

Immigration: The manifesto challenge

10 steps to restore public trust on immigration and integration

Sunder Katwala, Jill Rutter and Steve Ballinger
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6 Kean Street
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WC2B 4AS

Editor: Steve Ballinger

About British Future:

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank 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.

www.britishfuture.org

Tel. +44 (0)20 7632 9069

Twitter: @BritishFuture

Contents

Part I: The manifesto challenge

1. Introduction: the manifesto challenge 4
2. Ten key immigration questions for the next Parliament and the 2017 campaign trail 6
3. Meeting the manifesto challenge: our key tests for immigration reform 7

Part II: A common ground manifesto for immigration

1. Invest properly in an immigration system that is effective, fair and humane 9
 2. Propose a new UK migration deal with the EU to replace free movement 10
 3. Set sensible targets for immigration controls, making promises that governments are in a position to meet; and hold Britain's first-ever Comprehensive Immigration Review 13
 4. Non-EU immigration: review the rules on family migration 16
 5. Use money generated by the Immigration Skill Charge on training for UK workers; and consider measures to reduce dependence on migrant workers 18
 6. Uphold refugee protection, improve the system and extend community sponsorship 19
 7. Set a target for increased student migration – so that Global Britain competes to top of the league in attracting international students 21
 8. Implement local impacts funding, to ensure net gains from migration reach the places of most change 22
 9. Increase political accountability on immigration through a Migration Day report to Parliament and the public 23
 10. Commit to introducing a national integration strategy 24
- Beyond the campaign – engaging the public on immigration and integration 26

I. Introduction: The manifesto challenge

The General Election campaign will see politicians seek the trust of the British public. They are standing for election to a Parliament which will undertake the biggest change in British politics for half a century, as the UK leaves the European Union and negotiates its future relationship with the EU and its place in the world.

Brexit will have an impact across just about every area of public policy, and the new Parliament returned in 2017 is likely to oversee the most significant overhaul in a generation of the framework for immigration to Britain. Restoring public trust and confidence in how we manage immigration and integration in Britain is at the heart of the challenge of how to get Brexit right.

So the immigration debate on the 2017 campaign trail should move on from that of previous General Elections over the last 15 years. In past elections, the public debate has often focused on whether we can talk about immigration and how we talk about it. Frustrations have been expressed both by those who feared that too many politicians were trying to duck an issue that the public considers important, and by those who feared that an excessively angry and polarised debate risked being more about seeking scapegoats than solutions, damaging community relations in the process. Finding the right tone so that we have a frank and open, civil and constructive debate about this important issue certainly matters – but it would be strange if, in 2017, we were still discussing whether we can debate immigration or not.

So the 2017 challenge to the political parties is to go beyond showing that they are able to talk about immigration. Voters should expect candidates and leaders to engage constructively in a new debate about the future choices that Britain should make on immigration after Brexit. How much immigration do we want to keep? How can a new immigration system rebuild public confidence and consent? And how can it ensure that we meet the needs of our economy and our public services, while upholding our international obligations?

If that is the debate we need, it remains to be seen whether we get it or not during the 2017 General Election campaign. It might be that the governing party and its rivals for power choose to keep their cards very close to their chest, ducking any substantive debate about what the post-Brexit immigration policy should look like. There are some plausible reasons for caution on this front. This General Election campaign cannot settle or decide every detail of a future immigration policy. When the election is over, the new government will need to negotiate both Britain's exit from the European Union and any future UK-EU partnership with the governments of 27 other countries. But that is not a reason to duck the challenging questions about the future choices on immigration. Doing so would demonstrate a lack of confidence in the public. Whatever strategic choices the major parties make, the election campaign should be a chance to have the debate anyway.

The migration manifesto challenge to the political parties is to set out a new framework which can restore public confidence in how we manage immigration and promote integration in Britain.

In this report, British Future poses ten key questions about future policy choices which voters will want parties and candidates to be able to answer – at hustings, on the doorstep and in the media.

We then offer our own proposals in answer to those questions: ten practical measures that could help to rebuild trust and confidence in how we manage immigration and integration in Britain. These proposals would, we believe, secure the support of most voters across the political and referendum divides – so we hope that politicians of all parties will consider them, as they discuss immigration during the General Election campaign

2. Ten key immigration questions for the next Parliament and the 2017 campaign trail

Immigration remains an important issue for voters in this election. They will want to know what solutions candidates and their parties would offer in response to the key immigration policy challenges facing Britain. We believe that all candidates and parties fighting this election should be able to answer the following ten key questions on immigration – and we set out our own answers in Part Two of this report.

