British Future...

THE POLICY INSTITUTE

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The reset moment
Immigration in the new parliament

Sunder Katwala, Jill Rutter and Steve Ballinger, British Future

Bobby Duffy and Kirstie Hewlett, the Policy Institute, King's College London

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The UK in a Changing Europe

About British Future
British Future is an independent, non-partisan think tank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, opportunity and identity, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.

British Future
Kean House
6 Kean Street
London WC2B 4AS

Registered Charity number 1159291
Tel. +44 (0)20 7632 9069
Twitter: @BritishFuture
britishfuture.org

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The Policy Institute at King's College London works to solve society's challenges with evidence and expertise. We combine the rigour of academia with the agility of a consultancy and the connectedness of a think tank. Our research draws on many disciplines and methods, making use of the skills, expertise and resources of not only the institute, but the university and its wider network too.

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The reset moment

Leaving the EU and ending freedom of movement was always going to be a reset moment for UK immigration policy – it has just taken a rather long time since that June 2016 referendum decision to press the reset button. But the parliamentary impasse has now been resolved through Boris Johnson's December 2019 electoral victory, giving him a strong enough parliamentary majority to push key legislation through parliament. Following the publication of the policy paper "The UK's points-based immigration system" in February 2020,[1] immigration legislation looks set to follow shortly.

Much discussion of post-Brexit immigration reform has been framed around delivering against promises made in the referendum campaign. But Prime Minister Boris Johnson has a chance to set his sights rather higher. A new immigration system should now look beyond Brexit to focus on rebuilding public trust on immigration, and restoring voters' confidence in our immigration system and in the government's ability to manage immigration competently and fairly.

Since the 1990s, Britain's immigration debate has been angry and polarised – a shouting match between groups with the strongest views either for or against. Yet that has started to change in recent years. Immigration has declined in salience and is less of a top-of-mind issue for voters than it was five or 10 years ago. A less heated debate offers a chance for a more constructive discussion about the controls we want, the immigration that we need and how it can be managed effectively and fairly.

Attitudes are shifting too. The majority of the public, as our research in this report finds, are "Balancers" on immigration: worried about the pressures it can bring but aware of the gains for our economy and society. The challenge the government now faces is to strike the right balance too – managing those pressures to secure the gains.

The proposed "points-based system" is an attempt to do this.[2] It remains open to skills and students, with no cap on the numbers of highly qualified people who can come to the UK with a job or university offer. On this, most people will agree (even across political and Brexit identity divides). The points-based system is much more restrictive, however, on lower-skilled migration. With free movement coming to an end and no equivalent route opening up, employers' supply of low-skilled labour will be severely restricted, with the exception of some short-term seasonal worker and youth mobility schemes.

Most of the public would like to see lower-skilled migration controlled, but that Balancer instinct remains. People want a system that is controlled, selective and fair, but nevertheless take a pragmatic view which recognises that fruit still needs picking, homes need building and, in particular, that care homes need staff to look after our ageing population. The new proposals tip the scales against some of these sectors.

We should expect to see much argument in the coming months between the government and the industries affected by these restrictions on lower-skilled migration. It would be reasonable for the government to offer some compromises, at least to cushion the impact at the 31 December 2020 cut-off. But for now, businesses have been told they must "adapt" and to take a more flexible approach.

The move away from an all-encompassing "net migration target" – an albatross that hung round the necks of David Cameron and Theresa May for 39 quarters in a row – coupled with the end of free movement, removes the

perverse incentive to reduce flows of migration that are popular, such as international students who come to study at our universities. It allows selectivity between different categories of migration, which makes sense to most voters. And it can also introduce some much-needed flexibility to the immigration system, opening up opportunities to make it more responsive and accountable, both to the concerns of the public and the needs of employers.

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) could play an enhanced role, running a national conversation on immigration that keeps policymakers informed of public opinion and gives the public a voice on an ongoing basis. It could consult with business and others to help the system adapt to the needs of the economy and public services. Its findings should be publicised to inform debate, and could also lead to shifts in the way points are allocated or changes to shortage occupation lists to allow business to fill gaps in the workforce.

Most of all, though, this reset moment for immigration policy offers an opportunity to change the narrative on immigration. The message of the net migration target was one of crisis and lack of control: immigration is bad so we need to reduce it – but we can't. Instead, Boris Johnson's government has a chance to make the case that the UK now has control over who can come to the UK to work, study or join their family – and that we should welcome the immigration we have chosen to keep.

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This reset moment for immigration policy offers an opportunity to change the narrative on immigration."

1. Where is the public now on immigration and integration?

1. What does the public think now? Analysis of new ICM polling for British Future

Steve Ballinger, British Future

"We are a people's government ... and we are going to be working to deliver on the priorities of the British people," said Prime Minister Boris Johnson as he addressed his first cabinet meeting in December 2019. There is much discussion and debate about "what the people wants", both in politics and the media. Different people want different things – and that is as true on immigration as it is on other issues.

Reforming the UK's immigration system has been prioritised under the new PM – a necessary policy response to freedom of movement coming to an end on 31 December this year and a political response to immigration's role in the EU referendum that ultimately brought Johnson to power. Rebuilding public trust in our immigration system, which has eroded over successive parliaments, should be an aim for the new government. A clear and nuanced understanding of what the public does want on immigration will therefore be important.

> "
> There is much discussion and debate about 'what the people wants', both in politics and the media."

For this report, British Future and the Policy Institute, King's College London commissioned ICM to conduct nationally representative research into public attitudes to a range of issues and policies relating to immigration and integration. ICM surveyed online a representative sample of 2,305 adults who are resident in Great Britain, including a boosted sample of 427 people in Scotland, between 10-13 January 2020. We examine the findings below.

On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, including your local community? (1 is most negative, 10 is most positive.)

	All GB	SNP	Lib Dem	Labour	Conservative
Positive (8-10)	24%	46%	40%	35%	13%
Balancers (4-7)	56%	43%	55%	57%	55%
Negative (1-3)	20%	11%	5%	8%	31%

■ Positive about immigration (8-10)
■ "Balancers" (4-7)
■ Negative about immigration (1-3)
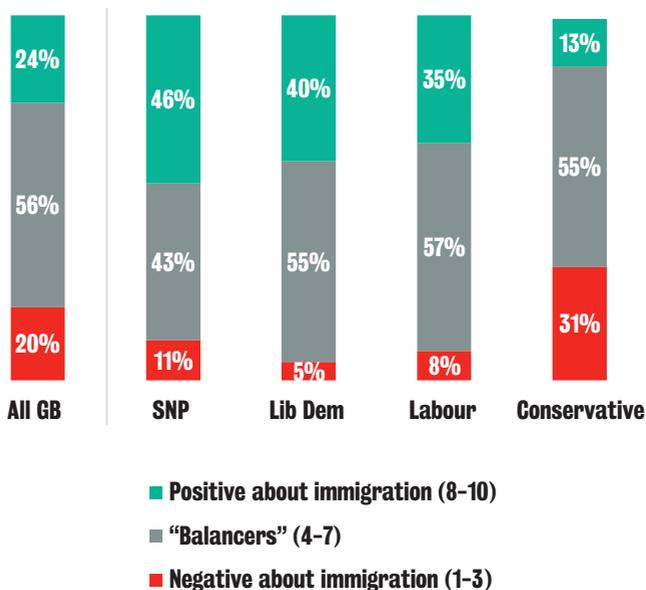
Most people are "Balancers" on immigration, seeing both pressures and gains

To understand people's overall attitudes to immigration, we asked them "On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, including your local community?" (with a score of 1 indicating "very negative" and 10 "very positive"). Most people (56 per cent) gave a score somewhere in the middle, from 4-7. A quarter of people (24 per cent) felt more positive about immigration, giving a score between 8-10; while one-fifth of people (20 per cent) have a negative view, giving a score of 1-3. While those with the strongest views can tend to dominate debate on immigration, only 10 per cent of people gave the lowest score of 1, and just 7 per cent gave the highest score of 10.

Looking at the 2019 general election vote, most Conservatives (55 per cent), Labour voters (57 per cent) and Lib Dems (55 per cent) are Balancers too. Only SNP voters buck the trend, skewing heavily liberal: 43 per cent are Balancers while 46 per cent are very positive about migration, giving a score of 8-10.

While people may have balanced views on immigration, they don't trust the government to manage it well

People don't think that the government has done a good job on immigration. Just 15 per cent of people agreed that "On the whole, I feel that the government has managed immigration into the UK competently and fairly". The majority (53 per cent) actively disagree with this statement, with a quarter of people (26 per cent) saying they "strongly disagree".

Voters from both main parties feel the same, differing only by degree. Just 18 per cent of people who voted Conservative in 2019 feel that the government has managed immigration competently and fairly, while nearly half (48 per cent) disagree. Labour voters feel more strongly that immigration has not been managed well (56 per cent) and just 13 per cent agree that it has been managed competently and fairly.

This finding is also reflected in levels of public trust in individual politicians when it comes to immigration. The current party leaders and the Home Secretary are more distrusted than trusted on immigration: while 37 per cent say they trust Boris Johnson on the issue, 41 per cent distrust him, with a net trust score of -4. A majority of respondents (57 per cent) said they distrusted Jeremy Corbyn on immigration, while only a fifth (22 per cent) trusted him. Home Secretary Priti Patel is trusted by only a fifth of people (20 per cent) on immigration but distrusted by one-third of them (33 per cent).

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "On the whole, I feel that the government has managed immigration into the UK competently and fairly."

All GB
- 2%
- 12%
- 25%
- 8%
- 27%
- 26%

2019 Conservative voters
- 3%
- 16%
- 30%
- 3%
- 25%
- 23%

2019 Labour voters
- 4%
- 10%
- 22%
- 8%
- 26%
- 30%

- ■ Strongly disagree
- ■ Tend to disagree
- ■ Don't know
- ■ Neither agree nor disagree
- ■ Tend to agree
- ■ Strongly agree
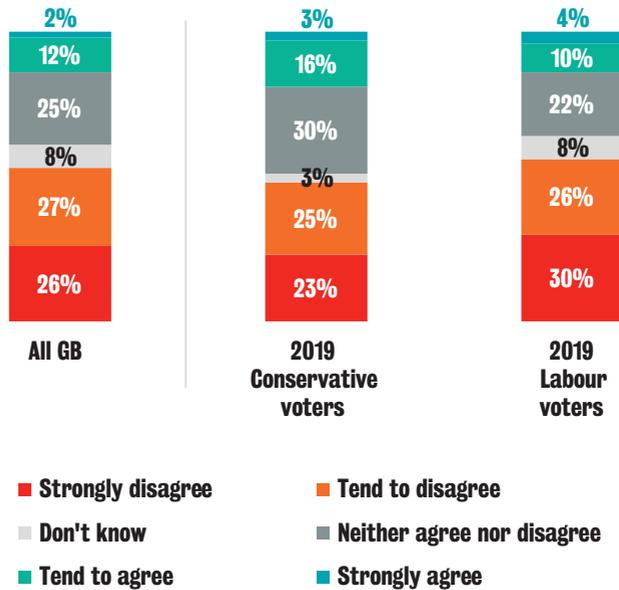
Immigration wasn't a key issue for voters in the 2019 general election

We gave respondents a list of 10 issues and asked whether they were important in deciding how they voted in the general election in December 2019. Immigration came close to the bottom: only housing had fewer people considering it "very important" (35 per cent). While 41 per cent of people said immigration was "very important", that is compared to 74 per cent for the NHS, 54 per cent for the economy and taxation and 43 per cent for the environment. More people said immigration was "not important" (19 per cent) than for any other issue (together with housing).

This is part of a well-documented trend showing immigration declining in salience for voters: while immigration has historically featured in the top three issues of concern for voters, in the last two to three years a series of polls have found that the public no longer considers immigration as one of their primary concerns.

Immigration remains a more important issue for Conservative voters than for those who backed Labour in 2019, with 52 per cent of Conservative voters saying immigration policy was "very important" in deciding who they voted for – though this was still less important to Tory voters in 2019 than the party's policies on Brexit (73 per cent deemed Brexit "very important"); the NHS (69 per cent "very important"); the economy and taxation (60 per cent "very important") or crime (59 per cent "very important").

