of the big problems is then trying to understand what happens to people who do overstay their visas. If they are not captured in the exit checks data for whatever reason, or if we cannot rely on the exit checks data to be sure whether they have left, then we have to find another source of data to track people, and this comes back to the question we were discussing earlier.

Some people will live under the radar for ever; obviously, this is a population who are very keen to avoid detection and may stay away from public services, the tax and benefit system and all these other areas where people get picked up statistically. That is not always the case; there are some datasets where you can see if there is activity. This is

something that the ONS has been trying to do, but it is very difficult to do it accurately because by definition it is a group that is evading detection, so we are never quite sure who is included. But we could do more. Where people come to the attention of the authorities through various different public services, there probably is more that could be done with that data.

Baroness Cash: I do not want to go on for too long, but what more could we do? You mentioned that the Scandinavian countries have everything. If there is anything to learn from them, we would love to hear it.

Dr Madeleine Sumption: I am exaggerating when I say they have everything; they will have the same problem of not necessarily knowing where some people are and what they are doing because those people are not in contact with the state in any way. However, the Scandinavian countries are able to link across multiple administrative datasets, so in many cases they are able to see if someone shows up in the criminal justice system or the health statistics, or if they claim asylum, because the data is all in the same place. That makes it somewhat easier for them to obtain data.

There are opportunities here to do the same. The first step would be to look at the data that already exists, such as immigration enforcement data; immigration enforcement comes into contact all the time with people who do not have immigration status. You could then trace that back to understand, for instance, what route they took into the country, whether they came on a visa, et cetera. We have little snippets of it, which are quite new and very helpful; I mentioned the statistics on the original route of entry for asylum claimants. Probably the first step would be doing that exercise across a large number of policy areas to try to build up a bigger picture.

The Chair: I am going to have to leave it there but we would like to chat to you separately, in writing at least, and pick up a bit more of your thinking on this area because it is a really important one for the committee. I am also very conscious of time, and we have a number of other issues, so I am going to ask colleagues to ask their questions briefly, and if you would be kind enough to give fairly brief answers, we can chase up after the session for any further data. On that basis, Lord Anderson will demonstrate how to do it.

Q115 Lord Anderson of Ipswich: The Government are consulting not only on changes to settlement requirements but on the possibility of applying those changes retrospectively to people who are already on the settlement pathway. I recall there was a case a few years ago when they tried to do something similar in relation to the highly skilled migrant programme, and the courts rapped them over the knuckles.

I wonder what your estimation is of the advantages and the disadvantages of the retrospective application of settlement requirements, and what line you would advise this committee to adopt when we look at that issue.

Dr Madeleine Sumption: The Government's argument for the retrospective application is effectively that it was a mistake to offer the current set of policies, particularly to people who came in 2022 and 2023, and they want to correct that. I guess that is most relevant in the cases where the routes have actually been closed down—for instance, care workers, butchers, chefs, and other mid-skilled workers who are not part of the industrial strategy. There are some economic arguments, particularly in the care sector; the Government may want to keep people in care sector jobs, and there is good reason to believe that a lot of people in the care sector who came in on those visas would quite like to leave. It is less obvious in other cases why they would particularly care about keeping people in the jobs for which they were sponsored.

The final argument is that, particularly for low earners, there would be a fiscal benefit to keeping people in a temporary status for longer because they have fewer rights and access to welfare benefits, and that can reduce costs. It is less obvious what the benefit would be of keeping people earning between £40,000 and £50,000 in a temporary status for longer.

There are basically two main arguments against. One is the fairness argument. People had an expectation, and they made plans around a particular set of policies. The other one is reputational; the UK might be seen as an unreliable place to be a migrant, and in the future that could have a knock-on effect on attracting people who the UK wants to attract. But it is not my place to say where you should come down on this particular issue.

Lord Anderson of Ipswich: I thought you might say that. Thank you very much indeed.

- Q116 **Baroness Buscombe:** The Government are proposing to change the rules around language requirements; as from 8 January this year, skilled worker migrants will be required to pass B2 level, which I understand is the equivalent of an A-level test. Is this the right direction to take, and could you explain in your reply what the different ABCs or whatever mean?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: This is a tricky one. In general, there is wide agreement that language is important for economic and social integration. However, it is difficult to specify precisely how high the bar should be, and in practice it is going to vary for different people. The B2 level is, as you say, an upper intermediate level; many of those coming in on the skilled worker route—especially now that it is graduate jobs only—will already have that level of English because they will need it for their work. It can be trickier for their family members to meet those requirements, so the levels are a little lower for them.

The big challenge is that currently in the UK we do not have any good data on how the ABC levels map on to people's actual proficiency. We have some broad data and self-reported data from people who say they speak English well, but we have no idea whether those who say they

speak English well would meet an A1 or a B2 test, or whatever they might be required to pass. Because we have no baseline to go on, it is very difficult to know what the impact of changing the language requirements will be.

Baroness Buscombe: Could you expand a little on that, please? Some would argue that we should not have tests, and some say we should. Do you think it is right that we have a two-tier system? Those who come and do all the right things and are applying for skilled jobs have to have much higher language skills so that they can integrate, but there are people who have given evidence to us who do not believe that it leads to more integration.

