



**NATIONAL  
CONVERSATION**

**IPSWICH REPORT**

**JUNE 2017**

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# CONTEXT

The National Conversation on Immigration visited Ipswich, a town of 180,000 residents and the administrative centre of Suffolk, which has a two tier local authority system. While education, social care, public health are the responsibility of Suffolk County Council, Ipswich Borough Council oversees housing and leisure services for about 75% of Ipswich's residents. The town lies on the Orwell estuary, about 15 miles inland from Felixstowe and Harwich ports, the former handling more containerised goods and the latter passengers. Ipswich is also a working port. The town's traditional industries were associated with these ports or Ipswich's agricultural hinterland. However, Ipswich like many places in the UK has seen a loss of manufacturing industry. Financial services, particularly insurance, is now a major employer in the town.

At 74.1% of the working age population, employment rates in Ipswich are close to the national average. In recent years, Ipswich has seen a considerable amount of development and gentrification, particularly around the Orwell waterfront. A new university – the University of Suffolk – opened a campus in the town in 2008. Despite these efforts and a healthy economy, the average earnings of Ipswich's residents is significantly below the regional and national averages<sup>1</sup>. Just 30.6% of Ipswich's population is qualified at Level 4 or above, compared with 34.8% across the Eastern region and £541 for Great Britain.

There is a long history of immigration into Ipswich, with long established African Caribbean and South Asian communities in town. More recently, Ipswich has seen the arrival of refugees, international students, Filipino healthcare staff as well as eastern European migrant workers.

Refugees started arriving in Ipswich in the 1990s, with significant numbers coming as clandestine entrants through the nearby ports or in freight traffic along motorways. There are a number of local charities that support them with advice, English language and welfare-to-work training as well as more informal befriending schemes. Local refugee groups estimate that about 2,000 refugees live in and around Ipswich, with the largest groups coming from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. Some of the refugees who live in Ipswich were clandestine entrants through the south and east coast ports or along motorways. As of March 2017, 80 asylum-seekers were being supported by the Home Office in Ipswich. Suffolk County Council had agreed to take 230 Syrian refugees over five years through the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme.

The most recent Annual Population Survey suggests that 17.8% (22,800) of the population of Ipswich identify as coming from minority ethnic groups, higher than the national average. The

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same statistics suggest that about 10% of the population was born outside the UK, with the main country-of-birth groups being Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Portugal, the Philippines and India. Many of the refugees who live in Ipswich as well as new arrivals from eastern Europe have settled in the north east of the town area around the Norwich Road. This area has a large amount of private rental accommodation and its main streets are lined with restaurants and shops serving specific minority ethnic communities.

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# WHAT WE DID

The format in Ipswich was different to other National Conversation on Immigration visits. We held two citizens' panel discussions, one where participants were female and one where participants were male. We decided to do this as we wanted to see where there were differences in how men and women talk about immigration.

The panels comprised 15 members of the public recruited to represent a range of views on immigration, with the very hostile and very pro-migration filtered out through a pre-interview screening question. All panel members came from Ipswich and further demographic information about the two panels is given at the end of this report. Basing our conversation on a discussion guide, the panels were asked questions about their views on the impact of immigration on the UK and their local area, EU and non-EU migration flows and on their opinions about integration. The citizens' panel also looked at securing a consensus, with participants asked about what needs to change in order to gain their trust and broad support for how the Government handles immigration and integration.

We held one stakeholder meeting, after the first (female) panel but before the second (male) panel. Here we met individuals representing business, university and civil society organisations. They were asked questions about attitudes to migration in the local area, and the future policy approaches they wanted to see in relation to EU migration and non-EU migration. Questions also probed the changes that would be needed to achieve a consensus on immigration. The order of our meetings also enabled us to put some of the first (female) citizen's panel's comments to the stakeholders that we met the following day.

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# KEY FINDINGS

## Attitudes to immigration

The citizens' panel were asked *'on a scale of 1-10 do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, nationally and in your local community'*. The female panel gave an average of 5.3 and a range from 3 to 8. There was no difference in the average scores of men and women

Almost everyone was a balancer in both panels, believing that migrants made a contribution to the economy, but voicing concerns about numbers and the pace of change in parts of Ipswich, the draw of benefits and pressures on public services. The female panel, in particular, was concerned about the impact of migration on schools. We were also conscious that there was a hierarchy of preferences towards recent migrants, with the Portuguese, Romanians and Poles now felt to be well-integrated. Both panels were concerned about undocumented migration, referring to a recent incident when migrants were apprehended arriving on the Suffolk coast by boat.