Do we talk too little about immigration? Or too much?

During the period when immigration frequently ranked among voters' most pressing concerns, some people felt that it had become a taboo subject that people were "not allowed" to talk about, while others felt that we talked about little else. We asked people whether they felt that immigration was talked about too much or too little at the moment, or about the right amount. For comparison, we also asked the same question about a series of other

Thinking about the party that you voted for in the 2019 general election, how important, if at all, was their policy on each of the following issues in determining your decision to vote for them?

FIGURE 3:
ISSUES THAT WERE **"VERY IMPORTANT"** IN DETERMINING HOW PEOPLE VOTED IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTION

Source: ICM poll for British Future, 10-13 January 2020; n = 2,305.
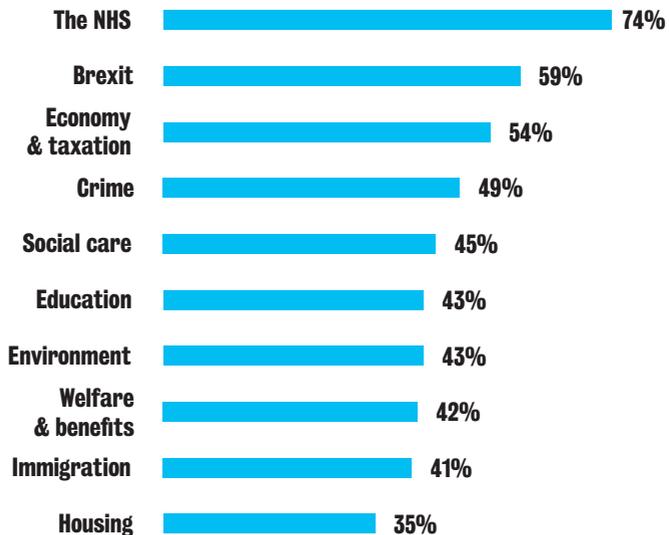
Issue	Percentage
The NHS	74%
Brexit	59%
Economy & taxation	54%
Crime	49%
Social care	45%
Education	43%
Environment	43%
Welfare & benefits	42%
Immigration	41%
Housing	35%

FIGURE 4: DO
WE TALK TOO
LITTLE OR TOO
MUCH ABOUT
IMMIGRATION?

Source: ICM poll for
British Future, 10-13
January 2020; n =
2,305.

The NHS — Too little 48%, Too much 7%
Environment — Too little 43%, Too much 15%
Economy & taxation — Too little 36%, Too much 6%
Immigration — Too little 33%, Too much 19%
Prejudice — Too little 26%, Too much 24%
Brexit — Too little 13%, Too much 43%
Party leaders — Too little 12%, Too much 37%

■ Too little   ■ Too much
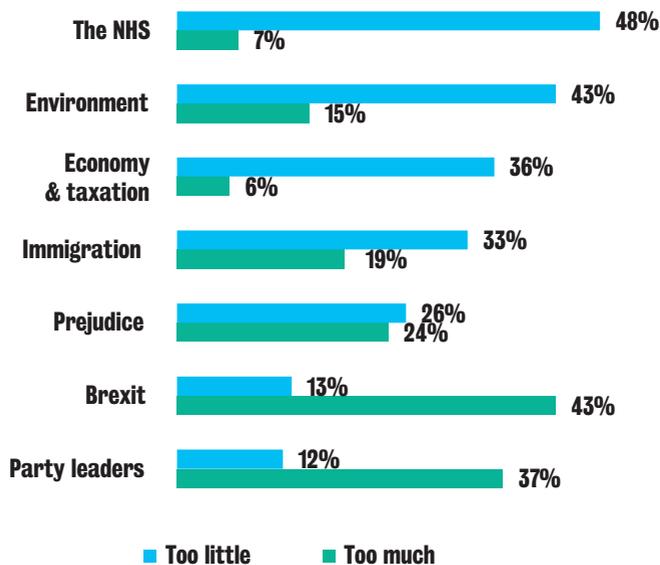
issues: Brexit; the NHS; the economy and taxation; the environment; the party leaders; and prejudice (eg antisemitism and Islamophobia).

More people now think we have got the balance right in the immigration debate, talking about it "about the right amount" (38 per cent) than feel we still talk about it too little (33 per cent). Other issues are now considered to be more neglected in our public debate: some 43 per cent of people say that we don't talk enough about the environment, 36 per cent that we talk too little about the economy and taxation, and nearly half the public (48 per cent) say we still talk too little about the NHS. One in five members of the public (19 per cent) feel that we talk about immigration too much.

When asked about current public debates on prejudice, just over a quarter of people (26 per cent) feel that we don't talk about this issue enough; yet a similar number (24 per cent) say we talk about it too much. More people – just over a third (35 per cent) – feel that we currently talk about

prejudice about the right amount. While the poll did not have a large ethnic minority sample (186 people), non-white respondents were more likely to say we talk about prejudice too little (31 per cent) and less likely to say we talk about it too much (19 per cent); but similarly, a larger proportion of non-white respondents (35 per cent) feel that it is discussed about the right amount.

How should immigration policy treat different flows of immigration?

The public would be happy for many flows of immigration to increase or remain the same, according to our new ICM research. 79 per cent of the public would prefer the number of high-skilled EU workers to remain the same or increase; 77 per cent for high-skilled non-EU workers; 65 per cent for seasonal workers; and 64 per cent for international students.

The government's decision to reduce migration routes for low-skilled workers[3] is, however, likely to dominate policy discussions over the next six months. A slim majority (51 per cent) would reduce low-skilled EU migration, with a third of people (31 per cent) feeling it should remain at the current rate.

Around four in 10 Conservative voters would be happy to see skilled migration increase, be it from the EU (36 per cent) or from outside the EU (40 per cent). Labour supporters are slightly more in favour of high-skilled EU migrants: 40 per cent would increase the number of high-skilled migrants from the EU and 37 per cent from outside the EU. Only 11 per cent of Conservatives want to reduce high-skilled EU migration (compared to 8 per cent of Labour voters), and just 12 per cent would reduce high-skilled non-EU migration (Labour 11 per cent).

A majority of Conservatives would prefer migration of seasonal workers to remain at current levels (55 per cent) or to increase (12 per cent). And the same goes for international students: exactly half of Conservative voters

For each of following groups, would you prefer the number of people coming to live in the UK to increase, decrease, or remain about the same?

	Decrease	Remain the same	Increase
High-skilled non-EU	12%	40%	37%
High-skilled EU	11%	42%	37%
Overseas students	24%	49%	15%
Seasonal workers	24%	50%	15%
Low-skilled non-EU	54%	29%	6%
Low-skilled EU	51%	31%	6%

■ Decrease ■ Remain the same ■ Increase
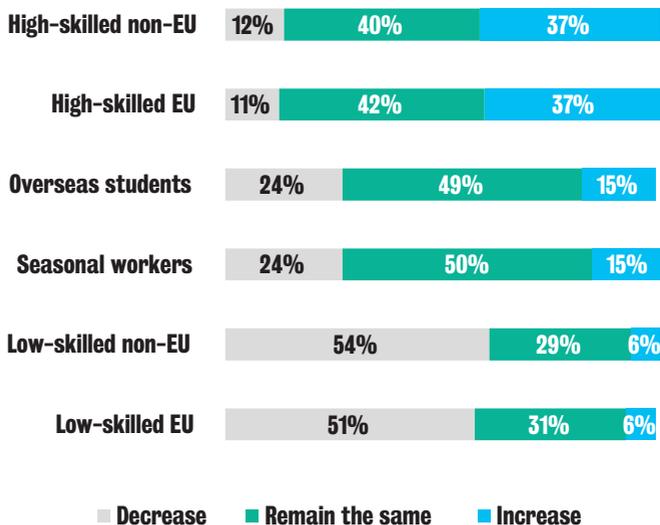
surveyed felt the number of international students coming to the UK should remain the same, and 10 per cent thought it should increase. Labour voters are twice as keen to increase international student migration, with 22 per cent wanting to attract more overseas students to British universities.

Conservatives do feel more strongly that low-skilled migration should be reduced, with 68 per cent preferring to reduce low-skilled EU migration. That's almost double the amount of Labour voters who support reductions of low-skilled workers coming to live in the UK (35 per cent).

The points-based system: what do people want to see?

The government has said that it will put in place a new, Australian-style, points-based immigration system when freedom of movement comes to an end at the end of this year.

The January report from the Migration Advisory Committee,[4] which examined salary thresholds and a points-based system, suggests increasing flexibility in the

immigration system, including medium-skill occupations. In particular, the recommendations single out the NHS and education as sectors that have been harmed by the rigidity of the current system. But there has been little public consultation on the points-based immigration system, including what characteristics people think merit higher and lower allocations of points.

The attributes that the public think should earn a high number of points in the new immigration system are:

- Being high-skilled (63 per cent);

- Having an occupation needed by the NHS (61 per cent); and

- Having skills or experience in a sector where there are high levels of vacancies (44 per cent).

Four in 10 people think that good spoken and written English (41 per cent), a clean criminal record (42 per cent) and an existing job offer (41 per cent) should all attract high points too.

Less important was someone being on a high salary in their current job overseas. Just 14 per cent said this should earn high points and 17 per cent said it should earn no points at all. Similarly, having £5,000 in savings was seen as meriting high points by just 13 per cent, but no points by a similar number (14 per cent). Only 20 per cent of people consider taking a job in the UK with over £30,000 per year salary important enough to warrant a high number of points – suggesting that the government was wise to follow the MAC's advice and lower its proposed salary threshold.

A more general observation on the findings is that people seem relatively generous in allocating points: someone with a job offer, decent English and no criminal record would get high or medium points on all three counts from over 70

"
There has been little public consultation on the points-based system, including what characteristics people think merit higher and lower allocations of points."

For each of the following characteristics, please tell us whether you think they should earn a person a high number of points, a medium number of points, a low number of points, or no points at all?

FIGURE 6: WHAT CHARACTERISTICS DOES THE PUBLIC THINK SHOULD EARN MOST POINTS IN A POINTS-BASED IMMIGRATION SYSTEM?

	High points	Medium points	Low points	No points
Being high-skilled (e.g. scientist, doctor, engineer, architect)	63%	18%	7%	3%
Having an occupation needed by the NHS (e.g. nurse, dentist, doctor)	61%	20%	8%	3%
Having skills or experience in sectors where there are high levels of vacancies	44%	32%	11%	4%
Having a clean criminal record	42%	28%	14%	6%
Being able to speak and write good English	41%	34%	13%	4%
Having an existing job offer to take up on arrival	41%	33%	11%	5%
Committing to work in a region or area that needs more workers (e.g. Scotland)	26%	39%	16%	7%
Taking a job in the UK with over £30,000 per year salary	20%	34%	17%	13%
Being on a high salary in their current job overseas	14%	34%	19%	17%
Having at least £5,000 in savings	13%	34%	25%	14%

per cent of the population – not a particularly high bar for a visa. Indeed, the majority of people would allocate high or medium points for all of the categories we offered them, save for having £5,000 in savings and being on a high salary in their current job overseas.

Voters across the political spectrum were broadly in the same place in terms of the categories they valued most and least. Conservative voters were more likely than Labour voters to attribute high points to speaking good English (48 per cent compared to 36 per cent, respectively); having a

clean criminal record (Con 48 per cent / Lab 37 per cent); being highly skilled (Con 69 per cent / Lab 59 per cent); and having an existing job offer (Con 46 per cent / Lab 38 per cent). Labour voters were somewhat more likely to prefer high points for committing to work in a region that needs more workers, such as Scotland (Lab 29 per cent / Con 24 per cent) or taking a job as a care worker (Lab 22 per cent / Con 13 per cent) – although 55 per cent of Conservatives still think working in the care sector should warrant medium or high points.

We also asked people about specific jobs and sectors, and whether coming to the UK to take up jobs in these areas should earn people more points. As mentioned above, "having an occupation needed by the NHS" was one of the most popular responses, with 61 per cent saying it should attract high points. After that, taking a UK role as a teacher was also important to the public, with around six in 10 people (58 per cent) saying that should earn people high (18 per cent) or medium (40 per cent) points. Taking up a job as a care worker fared similarly, with 18 per cent saying it should earn people high points and 35 per cent medium points.

