

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Immigration policy: principles for building consensus](#), HC 500

Tuesday 31 October 2017

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Rehman Chishti; Mr Christopher Chope; Sarah Jones; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Esther McVey; Will Quince; Naz Shah.

Questions 1-39

Witnesses

[I](#): Sunder Katwala, Director, British Future, Jill Rutter, Director of Strategy and Relationships, British Future, Dr Alan Renwick, Deputy Director, Constitution Unit, University College London, and Robert Ford, Professor of Political Science, University of Manchester.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Sunder Katwala, Jill Rutter, Dr Alan Renwick, and Professor Robert Ford

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to our evidence session this afternoon. I very much welcome our panellists today to give us some evidence in our inquiry into whether it is possible to build more consensus on immigration. Would each of you introduce yourself and tell us briefly the nature of the immigration attitudes research that you have done, starting with Sunder Katwala?

Sunder Katwala: I am Sunder Katwala. I am the Director of British Future, which is an independent, non-partisan think tank. We have been working on the National Conversation on Immigration that my colleague Jill Rutter can say a bit more about.

Jill Rutter: I am Jill Rutter. I am Director of Strategy and Relationships at British Future. I am one of the two people doing most of the legwork on the National Conversation on Immigration, which comprises 60 visits to towns and cities across the UK. We are 37 visits in. In each place we have what we call a citizens' panel and also a stakeholder meeting. Additionally, the National Conversation on Immigration, which is a public engagement activity, includes a survey open to anybody who wants to fill it in. We have had nearly 3,000 responses. We will do some nationally representative polling in early 2018 as well. I will talk a little bit about what we have found to date about public attitudes from the qualitative work, the citizens' panels.

Dr Renwick: I am Alan Renwick. I am from University College London and I am also the Director of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, which was an exercise in seeking to learn about informed and considered public opinion on the kind of Brexit that people want to see, focusing on trade and issues to do with migration policy. The Citizens' Assembly consisted of 50 people randomly selected from across the whole of the UK and stratified to be representative of the UK electorate so far as possible. They met for two weekends. They heard from lots of experts with varying opinions over the first weekend and in the second weekend they deliberated among themselves and reached some conclusions on the kind of Brexit that they would like to see.

Robert Ford: I am Robert Ford. I am Professor of Politics at the University of Manchester and I have been researching the public opinion of immigration and the politics of immigration for about 15 years now, most recently commissioning modules of questions with Anthony Heath of Oxford University on the British Social Attitudes survey in the past five years and then three years ago a module of questions on the European Social Survey that ran in roughly 30 countries all over Europe.



Q2 Chair: On the basis of the research that you have done, do you think that Britain is irreconcilably divided on the issue of immigration or do you think there are areas of consensus? Don't feel obliged to answer every question that members of the Committee put to you but do indicate if you want to answer any particular question.

Jill Rutter: On the basis of the National Conversation on Immigration, I do not think we are irreconcilably divided. Most people we have talked to are balancers who see both the pressures and gains of immigration when you talk to them in a conversation. It is important to say that people's face-to-face selves are quite different from their online personalities. In talking to people, there are common themes. People see immigration from the perspective of control and contribution. They want migration to be better controlled but are in favour of migrants who they see as contributors. Ethics and decency matter to people. They have values and they debate their values when you talk to them. Perhaps we will say a little bit more later but I think our coming to a consensus will require us to address local issues. There are very substantial local differences in what people say. Social contact is also important but we have to address people's legitimate concerns about control and contribution.

Robert Ford: There are two different answers to this question, in a way. If one looks at attitudes to immigration in the abstract, that is questions that ask specifically what do you think about immigration—do you think immigration levels need to come down, do you think immigration is positive or negative on the whole economically, culturally with regard to things such as crime or security—you find very large divides in public attitudes and those divides have grown over time. I do not think those attitudes accurately reflect the entire story because when you ask people about a highly abstracted concept like immigration that is complex they will substitute in their heads the heuristics that come most easily to mind. They do not want to have to think about a very hard question like what is the overall impact of several million people on society as whole, so they look for an easier question to answer.

If you give them an easier question, by unpacking the concept of immigration and asking them about specific kinds of migrants—skilled versus unskilled migrants, those from different regions of the world, those coming for different reasons—you find a great deal more nuance and capacity to build a consensus majority. To put it another way, the public is very responsive to what kind of immigrants you are talking about when you ask them about migration. The kind of division that we see when you ask about migration in abstract often fades away somewhat when you get into the specifics.

Dr Renwick: I can speak to two sources of evidence. One was the nationwide survey of 5,000 people that we did in order to recruit the members of the Citizens' Assembly. That fits the picture that you have already heard where we asked people a range of questions. For example, the first question we asked about immigration was: do you think



immigration is good or bad for Britain's economy? We allowed them to answer from 1, good for the economy, to 7, bad for the economy, and the majority put themselves in the middle three categories; 51% were in the middle. You see a very similar pattern across the other questions. From that nationwide sample, quite a lot of people see both sides of the argument.

I think you have seen a summary report of our findings of the Citizens' Assembly. The members concluded by recommending that the UK should maintain free movement of labour, which caused us some surprise, to be honest, but they also wanted a range of additional policy measures in order to reduce what they saw as the bad effects of immigration. They wanted the UK to take advantage of the mechanisms that are available in the single market to remove those who are not able to sustain themselves financially. They wanted the UK to look at the benefit system to see whether it might be possible to reform it to make it less accessible to recent migrants. They also wanted the UK to invest more in training so that we do not see skill shortages for nurses and doctors and these sorts of things. Overall, what we saw is very much a mixed picture where people wanted the benefits of immigration and saw benefits from immigration but also saw that there are costs to immigration and wanted steps to be taken to address them.

Sunder Katwala: If you were looking to identify a barrier to consensus, I think we were quite struck by trust being very low in several different ways. Confidence in the competence of governments of whatever political party to do what they are trying to do is very low. Confidence in the political class and a broader range of people, business leaders and others, would be part of this. Interest in listening or hearing what is going on in local experiences is seen as very low. There is a sense that the conversation is necessary, important, long overdue and should have happened quite some time ago. In a sense, Brexit and the debate it sparks becomes an opportunity to make sure we have the conversation we should have been having but also maybe an uncertainty about whether anything will ever change or things really change. There is the sense that people feel that public engagement in this is important but they do not think it has happened, it will happen or where it will go. That is the kind of barrier. If you get on to the content of what people want to choose, they are perhaps more responsive to the complexities than you would imagine if you picked up the newspapers and read the debate we are having.

Q3 **Chair:** One more general question before we get into the detail. If you had to pick one thing, your top priority of something that you thought the Government could do that would better build consensus on immigration, what would it be?

Sunder Katwala: I would try to increase significantly the visibility of the engagement with the public themselves with some greater transparency—I think people find this very difficult—about where does



that fit into what the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the House Commons does. People do not get a sense of how that has happened. We are going through this quite big process of change and it is very clear the Government will engage with businesses about what they need, what is the evidence of the Migration Advisory Committee, and it is very important that should happen. If people think that was the only conversation that is going on they will wonder where their voices come in. I think that people knowing that is happening, getting a sense of that going on would also challenge them to have views about the politics and the policies.

Chair: This could be either a process issue or a policy change.

Jill Rutter: A dialogue as well. The Canadian Government have had a governmental national conversation on immigration and we have used its methodology. I think dialogue is important for building consensus but also addressing all these local issues that are raised in the debate such as our overcrowded rental accommodation, low level antisocial behaviour in some areas but not in others. Addressing the real and lived experiences and the things that people talk about when we go out and do our citizens' panels is really important as well.