- 1) What needs to happen for Britain to have an immigration system that works properly and fairly – and is able to deal with the additional pressures of Brexit?
- 2) Should free movement end after Britain leaves the European Union? What new rules should the UK have for European migrants to Britain after Brexit?
- 3) Should the British government set targets for immigration levels? How should those targets be set? Where targets are set, what are the policies that would meet them? What is the right timescale for meeting them? What should happen if targets are missed?
- 4) How should our approach to non-EU migration change after Brexit? Do the parties propose to significantly reduce non-EU migration for work, or to maintain it, or to increase some forms of immigration? Does the party propose any significant changes to the rules on family migration?
- 5) What is the right balance between developing skills in the UK and bringing in skills that the economy and public services need? What policies are needed to achieve it?
- 6) Are candidates and their parties committed to honouring the UK's international obligations to protect refugees? What contribution should the UK make to the refugee crisis? What needs to happen to ensure that refugees who do come to Britain get to make their full contribution to our society?
- 7) Should the UK aim to reduce the numbers of international students who come to Britain – or should we maintain or try to increase the numbers? What does the UK need to do to attract the students that it does want?
- 8) What new policies are needed to address the local impacts of migration on public services and housing?
- 9) How can we secure public confidence and consent on immigration? Are there ways of engaging the public on questions about immigration in a way that builds trust and looks for common ground solutions?
- 10) What are the most important ways to improve integration in Britain?

3. Meeting the manifesto challenge: our key tests for immigration reform

Britain's decision to leave the EU is a reset moment for immigration policy - a chance to change the system and to rebuild public trust.

The pragmatic majority believe that immigration brings pressures as well as gains. What they are looking for are sensible policies to manage immigration so we control who comes here but still keep the immigration that's good for our economy and society, and which upholds Britain's international obligations.

In order to secure majority public support and consent, a 'common ground' approach to immigration would therefore focus on policies that are:

- **Workable** - We need an immigration system that works in practice – handling the pressures of immigration and securing the gains too, so that we meet the needs of our economy and public services. Governments need to come up with reforms that can work, and ensure that they put in place the administrative systems needed to implement them.
- **Principled and fair** - We need an approach to immigration and integration which offers a fair deal to those who come to live and work in Britain, and which is seen and felt to be fair by those already in the communities that they join. Britain should also uphold and honour the international commitments that it has made.
- **Trusted** - A new approach to immigration must secure public consent. There has been a loss of confidence, over the last 15 years, in how successive governments have managed immigration and integration in Britain. If we are to rebuild confidence and trust, we need to ensure that the public has a clearer voice in the democratic so candidates and parties need to make promises on the campaign trail that they can keep in government.

British Future here sets out our own proposals for a 'common ground' approach to immigration. Our aim in this manifesto is to set out a series of practical measures which could help to rebuild trust and confidence in how we manage immigration and integration in Britain, and which could have broad appeal to politicians from across the party spectrum.

Part II

A Common Ground

Manifesto for

Immigration

1. Invest properly in an immigration system that is effective, fair and humane

What needs to happen for Britain to have an immigration system that works properly and fairly – and is able to deal with the additional pressures of Brexit?

The political parties should commit to ensuring that the immigration system has the resources that it will need to function effectively.

An immigration system that works is central to public confidence. Yet the UK spends just £28 per head on border control and immigration enforcement, with 0.2% of public spending allocated to the immigration system. The Government had planned to make the immigration and border control system self-financing by 2019-20, meeting the current net cost of £503 million a year through visa fees. This will not now be viable, since leaving the European Union will bring additional pressures: securing the status of EU nationals living in the UK and implementing a new system in which a larger group of people are likely to be subject to immigration control.

British Future recommends that the next government postpone this policy and commit to a transparent assessment by the Migration Advisory Committee of the revenue and capital funding needed for the Home Office to fulfil its immigration function efficiently, including an estimate of the administrative needs of addressing Brexit.

Securing the status of 3 million European nationals will be the biggest administrative task in the Home Office's history. The Brexit Select Committee produced a unanimous cross-party report setting out the key reforms needed to make the system fit for purpose. British Future recommends that all parties publicly endorse and commit to implementing those recommendations, which include:

- Using existing HMRC and DWP data to reduce the disproportionate burden on both applicants themselves and their current and former employers;
- Introducing a streamlined, localised system to process the bulk of cases using local nationality checking services; and
- Changing the little-known requirement for Comprehensive Sickness Insurance, which is a major factor in 1 in 3 applications for permanent residence being refused. The next government should state that access to the NHS as a legal resident is sufficient to fulfil the requirement.