The finance and hospitality sectors were viewed less favourably: only 8 per cent felt that a job in either sector should earn high points, with 20 per cent saying a job in finance should earn people no points at all towards a visa (and 19 per cent saying the same for hospitality).

For each of the following characteristics, please tell us whether you think they should earn a person a high number of points, a medium number of points, a low number of points, or no points at all?

	High points	Medium points	Low points	No points
Taking a UK role as a teacher	18%	40%	19%	9%
Taking a UK role as a care worker	18%	35%	23%	11%
Taking a UK role as an agricultural worker	11%	30%	30%	14%
Taking a UK role as a builder	8%	28%	32%	16%
Taking a UK role in the finance sector	8%	26%	28%	20%
Taking a UK role in the hospitality sector (e.g. hotel staff, waiter)	8%	25%	34%	19%

Should Britain only admit high earners? The salary threshold

The Migration Advisory Committee proposed reducing the salary threshold for some applicants to £25,600, helping business to recruit medium-skilled workers,[5] and the government appears to have followed this advice in its policy paper published the following month.[6]

This may prove a popular move, certainly with employers (especially those outside of London) who often need to recruit people at a starting salary of less than £30,000. But the public is also sceptical about a salary threshold. As discussed previously, only 20 per cent of people consider taking a job in the UK with over £30,000 per year salary important enough to warrant a high number of points towards a visa. Some 63 per cent of people said that there would have to be exceptions to a salary threshold for people moving to the UK to do important jobs that need doing, such as nurses and care workers. Some 44 per cent also feel that teachers would need to be exempted from a salary threshold too.

What would increase people's confidence in the government's ability to manage immigration?

Restoring public trust in the government's ability to manage immigration competently and fairly should be a key priority as Boris Johnson and Priti Patel shape their new post-Brexit immigration system. Our findings suggest that increasing transparency and accountability may go some way towards achieving that. Three in five people (61 per cent) would have greater confidence in the government on immigration if "government ministers were held to account and forced to resign if they made serious mistakes". A third of people say this would make them a lot more confident in how the government manages immigration.

A similar proportion (59 per cent) agrees with the statement that "the government's performance on migration should be reviewed every year, through an annual migration day in parliament which should involve consulting members of the public."

The Home Secretary has tasked the MAC to publish an annual report on immigration. In a letter addressed to the Home Secretary in January, MAC Chair Professor Alan Manning provided some more detail on timings and what this might cover:

> "We envisage our annual report will examine the effectiveness of immigration policies and make an ongoing assessment of their impacts, which could include making further recommendations. Whilst the exact form of this report may change over time, we anticipate that it will consider how impacts vary across regions and sectors. The MAC's objective is to maximise the welfare of the resident population and we will assess impacts through this lens. We anticipate our first annual report will be published in Autumn 2020, though this is dependent on the extent of any further commissions from the government."[7]

FIGURE 8:
FACTORS AFFECTING CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF MIGRATION

Source: ICM poll for British Future, 10-13 January 2020; n = 2,305.

Government ministers held to account and forced to resign if they make serious mistakes

7% | 23% | 61%

Better ways of dealing with the local impacts of migration on housing and public services

11% | 26% | 53%

Increasing the Home Office budget so it can employ more immigration officers and make better use of technology

10% | 26% | 52%

Better support to help migrants integrate and become part of their local communities

15% | 33% | 40%

■ Less confident   ■ No difference   ■ More confident
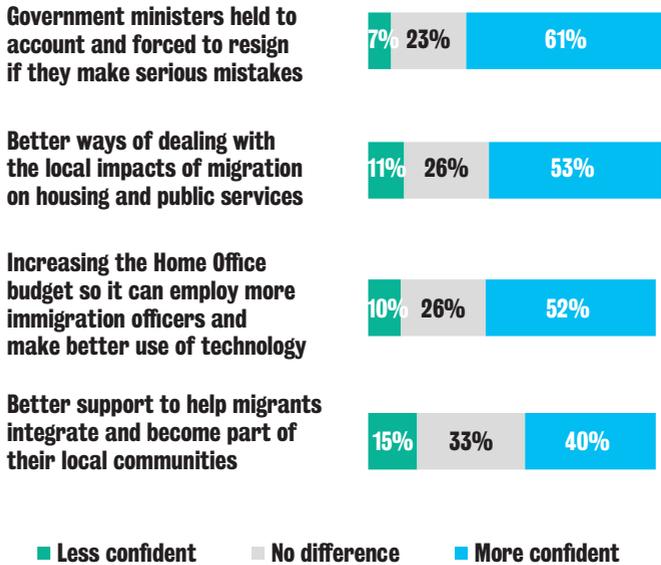
It will be important to the building of public confidence on immigration that this report receives sufficient public and parliamentary scrutiny and discussion.

The government has also suggested that it may consider reforms to the Home Office in order to make the department's borders and immigration function work more effectively. Most of the public (52 per cent) agrees that increasing the Home Office budget so it can employ more immigration officers and make better use of technology, would make them more confident in the government's ability to manage immigration.

A further potential change of policy that has received some discussion is the potential introduction of a regional element to immigration policy, such as offering more points toward a visa for those who are taking up a job offer in a nation or region that needs more migrant workers. The recent MAC report advised against such a policy. But it would be unlikely

to meet with significant public opposition: only 21 per cent of people are against the Scottish and other devolved governments having powers to decide how many visas are issued to people who want to come and work in those parts of the UK. Twice as many people (46 per cent) agree with the idea. In Scotland, support is stronger still: most people in Scotland agree with this policy (57 per cent), with one third saying they "strongly agree" (31 per cent). Only 20 per cent disagree with the policy.

When we asked the public what attributes should earn more points, committing to work in a region or area that needs more workers, such as Scotland, was seen as meriting high points by a quarter of respondents (26 per cent) and medium points by 39 per cent of people. The response was only slightly higher in Scotland, where 30 per cent would give high points to those committing to work in a region or area that needs more workers and 33 per cent medium points.

Integration and citizenship

Most people's understanding of immigration is seen through a local lens, in terms of how they feel it affects the place where they live.[8] Some 53 per cent of the public would feel more confident in the government's ability to manage immigration if there were better ways of dealing with the local impacts of migration on housing and public services, with 58 per cent of people who voted Conservative in 2019 and 51 per cent of people who voted Labour in agreement.

Getting integration right matters, too. The MAC report suggests that the government needs to think more about how immigration, integration and citizenship policies link up, but offers no advice on how to do it.[9] Getting that right will be key to securing public trust in how we manage immigration to the UK. Some 40 per cent of people would feel more confident in the government's ability to manage immigration if there was "better support to help migrants integrate and become part of their local communities".

"Most people's understanding of immigration is seen through a local lens, in terms of how they feel it affects the place where they live."
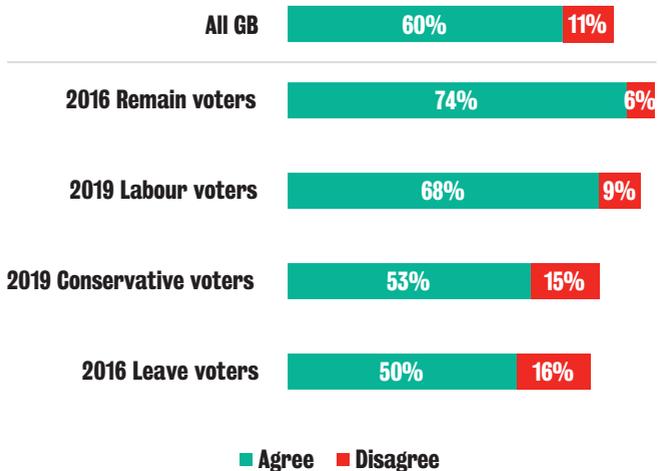
The government is retaining its Youth Mobility visa scheme and extending it to migrants from the EU. While there are many merits in such schemes (countries such as Australia and New Zealand also have them), our poll finds that the public prefer it when migrants stay and settle in the UK, over the churn of short-term migration. Seeing migrants make the decision to become British citizens often dispels public concerns about integration. Three in five people (60 per cent) agree with the statement that "if someone decides to live in Britain long-term, it is a good thing if they have an opportunity to become British by taking citizenship". Just 11 per cent of people disagree.

This position also has support from groups who tend to be less positive about immigration. Some 53 per cent of 2019 Conservative voters agree with this pro-citizenship position, with only 15 per cent of Tories disagreeing. And exactly half of those who voted Leave in the EU referendum support migrants having the opportunity to become British, with just 16 per cent disagreeing.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "If someone decides to live in Britain long-term, it is a good thing if they have an opportunity to become British by taking citizenship."

FIGURE 9:
SHOULD LONG-TERM MIGRANTS HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO BECOME CITIZENS?

Source: ICM poll for British Future, 10-13 January 2020; n = 2,305.

	Agree	Disagree
All GB	60%	11%
2016 Remain voters	74%	6%
2019 Labour voters	68%	9%
2019 Conservative voters	53%	15%
2016 Leave voters	50%	16%

■ Agree ■ Disagree

2. Less heat, more light? Long-term trends in immigration attitudes

Professor Bobby Duffy, the Policy Institute, King's College London

The image of Britain as always obsessing about immigration is largely a reflection of our poor collective memory. It has become such a feature of commentary and analysis in the past few years that it can seem that the public has always had a consistent focus on the issue, and that this underlying fact was just brought to the fore by the EU Referendum and its aftermath.

But the reality is that there has been much more change and nuance in immigration attitudes than may be obvious to us now.

For decades before the early 2000s, immigration barely registered in survey questions asking people what they see as the most important issues facing the country. This was true for *Daily Mail* readers as much as *Guardian* readers, Conservatives as much as Labour supporters. It just wasn't top of mind, regardless of your underlying outlook or values.

This changed when migrant numbers increased from the late 1990s. When you plot these real changes in actual numbers against attitudes and media coverage, there's a clear delayed reaction and transmission mechanism for concern. First, numbers went up steeply, and few people noticed for a year or two. Next, media stories about immigration and asylum shot up, increasing fivefold in five years. As this coverage increased, salience of the issue among the public rose a step or two behind, until it was regularly the top concern in the country between 2005 and the financial crisis in 2008.

Today, immigration again barely makes the top 10 in regular polling questions on the most important national issues. ICM research for this report shows that 41 per cent said immigration was very important in deciding how they voted in the 2019 election, behind nearly all the other issues asked about, including big-ticket themes like the NHS, the economy and Brexit, but also the environment, welfare and education.

Of course, this is partly because immigration is tightly wrapped up in Brexit, which still vies with the NHS as the most pressing concern for the country. Declines in the salience of immigration also don't necessarily mean that people are positively in favour of immigration now – just that it is no longer front of mind. There is a long history of migration scepticism in Britain: in the 1960s, over 80 per cent of the population said that too many immigrants had been let into the country and this stayed at over 70 per cent throughout the 1980s.

But there has been consistent softening in these views in recent years across various studies and measures, starting before the EU referendum vote and continuing since. Asked, for instance, whether they think immigration has been good or bad for the country, back in 2011 nearly two-thirds of people said the impact of immigration was negative. This has fallen to around one-third in recent studies.

There seem to be two main explanations for this shift, which can be roughly characterised as "reassurance" or "regret".

The first is the idea that some people feel they can now say that immigration has positive aspects, because they believe numbers will be lower in the future. Even though net migration has not shifted significantly in reality (lower EU migration has been balanced by increased migration from the rest of the world), the current rhetoric and future promise is of more control.

> Today, immigration again barely makes the top 10 in regular polling questions on the most important national issues."

Regret, on the other hand, could be driven by a better understanding of what we're losing from lower immigration: as warnings of skills shortages and economic impacts increase, and as we think more about what we lose from decreased diversity, the extent to which the country benefits from immigration becomes more obvious to some. Mirroring that, media coverage and negative slant within immigration stories have declined in the last couple of years.[10]

There is evidence for both these explanations playing a part. When you ask people who've become more positive about immigration why they changed their views, it is an almost perfect balance between the two explanations, with around four in ten citing a "regret" or "reassurance" rationale. Even apparently straightforward changes in immigration attitudes have competing drivers.