Dr Renwick: There is not any one thing that the evidence I have would allow me to pick out but just a range of practical policies for addressing housing shortages, issues with local public services where there are particular pressures and people feel that public services are not being allowed to expand appropriately to fit issues of training and the benefit system. A range of issues came out from the discussion.

Robert Ford: There are things that the others have picked up on longer run that I would agree with, particularly on the benefit system, housing and so on. In the shorter run, something that could be done relatively easily and quickly is there needs to be a better framework of administration and data collection to reflect the fact that the public do regard this as a complex, disaggregated issue. It does not make sense to be talking about student migration and unskilled labour migration under the same head in policy and statistics. The measures we have for gathering data on the numbers coming in and out of the country, primarily through the passenger survey, are very inadequate and that speaks to the issue of public trust. It worsens the quality of the debate because we know that the data is noisy, which makes it hard to conclude with confidence what is actually happening. It makes it more difficult to achieve the kind of disaggregation, the focus on different channels of migration that is clearly what the public want to see and respond to positively.

Q4 **Naz Shah:** How would you categorise British opinion on immigration? Do most people occupy a centre ground or are opinions more likely to be on the extremes?



Robert Ford: It depends on the question that you ask, to some extent, because different questions do produce rather different distributions of opinion, but on the whole there generally are more people in the centre than there are in the extremes, if you take the public as an aggregate. Speaking to the point of social polarisation I was talking about, we do see very large differences within particular subsets of society. For example, views among university graduates tend to the very liberal end on most measures and views among school leavers tend towards the more restrictive, negative end consistently. The same is true in age divide and in divide by migrant heritage, not just whether you are a migrant yourself but whether you have parents or grandparents who are migrants. That also has a strong line-up with attitudes. Although the aggregate opinion is generally moderate, you find quite strong skews in one direction or another within particular subsections of society.

Dr Renwick: I agree with what Rob said. I don't think I can add to that.

Sunder Katwala: There is a chance that things will get more polarised now, partly because the very liberal group, if you go to university cities, feels it should turn up and make sure its views are heard but might be talking to itself rather than talking across the city. We were having events in Bristol last week and there is a very liberal sense. Those voices might now be crowded out of a debate that listens to other voices but also an awareness that what people thought in the west of Bristol was not the same as what people thought five miles across Bristol in the east. To some extent, instead of saying people in London think that and everybody else thinks the opposite and then Scotland is a bit different, if people reflected on the fact that these very polarised views are held five miles apart in all the towns and cities in Britain, that is a much more manageable thing to do something about. You can hear the voices of businesses and health services near to you who say there is a real need for what we want but then there is a sense of public pressure as well. I wonder if that is a more manageable conversation in which you empathise more with the people who have opposing views rather than seeing it as a conflict or culture war.

Robert Ford: There are a couple of points about trends that I would highlight from the data that I have looked at. The first is that the differences in attitudes between social groups on education, age and so on have got larger over time. Comparatively speaking, we see larger divides in Britain than in many other large European countries, but on the other hand, insofar as we see movement in immigration attitudes over the past 10 to 15 years, it tends to be in a liberal/positive/less restrictive direction. In the European Social Survey, for example, we compared 2002 with 2014. The intervening period included the global financial crisis and the largest inflow of migrants in a 15-year period in Britain's history. In most measures, particularly interestingly economic measures—economic impact, do migrants contribute jobs or take away jobs—the movement was pretty consistently in a positive direction.



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Q5 Naz Shah: To what extent is there evidence of this social division on immigration? Is there any evidence? You said that there is a social division, whether they are on the extremes or the centre. You gave examples of the students being liberal and other people not necessarily so liberal. Do you have any evidence to back up this?

Robert Ford: Yes. We have a very robust evidence base that there are large differences between social groups and how they view immigration. University graduates regard immigration very positively; school leavers tend to regard it with more scepticism; older voters tend to be more sceptical than younger voters; working class voters tend to be more sceptical than middle class voters; ethnic minorities tend to be more positive than white voters. There are many measures that one can use to predict immigration attitudes and there are quite large and robust differences between social groups in the views of immigration. If you run the same kinds of analysis in other European countries you will find the same kinds of divides. This is a socially polarising issue in most countries in the sense that different sections of society take very different views everywhere, Germany, France, Sweden, you name it, every country, but Britain is quite near the top in how big the differences are between different social groups.

Q6 Naz Shah: To what extent do you think the public are concerned about illegal immigration and enforcement?

Jill Rutter: That is one of the things that we probed in the National Conversation on Immigration. Almost everybody wants better enforcement, better control, and that is a consistent theme, but not everybody is willing to pay for it. We have put the question to people: would you be willing to pay from £8 more a year in tax if that means more immigration officers? Not everybody is willing to pay for it for a whole range of reasons, including views about other areas of public spending. We have given people some case studies of three real illegal immigrants and what we found is that all but the people with the toughest opinion generally want this group to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. When we talk to people about these three cases they make pragmatic, economic and ethical judgments. For example, if a person has been working they will generally be more in favour. If a child has been born in the UK or has lived here for a very long time without any papers, they will generally have more favourable views. All but the toughest end make pragmatic and ethical judgments on illegal immigration.

Dr Renwick: The evidence from the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit was very similar to that. People were concerned about illegal immigration and also people who they perceived as abusing the right to free movement under the single market, those who are not sustaining themselves financially. They were quite open to a variety of measures to be taken against that. They were interested in the idea that people who were not sustaining themselves financially could be removed from the UK. When we suggested it is a bit difficult to do that without some kind of ID card system, that did not put them off the idea that this is something that we



might want to do. They were very keen on introducing more enforcement for those sorts of rules.

Sunder Katwala: I think the lack of confidence in competence and control of governments on this issue explains why you do not get very far in the immigration debate by using statistics. People will ask in these panels: do you know the number of people who are here illegally or without status? You say that by definition nobody knows that but there is a set range. They will say, "So the statistics will tell you about the people you know about. I will be taking your statistics with a pinch of salt". Confidence in the competence of a system is going to be very important to the sense that you can have an evidence-based debate about the choices you are going to make.

Q7 **Will Quince:** If I can come back to a point that Professor Ford raised twice about the UK being more polarised in relation to immigration than some of our European neighbours, how recent is that data? I would suggest, not being an expert, that the recent elections in Germany, France and Austria would suggest that they are becoming more polarised. I am interested in how old your data is, how much it does reflect that and if it is becoming more polarised.

Robert Ford: It is a very well made question. The data is 2002 and 2014 so, yes, it is before the bulk of the refugee crisis and before the recent European elections in Germany and Austria. It is quite possible that that picture has changed since.

Chair: You had two data points in your European analysis as well, 2002 and 2014?

Robert Ford: Yes.

Sunder Katwala: There is recent transactional data that shows the polarisation is similar everywhere in its shape but varies in the intensity, so it is certainly the case that this is what is going on.

Q8 **Will Quince:** Mr Katwala, you mentioned a barrier to building consensus and that there is a lack of understanding about immigration data and the system used. Do you think the debate is a proxy for other issues? You have all sort of touched on that. How much do you think we, as politicians—I use the royal "we" in that point—are guilty of decades of successive governments failing to talk about the real issues and also upselling the benefits of globalisation and immigration to places outside of our major cities that do see the clear benefits of immigration?