More than half of the panel participants felt that immigration was an issue that they talked about reasonably frequently, sometimes triggered by negative stories. National events and local media coverage made immigration a topic of everyday conversation, most recently the London and Manchester terrorist attacks.

*"I'm a mum and my child is at primary school, its talked about at the school gate..it tends to become the topic of the day when something kicks off... It split a group of us up because someone got very stroppy and said 'send them all home'"* (Female citizens' panel participant).

As the quotation above illustrates, we were told on the female panel that these discussions occasionally caused divides. Interestingly, the way both panels spoke about immigration was quite different. Despite concerns that polarised discussions on immigration had caused arguments, the all-female panel were less likely to disagree with each other than the male panel, and were generally more reserved. on the mal panel, participants spoke more freely and at times the discussion was confrontational, but the group more easily came to a consensus on a number of points.

Overall, our panel and stakeholder meeting suggested that most people who live in Ipswich are balancers, seeing the benefits of migration, but also having concerns, particularly about immigration enforcement and neighbourhood decline in parts of town with high migrant populations. We were also told of a small, but vocal minority of Ipswich residents who have expressed anti-immigrant sentiments on social media.

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## EU migration

Both panels were asked about the changes they would like to see the Government make after the UK leaves the EU. Suggestions included requiring EU migrants to have a job or find a job soon after arrival, as well as being obliged to learn English.

*“They shouldn’t be allowed here unless they’ve got a job to come to or if they haven’t found a job within perhaps months. And I think if they don’t speak English when they arrive, then they should be compulsory to attend English classes so that they integrate with our society”* (Female citizens’ panel participant).

Like every previous citizens panel, many of our Ipswich participants – male and female - suggested an Australian Points Based system as something that they would like to see adopted in this country. Most panel participants felt it would be better after Brexit to treat EU and non-EU migrants the same way.

*“It should be a point-based system after Brexit, like they have in Australia. We need to audit where the gaps are, and give people points if they want to fill them...we need stricter checks on those who come here”* (Female citizens’ panel participant).

In all the panels we have held, many more people have heard about the Australian Points Based System than the UK’s net migration target. The ‘Australian Points Based System’ is used as a shorthand for a controlled and selective immigration system that participants felt that they did not have with EU free movement. The popularity of an Australian-style immigration system as public demand raises important and difficult issues for politicians and policy makers. It is worth considering why the ‘Australian Points Based System’ has become such a powerful slogan that resonates with the public.

Our visits have shown that many citizens’ panel members have relatives or friends who have emigrated to Australia - nearly 1.3 million people born in the UK now live there<sup>2</sup>. Others have made family visits to Australia. This means that many people in the UK have had an experience of applying for a visa, or entering Australia as a visitor. It is much harder to get an Australian work visa for low-skilled jobs and applicants also have to declare any criminal record. The visibly high levels of bio-security at ports of entry into Australia – searches, x-rays and detector dogs – also gives an impression of tighter border control than in the UK.

UKIP also made manifesto commitment to introduce an Australian-style Points Based system in the 2015 general election and later in the 2016 EU referendum. This pledge received a great deal of media coverage. All these factors have contributed to the popularity of the Australian Points Based System as a policy demand in the UK.

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## Non-EU Migration

Both panels had relatively few concerns about migration for work and study from outside the EU. Although almost everyone knew little about the rules governing non-EU migration, there was a perception that those who came to work or study made a contribution to the economy.

*“If you’re coming from outside, you’re coming in here very genuinely, it’s a big step for you, they’re not just coming here for benefits, from US and Australia.....The difference with that is obviously the majority of people who come in like that [ as non-EU migrants] are paying their way, they’re paying their taxes and everything else – they’re contributing to the economy, they’re not draining the economy and they actually have the skill set as well...they’re willing to integrate and they want to be here” (Male citizens’ panel participant).*

The panels were not aware of current regulations on family migration, or that family migration visas are almost always only granted to immediate family members. There was a perception – also articulated in previous panels that extended family members could come to the UK with family visas.