Dr Madeleine Sumption: Tests are a reasonably reliable way of assessing language proficiency. Obviously, they are not perfect. It is certainly not unusual for there to be different requirements for people coming through different routes, partly because the purpose of that migration can be very different. It has always been the case that people coming on work visas, particularly long-term work visas, are held to a much higher standard, both in skills and language proficiency, than people coming as family members. If people do not meet the work visa requirements then in consequence they will not be able to come to the UK, but the consequences for the UK as a whole are not that significant—whereas if you had a very high requirement for family members of British citizens, for example, that would effectively make it much harder for British citizens. People could be separated from their families and so forth in consequence, which the Government have generally wanted to avoid. So it is inevitable that there will be different requirements for different groups of people, although setting precisely where those requirements should be is genuinely difficult.

Q117 **Baroness Bertin:** Following on from that, the Government have proposed a refresh of the Life in the UK test. I know you have spoken on this many times before, but it has been described as a bad pub quiz, with questions that are not relevant, certainly to integration and cohesion. You mentioned that we do not really have a strategy on integration. I just wondered: what are the main issues and how could it be refreshed in a way that actually does a proper job?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: The key thing with the Life in the UK test is to remember that it is inevitably a blunt tool; you are looking at a multiple choice test. It is very easy for testing routine knowledge, such as whether someone knows about getting an MOT for their car, but obviously it is not particularly profound. It does not capture what most people think about sharing common values or what have you. There is a category of questions along those lines, which are perfectly easy to answer; you then have history and culture-type questions, and that is where the “bad pub quiz” critique comes in. The big question is: are these genuinely things that are shared references in our society, or relatively obscure knowledge that most British people actually do not know? There is a lot of stuff in the current test that British people tend not to know. That does not have to be the case. If you look at the US citizenship test, for example, most

of it is composed of shared cultural references that Americans would usually be able to answer.

In the last category, there are questions about values, and that is genuinely very difficult. You cannot work out someone's values from a multiple choice test. You can find out whether they know what they are supposed to say. If you have a question such as, "Is extremism a British value? True or false" people will correctly tick "false". But I do not think we should kid ourselves that we can actually look into people's hearts through this process.

Baroness Bertin: In which case, what are we trying to do here? Is this something that should be changed quite radically, so that if you pass there is much more pomp and ceremony around citizenship, and therefore it is about changing, rather than, as you say, just getting through a series of digital multiple choice questions? Should the whole thing be changed completely so that it is actually a source of huge pride to achieve passing the Life in the UK test? Should we change the name so that it helps cohesion and serves a higher purpose?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: The pomp and ceremony usually comes with the citizenship ceremony, which has that formal role in celebrating becoming a citizen. There are lots of ways one could change the test. Currently it is more or less functioning as a language and cognitive test. Basically, can people just learn all this content from the book. I guess the question for you is whether that is all you want it to be, or do you want something simpler that more closely reflects what the average British person on the street would expect a new migrant to know? I would just caution that it is not going to be able to achieve all these things; at the end of the day, it is just a little written test and I do not think it is going to be able to achieve particularly lofty goals.

Q118 **Lord Henley:** Can we move on to ask for your views on the impact of migrants on public services?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: This depends on the type of migration and, to some extent, the type of public services. In the long run, the impact on public services is partly going to depend on the impact on public finances, because if people pay a lot of tax then there is going to be enough money to expand public services. That is not always the case; in the short run, there may still be some pressures and money does not always get to the right place at the right time. But broadly speaking, in the long run, this is a question of public finances and different types of migration have extremely different impacts on public finances. Some groups, such as skilled workers, are fiscally very positive. Other groups such as the family members of British citizens are fiscally negative, and refugees are likely to be very negative, although we do not yet have great data on that. We do not have an overall reckoning; the Migration Advisory Committee is gradually producing estimates of different immigration routes but has not yet covered the entire system. But broadly speaking, past studies have tended to suggest that the positives and the negatives balance out to the

extent that you care about what everything adds up to, although, arguably, the route-specific analysis is more important.

Lord Henley: Can we have an immigration policy that promotes both immigration and economic benefits, or is there necessarily always going to be a trade-off between the two?

Dr Madeleine Sumption: When you say promote, do you mean integration?

Lord Henley: Yes.

Dr Madeleine Sumption: It depends on the type of immigration. There are some characteristics associated with higher economic benefits that are also associated with easier integration. If migrants have a high level of education and a high level of language proficiency—language is obviously very important—there is no trade-off. The trade-offs come in other cases. So for example, when you have specific policies that restrict people's rights in order to reduce their cost, such as restrictions on welfare benefits, restrictions on the ability to bring a partner, and making people pay significant immigration fees, those policies are likely to make life much harder for the individuals concerned and reduce their integration; that is one way the trade-off might come. I guess the other way is that you can admit people with relatively generous rights and then provide them with a lot of support. That, obviously, would come with a cost as well, so there would be a trade-off there.

The Chair: There is so much more we could spend time on but unfortunately our time has come to an end. On behalf of the entire committee, can I say a huge thank you? We know you have already been helpful to the committee in addition to this particular session, but I suspect we will be coming back to you for more assistance before we have finished our work. For the time being, thank you very much indeed. The session is now suspended.