Sunder Katwala: I would avoid using a contrast between, say, immigration and the real issues. I think different people respond differently in different ways. For some people the issue of will my children get a fair chance in jobs and housing, issues that are not really about immigration, is predominant. For other people the sense of national control and not having control and should we have more control, which is an immigration systems and policy issue, is the real issue. For other



people who may be economically slightly better off, the issues of cultural integration and identity that relate to long-term immigration are the issues. What we have seen, which is not surprising at all, is that the places that have seen the most recent, fastest change are most concerned about how that pace of change has been handled. It is also not surprising in a way that the places of lowest change or lowest contact are most worried about what people see on the news when they do not have that experience. We ask people, "Do you work with migrants, do you talk to migrants at the school gate?" and some people will say not really at all. Then you have a very nation-level debate, but in a lot of places you are hearing about people's lived experience of contact and integration in those areas.

Those places are more confident that immigration is part of the picture going forward but they will then say it really matters if integration works well we will have more of it but if we are not getting it right we have to get that right. That was very much what people in Leicester or Wolverhampton say where most people had a family and personal contact experience of immigration. It was about the way those citizens handle change and integration. What the real issue is differs for lots of people. If you say, "This is about jobs and the economy, it is not really about immigration, is it?" that will miss it for some people.

Q9 Will Quince: I perhaps did not put my question across properly. It is not so much what the real issue is. It is the perception of the real issue. I am going to use Gordon Brown as an example because it happens to be the one that is most prominent—to say to somebody who raises genuine concerns about immigration, "What a bigoted woman", when she was not bigoted but had some real concerns. What I am saying is, is it the failure of successive politicians to address the real issues and to talk to those people and find out what their real concerns are instead of just dismissing them as bigoted or potentially racist or xenophobic that is the real issue?

Sunder Katwala: I think we want to isolate the people with xenophobic views and challenge them about the type of behaviour that is acceptable in public or on public transport and so on. One way to make sure that we have a strong, solid majority consensus for doing that is making sure that people who want to discuss concerns about the pace of change or public services or integration are not told, "We think that is a very worrying view". As Jill said, decency is very important to people. We ask people what should happen to those who are already here and people with very tough views about the numbers going forward are surprised that we are asking them the question.

Chair: Apologies. We are going to have to suspend the sitting for the Division.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—



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Chair: We will resume the meeting. It is the occupational hazard that is votes in Parliament.

- Q10 **Sarah Jones:** We have talked a bit about the difference in opinion when you delve deeper and talk about different types of migration and students and low-skilled and high-skilled workers. Could you elaborate a bit more on the high/low skilled and the different views that the public have on that split?

Jill Rutter: From both polling and talking to people in the National Conversation, people are quite happy to increase the numbers or keep the numbers at the same level for high-skilled migrants from outside and inside the EU. Most people want to reduce the numbers of generic low-skilled migrants but when you talk to people and name jobs such as care workers and fruit pickers, they have a different approach and perhaps want to keep the numbers the same. We have noted differences in rural areas. There is a bit more permission in rural areas for seasonal workers working in farming and food processing. On student migration, people largely do not see international students as migrants at all. They see them as students. Out of the 37 panels so far, we have had only one where there have been any significant negative comments about international students.

- Q11 **Sarah Jones:** What does the accepted definition of low-skilled involve and what proportion of migrants in this country are low-skilled and what proportion are high-skilled? Specifically, are nurses and junior doctors in what you would categorise as low-skilled or what is accepted as that category?

Jill Rutter: In immigration policy, the tier 2 visa system for non-EU nationals has a way of sorting people by the skills of the jobs that they are coming to do. We don't take people coming to do jobs below a level 4 skill level at all. In public perception, people see highly-skilled jobs are largely in the NHS, doctors, nurses and then scientists.

- Q12 **Sarah Jones:** Sorry, the question is for the purposes of when you do your research, how do you define low-skilled and high-skilled? Is it done on wages and, therefore, most people are in the low-skilled category, or is it different? I am trying to get to the bottom of whether the public understand what low-skilled is or whether there is a different understanding. If nurses are in low-skilled, they might not think they are in that definition.

Jill Rutter: People see low-skilled jobs as routine jobs in factories, cleaners. It is at that low-skilled level. From talking to people, I don't think they have a very good understanding of mid-range skilled jobs. Highly-skilled jobs are very often seen from the perspective of the NHS.

Dr Renwick: It was the same for the Citizens' Assembly. Our members were very surprised when several experts who addressed them said that people like teachers and nurses are categorised as low-skilled. They were rather alarmed that a lot of the rhetoric is about we should concentrate



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on high-skilled migration and then they discovered that that excludes lots of these categories.

Q13 Sarah Jones: I am trying to say that there is a big difference between what the public would describe as low-skilled and what we would categorise as low-skilled. There is a misperception that we need to unpick somehow.

Dr Renwick: Yes, very clearly.

Q14 Sarah Jones: We were talking about people's ability to trust enough to believe facts and figures, for example, but if you say to people that job vacancy rates are at the highest they have ever been since we started recording and there are 750,000 vacancies, does that shift the way they view their opinion on immigration or not?

Jill Rutter: People do not understand the difference between being unemployed and being economically inactive. They think everybody who is not working is unemployed and looking for jobs. When we talk to people, often they will say it should be the unemployed Brits who are doing the job. People do not understand and have not assimilated that our unemployment is at an historically low level. There is a real gap in public perceptions about the labour market and the employers' perceptions and their difficulties in recruiting staff.

Robert Ford: On the point of how the public understand high versus low skill, I have asked in the British Social Attitudes survey what is the comparison of professionals versus unskilled labourers and that produces a very large effect. British Future have gone further and asked about very specific careers such as business and finance, IT specialists, engineers, scientists, researchers, doctors and nurses. Doctors and nurses get the most positive response, then scientists and researchers, then engineers, with business and finance and IT specialists somewhat below, but for every single one of those categories you get 75%-plus of the public saying retain migration at the levels that they are now, and remember this is at a time when 75% of the public say they want overall migration reduced. Basically the change is from "retain" to "increase" as you move across that spectrum.

When you look at low-skilled workers, the one that really stands out is care work. It receives much more positive responses in British Future polling. I have seen that in Transatlantic Trends polling a few years ago as well. There one can see a mechanism at work in the public mind in that there is an awareness of a severe crisis in the care system such that the case that migrant labour will be needed in this sector is one that the public is receptive to. I think what that points to more generally is the public is responsive to the state of specific areas of the labour market when answering these kinds of questions in both the high-skill and low-skill categories.

Q15 Sarah Jones: Can I ask for a bit more on your view of whether the



public accept facts and whether they are able to believe facts because of this lack of trust? I was reading a Sam Bowman piece and there is evidence that when you tell people a reality about migration, a fact, it does change their view. They have done this big piece of research showing it changes their view, but I also completely understand the concept that people do not trust us enough to understand. Can you unpick that a bit more in the context of this?

Robert Ford: I can give you a couple of specific pieces of evidence. It is a complicated story because of this tension between people responding to facts and the distrust that means they do not necessarily believe the facts. We know that the default public position about how large the migrant population is is way above what it actually is, whatever way you ask it. Incidentally, this is not unique to Britain. It is found in every single country where it has been polled. If you give people the correct figure then generally what you find—this has been done in experiments in a number of places, not just Britain—is that their attitudes become somewhat more liberal after having been given that correct figure. Whether that lasts, of course, is hard to say; given low trust it may not do. Another example is on the British Social Attitudes survey I ran an experiment where I tested whether people knew about the points-based system that applied to non-EU migration and people who were aware were less negative about migration than people who were unaware.

We know from survey research that these effects do not necessarily last because these corrections fade and the inaccurate original information is what returns to the fore. It does suggest that at least potentially you can get a positive response by correcting a misperception in some contexts.