British Future's research indicates that there are public concerns about the integrity of the asylum system. Civil society organisations that work on refugee protection also have their own, different concerns about the system. Mistakes in the administration of asylum support have left too many asylum-seekers destitute: the number of asylum-seekers who had been awaiting an initial decision for more than 6 months increased by 143% in 2016 from 3,626 in 2015 to 8,825 a year later, leaving too many people unable to work and in limbo.

Of the 12,304 asylum applicants who appealed against a negative decision in 2016, some 41% had their appeals upheld by tribunals. This suggests that too many initial asylum decisions are of poor quality, a situation that causes anxiety for those who have fled war and persecution, as well being an unnecessary expense to the taxpayer.

Leaving the EU offers the opportunity for root and branch reform of asylum determination, enabling the UK to develop a system that is humane and effective, while at the same time commanding greater public support. British Future recommends:

- Merging the Home Office budget (for initial asylum determination) with the Ministry of Justice budget (for appeals) - a cost-neutral measure that would incentivise high quality initial decision-making.
- Introducing a sole case owner system, where a named immigration officer, educated to graduate level, would deal with an asylum case from start to finish.
- Using detention solely as a measure of last resort prior to removal from the UK and ending the expensive use of indefinite detention.

2. Propose a new UK migration deal with the EU to replace free movement

Should free movement end after Britain leaves the European Union? What new rules should the UK have for European migrants to Britain after Brexit?

Both the UK government and the EU negotiators have said that the rights and status of the EU nationals in the UK and the British citizens in the EU are their top priority in the Brexit negotiations. All candidates should agree to support a secure guarantee to EU nationals in the UK and British citizens in the EU to be able to carry on their lives as before, as a top priority issue to be settled first and separately in the Brexit talks.

The UK government wants a 'deep and special relationship' with the European Union after Brexit, with the closest possible comprehensive free trade agreement that can be negotiated, outside the single market and the current free movement rules on immigration. The political parties should also tell voters during this General Election campaign whether they would be prepared to negotiate a new UK-EU migration deal as part of those Brexit negotiations, if this helped to secure a positive broader partnership, or whether they believe that it would be wrong for post-Brexit Britain to agree distinct rules with the EU which were not comparable to those from the rest of the world.

British Future recommends that the UK should be willing to propose and agree a new UK-EU migration deal, if this forms part of a comprehensive free trade partnership deal, to be negotiated after the Article 50 period. For a detailed explanation of this proposal see *Britain's immigration offer to Europe: How could a new preferential system work?* by British Future, October 2016.

<http://www.britishfuture.org/publication/britains-immigration-offer-to-europe/>

We recommend that the UK should build domestic public, political and business support around a proposal to table in the negotiations, with the following features:

- **Visa-free travel for EU/EEA nationals to the UK, and for UK nationals going to the EU**, for visits of less than 6 months (but not including the right to work).
- **A time-limited transitional phase, of up to 3 years, if necessary to avoid a ‘cliff-edge’ scenario.** It is unlikely that the two-year Article 50 ‘divorce negotiations’ can do more than set the contours for the future strategic partnership between the UK and the EU. So a time-limited transition period may be necessary to provide a viable bridge from the two-year Article 50 ‘divorce negotiations’ in 2019 to securing a comprehensive new UK-EU future strategic partnership by 2022.

The UK should introduce a registration scheme for EU nationals during the transition period, as many existing EU member states currently do, in order to help them secure their rights and demonstrate their status. The UK could also seek to negotiate limited modifications to existing free movement arrangements during this transitional phase. These could include making free movement rights dependent on securing a prior job offer or a shorter period to secure work. This would depend on securing the agreement of other EU governments and hence major changes are unlikely. It will be important, for political and public viability, that the transitional period is time-limited: setting out clear contours of the post-free movement system that would follow the transitional period will be important to securing the public and political support for such a transition.

