

Dear Home Secretary

Congratulations on your appointment to one of the most important and challenging roles in government. As Home Secretary, you will have lead responsibility for keeping the public safe in security, terrorism and policing. Securing the status of over three million EU citizens in the UK will of course be a priority. You will also have responsibility for the most important immigration reforms in our country for half a century.

Immigration has been a controversial and often polarising issue, with low public trust in the performance of governments over the last 15 years. At the same time, most people are 'balancers' with nuanced views, seeing both pressures and gains from migration, and recognising that migration has benefitted both our economy and society over the generations. Your own appointment as Home Secretary, as the daughter of migrants to Britain, is itself an important example of the welcome and opportunities that Britain does offer when we get immigration and integration right.

British Future's research includes the National Conversation on Immigration, which was the largest-ever public engagement exercise on immigration in this country. We found that people want immigration to be controlled, migrants to make a contribution, and the system to be compassionate and fair to the people involved in it, so that it does works fairly for those who come to contribute to Britain and for the communities that they join.

This suggests five key priorities for restoring public trust in a new immigration system, with the potential to unlock a much broader consensus than in the past.

### **Set sensible targets**

There is a widespread consensus that the net migration target – a flagship pledge that could never be kept – has only eroded public confidence. There is less clarity about what might replace it. Targets can play an important role in public accountability. Future numeric targets would chime much better with the public's views about control and contribution if they treat different flows of migration differently. A new system should welcome migration that helps the economy to grow, and sustains our public services, while ensuring employers play their role in managing local impacts fairly. Sensible targets would cover flows that are in the government's control, and would be based on evidence that any pledges made could be met in practice.

### **More accountability and public voice**

Rebuilding public confidence should be an explicit objective of future policy. This depends on giving both Parliament and the public more voice in how policy is decided. An Annual Migration Day in the House of Commons should be introduced, playing an analogous role to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget. The Migration Advisory Committee should be tasked to coordinate an official National Conversation on Immigration, to feed into the annual Migration Day debate, so that all views get heard, not just those lobbying most strongly at both poles of the debate.

### **Invest in the immigration system**

Errors and delays have an important impact on individuals, as the Windrush scandal showed. The run-up to the spending review needs to include an open and honest conversation about the resources that the Home Office needs to achieve its aims and to improve its performance, with a system which is effective, fair and humane. The success of the Syrian resettlement programme in communities around



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Britain offers useful lessons for broader asylum policy. In now considering reforms to the asylum determination system, we hope the Home Office will focus on ensuring high-quality and prompt initial decision-making on asylum, reducing lengthy and costly appeals.

### **Ensure English language is a foundation for integration**

A common language is the essential foundation for full economic, social and democratic participation in our country. As such it is something all relevant government departments should work to promote. Migrants who work long hours and those who have little social contact outside their ethnic or linguistic communities are among the groups who struggle to learn English. We are calling for the Government to change funding regulations to allow non-EEA spouses/partners and asylum-seekers to study on ESFA subsidised courses in England. A new Learning English Freeview channel would also help learners practice their English. We hope that the Home Office will use its membership of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Safe and Integrated Communities to prioritise English.

### **Encourage migrants to become citizens**

We should welcome it when people making their lives in Britain want to become British citizens. But government policy has been agnostic about this – tending to actively favour temporary migration over settlement, despite our research showing that the public hold the opposite view, preferring it when migrants stay, settle and become British. While registering over 3 million EU nationals for settled status, the government should send the clearest possible symbolic and practical message that Europeans remain welcome in Britain beyond Brexit by incorporating a clear, simple and free route to citizenship. In addition to reviewing the content of the Life in the UK citizenship test, the Government should review the overall purpose of its citizenship policy and the role it can play in promoting integration.

Reforming the immigration system is among the biggest challenges in British government and politics. If you can unlock that public consensus, you may have the opportunity to be one of the great reforming Home Secretaries.

Good luck in your work – and we look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely

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