Dr Renwick: In the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit—a very different context from an opinion survey—the members loved hearing from experts. We did a survey of the members at the end of the first weekend and when we asked them what they most liked about the weekend it was spending time with the experts, hearing from the experts, experts, experts, experts, all the way through. That was a context in which they could spend time with experts face to face. The members of the Citizens' Assembly were typically sitting around tables of seven or eight members with a facilitator and for a lot of the time they had an expert on their table and then the experts rotated around the tables. They could spend 10, 15 minutes really grilling the experts and looking them in the eye, and trust develops naturally through that kind of exchange. The experts were coming from very different positions but the members respected them and the fact that they had legitimate reasons for the different views that they were expressing and they really valued that.

Jill Rutter: I wanted to say a bit more about public understanding of facts and whether more facts would help build a consensus. From the citizens' panels, people seemed to have a very selective understanding of facts. We have asked every panel if they have heard of the net migration target and generally only one or two people per panel have even heard of



it. There seems to be a sort of confirmation bias. People pick up on things and believe statistics that resonate with their world views. For example, lots of people have heard of the Dublin regulation that you have to claim asylum in your first point of entry into the EU because that resonates with their thinking on the plight of refugees across Europe and people being attracted to Britain because of its welfare system. What people understand is very selective and they only pick up things that resonate with their world views.

Sunder Katwala: I think it depends what you are doing with facts. Dr Renwick has given us an example where people wanted to hear from experts. They wanted experts to answer the questions they had. If what you are doing with facts is saying, "If you were as clever as I am and you had looked into it you would know there is a labour shortage and if you read my study again you will agree with me", that does not work because people are thinking, "Obviously the economy is working well for people like you but you are not listening to me". There is quite a lot of talking past going on. For example, it is clear to us from having these conversations that pressures on public services come up almost everywhere and especially in the places where you can see why people say there is pressure on school places. Pressure on jobs and wages, "They take our jobs", comes up much less often and comes up in very specific contexts. If you have people saying, "People are misunderstanding the pressure on jobs and wages. Here are more facts about that. Don't be silly, read my study" when that is not the question people are asking then you are reinforcing that sort of elite that is doing well telling us that if only we paid more attention we have to agree with them with your social and political values. There is that trust issue. If people are getting information they want in a way that seems straight that might work better if the information is good.

Q16 **Sarah Jones:** You mentioned that people do not know the net migration target. What would reforming, getting rid of or changing that target do to public opinion?

Jill Rutter: Among the people who have heard of it, the immediate response is that they have not met it. It seems to be something that is damaging trust and we are reminding them quarterly that it has not been met.

Sunder Katwala: They would not design that target. They would have targets because they believe in control and contribution but they would think differently about different things, jobs and refugees or different skills or different students. We try to get what they would do about the different flows. It does not seem to us that they would naturally want a target that put it all together but that does not mean they would not have targets.

Robert Ford: There are a number of problems with the targets when you look at the history of public opinion. If you look at what happened to public confidence in the Government's ability to deal with immigration



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when the coalition came in in 2010, you see a very clear and steep decline in the proportion of voters saying in particular that the Conservative Party is best placed to deal with immigration. It seems that one of these things that the public have picked up in the debate is that there is a target and we never hit it.

Another thing we know about the migration target and public views of migration is that the public do not think of students as migrants. If you ask, as researchers have done, who do you have in mind when you answer questions about immigration, they never say students. This also seems to have come out in the discussions that Sunder and Dr Renwick have been reporting. That is a big contribution to the net migration message but it is one that the public are largely completely unaware of and if you tell them about it they are surprised that these people are in that target at all and they do not want them in that target.

There are a number of issues with the migration target. It does not seem to meet what the public want to see in the system. Also they are not very familiar with the concept of net and the role that emigration plays in this, which is not visible to them or seen as a policy issue in the same way but yet it drives the net number almost as often as changes in immigration drive the net number but not in a way that the public understand in a straight forward way.

- Q17 **Will Quince:** You have talked a lot about facts and even if you take those points, clearly the tone of the debate is very important too. I mentioned politicians before and perhaps our inability to tackle the issue head on but we also have to think about the media. What are your views on whether the tone of the debate reflects the views of the public or it is the views of the public that are driving the tone of the debate?

Jill Rutter: I think it is both. In talking to people, there is a kind of feedback system. The media affects what the people say and then it is reflected back, so it is a kind of circle. Social media plays quite an important role in many people's lives and does impact on the tone of the debate. There are some quite hateful and very negative comments posted on social media sites, which people read and dismiss but I think there is a subliminal influence.

- Q18 **Will Quince:** Taking your point about social media and other things, you have also mentioned the Government are not particularly trusted when it comes to immigration messaging and facts, as you put them. What more do you think the Government could be doing to challenge misconceptions and myths about immigration?

Jill Rutter: I think local voices are very important, local business leaders, local politicians. Local politicians are often, not always, a bit more trusted. We have had lots of input from local chambers of commerce and farmers, local business voices, and it is their voices, it is them engaging and acknowledging the pressures that I think is quite



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important in framing the tone of the debate. I think more local SME voices engaging in the migration debate would be helpful.

Q19 **Will Quince:** How do they compete with the headlines in the *Express* or the *Mail* and other tabloid papers?

Jill Rutter: It is a very different debate. It is much more face to face with the people you are working with, the people you go to church with, your networks in your local area. People assimilate information from different sources and make their own judgments. I think dialogue is really important in building that consensus.

Sunder Katwala: If you ask people do they trust the newspapers they say they don't, they have very low trust in the national newspapers. Whether or not they are then influenced by things they say they don't trust is a different point. People have different views about the constructive or not role of their local newspaper.

Q20 **Stuart C. McDonald:** I want to ask about one particular form of migration, which is asylum seekers. The research seems to suggest that quite often public concern about asylum seekers is probably disproportionate to the numbers that are here in the asylum system. Why is that? Is it to do with the media? Is it something to do with the dispersal procedures? Is it a misunderstanding of what an asylum seeker is? How do you go about trying to challenge those attitudes and make a positive case for the asylum system and the refugee convention?

Jill Rutter: People have very mixed views. There is underlying sympathy from almost everybody, particularly for the plight of women and children, but that is balanced with concerns about vetting, security and benefit dependency. When I started speaking I said that people view all migration from the perspective of control and contribution. Asylum flows across Europe are seen as less controlled and asylum seekers are viewed as non-contributors. They are viewed as being benefit dependent, perhaps needy, and people view the flight across Europe as people being drawn to the UK, to western Europe, because of the perceived generosity of the welfare system. I think the security situation has not helped things. Although people recognise that refugees have fled the Taliban and ISIS, they see a risk of terrorists entering the UK as refugees, so that has not helped.

I was very struck by the lack of real social contact between asylum seekers and refugees and the resident population. Nobody really comes into contact with asylum seekers who they see as asylum seekers and refugees. Even in places like Middlesbrough it is a very transient population that has quite limited contact with the majority of the community.

Q21 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Did you pick up on differences in attitudes in places that are taking part in the dispersal of asylum seekers?



Jill Rutter: We went to Middlesbrough where I thought it would be a very salient and pressing issue. It was less salient an issue than we expected. Often the real concerns are in areas that do not have many asylum seekers. For example, we had quite a tough panel in Trowbridge. We have asked should more asylum seekers be allowed to work and a lot of people are very surprised that they are not and have said it would help integration. Work and volunteering and effecting more social contact between asylum seekers and refugees and the majority population is really quite important. I wanted to read you a quick quote from a citizens' panel in Durham, "We do need immigration but we also need compassion for people who need refuge. I think it should be controlled but it should be controlled with a heart not an open door policy". That is a sentiment that we have picked up in different places—compassion but controlled.