- **Reciprocal ‘skilled movement’ between the UK and the EU27 member states.** There would be no numerical limits on the numbers of EU/EEA workers coming to the UK to take a job above an agreed skills or salary threshold, nor for UK workers eligible to take up similar roles across the EU27. The UK should be willing to negotiate over how to define the threshold, by proposing a number of potential alternatives. These could include a salary level around £24,000 or, alternatively, a skills threshold could be used so as to avoid issues with regional and gender pay differences. Those undertaking such roles would be able to bring immediate family members with them as dependents, and should remain eligible for UK permanent residence and/or citizenship after 5-6 years, reflecting current practice.
- **Set controlled UK quotas for low and semi-skilled migration, with EU migrants getting first option on quota jobs.** A new UK system should be introduced for controlled, low-skilled and semi-skilled migration, with EU27 and EEA nationals having first option on the work permits made available. Some quota allocations could potentially be reserved for specific sectors such as hospitality, food and farming.

These visas should include the right to be accompanied by immediate family members, while excluding access to social housing and out-of-work welfare benefits. Visas should be renewable and include routes to citizenship, subject to good character requirements, with all renewals

counting against the quotas set and so affecting the number of places being made available. The UK should set criteria for routes to settlement and citizenship.

Non-EEA nationals would not be eligible for these UK labour market visas, except by agreement with the EU/EEA members if there were not enough EU/EEA applicants to fill the quota. The UK would still be free to extend non-EU visa allocations above the skills threshold. It would similarly be up to individual EU member states to decide whether or not any low- or semi-skilled migration opportunities were available within their national immigration systems, either to UK citizens in particular, or third-country nationals generally.

If there is no UK-EU partnership deal with a migration element, the UK would naturally have similar rules for European and non-European migration to Britain. We would then need to consider where to get the low and semi-skilled immigration that the Government decides is needed.

3. Set sensible targets for immigration controls, making promises that governments are in a position to meet; and hold Britain's first-ever Comprehensive Immigration Review

Should the British government set targets for immigration levels? How should those targets be set? When targets are set, what are the policies that would meet them? What is the proposed timescale? What should happen if the targets that are set are missed?

Since Brexit is a reset moment for immigration policy, the UK should hold its first ever Comprehensive Immigration Review, as governments have done in the past to address national security and public spending, but which has never been done on immigration.

The current 'tens of thousands' target did not arise from any serious policy analysis, but from a soundbite that was popular, and it defines 'normal' levels of net migration as those that prevailed in the early 1990s.

The remit of the Review should address top-level issues, rather than the Migration Advisory Committee's inputs to policy being restricted to narrow micro-policy issues.

A Comprehensive Immigration Review: the key issues it should address:

- What are the policy options which could be considered if the government sought to reduce the level of migration to the UK, while protecting the economy and public services? What is the best available evidence on the economic, social and cultural impacts of the various policy options that could be considered?
- How can migration policy help to drive regional growth, as part of the government's industrial strategy? What contribution can migration policy make, in conjunction with other areas of public policy to help to balance both economic activity and population pressures across the different nations and regions of the UK?
- What measures could prove effective in reducing the demand for migration in the UK, particularly in sectors which are currently most reliant on low-skilled and semi-skilled migration? Over what timescales would it be possible to make significant progress?
- What policy measures can government take to address the impacts and pressures of migration on local public services and housing availability, for the migration that the UK chooses to keep?
- What opportunities are there for government and for other migration stakeholders, in business and civic society, to contribute to the successful integration of migrants into local communities and British society?
- How to engage the full range of interested stakeholders, and the public themselves, to ensure that all views about the benefits and costs of different policy options are heard, and so that stakeholders from all sides of the immigration debate are challenged to find the common ground for the new post-Brexit immigration framework.

Set sensible limits for immigration controls, making promises that governments are in a position to meet.

Targets matter in immigration politics. There will be limits to immigration in a post-Brexit immigration system. The migration targets that a government set have both practical and symbolic role: they inform the policy choices that governments make. They demonstrate that the British government and parliament can set migration policy. And they give the electorate a clear commitment about what the government is trying to achieve, so that they can gauge its competence and effectiveness in delivering what it has promised, or not.

In 2010 and 2015, the Conservative manifesto made pledges to reduce net migration to sustainable levels, defining this as net migration in the tens of thousands. The Conservative-led governments were unable to keep this promise, however. It was impossible to guarantee net migration at that level while Britain was a member of the European Union, as EU free movement rules meant that the UK could not control the numbers of EU citizens who chose to live and work in the EU. The government did not make policy choices about non-EU migration which were compatible with its headline pledge either.