This points to the challenge for politicians that immigration policy poses. Despite the promise of greater immigration control, and a clear commitment to all sorts of economic trade-offs to deliver this control, only 15 per cent agree, in this latest survey, that the government has dealt with immigration competently and fairly. Of course, it's early days, and big chunks of the public are giving them the benefit of the doubt: the historic trends show a pretty iron rule of seven in 10 being actively dissatisfied with any government's immigration policy, and only half say that now.

In many ways this apparent historic stability in dissatisfaction with any government on immigration is a reflection of the change and subtlety of attitudes over time. Immigration policy is not easy because our views are nuanced and shifting – not because there is a simple answer out there that previous governments have just ignored.

3. Is Britain as polarised on immigration as we're led to believe?

Dr Kirstie Hewlett, the Policy Institute, King's College London

Immigration is often held up as one of the most divisive issues in the EU referendum campaign, playing a defining role in how people identified as "Leavers" or "Remainers". Yet the extent to which immigration remains a polarising issue today is somewhat unclear.

For an issue to be polarising requires more than disagreement. Published last year by the Policy Institute at King's College London, our *Divided Britain?* report highlights the fundamental difference between issue-based polarisation and affective polarisation.

Issue polarisation refers to deep-set and often heated disagreement in attitudes formed around one or more policy positions or issues. Affective polarisation is more subliminal. It refers to when we align our identity with a political party or group, and then distrust or dislike the other side, and distance ourselves socially from them.[11] While both forms of polarisation can and do coexist, an individual could be affectively polarised even if they don't disagree on issues, and vice versa.

There are a range of ways we might measure the extent to which we're polarised on an issue such as immigration. Let's first consider salience. Enough people need to be suitably concerned about a given issue, relative to others, for it to be considered meaningfully polarising. Salience is therefore greater when the mass public cares strongly about an issue, rather than just enclaves of the population.
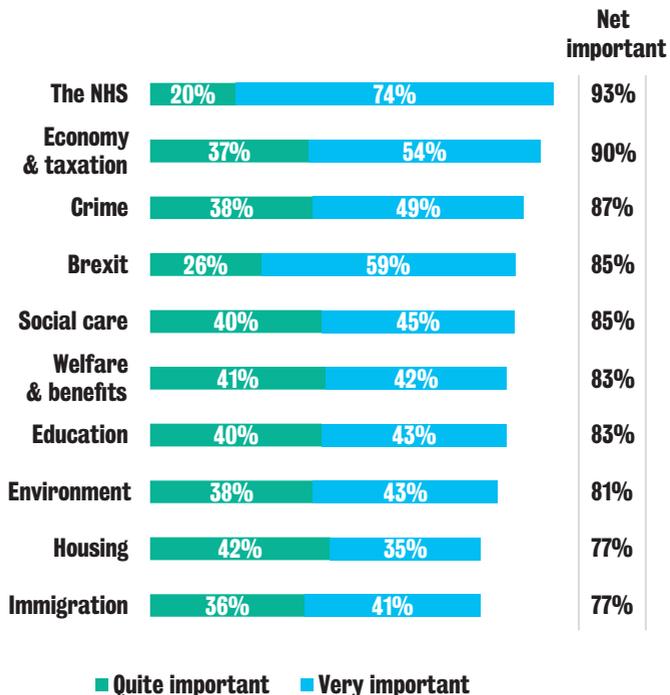
As highlighted in the previous chapter, after steadily growing since the late 1990s, the salience of immigration has recently declined, with concern about immigration falling behind a range of other issues, such as the NHS, the economy and Brexit. In ICM research for this report, we asked respondents to rank 10 policy issues according to how important, if at all, they were in determining their vote in the 2019 general election. Far from being the most salient, immigration was bottom of the list.

Nor have we lost common ground in our views on immigration. The new ICM survey shows that over half of the population are Balancers when it comes to immigration: when asked to rank the impact of immigration on the UK, including their local community,

Thinking about the party that you voted for in the 2019 general election, how important, if at all, was their policy on each of the following issues in determining your decision to vote for them?

FIGURE 10:
SALIENCE OF
10 PROMINENT
POLICY ISSUES

Source: ICM poll for British Future, 10-13 January 2020; n = 2,305.

|	Quite important	Very important	Net important
The NHS	20%	74%	93%
Economy & taxation	37%	54%	90%
Crime	38%	49%	87%
Brexit	26%	59%	85%
Social care	40%	45%	85%
Welfare & benefits	41%	42%	83%
Education	40%	43%	83%
Environment	38%	43%	81%
Housing	42%	35%	77%
Immigration	36%	41%	77%

■ Quite important ■ Very important

on a 10-point scale, 56 per cent of the population placed their views in the middle (giving a score between 4-7). And those with stronger preferences were relatively evenly split between each end of the spectrum: 24 per cent were positive about the impact of immigration (8-10) and 20 per cent negative (1-3).

On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, including your local community? (1 is most negative, 10 is most positive)
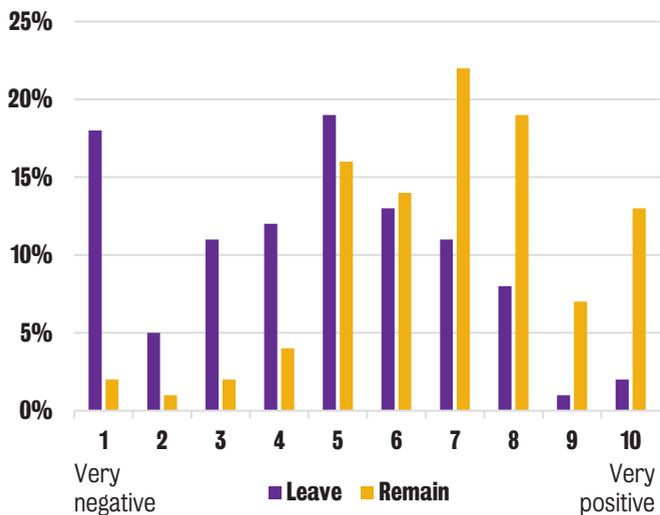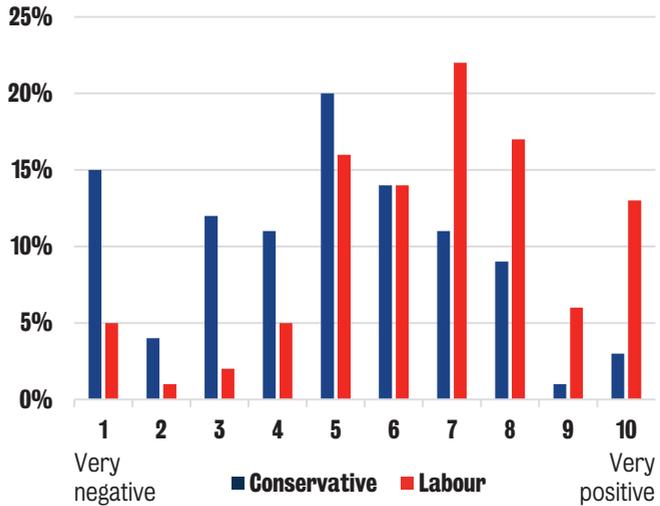
> **There is remarkable consensus across the political tribes that some flows of migration, such as high-skilled workers and students, should remain at current levels."**

If we were truly polarised on immigration, we would expect to see the opposite – a bimodal distribution – with the majority of the population placing their view at the furthermost ends of the spectrum. While we do see the greatest variance of opinion when we compare the distribution of attitudes between Conservative or Labour voters, and those who voted to Leave or Remain, there is still considerable common ground, with a substantial crossover of opinion in the middle of the spectrum.

When considered at a general level, however, there is clear disagreement about what we do next. A large majority of Conservative and Brexit Party voters want to see the amount of immigration into the UK reduced (77 per cent and 90 per cent, respectively), compared to under a third of Labour, Lib Dem and SNP voters, who would prefer for immigration levels to remain as they are. This suggests that the way in which the government handles the new immigration policy has the potential to reignite divisions around immigration in the future – though, as highlighted in earlier chapters, there is remarkable consensus across the political tribes that some flows of migration, such as high-skilled workers and students, should remain at current levels, alongside consensus on a range of other facets of the debate, such as the right to citizenship for migrants who are long-term residents of the UK.

There also appears to be a link between how one views the impact of immigration and how divided our country feels. Three-quarters of respondents to the ICM survey agreed that British society is divided – and this belief was strongest among those who felt positively or negatively about immigration. Some 80 per cent of those who felt most strongly about immigration agreed that our society is divided – 11 percentage points higher than the Balancers.

Further research is needed to establish the extent to which this perception stems solely from our opinions on immigration, or whether it correlates with attitudes towards

other issues, as part of a connected set of views that inform or that we derive from our political identities. (In *Divided Britain?*, we referred to this as "conflict extension").

We also need to do more to understand how views on immigration are associated with affective forms of polarisation. Positions on immigration arguably play into well-evidenced affective divides around Brexit identities.[12] However, we know little about whether being pro- or anti-immigration has an independent effect on how we construct in- and out-groups, ie who we're willing to socialise with and how we see the other side. But what's clear is that when it comes to our attitudes towards the issue itself, immigration is not the polarising issue we often expect it to be.

2. Challenges for this parliament – politics and advocacy

4. Talking to the Red Wall: making immigration work in cities and in towns

Jill Rutter, British Future

The EU referendum drew attention to long-standing divisions across the UK, by education, wealth and power, age and ethnic group and by geography. In England and Wales, it was the biggest cities and university constituencies that voted to remain in the EU, while towns and smaller cities voted to leave.

Attitudes towards immigration were one of the most important factors that influenced voting patterns in 2016. Since the referendum, commentators have highlighted a clash of values on this issue, with this country's younger and more cosmopolitan cities set against its older, more socially conservative towns. The academics Will Jennings and Gerry Stoker write about the "two Englands" as "one that is metropolitan, global in outlook, liberal and more plural in its sense of identity, and one that is less liberal, more negative about the EU and immigration, more nostalgic and English in its identity."[13]

Demographic change has been a driver of this values divide. Age, education and social contact are factors that are associated with attitudes to immigration, with younger people and graduates being more likely to see immigration and ethnic diversity in positive terms than older people. Over the last 30 years, villages and towns have lost young people and graduates. In part, this has been caused by a loss of secure jobs in industries such as manufacturing, as well as by the expansion of university education: many young people who leave home to go to university never return. In

1990 the Higher Education Participation Rate stood at 17 per cent, while in 2016 it reached 50 per cent.[14]

This stark, place-based divergence in attitudes presents dilemmas to the main political parties. The Labour Party has traditionally drawn its support from both the inner cities and northern and midland industrial towns. How will Labour appeal to voters in both cities and towns? What should party activists say on the doorstep? These difficulties were highlighted in the 2015 general election campaign when the party issued instructions to "move the conversation on" if immigration was raised by voters.[15] The need to appeal to voters in towns and in cities is a challenge that the SNP will also face, should it achieve its aim of an independent Scotland.

> "The suburbs and commuter towns of England have become more diverse as minority ethnic populations move out of the inner cities."

The Conservatives now face a similar challenge. The party's heartlands were traditionally the suburbs, the towns of southern England and the countryside. While once largely white, the suburbs and commuter towns of England have become more diverse as minority ethnic populations move out of the inner cities.[16] In the 2019 general election, 50 of the 58 constituencies that the Conservatives gained were so-called "Red Wall" seats – Brexit-voting post-industrial towns in England and Wales. A dominant narrative, supported by polling, is that people who live in towns are more concerned than city dwellers about immigration. The temptation for the Conservatives could, therefore, be to sound tough on immigration to keep Stoke and Scunthorpe onside, though this approach risks alienating voters in Stevenage and Sutton, which it needs to appeal to if the party is to stay in power.

But how large are the differences in attitudes to immigration between cities and towns? Are we really a nation of two opposing tribes? And are there approaches to immigration policy that appeal to voters in cities *and* in towns?

## How different are cities and towns?

In looking at attitudes to immigration in cities and towns, we have drawn on the 2020 ICM survey as well as findings from the National Conversation on Immigration,[17] which was the largest ever public consultation on this subject, undertaken by British Future and HOPE not hate in 2017-18. As well as two surveys, the project conducted face-to-face discussions with representative groups of the public in 60 towns and cities across the UK.