Sunder Katwala: What does not necessarily happen to a degree that surprised me is that the place that is most pragmatic about economic migration is not necessarily the place that is most sympathetic to refugees. The most sympathetic discussion we have had of refugees was in Paisley and that seemed to be a cultural, social attitude that was held there. Some places that are quite worried about the scale and pace of economic migration—Merthyr Tydfil, for example—seemed more sympathetic to refugees than other places that were being very pragmatic about the needs of business but seemed to be cooler to refugees. We would like to dig into that more but these seemed to have different drivers.

Robert Ford: From the point of view of survey-based public opinion, what we see with asylum is the mixing together of several elements that tend to produce negative responses anyway. If you start from the point of view of the principle of asylum you see fairly robust majority support for the principle of providing asylum to people in genuine danger. Then when you ask people whether or not we should take more or fewer asylum seekers you get very lopsided majorities in favour of fewer. How does one get from A to B? I believe the answer involves a mixture of distrust in the migration system as a whole and certain narratives regarding the motives of people who are being described as asylum seekers. The common view seems to be this is a good principle but it is being abused and it is being abused primarily in order to get access to the benefit system.

I ran some data in 2013 where I asked people what was the primary motive for coming to Britain in terms of migration, as in what was the latest stream of migration. We know the answer to that is work-based migration and the second largest is study. Among those who have negative views of migration, the most common answer was asylum and among those who are the most negative of all, one in five spontaneously offered benefits as an answer even though it was not one of the response categories offered, because it is not one of the official migration statistic streams. We ran a second experiment where we offered benefits as an option. At that point you got to 55% of those who were most negative



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about migration saying that the welfare system and benefits access was the primary source of migration to Britain and that seems to be tied up in particular with arguments over asylum. The issue seems to be that those who oppose asylum very often believe that a noble principle is being abused. That is the belief that needs to be addressed if one wants to build stronger support for asylum.

Incidentally, this has knock-on effects to views of the broader immigration system because if you ask people, "Who do you have in mind when you answer questions about immigration?" one of the most common answers is asylum. With some of the figures you see about wanting immigration reduced, the mental image people have is of an abusive asylum seeker rather than, say, a labour migrant.

- Q22 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Jill Rutter, you said that folk were surprised to find that asylum seekers did not have the right to work. Are they aware about the very restricted rights to asylum support that people have, that asylum seekers do not have access to the general benefit system?

Jill Rutter: People are largely aware of the very restricted rights to asylum support. They do not know much about the detail of the asylum system. They do not know much micro policy detail generally.

- Q23 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Has British Future investigated public attitudes to subnational or regional immigration policies? If so, what did you find?

Jill Rutter: We have done four citizens' panels in Scotland to date and we have asked all of them whether the Scottish Government should have powers over immigration policy. Shetland said definitely not, Paisley and Aberdeen were divided and Dumfries were mostly for. Our Scottish panels were very different. Paisley was a very liberal panel and the Roman Catholic church seemed to have quite a big influence on people's moral attitudes in that part of the west of Scotland. There were issues of trust in the Scottish Government to manage the borders. We had one person who said that they were thinking of voting for independence in the referendum but had changed their mind specifically on the issue of immigration. I think the issue of trust to deliver on the immigration policy applies equally in Scotland.

- Q24 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Do people offer reasons? Do they offer any thoughts on whether there is a case for demographics or economics for there to be different policies applied or are there more basic instinctive reasons as to why they support or oppose devolution of powers?

Jill Rutter: We have talked about population in Scotland. Lots of parts of Scotland and rural Scotland are faced with population loss. You have councils and businesses who want to draw migrants in and they have not reached that issue with the local population. Again, there is a gap between public opinion on the need for migrants to grow the population and what council and businesses want.

Chair: We have another Division. We will return again. I am due to take



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Tim Loughton's questions next but I will take whoever gets back first.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Q25 **Stuart C. McDonald:** I wanted to ask Dr Renwick for your views. I think you asked similar questions about possible substate or regional immigration policies.

Dr Renwick: I cannot offer you any evidence on substate, I am afraid, and similarly on your questions on asylum because Brexit does not affect our responsibilities towards asylum seekers. We explicitly excluded that from the discussion.

Q26 **Sarah Jones:** On how you shift public opinion, is the immigration debate slightly disingenuous because there will be a box within which Brexit operates? There will be some options outside of which things can't happen. If we said we want a cap on low-skilled workers, we know that the eastern Europe countries are going to veto that. There is a kind of box of possibilities. Is a conversation with the public about the broad sweep of immigration slightly disingenuous and if we wanted to shift public opinion into a box of possibilities, how do we do that? From my perspective, is it better—which speaks to what Will was saying—to say in this deal because we have got whatever the deal ends up being, immigration is going to stay pretty much as it is but that is good for you because—and should we as politicians be doing a lot more speaking positively about immigration? There is quite a few questions rolled into one.

Sunder Katwala: I think there is a danger if you try to say let's make this debate about our immigration choices, let's make it primarily about the trade-off between our immigration desires and our market access. What part of that discussion seems to say is, "We know what you want and now we are going to tell you you can't have what you want, but let's see if you might want what you can have". You have started off saying, "It is very important but let's just admit it, something else is going to be more important". I think even if you are going to arrive at that debate, if you try to do it the other way round, say let's have a discussion here at home about the right immigration policies to strike these balances for Britain between the pressures and gains for the national economy and the local areas, let's decide where we really are and then we will give the Home Secretary something to take. You have not immediately said, "Put this second. It is very important but something else is more important". The general national polling evidence says that people do not think that trade-off should exist, so you can say it does exist because the European governments think it should. Alan would have things to say about what people did with that trade-off, but always starting with you are going to have to choose something else seems to me to slightly take people's voice away on immigration.



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Dr Renwick: Yes, and we expected the members of the Citizens' Assembly to probably want quite a close trading relationship with the EU but to be more distant for movement of labour, and that is not what came out. We were expecting in the final session of the Citizens' Assembly to be getting them to think about trade-offs and if you cannot get the close trading relationships that you want and the tight controls over immigration, where do you go.

Q27 **Sarah Jones:** But you cannot have a citizens' assembly with everybody is the point. Everybody is not going to be that informed and come to that sensible conclusion, if it is sensible. You are going to have the vast majority of the population that think what they think and will expect immigration numbers to go down, full stop, and will feel that they have been lied to if they do not. Do you know what I mean?

Dr Renwick: Yes. I think the Citizens' Assembly revealed that there is quite a strong appetite for hearing ways in which it is possible to reduce overall immigration levels without having the kind of draconian measures that some might think of. As I said, the majority were keen, clearly, to reduce immigration but did not want that to be done in a way that would harm the economy, so far as possible.

Q28 **Mr Christopher Chope:** The people made the right judgment in the referendum. That seems to be the consensus you have reached.

Robert Ford: Is that a question?

Mr Christopher Chope: Your analysis shows that everybody made their own individual decision based on knowledge of the facts, or not so much knowledge of the facts but basically we should respect each of those people who voted in the referendum equally and we should not be in the position of saying that some had a more considered and informed opinion than others. That seems to be the essence of what you are saying, that there are lots of different nuances here but every opinion, however well or badly informed, is of equal value and that that led to the result that we got in the referendum.

Dr Renwick: I would not presume to make any claims about the basis on which people made their decisions in the referendum. In an ideal democracy, one would hope that people are making their choices on the basis of information and careful consideration of the issues, and if in light of that they come to conclusions that I disagree with, that is just fine. But we do not have good evidence on the degree to which people on both sides had a clear understanding of the issues. We have evidence on various bits and pieces, so we can ask people questions about particular issues that were relevant to the referendum and we can see whether their responses to survey questions suggest that they understood those or not. But trying to get a general understanding of how they understood the issues is very difficult and I would not presume to make a judgment such as you are inviting us to make.