*“We’ve had that in school where an aunt will come over and bring a child and then a grandma will come over or another. And then they’ll keep coming and they’ll all bring their nieces and nephews” (Female citizens’ panel participant).*

## Asylum seekers and refugees

As noted above, refugees have lived in Ipswich since the mid-1990s. Of the two panels that we ran in Ipswich, the male panel had the more sympathetic views but often this sympathy appeared to be directed towards very young refugee children. Age disputed children evacuated to the UK from Calais were mentioned in both panels and given as evidence of a lack of effective immigration control.

The direction of discussion in the female panel may have been influenced by a panel member who worked with unaccompanied refugee children. Female panel members talked about feeling threatened by groups of young men, presumed to be refugees who gathered in groups in parts of town such as the Norwich Road area. There was a clear desire in the female panel to share out numbers of asylum-seekers, as well as a desire for greater vetting of asylum applicants, with panel members talking about their personal experiences.

*“Because of the war and problems in Syria they’re forced out. I think as long as all the countries take a fair share and they don’t all pick one country...other countries have taken them - they’re going to Sweden they’re going to Germany, France. And that’s*

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*fair. Obviously numbers should be limited and check their background too because if they've got criminal records then I don't think we should accept them"* (Female citizens' panel participant).

On both panels security concerns about asylum seekers were linked to recent terror attacks in London and Manchester.

## **Border control**

Panel participants were asked about their perceptions of the effectiveness of border controls. Undocumented migration featured more in the discussion than in many other groups. The long Suffolk coastline, the proximity of Ipswich to Felixstowe container port, and local media coverage of clandestine entry to the UK is likely to have influenced perceptions about undocumented migration. However, concerns about undocumented migrants were balanced with the view that it would be impossible to have total control over our borders.

*"There's thousands of containers coming in every single day, they can't check every single one of them. But it's happened quite often where they've found a group of illegal immigrants that come out of containers right down the road. But you still can't check every single one"* (Female panel participant).

Despite concerns about undocumented migration over half of the panel was unwilling to pay a little more in taxation so that more immigration officers could be employed. The narrative "the government wastes our money anyway, so why should we pay" was used to justify this view.

Participants were then given a case study of H, an undocumented migrant from Nigeria who had remained in the UK after overstaying his visa. The two groups were asked to decide how the British Government should approach his case. Both panels were split on what should happen to him. Those who felt that the benefits of migration outweighed negative impacts – generally scoring 6, 7 or 8 in the first question we asked about the impacts of migration – felt that there should be system in place to deal with undocumented migrants on a case-by-case basis. Arguments about economic contribution were also invoked, when panel members debated whether it should stay. Those who had more concerns about immigration differed in their approach, feeling that H should not have remained in the UK in the first place.

*"No system can be one size fits all. There should be systems in place for people like H, I'd be saying to myself, he hasn't paid any tax, because he's been receiving cash in hand, but he has been supporting himself, he's now his mothers main carer. If we send him home, well have to pay for more carers, I'd say I know what we'll do with H will give him leave to remain in the UK, but he's taking the Mickey working cash-in-hand, so I'd say sorry H,*

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*I'm not going to let you have any benefits" (Male citizens' panel participant).*

*"If you read the first paragraph [of the case study] that says to me that he shouldn't have been here after all. If you read the first paragraph, he was illegal then so he had no right to be here so you have to go back to his original situation that he shouldn't have been here" (Female citizens' panel participant).*

## **Numbers**

Both panels voted on whether they wanted different types of migration to be increased, reduced or remain about the same. Just over half of both panels wanted to keep levels of migration about the same for all groups of migrants, including low-skilled and seasonal workers.

*"I have no problem coming here to work, we have fruit pickers here because they can't get people here to do it, people who live around the areas won't do fruit picking so they get Bulgarians, Romanians, who make a lot of money, work like crazy and make lots of money and then go back at the end of the season (Male citizens' panel participant).*

This is not to say that numbers were not an issue of concern. Numbers emerged as a topic in the initial discussions in both the male and female panel and not just those with greater concerns about the negative impacts of migration, although views about numbers were expressed differently between two groups. Cultural concerns appeared greater for the more sceptical members of the panel. We were told: *"Certain parts of town have too many foreign people."* For those who had more balanced or positive views about the impacts of migration – locally and nationally – the concern about numbers was expressed in terms of not having the infrastructure to support migrants.