The 2020 ICM poll asked: "On a scale of 1-10 do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, including your local community". The survey, like the National Conversation on Immigration, did show some differences in public attitudes to immigration between towns and cities, but also much common ground. It found majorities in both towns and cities who are Balancers on immigration: 57 per cent of people living in small towns gave a score of 4-7, and 50 per cent of those in large cities said the same. In small towns, the remainder split quite equally

On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, including your local community? (1 is most negative, 10 is most positive.)

Large city ■ Small town
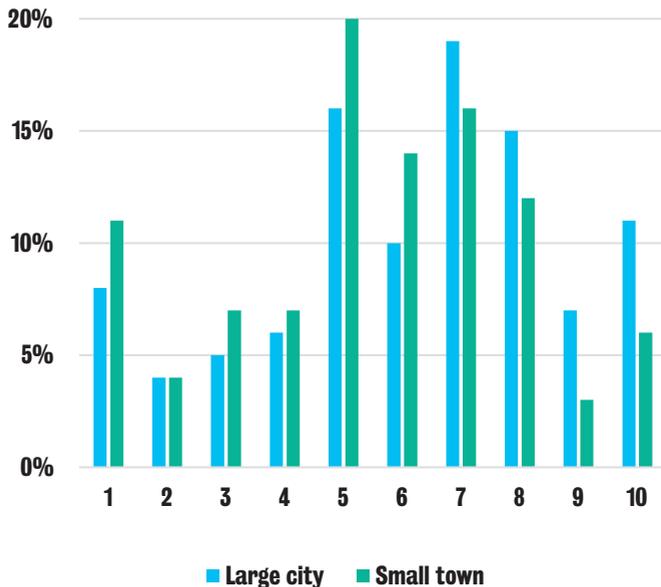
between those who viewed immigration negatively (with 23 per cent giving a score of 1-3) and positively (20 per cent giving a score of 8-10). People living in large cities, however, were significantly more likely to feel very positive about immigration, with 33 per cent giving a score of 8-10, than very negative (with only 17 per cent giving a score of 1-3).

The National Conversation on Immigration also found that most people, irrespective of where they live, are Balancers who see the pressures and gains of immigration. Typically, they see benefits from migration, in terms of the skills that migrants bring and the jobs they fill; but they also voice concerns about rapid population change, pressures on public services, social segregation and neighbourhood decline. Across towns and cities, most people want a controlled approach to migration: they expect migrants to contribute to the UK and they want everyone to be treated fairly:

> "Most people want a controlled approach to migration: they expect migrants to contribute to the UK and they want everyone to be treated fairly."

"I think immigration's positive for work, particularly within the NHS and things. I think we've got a lot of good doctors, nurses, professionals, who we wouldn't have if we didn't have immigration. But maybe some of the problems have been in the town centre, it's quite bad for immigration, the neighbourhoods have got worse because certain people have moved into the community who have been brought in through immigration, but then you've got good and bad in every community – so it's not just immigration." (Middlesbrough discussion, National Conversation on Immigration.)

"We do need immigration, and we also need compassion as well, for people who need refuge. I think it should be controlled but it should be controlled with a heart, but not some open-door policy." (Durham discussion, National Conversation on Immigration.)

The majority of people, wherever they live, also believe that the UK should help refugees fleeing war and persecution – a corollary of the desire for policy to be

fair and compassionate. The 2020 ICM research shows comparatively little difference in views about refugee protection between towns and cities.

Looking across the UK, there are some clear geographic differences in attitudes to immigration between big cities and the rest of the UK. The different demographies of towns and cities contribute to this, as does the fact that proportionally fewer international migrants live in towns, reducing positive social contact between newcomers and the resident population. Such contact has been shown to have a significant impact on attitudes to immigration, increasing empathy between people and reducing the extent to which migrants are seen as a threat.[18]

Our biggest cities also have a longer history of receiving international migration, so city dwellers are less likely to feel concerned by rapid changes brought by recent migration from the EU. And in some places the arrival of new migrants has not been well managed in terms of the impacts it can have on housing, pressures on the NHS and integration. The

"We need an asylum system that is effective, fair and humane so Britain can uphold our responsibility to offer refugee protection to those who need it." Percentage net agreement.

FIGURE 13: SUPPORT FOR PRINCIPLE OF REFUGEE PROTECTION IN TOWNS AND CITIES

Source: ICM poll for British Future, 10-13 January 2020; n = 2,305.

Rural	67%
Large city	66%
Small town	65%
Medium town	62%
Small city/ large town	57%
All GB	63%
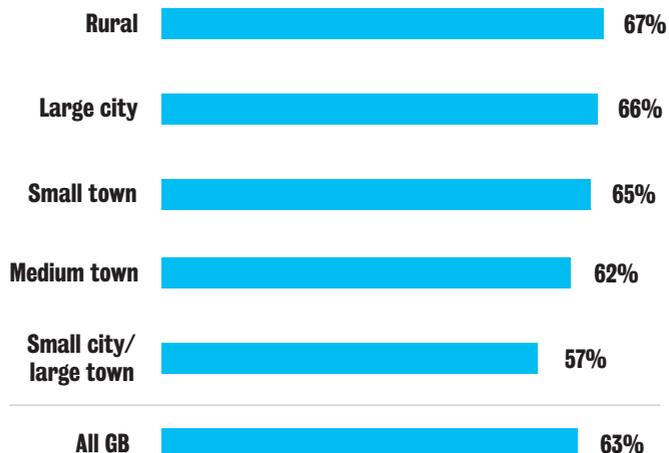
National Conversation on Immigration also found that many people felt that their views were not heard or valued, with this sentiment felt more strongly outside the south east:

> "I think the government should listen and consult, do things like this [the National Conversation on Immigration] and ask the people what they think because I think the reason why people are unhappy with immigration is because a long time ago they didn't ask or consult, it was very much 'we know better'." (Wrexham discussion, National Conversation on Immigration.)

Linking immigration and integration

While differences in attitudes between cities and towns are real, there is still much common ground. But there is a risk that these divisions will grow, unless action is taken to address them. This involves economic policy that is responsive to the needs of towns and devolution of decision-making to the regions and nations of the UK.

Immigration policy needs to be place-based, too.[19] British Future has long argued that there needs to be public engagement on immigration policy through an official "National Conversation" run by the Migration Advisory Committee. Giving the public greater voice would help address the view that immigration policy is a distant power visited (from London) upon towns.

The government needs to tell a different story about immigration that can be argued with confidence in cities and towns, across generations and social classes. Mixed messages – an "open" voice in cities and a "control" voice in towns – will not inspire public confidence. Government narratives need to focus on both control *and* fairness.

Immigration is a national issue which people see through a local lens. Pressures on housing, neighbourhood decline and failures of integration can all damage public consent for immigration. Employers who hire large numbers of migrant

workers under the new points-based system will be required to hold a certificate of sponsorship. A condition of this being awarded should be that they can show how they will help integrate migrant workers into the local area and deal with local impacts of immigration.

Running from 2016-2021, the Controlling Migration Fund has allocated £128 million to councils to address the impacts of recent migration, with local authorities able to decide how this money is spent. Yet such a fund only operates in England and this current funding round ends in March 2021. This fund must continue, and there should be extra investment in integration in areas with high levels of temporary migration and to increase levels of social contact across ethnic divides. All four nations of the UK need more ambitious integration strategies.

The direction of immigration policy must encourage and not undermine integration. Only by doing this can we reconcile the "two Englands" and put in place an immigration system that works for the economy and has public support in all parts of the UK.

5. Can Boris get the balance right? Challenges for the Conservative government

Sunder Katwala, British Future

To the victor, the spoils. Boris Johnson won the election that brought the acrimonious hung parliament of 2017-19 to an end, persuading enough voters to punish his parliamentary opponents to gain a decisive majority. The Prime Minister's prize is to govern: to make the key decisions about Brexit, including the immigration reforms that come with it. With great power comes clear accountability too. Having taken control of parliament, the Conservatives own this reset moment for immigration. They also own the trade-offs to get this right for the economy, for society, and to secure the confidence of the public too.

The Johnson government understands that most voters are "Balancers" on immigration, seeing both pressures and gains. That is why the Conservative election manifesto narrative contained the most conscious of balancing acts – cycling through key themes of "Control" (an Australian-style points system), "Contribution" (global Britain open to the skills we need) and "Compassion" (acknowledging the "disgrace" of the Windrush scandal and promising to protect EU nationals' rights). The manifesto's self-assessment was that it offered "a balanced package of measures that is fair, firm and compassionate".

Those Balancer slogans were well crafted for the Conservative electoral coalition of 2019. Turning them into policy depends on navigating the challenges which could knock the balancing act off course.

The government's Balancer instinct is that a new global UK immigration system, if it is more restrictive than EU free movement, can also be more open to some flows of non-EU migration. This could strike the right balance between securing public consent and easing the worst fears of business, which needs people to fill gaps in the workforce. However, if the primary question at the end of this parliament is still whether overall numbers have fallen – and by how much – then this government may be setting itself up to fail.

Boris Johnson came to office confident of escaping that immigration numbers trap. This pro-Brexit Prime Minister is instinctively more liberal on immigration than his predecessor. Theresa May, the reluctant Remainer of 2016, saw the vote to Leave primarily as a refreshed mandate for her long, persistently unsuccessful battle to slash net migration. Ditching her net migration target, missed for 39 successive quarters, was pretty much Boris Johnson's first act as Prime Minister last summer. Downing Street explained that the new Prime Minister "did not want to play a numbers game" on immigration. The question driving policy would no longer be "whatever it is, how can we get less of it?".

> If the primary question at the end of this parliament is still whether overall numbers have fallen – and by how much – then this government may be setting itself up to fail."

Instead, this new Balancer government wants to see some flows of migration rise, and others fall. This Prime Minister rarely misses any opportunity to declare that he wants Britain to be "a giant magnet" for scientists from around the world. Dropping the one-size-fits-all target has unlocked the broad cross-party and public consensus on the gains of student and skilled migration, with more liberal rules to enable more overseas students to work in the UK after graduating from a British university. Nor does Johnson and his government want to refuse visas for doctors and nurses that NHS Trusts want to employ.

But very few of the political headaches of making immigration policy come from deciding whether scientists

or sports stars, doctors or nurses can get visas. Many of the challenging choices about migration for work are about mid-skill and low-skill migration. When employers say there is a need for people to come to work in care homes or hotels, construction sites or coffee shops, how often should the government say "no" – and how far is it willing to make a pragmatic public case that "control" of migration doesn't necessarily mean cutting it heavily?

The 2019 manifesto has reopened the numbers trap. As well as pledging to curb low-skill migration, the Conservatives made the late addition of a pledge to bring overall numbers down – though the policies in the manifesto appear as likely to maintain or moderately increase immigration overall as to reduce it. Because of shifting patterns of migration since the 2016 referendum, EU net migration contributed 48,000 to net migration in the last 2019 figures, while non-EU migration contributed 229,000. That was before new reforms make the system a little bit more open to some workers from outside the EU.

The biggest question about whether the Johnson government will stay the Balancer course is political. Does Boris Johnson want to polarise or depolarise on immigration?

The Balancer agenda aims to depolarise – seeing the much reduced salience of immigration since 2016 as a chance to take the heat out of the debate, making it a more pragmatic question of the controlled migration that Britain chooses to have.

That could fit well with a Conservative focus on delivering for the unusual constituencies they had rarely won before. As ICM's polling for this report shows, most of Boris Johnson's new voters are part of the Balancer majority – who worry about the pace of change and support controls and selective reductions, while welcoming migrant skills in the NHS and the economy.

Yet there could be political pressure to stoke up "culture war" politics, rather than to defuse it. If the hard yards of delivering on infrastructure, growth and reviving town high streets make slow progress, picking symbolic identity fights with the cultural left – over crime and terrorism, or immigration and human rights – could seem tempting. Political opponents often suggest this may be the tactic of a new Trump-Boris axis.

> The 2019 manifesto has reopened the numbers trap."