Q29 **Mr Christopher Chope:** I am inviting you to make the judgment that no



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judgment can be made, that the referendum result speaks for itself and that it is pointless people trying to go behind that result and say that X million of the 17.4 million who voted to leave got it all wrong because they misunderstood the facts or the group who chose to remain got it all wrong. Just respecting the will of the people in a democracy and a referendum is a good thing in itself, and it seems as though the consensus we have heard from you this afternoon is to that effect.

My question is about when we have left the EU at the end of March 2019 and we are then treating all foreigners equally. We are in control of our own borders so this democratic Parliament can decide the policies relating to border control, who comes and who goes. When we have more transparency in relation to what is happening and we have more confidence in the Government because they have better control over our own borders, do you think that that will enhance public consensus on this issue of migration?

Robert Ford: I think it is too soon to tell at the moment because we are talking about a complex hypothetical right there. There are, as you have just listed, a number of elements to how migration and the migration system will change following any Brexit deal agreement, and we do not know what those are yet.

What I can speak to is the degree to which those elements seem to have some impact on public opinion as it stands right now, and it does seem to be the case that a greater degree of national discretionary control over migration is something that, in particular, the voters most concerned about migration would like to see. We would expect them to respond positively to evidence that that was in place. Whether or not that will be sufficient is impossible to say on its own, but it is clear that that element, indeed the degree to which freedom of movement has constrained the migration system, is something where there is a big gap in knowledge between the political class and the public at large. The public do not on the whole realise the degree of constraint imposed by freedom of movement and often do not accept it as being legitimate. They do think that migration is an area where there should be national discretionary control. That is an area where we would expect a change in the system to potentially produce a change in the public, though whether or not on its own it will be enough I couldn't say.

Sunder Katwala: I think that 52% voted to leave the European Union, so the political system is in the process of respecting that result by leaving the European Union and that is what is happening now. It would misread that result to say that meant that 52% of people are against all immigration and 48% like all of it. It is much more complicated.

I think the public do have a sense that that has been a wake-up call to the political and business classes. Let's see what they do with that. Let's see if they respond or not. There is some opportunity there. I think because of this low trust, low confidence, we also now have to be clear with people about what is going to happen. It seems very likely that not



much will change between 2019 and 2021. It might not be the EU directive on freedom of movement, but it seems extremely likely that most people from the European Union who want to come and get a job in Britain would be allowed to do so, partly because we have to deal with the 3 million European migrants who are here. The Home Secretary has said we will have a grace period of two years where you do not need the documentation and so on.

I would be wary of promising people that on 1 April 2019 they will live in a completely different world if what we will be doing is debating, organising and implementing a new system for two years after that or people will start to feel that they were overpromised and underdelivered. In a way, it is an opportunity to strike these balances and have people feel a sense of confidence and control in why we have chosen the system we have, but we should not tell them that everything will happen overnight if we know it will take longer than that to organise.

Jill Rutter: UK control is very much linked with this idea that we will be able to vet who comes in from the EU. People want vetting and in asking people what they want after we leave the EU, in every panel that we have the Australian points-based system is mentioned as their ideal, although people do not know the detail of it. The Australian points-based system does seem to be a kind of code for a well controlled immigration system that the British Government are sovereign over. Criminal vetting, vetting for criminal records, is quite a key demand. It is satisfying this need for control and vetting that we need to think about and maybe, I don't know, if they called the immigration system the Australian points-based system or something like it—

Sunder Katwala: They know it welcomes skills. They know family members who have gone there but they had to do something to get in and so on. It is a code for a system where you decide but you do not then close the borders. That is quite important.

Another area where the lack of trust might be important to what happens afterwards is that we find a lot of scepticism about temporary visas. Three years seems quite a long time to people and does not sound very temporary. The lack of confidence in control means that people do not think if people come for three years on a temporary visa the Government will be in control of that. If people are worried about the pace of change and the level of integration, then they would not think that temporary visas are there. In a way, something that the political system alighted on as a reasonable thing—the needs of the economy means you need some people but let's make it temporary—does not really fit with people's intuition as to what well managed immigration and integration looks like. We have a lot of choices to make going forward.

Q30 **Rehman Chishti:** Dr Renwick, you talk about expert opinion and people wanting to have expert opinion. You also referred to a roundtable where there were experts giving their information and sharing it. What is the



benchmark to be an expert, because everyone seems to be an expert these days?

Dr Renwick: For our exercise, we chose some of the leading voices in these debates. On the migration issues we had three experts who spoke. They were Professor Jonathan Portes, Professor David Coleman and Professor Catherine Barnard. Professor Jonathan Portes is the country's leading economist with expertise relating to migration. Professor David Coleman works closely with Migration Watch and has done a lot of work for many years on the demographics of migration. Professor Catherine Barnard is one of the country's leading lawyers with particular focus on these areas. I think it would be difficult to doubt that they fit into the category of expert. We did not attempt, for this exercise, to explore the boundaries of the expert category, but I think they were very clearly experts. They had very different perspectives coming from those three disciplines and also very different views on the effects of migration that ought to be taken into account.

Q31 Rehman Chishti: It is not that I doubted that. It is just simply where people want clarification because the word "expert" gets bandied about quite a bit these days and it is important if you are looking at the weight that is being put forward to the research that people see the background of the individual that you have just given, which I am sure goes a long way to helping address and understand that. That is the reason for the clarification on that.

A question to Robert Ford: we talked earlier about your comment that ethnic minorities are positive to immigration, by and large. I think that is the point you made earlier on. Looking at the context of the referendum and where immigration came up as an issue, you had areas like Birmingham, which voted "out" in the vote that took place, and you have a very large number of people there from the BME background. How do you explain the clarification on that with your point earlier about ethnic minorities being very positive of immigration by and large overall? You are looking at the voting trend in certain areas, where immigration certainly was a factor in the country, and people then voted a slightly different way. How does that work?

Robert Ford: There are a number of points that act to explain how that works. The first is to remember that the points I am making are matters of degree, not absolute. When I say ethnic minorities tend to be more positive, that is a relative statement not an absolute one. It is not to say that there are not migration sceptics among the ethnic minority public and, in particular, it is not to say that ethnic minority Britons would be positive in an absolute sense about every aspect of the migration system either. Their views tend to track the general public in this respect in that areas that are more contentious or where there are more negative views—for example, unskilled migration—they will tend to be more negative, too.



The second thing to remember is that migration was not the only factor driving votes in the EU referendum. There is not any particular reason to think that that was different for ethnic minority Britons as compared to the white population. A lot of voters in places like Birmingham will have been voting to leave for reasons that were unrelated to migration voting to remain for reasons that were unrelated to migration.

The third point to make is that it is possible that there were aspects of the migration debate that had particular resonance with migrant populations. Sunder may be able to speak to that as well. In particular, I have seen discussion of the idea that ethnic minorities may have been more sensitive to family reunion migration; for example, if you are coming from outside of the EU, there are very strict rules and this may have created tensions about the much broader rights that EU migrants have. I cannot answer whether or not that was a decisive factor for many voters but all I am flagging up is that there may be particular issues within the migration system that if you are a first or second generation migrant from outside the EU it will be particularly salient to you in a way that would not be the case for most white voters. I think it is a plausible hypothesis.