*"What I see is a country that's not equipped with the resources – I work in education as well – and we've had a lad turn up last week who can't speak a word of English and we've had to use our own students in the classroom to interpret.... I'm not saying they shouldn't be here because I'm quite an inclusive person but I just don't think the country has been equipped in regards to housing, education, public services" (Female citizens' panel participant).*

Only three people out of fifteen had heard of the net migration target. There was a debate about the value of such a target which some panel members felt might stoke prejudice. Other panel members felt that the net migration target had some value as a way of monitoring demographic change. One panel member felt that births and deaths should be included in the figure.

*"It's quite misleading isn't it? To perhaps people who are racist and prejudiced, it's not going to sit well with them when they hear*

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*this big number but they don't know that this number doesn't include UK citizens, they just see the number and go 'wow that's massive' And I also think it can be played with politically as a headline rather than doing anything practical about it"* (Female citizens' panel participant).

### **Impact of migration**

The discussion about the impact of migration covered the economic, social and cultural impacts of migration. There was a consensus that overall migration brought economic benefits, both nationally and locally, with a longer debate about the economic benefits of migration in the male panel. This was balanced with greater pressures on public services.

Both panels had concerns about some of the social and cultural impacts of migration in the local area. Many migrants live in the Norwich Road area of Ipswich as affordable rented accommodation is found in this part of the town. Many shops and restaurants serving migrant and minority ethnic groups are also found in this area. A few panel members felt that the Norwich Road had been 'changed' in a negative way. A greater concern was that panel members felt threatened by migrants who loitered in the area – an issue that was mentioned in both panels and in the stakeholder meeting, although these views were challenged by others in the groups.

*"Once in a blue moon, you'll hear people say 'when you walk through the town you'll hear foreign voices, you won't hear English'. But they might be doing night shifts and during the day doing their chores, and whilst in the evening were relaxing. And they do all group together, and they do come across a bit intimidating but if you go abroad, that's what do foreigners do. They all sit around and chat and have coffee. If you go off to Bulgaria, and you go there, they're all sitting about having a coffee"* (Male citizens' panel participant).

Both panels agreed that integration would limit negative impacts.

### **Integration**

Both panels, as well as the stakeholder meeting, took a long view of integration, feeling that those who had arrived in Ipswich in the past were well integrated, but more recently arrivals were not.

*"I think it's different now perhaps to what it was back then because I think they came over wanting to integrate into our society whereas now there's a sense that they don't want to integrate into our society but they want the benefits of our society"* (Male citizen' panel participant).

Despite the concerns about the impact of migration on schools, they were seen as an integration success story. Parents felt it was beneficial for their children to be exposed to different

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cultures.

*“Children are very accepting of different cultures. I think adults take a little more persuading whereas children don’t have that agenda, they don’t feel that they have to prove themselves to each other, they just accept and go forward”* (Female citizens’ panel participant).

Panel members and those who attended the stakeholder meeting felt that in general community relations in Ipswich were reasonably good, although a small minority of people felt that they could voice prejudiced remarks or post racist comments on social media. Some panel participants felt that such sentiments had become more prevalent since the EU referendum. This was clearly something to which all panel members had been exposed. In both citizens’ panels there was some moderation of remarks that group members felt was prejudiced: *“you can’t say that all Romanians are bad, the family I know, the father is a doctor.”* Two panel members told anecdotes of challenging family members, friends and acquaintances about opinions they considered to be prejudiced.

There were many suggestions as to how integration might be improved. Panel members wanted EU migrants to have to pass an English language test before they came here. Other panel members suggested local task forces. Enabling people to talk more about immigration was another suggestion as it would help dispel prejudices and bring communities together.

### **Differences between female and male panels**

As noted above we were interested if men and women talk about immigration differently and in this context held separate male and female panels. Responses to issues such as refugee rights or the treatment of undocumented migrants were talked about with more emotion on the female panel, whereas men tended to spend more time debating the impact of immigration on the economy. When given a case study of an undocumented migrant, men tended to weigh up potential economic contribution against risks to make a decision about how the case should be handled. The women’s panel applied greater empathy to these issues, sharing concerns about the exploitation of undocumented migrants: *“you can imagine being a female in that situation”*.

The female panel included a number of public sector workers, so many shared worries about the impact of immigration on services already put under strain by budget cuts. Many were mothers and we had school gate stories, as people shared concerns about the treatment of the impact of migration on schools.

It would be easy to overestimate the differences between our gendered panels. Both our male and female panels mostly saw the same benefits of immigration, and shared many concerns. Both panels wanted to see a migration system that is fair and

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works for everyone. Both panels were made up of balancers who saw the benefits that migration had brought to Ipswich, but also had some concerns about how it had been managed.