Polarising on immigration would have costs. It would mean more conflict with business, and would sacrifice the "global Britain" brand which Johnson uses to contrast his vision of Brexit from Nigel Farage's. There would be electoral risks of fuelling geographical and generational polarisation, too. The 2019 "realignment" succeeded where the 2017 Conservative election campaign fell short – but the think-tank Onward has made an influential case that the government will need to deliver for "Workington Man", while also narrowing the electoral generation gap and broadening the Conservatives' appeal to minority voters.

That could lead the government to deepen the Balancer agenda, not to abandon it. It might involve a new deal with business, asking employers to step up and play their role in rebuilding public confidence, with more hands-on support on local integration and learning English, and linking skills strategies more closely to the pragmatic use of migration to help plug skills gaps.

The government has an opportunity to restore public confidence in immigration – but not if it seeks to turn up the heat on the issue, rather than striking a more balanced tone.

6. Can Labour build its bridge on immigration?

Sunder Katwala, British Future

Questions of identity are at the heart of Labour's post-election inquest, after a doubly traumatic result for many in the party extinguished both Labour's hopes of governing and the chance of remaining in the European Union.

While immigration was not a high-profile issue in the election campaign, a broader post-Brexit culture clash over questions of identity broke up the coalition of voters that Labour would have needed to win. Many social democratic parties across western democracies have had similar experiences – though the stark divides in post-Brexit voting behaviour, drawn along generational and geographic lines, hit Labour especially hard in the current electoral system, with the party's vote becoming more concentrated in the city seats that it already held.

The politics of a "culture war" – between the polarised identity tribes of the liberal left and conservative right – present a dangerous trap for Labour. But defusing a culture war may be more easily said than done, especially if party members fear that this means conceding defeat or selling out on core questions of identity and values by pandering to extreme, nativist opinions.

Labour's internal consensus on immigration

The candidates in the 2020 Labour leadership contest seem unlikely to disagree much about immigration. The contenders are prioritising the party audience: and it is not difficult to find common ground when Labour is talking to itself.

Immigration is probably the issue on which so-called Corbynistas and Blairites may be most likely to see eye-to-eye, though they may voice the case for openness differently. A broader pro-migration consensus across the party spans most members who wouldn't self-identify with either of those factional labels. The challenge for all strands of Labour opinion is to find common ground not just within the party, but also with enough of the public outside it too.

Labour's internal conversation may be too narrow to do this. Often, when the Labour Party talks to itself about immigration, it is a conversation among people who *don't* feel conflicted about immigration, talking about how they could secure the confidence of others who do. It is an exercise in trying to find the common ground with people who aren't in the room.

Labour's internal debate can also focus too heavily on policy answers. MPs and party members have suggested, for example, that sceptical voters would have been reassured by an explanation of how the UK did not apply all of the controls available within the freedom of movement rules. Yet our National Conversation on Immigration found micro-policies of this type have next to no general public salience.[20] They may or may not be sensible policies, but their scope for public reassurance is consistently over-estimated by politicians.

Why the policy debate of 2020 will be overtaken by events

The current leadership contest is unlikely to decide key features of Labour's immigration policy at the next general election, perhaps in 2024. Instead, candidates are converging on a shared position, on defending freedom of movement, which is likely to be overtaken by events this year and next.

After Brexit day, all of the leadership candidates have articulated the broad internal consensus in the Labour Party on the future UK–EU relationship, which is in favour of

> " Candidates are converging on a shared position, on defending freedom of movement, which is likely to be overtaken by events this year and next."

seeking the closest relationship with the single market that is possible. This entails accepting freedom of movement – so most Labour politicians have concluded that they may as well argue for it as a positive good, rather than simply the necessary price of club membership.

That is a natural case for Labour to make during this year of Brexit transition – but is almost certainly another argument that was lost on general election night. It will be the new Leader of the Opposition's job to scrutinise the government during the UK–EU negotiations and the forthcoming 2020 Immigration Bill, and to propose alternatives, though the Commons' arithmetic means an unlikely political earthquake would be required for Labour's plans to prevail.

Labour's current policy approach also faces a tension between supporting the closest UK–EU links, but also accepting the fairness case against differentiating between EU and non-EU migration. The party does support several pro-migration calls for non-EU policy change – including reducing the family migration threshold, ending indefinite detention and letting asylum seekers work. But it is unlikely to follow the logic of combining EU free movement and a global system through to proposing global free movement in its 2024 general election manifesto.

Responding to questions after a Brexit Day speech, in which he insisted that the Leave versus Remain divide must end, Keir Starmer also proposed restoring freedom of movement after it is abolished. Those are difficult aims to reconcile: reintroducing free movement would be the single policy proposal most likely to split opinion down 2016 referendum lines. Any workable proposal to restore free movement would have to be located in a broader policy for the UK–EU relationship, and nobody can know yet where that may stand in four years' time.

Whatever the candidates say this spring, Labour is likely to have to review the central elements of its immigration policy again by the middle of the parliament.

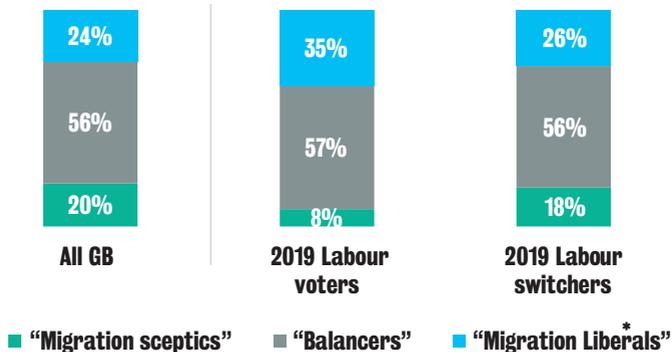## A bridging agenda must look beyond the party to the electorate

The challenge for Labour in 2020 is less about policy than about coalitions of support. Leadership contender Lisa Nandy is among the candidates to propose a "red bridge" to reunite Labour's potential vote.

Both during and beyond the leadership contest, the party needs to face outwards and find practical ways to reduce the social distance between the party membership and the potential Labour voters they are talking about winning back.

On a scale of 1–10, do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, including your local community? (1 is most negative, 10 is most positive.)

FIGURE 14:
ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION AMONG 2019 LABOUR VOTERS AND LABOUR SWITCHERS

Source: ICM poll for British Future, 10-13 January 2020; n = 2,305.

All GB	2019 Labour voters	2019 Labour switchers
24%	35%	26%
56%	57%	56%
20%	8%	18%

■ "Migration sceptics"   ■ "Balancers"   ■ "Migration Liberals"*

* Those who voted Labour in the 2017 General Election but did not vote Labour in the 2019 General Election

A Labour bridging agenda on immigration won't reach everybody. The party has little chance of reaching the quarter of the public with the very toughest views. What it needs is a broad coalition of left-liberals and left-leaning Balancers. The political challenge is to do so in ways that reduce the distance between the Labour party itself and

the potential Labour voters they are talking about winning back. The internet makes this harder, given the speed and intensity of online debate, which amplifies the most polarised views over the quieter majority.

It is noticed less often that "culture war" polarisation can be bad news for the groups that make up the left-liberal tribe. Labour voters in the social groups more likely to sit on the liberal left – graduates, the under-40s, those who live in cities and university towns, and ethnic minorities – would find themselves stuck in a "coalition of the losers" unless Labour can succeed in broadening its appeal, electorally and geographically, to give itself a chance of governing and delivering some of what its core supporters might want.

But the internal party debate becomes more polarised if it seems to be framed as a question of "values versus electability", given the party's divisions and conflicted views about its record in power and opposition under Blair, Brown and Corbyn.

Labour may find more confidence in a bridging agenda if it thinks about this as a question not just of electability, but of the mission and purpose of a centre-left party in polarised times. Labour can struggle to find its voice on identity – because many in the party, who know what they stand for on economics, inequality and public services, fear that engaging with identity issues will prove an unwelcome and divisive distraction.

Yet Labour has a long, somewhat untold, history as a bridging project. The party's founding mission was about integration – to bring organised Labour into the political system – and succeeded in ways that shaped Britain's twentieth century at home and abroad, with the cross-class coalitions that built a new welfare settlement. In the post-war era, Labour gave new Commonwealth citizens a stake in society, pioneering anti-discrimination laws and minority voices in parliament that became a cross-party norm. So

"

Labour has a long, somewhat untold, history as a bridging project."

Labour could see its role as a bridging party in this century not just as a matter of votes but of values too: that those who seek to govern in polarised times must show that they can bridge the divides between the towns and the cities, and between majorities and minorities, in a shared society.

There are many approaches to immigration, integration and citizenship that could strengthen confidence across this broad coalition. Labour needs to speak for an agenda that prioritises fairness to those who come to Britain and to the communities that they join, and which invests in strengthening contact and sustained solidarity across these groups.

To build that bridging agenda, the challenge beyond the leadership contest is how Labour finds practical ways to make sure that it isn't only finding common ground inside the party, but beyond it too.

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"Labour needs to speak for an agenda that prioritises fairness to those who come to Britain and to the communities that they join."

7. Business after Brexit: Can employers get a hearing on immigration in this parliament?

Steve Ballinger, British Future

There is a clear role in this parliament for business advocates on immigration policy, as the government looks to balance its commitment to end freedom of movement with the "Global Britain" brand and a much-discussed openness to skills and entrepreneurial talent. For that role to be productive, employers will need to reflect on the strategies and approaches that have been used before, with limited success, and develop new ways to constructively engage in the debates about immigration in the new parliament.

Before, during and after the EU referendum, the approach of business was to focus on the financial case for the immigration it needs to fill both high-skilled and lower-skilled jobs. The macro-economic case was valid but rang hollow with many voters, for whom percentage rises or falls in GDP felt very distant from their own lives. Employers struggled to overcome the public perception that this was a self-interested argument, that "immigration may be good for you but why does that make it good for me?". And so the debate could look rather binary: politicians could give either voters or business what they wanted, but not both.

This was predicated on a misreading of public attitudes to immigration. Most people think that immigration brings pressures to Britain, particularly in places that have experienced rapid change, but also that it brings benefits too. They welcome the contribution that migrants make to our economy, our culture and to public services like the

> "A constructive approach from business will also mean engaging with debates about integration and managing local pressures."

NHS. Business voices looking to make their case in the new parliament will need to engage and reflect this nuance in their own approach.
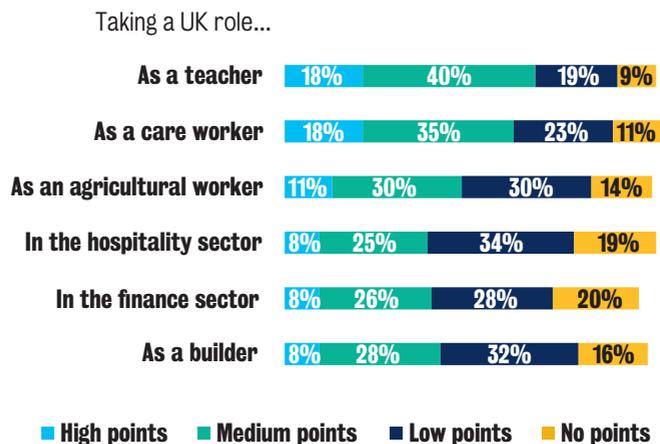
So business voices advocating for the benefits of immigration will need to make the case for migration that benefits the economy and society in ways that can secure political and public consent. There is consensus in support of high-skilled and student migration, but a greater challenge to unlock contingent public support for migration into low- and semi-skilled roles.

And some sectors that rely on migrant workers will need to make a stronger case for it to continue. While our research found that most people think a new points-based system should look favourably on those coming to work in the NHS or social care, they were more sceptical about the construction and hospitality sectors.

For each of the following characteristics, please tell us whether you think they should earn a person a high number of points, a medium number of points, a low number of points, or no points at all?

FIGURE 15:
SHOULD TAKING A ROLE IN A PARTICULAR SECTOR EARN PEOPLE MORE POINTS TOWARDS A VISA?

Source: ICM poll for British Future, 10-13 January 2020; n = 2,305.

Taking a UK role...