Sunder Katwala: The evidence we have is that British Asians voted 2:1 for remain and black British people a little bit more for remain. That is probably a million ethnic minority votes for leave but a majority for remain, and it would not surprise you that if you were an ethnic minority Briton in London who had a degree you are very likely to be remain. If you were somebody who was older and somewhere else that was voting leave, you might have been more leave. People are going to vote on different reasons, economic risk and so on. I think there was a cocktail of things going on. Ethnic minorities who have very strong British identity and very low European identity would not choose the European freedom of movement as their principle but would be very sceptical of UKIP, in particular, as a migration-controlling voice. I think a third of British Asians was rather an underperformance from the leave side.

Q32 **Rehman Chishti:** Sure, I get that. How would you apply your earlier comment about how cities handle change? You gave the example of Leicester and Wolverhampton. Next to Wolverhampton you have Birmingham. How do you put that—

Sunder Katwala: I thought it was very striking that the discussions we had in Leicester and Wolverhampton were somewhat more liberal among the ethnic minority Asian, black and white participants because they had long histories of migration. I felt there was a bit of a difference in the group—this is really anecdotal and qualitative—in that the white British participants in both Leicester and Wolverhampton seemed more interested in the pragmatic questions about the needs of the economy, the health service and so on. British Asian participants, who were very committed to their own family history of migration showing it was part of the picture, put more emphasis on integration has to work in the future



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for this to work; we got there in the end in this country but we could go in the wrong way or the right way.

I think places of high diversity care a lot about integration and getting it right and not now clustering into more segregated cities and seeing the glass as half full and half empty. I think that makes integration a very good chance of being common ground because while people talk about integration in different ways in different places, if you go to liberal places of high diversity and high change and high churn, people really think we should work very hard on integration. I think people from migrant and refugee backgrounds think that.

There is just a factor and it is true for white British people as well. If your parent was a migrant, you have somewhat more of a lived experience of being slightly inclined to the pro side as well as knowing about the pressures. White British people with migrant parents are quite like British Asians in this respect.

- Q33** **Rehman Chishti:** A final question to Ms Rutter about the point earlier on asylum and refugees and those who want to come here for asylum and refuge and the concern that you raised that that may have had about committing terrorist offences. To address the opposite of that, looking at the large flow of those seeking asylum or refugee status in Europe at the moment from war-torn countries, do we know the number of those who have actually come on an asylum and refugee basis and committed terrorist acts? They can help to address the reality of those who are coming from a genuine refugee asylum basis rather than for that. Do we have that answer or that information or not?

Jill Rutter: We do not have that answer but any number, even if it is just one, damages—

- Q34** **Rehman Chishti:** No, I get that, but on perception and reality, if it is the perception that those who come over for asylum and refuge may then go on to commit a terrorist attack, in relation to the reality of the large flow of individuals across Europe, do we have specific numbers of those who may have gone on to commit terrorist acts? We do not have that information?

Jill Rutter: We do not have that figure at all, no.

Chair: Thank you. I am going to draw the evidence session to a close in a second. I just have a couple of final questions unless, Esther McVey, you want to come in.

Esther McVey: No, I am fine, Chair. I guess what I have been most impressed about is getting round the country and listening to people. I think, as you said, the five miles apart and really listening to the lived experience of people who are seeing it, which is slightly different to maybe—but you get that—the establishment, London and the media is suffering from how they perceive it. You have to live it, see it, breathe it, hence you have the very differences between the regions, which I think



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your report clearly reflects upon. I think that is an important message for us in Parliament and an important message for the media based in London that really, like you, they need to go to the regions and speak to people.

- Q35 **Chair:** Can I ask a couple of follow-up questions? Stuart McDonald asked you about the regional issues and the position within Scotland. Have any of you explored whether or not any other sense of regional control or local control strengthens legitimacy for migration arrangements in any way or whether most people just expect this to be at a national level and do not expect any local decision-making?

Sunder Katwala: I think Scotland is different in the type of debate it would have because of the type of devolution and independence debate that it has. Elsewhere, I think people's worries about control and confidence would make them quite sceptical. That might be for a different reason, because you are going to do it in workplaces and so you could do it, but they would be quite sceptical.

- Q36 **Chair:** People would be sceptical about things like approach to regional allocation of work permits and so on?

Sunder Katwala: I think partly how will you police and operate it as well as who will make the decisions and do we trust the way the decisions will be made. I think Scotland is a slightly distinct debate.

There was quite a different set of discussions in the events we had in Northern Ireland, which might be worth saying something about. I think Brexit feels more real to people in Northern Ireland. Jill, do you want to say anything more about the differences within Northern Ireland?

Jill Rutter: We found some quite interesting differences between attitudes in Northern Ireland compared with mainland UK, quite high levels of Brexit anxiety, not knowing what is going to happen about the Irish border and worries that any hard border would undermine the peace process. There were also slightly different attitudes to integration, more acceptance that some divisions in communities are inevitable. People made much stronger reference to their own family histories of emigration in Northern Ireland and that affected the judgments and values that they were making in the conversation. It was a slightly gentler conversation, a more positive conversation, even in some quite tough areas.

We were in Dungannon, which has seen very rapid migration on the level of the Fens, yet the scepticism and perhaps overt hostility that you have seen in Wisbech, March, Boston, was not there in Dungannon at all, much better management of the local housing market. I think looking at what has happened in Dungannon and has not happened in the Bostons of the world is quite interesting as well.

Robert Ford: This is not a question I have polled on and it is interesting that the debate has gone there. It is perhaps something that future data needs to look at. I think that there is a very plausible argument that can



be made that particularly more localisation in allocation of resources designed to deal with pressures associated with migration and certainly much higher profile use of that lever would be valuable. We know that public distrust in immigration is at least in part related to the fact that the pressures feel real and local, yet the benefits often feel distant and abstract. You see that in some of the statements that people will make about, "It is your GDP, it is not our GDP" when national level data is used to make a case for migration being beneficial.

By using policy levers that involve directly providing resources in a rapid, responsive, transparent and high profile way to areas like the Fens or other parts of the east coast that experience a large influx of migration over a relatively short period of time—something we know is associated with quite an anxious and negative reaction—could be a good way of restoring that link, of saying, "The country is benefiting from these people coming in and so is your community because we are providing you with the resources to ensure that you can manage it to your benefit".

Dr Renwick: Yes, and exactly the same came out in the Citizens' Assembly. What the members called responsiveness to regional need was one of their top priorities for migration policy, and that is what they meant by it. It was not the regional work permits policy that you were suggesting that they had in mind, so far as I am aware, when they were saying that.

Jill Rutter: People expect the bins, the housing market, the school places to be sorted out locally, and one thing that has come out of our stakeholder meetings is that nobody knows what this controlling migration fund is doing. It is not your Committee because it is a DCLG fund. Even people that we have met from councils do not know whether their councils have any of this money and what it is going to be used for. It is meant to be addressing some of these local pressures, but nobody really knows where the money is going.

Sunder Katwala: I think there is a distinction between telling people about policy change and focusing on policy change that will not answer all of the questions because people's knowledge of impacts funding and so on is going to be very low anyway. I think policy is overestimated, the value of policy change, yet designing the policy to get it right and to make it visible will deal with some of the things that we know are pressures. There might be policies that are very important but are not going to be the answers to trust, but we should not think that having a policy magic bullet is what gets you concern on immigration either.

Chair: We are expecting a vote imminently, so I was going to close the session at the point at which the Division bell goes. I am going to ask you two final questions and if the Division bell goes I will ask you if you can send any further evidence to us in writing. I will take Esther first.

Q37

Esther McVey: If you think there has been denial over so many years about official figures, as you say, what people were wanting to see, relate



to and understand, where they have drawn their own conclusions because they have seen it, felt it in their own community, do you think now we are going to have to make amends for past mistakes?