What emerged on our gendered panels was not so much *what* was said, but *how*. We have noticed in our mixed panels that men tend to be more dominant, but separating our panels by gender gave us a real insight into how immigration is talked about. The discussion on the men's panel was lively and people challenged each other on different aspects. Participants spoke very openly, often for lengthy periods and as facilitators we sometimes had to intervene to bring in quieter participants. At times the conversation was confrontational, but the panel did find common ground on most issues through sharing their views.

The female panel had a far more equitable discussion and the group generally met a consensus on key issues. Participants listened to each other more, and there were not one or two voices that dominated discussions. However, at times it felt as if our panel participants were holding back. As we left the meeting, one female participant asked us, "*do you think people really said what they wanted to?*". This led us to conclude that in all the citizens' panels that we hold we need to make sure that all voices are heard, and that panel members do not feel under pressure to hold back their opinions.

### **Regaining trust in the immigration system**

Participants were asked about the changes they would like to see brought in to enable greater confidence in the immigration system. Suggestions were more detailed than many previous panels and included:

- An audit of employment vacancies, then to let migrants fill these vacancies
- An Australian style points based system to cover all migrant workers after the UK leaves the EU
- More restrictions on migrants' ability to claim welfare benefits
- More stringent checks on asylum applicants and then speedier removal of those who are refused
- Criminal record checks before migrants arrive in the UK, alongside the rapid removal of foreign national offenders
- Greater in-country enforcement and the removal of more undocumented migrants
- A cross-party commission to look at the future of immigration policy
- Greater honesty from the Government, including about pressures and things that go wrong, and accept that things

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are under pressure.

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# CONCLUSIONS

Overall, our two panels mostly balanced the economic benefits of migration with some concerns about the impacts on public services. Again, participants' views reflect local issues – there was much more discussion about undocumented migration in both groups, reflecting local media coverage and the proximity of container ports to the town.

Both panels also articulated detailed suggestions as to how immigration and integration policy might be improved. Some of these suggestions are already policy in the UK, which highlights the limits of policy change as a means of securing greater trust in the immigration system.

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## Appendix

List of stakeholder organisations

East of England Strategic Migration Partnership

Ipswich and Suffolk Race Equality Council

Suffolk Chamber of Commerce

Suffolk Refugee Support

University of Suffolk

## Demographics of citizens' panels

Panel	Gender	Age	Occupation	Ethnicity
1	Female	67 years	Retired administrative officer – C1	White British
1	Female	43 years	Support officer	White British
1	Female	67 years	Retired administrative officer	White British
1	Female	42 years	Crane driver - C2	White British
1	Female	34 years	Postal worker - D	White British
1	Female	59 years	Accountant - B	White British
1	Female	64 years	Retired administrative officer	White British
1	Female	44 years	Teacher - B	White British
1	Female	46 years	Logistics manager - B	White British
1	Female	30 years	Local government officer - C1	White British
2	Male	40 years	Painter and decorator – C2	White British
2	Male	42 years	IT technician – C1	White British
2	Male	57 years	Maintenance engineer – C2	White British
2	Male	38 years	Delivery driver - D	Mixed heritage
2	Male	55 years	Mortgage advisor - C1	White British

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**Endnotes:**

- 1 The 2016 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings estimates that gross median weekly wages for Ipswich were £492., compared with £569.40 in the Eastern region and £541 for Great Britain.
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics census 2016 data.







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## About

**The National Conversation on Immigration is a project run by British future and HOPE not hate.**

### British Future

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank seeking to involve people in an open conversation which addresses people's hopes and fears about identity and integration, migration and opportunity, so that we feel confident about Britain's Future.



We want to ensure that we engage those who are anxious about cultural identity and economic opportunity in Britain today, as well as those who already feel confident about our society, so that we can together identify workable solutions to make Britain the country we want to live in.

### HOPE not hate

HOPE not hate exists to provide a positive antidote to the politics of hate. We combine first class research with community organising and grassroots actions to defeat hate groups and to build community resilience against extremism.



Hate is often the consequence of a loss of hope and an articulation of despair, but given an alternative, especially one that understands and addresses their anger, most people will choose HOPE over hate. Our job is to expose and undermine groups that preach hate, intolerance and division whilst uniting communities around what they have in common.

We aim to take a part in building a society that celebrates rather than scapegoats our differences.