Role	High points	Medium points	Low points	No points
As a teacher	18%	40%	19%	9%
As a care worker	18%	35%	23%	11%
As an agricultural worker	11%	30%	30%	14%
In the hospitality sector	8%	25%	34%	19%
In the finance sector	8%	26%	28%	20%
As a builder	8%	28%	32%	16%

■ **High points**   ■ **Medium points**   ■ **Low points**   ■ **No points**

Employers must still make the case for the benefits of migration to the economy – and with attitudes to immigration overall getting warmer, it will get more of a hearing. But they must engage, too, with the pressures, and recognise the role that business can play in addressing (and creating) them. A constructive approach would develop and articulate plans to reduce the demand for immigration, whether by improving training to help produce more home-grown skilled employees, or reducing demand for low-skilled migrant labour (for instance, by increasing recruitment in the UK labour market, increasing productivity or investing in automation).

A constructive approach from business will also mean engaging with debates about integration and managing local pressures. Most of the public (53 per cent) would feel more confident about immigration being managed well if there were better ways of dealing with the local impacts of migration on housing and public services. While this is not the responsibility of business alone, it has an important role to play.

If the migrant workforce that an employer needs is placing pressures on local housing and services, business should play an active role in addressing them. If language barriers are hampering integration of new arrivals, employers could make space available for English language classes. This report recommends that employers would need to show that they will play an active role in the integration of new workers in the local community in order to be awarded the certificate of sponsorship needed to hire staff from overseas.

Boris Johnson's government will be determined to show that it can make a success of Britain's new relationship with Europe and the rest of the world. Economic success will be crucial to that story, and business actors can and should be one of the most effective voices arguing for reforms that work for the economy. Getting a hearing on immigration in the new parliament will require a shift

in approach, to a positive strategy that balances policy critiques with constructive alternatives that go beyond what government can do for business to include changes employers can make too.

3. Challenges for this parliament – policy

8. Will points win prizes? Immigration policy after Brexit

Jill Rutter, British Future

The next twelve months will be a period of significant change in the immigration system, with the unveiling of the British points-based system and legislation later this year. The net migration target has been dropped and the government intends to bring in a new set of measures to replace it. By January 2021, the Home Office will start to roll out its new system covering those who want to come to the UK to work, whether they are from inside or outside the EU.

All of this presents an opportunity to make the case for an immigration system that works for employers, is fair to migrants and is capable of securing public trust and support. What will it take to achieve these three aims?

A British points-based system

A points-based immigration system is one that selects labour migrants on the basis of attributes such as skills, work experience, language ability or age. Australia and Canada both have such a system and prioritise applicants by allocating points to these characteristics, with those who score highest offered a visa.

Most countries do not use points-based systems to allocate work visas, instead using employer-driven systems whereby would-be migrants need a job offer or a sponsoring employer. Austria and New Zealand currently use a mixed system, which allocates points based on a person's characteristics and requires a job offer or sponsoring employer. The current proposal for a British points-based system is a mixed system

too, in that most migrants will need a sponsoring employer as well as sufficient points.

The new British points-based system will replace existing policy which distinguishes between workers from inside and outside the EU. Currently, citizens of EU countries work in the UK under free movement rules which will end in December 2020. Workers from outside the EU currently enter as:

• Highly skilled Tier 1 workers, with 6,111 such visas granted in 2018;

• Tier 2 skilled workers (102,653 visas in 2018); and

• Through temporary schemes (67,372 visas in 2018).[21]

The government has now made its plans clear in a policy statement published in February 2020.[22] It is proposed that the British points-based system will comprise three different routes into the UK:

• An exceptional talent route for highly skilled migrants and entrepreneurs. These individuals will not require a job offer and will be fast-tracked into the UK to take up jobs, for example in the STEM sectors.

• A skilled worker route for those who have a confirmed job offer in the UK. Those who come under this route will have to be skilled (above skills level 3)[23] and earn above a salary threshold, likely to be set at £25,600.

• International students, who will require sufficient points to enter the UK.

70 points will be needed to enter the UK and it is likely that most people coming through the skilled worker routes will require a sponsoring employer. A previous proposal to pilot a 12-month temporary "guest worker" scheme

to cover low-skilled migration for work has now been dropped. Instead, the government will expand its seasonal agricultural worker scheme to 10,000 places and open up two-year Youth Mobility visas to those from the EU.

Restoring public trust

So far, the debate about the new British points-based system has been dominated by employers who are concerned about the impact of the salary threshold on their ability to recruit workers in sectors where salaries are low, such as social care. But what does the public think and can a British points-based system secure broad public support?

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> There is no doubt that a points-based system has cut-through with the public."

There is no doubt that a points-based system has cut-through with the public. When the National Conversation on Immigration organised public discussions in sixty towns and cities across the UK in 2018, the Australian points-based system was mentioned in every meeting. Far fewer had heard of the UK government's (now abandoned) net migration target, its headline policy at the time. An "Australian-style points-based system" was shorthand for a controlled and selective immigration system that meets the economy's needs.

> "I think bring in something like the Australian system. They've got it right to be honest. You can't really move to Australia unless you've got some kind of trade or education, that you can bring to the country. For example, I had a friend who's a barber, he's not a rocket scientist but that's how he was able to go because he could provide a service in Australia." (Knowsley discussion, National Conversation on Immigration.)

People know about the Australian system because they, or someone they know, have actually experienced it. "After I finished university, I thought about going to Australia," one man in Dumfries told our researchers. "To get into Australia, I needed to have so many pounds in my bank account. I

needed to be educated to a certain degree. I had to have a driver's licence with no points on it."

The public have views about the attributes that they think should earn a high number of points. As discussed in detail in earlier chapters, they would allocate high points to those who are "high-skilled", or are coming to the UK to work in the NHS or in a sector where there are high levels of vacancies. Spoken English, a clean criminal record and an existing job offer were also prioritised by the public. A high salary was seen as less important.

Filling vacancies across the UK

Another issue that has concerned policy makers is the extent to which the new points-based system can respond to vacancies that may be more acute in particular parts of the UK. Over a quarter of people in the ICM research felt that a commitment to work in a region that needs more workers should attract a high number of points and 39 per cent of people said it should attract a medium number of points. Overall 46 per cent per cent of people said that the devolved governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales should be able to decide how many visas are issued for people who want to work in these parts of the UK. Awarding extra points for a job offer in Scotland would be one way of making sure that the new points-based system can respond to these geographic gaps.

The requirement for those coming through the skilled worker route to have a sponsoring employer will mean that there is little risk of someone entering to take up a job in a sparsely-populated area and then moving on to the bright lights of the city. But those coming through the Exceptional Talent route do not require a job offer or a sponsor. It is important that those who come through this route are incentivised to work in all parts of the UK, not just its major cities.

Making the link between immigration and integration

Getting it right locally is key to getting the public consent for the immigration that the economy needs. This means encouraging migrants to learn English if they do not already speak the language. Successful integration means that newcomers and long-settled residents have contact with each other, so that new friendships are formed and "them and us" identities break down. A points-based system can also incentivise integration by allocating points for language fluency.

Giving the public a voice

Just over fifteen years ago the government opened up the UK labour market to workers from 10 new member states of the EU, without any transitional controls. EU citizens now make up over five per cent of the UK population, many of them now settled in parts of the country that had previously seen little international migration. It was in such towns that some people felt unsettled by rapid migration. A legacy of this period is the view that politicians do not consult or listen to people outside the big metropolitan areas. This is something that was heard time and time again during the National Conversation on Immigration. We are about to see another far-reaching change to immigration policy. This time round, the government would be wise to carry out some public consultation to give people a voice.

"This time round, the government would be wise to carry out some public consultation to give people a voice."

9. Fixing the system: improving Home Office performance

Jill Rutter, British Future

While immigration has become less salient, trust in the government's ability to manage migration is low. Our ICM polling found that just 15 per cent of the public agreed that "on the whole, I feel that the government has managed immigration to the UK competently and fairly".

A number of factors have contributed to low public trust – some local, some national. But among them is the poor performance of the Home Office across a wide range of issues. The Windrush scandal in 2018 and the failure to remove foreign national offenders in 2006 were high profile issues that led to Home Secretaries resigning. Much lower profile, but equally damaging, have been "everyday" failures such as delays and mistakes in the asylum system. Fixing the Home Office must be high among the government's priorities.

The Home Office is the fifth largest government department in terms of the number of staff that it employs. Over 8,000 staff work for the Border Force and 7,500 people work for UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). The department lost staff in the round of public spending cuts after 2010, but staffing is now above 2010 levels.

The Home Office has seen considerable restructuring over the years, often in response to high profile failures. Its three main immigration divisions are now UKVI, the Border Force and Immigration Enforcement. It is UKVI which oversees asylum determination, the EU Settlement Scheme as well as applications for citizenship in the UK and applications for visas from overseas. Total Home Office expenditure on immigration in the financial year 2018-2019 was £2.67

billion, although the Home Office's immigration function also generates an income – £1.95 billion in 2018-2019, mostly from visa fees.[24]

There are functions the Home Office performs well. The process of applying for a Tier 2 (General) visa takes about three months in the UK from start to finish. Tier 2 visas are currently the main route into the UK for skilled workers, with comparable processes in Australia taking 15-19 months. The US visa system is even slower, and in both the US and Germany there has been little progress in moving towards a digital system.[25] The EU Settlement Scheme had concluded 2,450,220 cases by the end of 2019, with most applicants receiving a decision very quickly.[26] But there are areas of work where the Home Office performs badly and where mistakes and delays have a high impact on people's lives.

The mistakes made in the Windrush generation's cases will be highlighted in a soon-to-be published "lessons learned" review. Asylum seekers face long delays in receiving decisions about their case and are barred from working while they wait. In the year 2018-2019, just 19 per cent of asylum seekers had their decisions concluded within six months, and of the Home Office's live asylum cases, 34 per cent of applicants had waited more than three years.[27] There were 16,772 asylum cases which dated back before March 2007.[28] In 2018, the Home Office made 21,119 asylum decisions, of which 33 per cent were positive (in that the applicant was allowed to remain in the UK) and 67 per cent were refused. But of those who appealed against a negative decision in that year, 38 per cent were successful. This amounts to 4,467 cases where the Home Office got it wrong the first time round.[29] As well as leaving people in stressful limbo, poor quality decision-making costs taxpayers money through costly appeals.

So why is the Home Office getting it wrong? The Institute for Government suggests that there has been an under-

investment in staff and IT in parts of the Home Office, and a disconnection between policy and operations.[30] An example of this is "country guidance" that describes human rights and security conditions in countries from which asylum seekers flee. Whitehall civil servants write such country guidance, but it is immigration officers in Croydon, Liverpool, Cardiff and other UKVI offices who have to use it to decide whether the asylum seeker sitting in front of them has a "well-founded fear of persecution". This is a hard task, made harder by the impenetrable nature of country guidance documents that are not written with caseworkers in mind.

Immigration law is notoriously complex, and this makes parliamentary and media scrutiny difficult. Since 2010 there have been over 6,000 changes to the immigration rules alone. In such a situation, it is near-impossible for most MPs to keep track of the changes and fulfil their role of scrutinising the work of the government.

Addressing underperformance

The Home Office needs to combine robust immigration controls with fairness to those who use the system. Achieving balance between these two policy aims has been difficult in the absence of any real strategy, save that of bearing down on numbers to meet the net migration target. Now that the Home Office has been liberated from this target, several things need to happen in order to improve this department's performance.

- The government should make sure that the introduction of the new points-based system involves extra investment in Home Office staff and technology in all parts of the immigration, asylum and nationality system.

- Action should be taken to avoid the EU Settlement Scheme turning into a new Windrush scandal, but on a much larger scale. Of the 2.45 million EU citizens who had applied to the EU Settlement Scheme by

the end of 2019, some 41 per cent had received pre-settled status. This gives someone five years' residency in the UK, and it is expected that when this expires, EU citizens will upgrade it and get the right to live in the UK permanently with settled status. The Home Office should set out a strategy to make sure that all EU citizens who qualify for the EU Settlement Scheme are able to secure permanent rights of residence in the UK, making sure that those awarded pre-settled status are able to upgrade their documentation.

⬧ The Home Office should use the opportunity of immigration reform to "clear the books" and look at ways of offering an affordable route to settlement and citizenship for those left in limbo, where they have been in the UK for more than 10 years, can speak English and have no unspent criminal convictions. Asylum applicants who have been waiting for years for their case to be concluded are a group who would benefit from such an approach. Offering a route to British citizenship for this group would enable them to contribute to the UK.