Sunder Katwala: In terms of the conversation being late to start, I do think we are having it now. If we then say we have had it and let's stop it, that will not work. I think we are making amends for catching up with that thing. I also think people are very sceptical of consultation by politicians, whether it is local or national, if they think you already know the answer and now you are consulting so they will agree with the answer you have already decided. One of the advantages of being incredibly open to what happens next is that quite a lot of politicians in the Government have not decided on the answers, so this seems a very good time to make sure that people get a strong voice in those answers.

Q38 **Chair:** My final two questions were related to that, really. The first was to come back to the question I think you have been asked in different forms throughout, which is about any further policies or any things that would be your top policy for building more consensus or anything that you have not covered so far for what action might be needed to build the consensus.

The second is this inquiry is looking more widely at principles of immigration and consensus, but we will then move on to looking specifically at what the Brexit options might be. It was really to end on your reflections on the Brexit process. Given that there may at different stages be trade-offs as part of the discussion about what the future trade arrangements might be, whether there are immigration deals as part of that and where the debate heads from here, what are your reflections at this stage on how best to have the debate about the future of EU migration in order to build most consensus and a sustainable arrangement behind it?

Dr Renwick: I can respond to the second of those questions. I am merely the mouthpiece for the Citizens' Assembly, but what they said very strongly was that they think there should be opportunities for considered public input into this process. It may not be surprising when they have just done a citizens' assembly, but they would like to see more exercises of that kind as the Brexit process is ongoing. They recognise that many of the questions are very uncertain at the moment. We do not know what the answers are going to be, and they felt that a high priority should be to have that kind of exercise further on in the process in order to allow considered public opinion to be heard.

Robert Ford: My answers to the two are probably relatively overlapping in that what to do in terms of the Brexit negotiations and what to do in terms of immigration policy are going to overlap to some degree.

The areas where I think there could be major gains to be had in rebuilding public trust and taking the heat out of the issue through looking with a strong reforming mind would include benefit access and, in



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particular, the issue of time to access and the issue of contributions-based systems. My data has shown that you can get to a large majority of the public with a figure of three years for access. There is also clear evidence that contributions build confidence as well. Making that explicit link between paying in and taking out helps to restore trust.

Secondly, political citizenship access. I think the public often regard the migration system, the citizenship system and the benefit system as like clubs that you pay in and contribute for a while and then you should be given the full rights and resources of the clubs. They regard it as a something-for-something exchange. Right now, on the citizenship side we have an issue whereby we have a very large population of EU migrants who are currently completely outside of the club but there is no particular reason to think the public want them excluded from the political club. They should be part of the political conversation, so there should be some clearer, perhaps easier, route for them to get to citizenship and thereby be part of the conversation. That should certainly be part of the conversation about reform because it has been very striking that the conversation about the 3 million has often been a conversation about them without being a conversation that fully involves them because they are not part of the electoral process in the same way as other parts of the resident population are.

The third area I would look at, to come back on a point I made before, is disaggregate this debate about migration by skills and sector because you will get a much more productive, nuanced and consensus-building conversation if you are talking about particular skill sets, sectors and demands. You unlock a lot of routes to having a productive conversation by doing that.

Jill Rutter: We have already talked about the importance of dealing with the local impacts. Social contact, social and economic integration, are really important in humanising migrants and enabling people to see them as members of the local communities. I am fairly sceptical about micro-level policy changes, whether it is to immigration or to benefit entitlements, because people simply do not know about them. They will not hear about them. Policy can help build a consensus, but it might be housing policy changes, much broader brush changes, that are needed.

Also, don't enact policy that damages trust. Sunder has already mentioned short-term visas. We have talked about short-term visas in our panel discussions and people do not want them. They do not trust the Government to enforce them and they want to get to know their neighbours. They want migrants to settle, to commit to the community and learn English. Lastly, dialogue is needed, whether in the form of a national Government conversation about Brexit or specifically on immigration, and now is the time for it before the final choices are made.

Sunder Katwala: I would say we mix up two things when we talk about immigration after Brexit. People are asking the question, "How should we



now reform the system if we have new choices?" Then they are asking questions like, "What would the right level of immigration be next year or in five years' time?" I do not think anyone can know what the right level of immigration is in five years' time because we do not know what it will be in two years. If you separate those issues, have a debate about the principles, what things we set targets for, what things we control, what things we do not control, what I think the political system should then do is make sure it is not a one-off process: you have a say in a referendum; you have a say for a year or two during some negotiations; we will now go back to being in charge of it.

I am quite interested in what the analogy is to the budget every year on immigration for the Home Secretary, where they come to the House and tell you what has happened on asylum and refugee policy, on economic immigration and other things, and maybe that will be a way of linking. If there is a process of engagement, of Select Committees, Parliaments, regional things, it comes somewhere and people could see the link. I think that link is incredibly opaque to people as to how asking us to have our say will turn up in policies, especially if we say we will control these forms of migration but we will decide on a year-by-year basis what is right for the economy, what is right for the health service and what is right for local communities. How will we structure that conversation so it can be seen that the Government respond to it? I think there might be a useful way to do that so there is a sustained engagement, not just a one-off Brexit engagement.

Q39 Chair: Thank you. It occurs to me there is one issue that we have not really covered and that none of you have mentioned very much, which is attitudes towards employers and whether or not employers are seen as exploiting immigration, issues around wages or terms and conditions and whether or not immigration is being used to undercut terms and conditions. Is that a significant source of concern and are there labour market measures that could address that or do you not see that as being a central part of public concern or public debate on immigration at the moment?

Jill Rutter: It is a concern that is raised in some areas but after 37 visits it is not a common theme. The areas where it has been raised are Chesterfield, where Mike Ashley's Sports Direct is based. I think Sports Direct has brought communities together there now, a few years on. Northampton, where you have a big distribution logistics sector and we had a lot of discussion about the undercutting of wages and work conditions in Northampton, and in our Scottish panels as well. It is an issue that is raised by younger people, who are just starting to enter the labour market, more often than older workers, but labour market impacts is not a common theme.

Sunder Katwala: I think there is a challenge for employers in the areas that have relatively low-skilled, semi-skilled and less public consent. They may be able to win the argument but it will take time to get this right and



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we want a transition that does not hurt us. They will need to buy confidence that they really are going to put more skin in the game of training, employment and so on. Getting that balance right, if people really believed you were making that connection, I think they would be quite inclined to give you a smooth development as long as they can see you do that in year 1, year 2 and year 3. There are sensible ways to reduce the demand for migration in the industries that have been most dependent upon it, but that is less in people's minds than the pressure on school places and health services.

Robert Ford: It is not something, surprisingly, that I have asked about directly—I thought I had—but there are a couple of data points that do speak to it. One from the European Social Survey is people were asked, "Do you think immigrants create new jobs or do they take jobs away from people born in Britain?" Basically, public opinion splits three ways on this. About a third say neither and roughly a third say create new jobs and roughly a third say take jobs away. That is a fairly large positive shift in attitudes from when this question was asked 15 years ago in 2002. There is evidence that a substantial segment of the public do express that anxiety, but it is falling.

The second point is that when we look at the forms of migration that are uppermost in people's minds when they are positive or negative about migration, what we find is that the more negative people are about migration the less likely they are to cite migration for work and the more likely they are to cite asylum and benefits, which would suggest that the most anxious voters in the electorate are the least likely to be talking about migration in the workforce.

Chair: Thank you very much for your patience I realise this has been a very extended session as a result of all the votes. We really appreciate the evidence that you have given us. It is very helpful for our inquiry. Thank you very much. We conclude this session.