We need to find ways to increase transparency through real scrutiny of legislation and the work of the Home Office, and by implementing an annual Migration Day in parliament. We recommend that the Home Secretary should present an Annual Migration Day report to the House of Commons which makes recommendations for future policy over the year ahead, informed by advice from the Migration Advisory Committee, as well as a national and local programme of public engagement. Performance against targets and the Home Office's migration transparency data should be covered in the Annual Migration Day report. The MAC has now agreed to publish an annual report.

10. Immigration and integration: time to make the link

Sunder Katwala, British Future

Few things have more impact on people's consent for future immigration than their perception of how integration has been going so far. At this once-in-a-generation moment for immigration reform, policymakers should be asking what it can do for integration too.

That integration remains a missing link in the immigration reform debate is partly a long-standing blind spot: Britain never had a proper integration strategy over the post-war decades. Over the last decade, the absence of a link between immigration and integration was also a somewhat conscious policy choice. Theresa May, as both Home Secretary and Prime Minister, had a policy aim of "breaking the link between migration and settlement", seeking to reduce the number of migrants who become British citizens.

In this new and different post-Brexit context, Boris Johnson and Priti Patel should consider how to make the link between immigration and integration, seeking an approach to immigration policy which is consciously pro-integration, rather than indifferent or agnostic to it.

A government which looked at each area of immigration policy through an integration lens might explore several ways in which a proactive integration policy could increase public confidence in how we manage immigration and integration.

English language

Fluency in English is foundational to integration. Around 844,000 people living in England – 1.6 per cent of residents – do not speak English well or at all. Speaking

good English is a requirement for citizenship, and the government has set out how this can be reflected in the new points-based system.

The government needs to integrate this goal into a comprehensive strategy for universal fluency in English by 2030, with a 10-year plan to get there. This would include clarity about the roles and responsibilities of different actors, including promoting an expectation on employers to support workplace-based English provision, where relevant, as well as civic society efforts to supplement formal classes with volunteer-led conversation clubs that combine English learning with social contact.[31]

Temporary visas and routes to settlement

On mid-skill and low-skill migration, the government's initial instinct was to make a clear distinction, not just to whether people can come to work but also whether they can stay on. The 2018 white paper envisaged a £30,000 salary threshold, with the norm for migration for work below this level being on temporary 12-month visas which would not be renewable.[32] The intention was to create a route to plug the gaps for those coming to do lower-paid work, as long as they go home again a year or two later. But if the pace of change was a more important driver of immigration anxiety than overall numbers, the increased churn that comes with insisting on a "Gastarbeiter" model, where almost all low-skill migration is temporary, could increase that perception.

Reducing the salary threshold to £25,600 – or to £20,480 for jobs on a shortage occupation list – has the implication that those who come to work in mid-skill roles, such as teaching assistants, jobs in nurseries or on construction sites, should now be eligible for routes to settlement and citizenship. This is a welcome move away from the philosophy of breaking the link between work and settlement.

While media headlines focused on the decision not to allow a low-skilled work route, there may prove to be other

temporary routes. One possibility is that existing youth mobility schemes, offering a two-year visa for those under 30, could be extended from eight non-EU countries (which currently include Canada, Australia and New Zealand) to the EU27 as part of a UK–EU deal. It is essential that there are effective local strategies to integrate those who will only remain in the UK for a short period, whether they are students, seasonal agricultural workers or those who arrive through an expanded form of the Youth Mobility scheme.

A strategy for citizenship

Promoting citizenship is good for integration, encouraging migrants to put down roots and settle in the UK, and requiring new citizens to speak English to a decent standard and have an understanding of the society that they are joining.

> "
> The government does not have any clear objectives for its citizenship policy."

Yet the government does not have any clear objectives for its citizenship policy. It is embarking on a review of the role of the citizenship handbook, test and ceremonies, and could extend this to considering the broader purpose of citizenship policy. One reason that visa and citizenship fees are set comparatively high in an international context is to generate surplus income to fund other Home Office operations: little apparent consideration has been given to the public policy and social benefits of encouraging citizenship.

The Migration Advisory Committee's January 2020 report recommended ceasing to ratchet up the fees, prior to consideration of how to balance the aims of this policy.[33] Our ICM poll shows broad public support for a government policy of actively promoting citizenship when people come to live in Britain long-term. The settled status scheme means that three or four million European nationals will become permanent residents without being full citizens – the largest ever group of permanently resident, non-citizens in British history – and offers an opportunity to think about the value of citizenship. Alberto Costa MP is currently chairing a

British Future cross-party inquiry to explore constructive recommendations for reform of citizenship policy.

Regularisation

Another issue rarely connected to integration policy is that of the status of irregular migrants, which could make an unexpected return to the government's agenda during this parliament.

It seems unlikely that this would be on the political agenda if Boris Johnson was not Prime Minister. Politicians across the party spectrum have tended to steer clear of the issue for the last decade, since it proved a controversial flashpoint during the 2010 general election. Yet Johnson has been consistently in favour, supporting civic society calls for an "amnesty" as London Mayor, and reiterating his support for the principle more recently. He spoke about the issue during the EU referendum campaign of 2016, telling a Vote Leave rally five days before the referendum that the proposal could untrap those "unable to contribute to the economy, unable to pay taxes, unable to take a proper part in society ... it is the humane thing to do, it is economically rational and it would take back control of a system that is out of control".

That counter-intuitive intervention appeared to be largely an unplanned response to distance Vote Leave from the Nigel Farage "Breaking Point" poster, whose release had coincided with the assassination of the Labour MP Jo Cox later that same day. Yet Johnson has continued to reiterate this position at regular intervals since, clashing with Theresa May by making the case for a broader regularisation programme in Cabinet discussions of the Windrush scandal. Johnson told the House of Commons, during his first parliamentary appearance as Prime Minister in 2019, that he remains in favour of the proposal, saying that the practicalities of the issue needed further exploration but that he personally favoured seeking to regularise the status of thousands of people who had been in the UK long-term.

It is easy to see how regularisation might slip off the agenda again if it is crowded out by a full programme of issues on Brexit, immigration and domestic policy. Some inside government would be happy to see regularisation shelved, put into a "too difficult to think about box" as a potentially contentious and polarising cultural flashpoint. Yet a Conservative government pursuing this agenda ought to have strong prospects of unlocking broad cross-party and civic society consensus. Johnson may prove a particularly effective messenger in seeking to reassure the Balancer middle ground, in the context of a wider reform, that a well-managed regularisation process could be part of fixing the system by clearing the books, bringing those living long-term in the UK within the law.

Johnson might see both political risks and opportunities in a high-profile "amnesty" moment – in many ways the least Trump-like policy imaginable. It would also be possible for the government to take forward the regularisation agenda more incrementally: reviewing the process and existing routes for those who have been in the UK for ten years, and seeking to lower some of the barriers regarding eligibility and cost for those seeking to pursue them.

4. Recommendations

Recommendations

Immigration has been a divisive issue in the UK. Our latest report paints a mixed picture. The majority of the population has balanced views and sees the pressures and gains of migration. They support the principle of refugee protection, and believe that migration has brought economic and social benefits to the UK. At the same time, many people feel concerned about aspects of immigration such as pressures on GP surgeries and social segregation. The public want immigration to be controlled, but they want these controls to be fair.

While immigration has fallen in salience in the last three years, our research finds that public trust in the ability of the government to manage immigration is still low. Increased migration after 2004, alongside a failure to deal with local pressures, has led to a view that political leaders have mismanaged immigration; that they neither listen nor care, and are never held to account when things go wrong.

High-profile policy failures such as the Windrush scandal and the government's inability to meet the net migration target have also left their mark on the public's memory. Delays and mistakes in processing asylum applications reinforce the view that the Home Office is an under-performing department. Investment in Home Office staff and IT is long overdue.

In the next 12 months there is an opportunity to change this and rebuild public trust. The government has unveiled its plans to put in place a British points-based system for those who want to work in the UK, irrespective of whether they are from outside or inside the EU. The net migration target has been dropped and as part of this overhaul of the immigration system, the government plans to bring in a set of new measures to replace it. New immigration legislation will be presented to parliament. This provides

an opportunity to make the case for policy change, and an immigration system that works for employers, is fair to migrants and refugees, and secures public support and trust.

To achieve these aims, we are putting forward a set of recommendations that are based on five principles: greater public voice in the immigration system; investment in Home Office staff and IT; greater scrutiny and transparency; having a system that is responsive to the different social and economic conditions across the UK; and making sure that immigration policy does not undermine integration.

1. Increase public voice in the system

The government should make building public trust in immigration an explicit aim of immigration policy.

Public consultation on immigration and integration should be institutionalised by requiring that the Migration Advisory Committee conducts public engagement on these issues in all parts of the UK as part of its planned annual migration report.

The Home Office should use citizens' assemblies or other forms of engagement to involve the public in large or highly salient policy issues, such as the design of the new points-based system or the planned opening of an asylum hostel in a local community.

2. Invest in an immigration system that is efficient and fair

The government should make sure that the introduction of the new points-based system involves extra investment in Home Office staff and technology in all parts of the immigration, asylum and nationality system.

The Home Office should set out a strategy to make sure that all EU citizens who qualify for the EU Settlement Scheme are able to secure permanent rights of residence in the UK,

> " The government should make building public trust in immigration an explicit aim of immigration policy."

making sure that those awarded pre-settled status are able to upgrade their documentation.

3. Improve transparency and scrutiny

Hold an annual migration day in parliament, similar to budget day, and make sure that the Migration Advisory Committee's planned annual migration report is presented to the Westminster parliament for debate, and to the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The government should set up an independent statutory body that scrutinises proposed secondary legislation before it is presented to parliament, operating in a similar way to the Social Security Advisory Committee for the benefits system.

It should also make sure that the new suite of measures that will replace the net migration target includes targets on integration, such as the employment rate for refugees and progress towards achieving English language fluency.

4. Put place into immigration policymaking

The government should make sure that those coming to the UK through the work visa Exceptional Talent route, or as students, are incentivised to work or study in all parts of the UK and not just in its major cities.

Employers who hire migrant workers are required to hold a certificate of sponsorship. To gain it, they should have to show how they will help integrate migrant workers into the local area and deal with any local impacts of immigration. Similar obligations should be placed on universities as sponsors of international students.

There should be extra investment in integration in areas with high levels of temporary migration. Employers, universities and councils should be obliged to show how they will help the integration of those coming to the UK for short periods of time where relevant. Civil society organisations should

also be encouraged to help integrate those living in the UK on a temporary basis.

5. Make the links between immigration and integration

The government should make sure that the new points-based system incentivises integration by allocating points to those who can speak English and through the obligations placed on employers set out above.

It should also allow asylum seekers to work and support themselves if they have waited for more than six months for a decision on their case.

The government should encourage the uptake of British citizenship and conduct a review of fee policy, with the aim of reducing financial barriers to the acquisition of British citizenship.

It should also use the opportunity of immigration reform to look at ways of offering an affordable route to settlement and citizenship for those without status who have been in the UK for more than 10 years, can speak English and have no unspent criminal convictions.

Notes and references

Notes and references

1. Home Office (2020), *The UK's points-based immigration system: policy statement*. Available from gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-points-based-immigration-system-policy-statement/

2. Ibid.

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The immigration reforms of this parliament are set to be the biggest changes in British immigration policy for half a century.

Since the 1990s, Britain's immigration debate has been angry and polarised. Yet that has started to change in recent years. A less heated debate offers a chance for a more constructive discussion about the controls we want, the immigration we need and how the system can be managed effectively and fairly.

A new immigration system can look beyond Brexit to focus on rebuilding public trust on immigration and restoring voters' confidence in the government's ability to manage it well. A clear and nuanced understanding of public attitudes to immigration will therefore be essential.

The reset moment: immigration in the new parliament draws on new attitudinal research by ICM exploring public attitudes to a range of policies and issues relating to immigration and integration. The authors, from British Future and the Policy Institute at King's College London, hope it will be useful to those in civic society, politics and business seeking to inform the debate on the UK's new approach to immigration.

Our research draws on many disciplines and methods, making use of the skills, expertise and resources of not only the institute, but

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