Once Britain leaves the European Union, it could become possible to make a serious effort to meet the target, in the medium-term at least, though that would entail a willingness to make much deeper reductions in non-EU migration than the government has chosen to make, with significant cuts to forms of skilled and student migration that have broad public support. A government that does not believe that deep post-Brexit cuts to non-EU skilled migration would fit with its post-Brexit 'global Britain' agenda to deepen global economic ties would need to revise the current target to one that it intends to achieve.

Even if the Prime Minister intends to make a serious effort to reduce net migration to the 'tens of thousands', it is very unlikely that she could make a credible promise to deliver this during the next Parliament. The first Article 50 stage of the Brexit negotiations will not conclude until 2019. If the talks are successful, there is likely to be a transitional period. Political parties can certainly pledge to end EU free movement in the 2017 general election campaign, but should be wary of pledging a specific timetable for this, unless they wish to rule out any transitional arrangements after March 2019, or to introduce new 'red line' conditions which would constrain the Prime Minister's negotiating hand.

In the 2017 campaign, it would be better to focus on the principles for a new immigration framework, a clear commitment to replace free movement, and to avoid making any specific commitment to the levels of net migration that can be achieved before the end of the Parliament.

If the Conservative party does want to maintain its 'tens of thousands' ambition, it would be strongly in the interests of the next government to make clear that this is being softened to a

longer-term aspiration, and that there is no pledge to achieve a specific level by 2022. Failing to do that would have a corrosive impact, in that each quarter's immigration statistics will again produce yet another round of headlines about broken promises, corroding the Government and the party's reputation for competence on immigration.

The opposition parties who are critical of the net migration target should set out what new targets they would introduce to replace the existing one.

British Future recommends that the political parties move away from a one-size-fits-all net migration target – replacing it with a different set of public measures. Our recommendation is that the next government should set immigration targets which cover forms of immigration that are within the government's control, and which are flows that the government seeks to limit or reduce.

Since emigration levels are not subject to government control, a new headline target should be about the desired level of immigration of foreign nationals to the UK, rather than net migration, though the government may take shifting levels of emigration into account too when considering its immigration targets for the following year. Another alternative to an overall immigration target would be to set specific targets, or limits, for those migration flows which the government intended to limit or reduce.

Immigration statistics make sense to the public and help to enable an informed public debate when they fit the public's own common sense intuitions about what is and is not 'immigration'. It would be better to report the return of British nationals to the UK and student migration separately, and to omit these from the headline target. Those migration flows that are not subject to specific numerical targets – such as EU skilled migration in the system proposed above, and refugee protection – should be reported transparently, and scrutinised and debated.

4. Non-EU immigration: review the rules on family migration

How should our approach to non-EU migration change after Brexit? Do the parties propose to significantly reduce non-EU migration for work, or to maintain it, or to increase some forms of immigration? Do parties propose any significant changes to the family migration rules?

The future of UK immigration policy is broader than the question of European migration. Using this ‘reset moment’ for immigration policy effectively means thinking about the overall mix of migration from Europe, the Commonwealth and around the world. But it will be difficult for the political parties to offer a coherent view across both EU and non-EU migration during the 2017 campaign, while it remains unclear how far migration will feature in the Brexit negotiations.

So it may be closer to 2019 before the Government and other political parties can look coherently at EU and non-EU migration, which is why British Future proposes a Comprehensive Immigration Review during the parliament.

One debate which can begin in this General Election is how far it is important to insist that a new British immigration policy should have similar rules for European and non-European migrants to Britain, or whether the government should be able to negotiate and agree different approaches with either the European Union, or with other economic and diplomatic partners. There are some powerful intuitions in favour of the ‘same rules for everyone’ being a fair principle for a new Global Britain immigration policy after Brexit. This would address some of the fairness concerns about the different treatment of EU and Commonwealth migration under the free movement rules – and it would chime with public attitudes in the UK, which are in favour of differentiating by skills more than by nationality, reflecting how levels of European identity are considerably lower in the UK than in other EU27 countries.

However, there are also some important practical objections to constraining UK government policy in this way, particularly for economic migration. Firstly, the UK has always had a different approach to Irish immigration, and there is an almost universal political consensus in favour of this continuing after Brexit. So every strand of political opinion does favour some exceptions to a nationality-blind approach, reflecting historic relationships. Secondly, it may be possible to have an immigration system which does contain some different regional policies, without having as sharp a distinction as the free movement rules. For example, the UK has visa-free travel with a large range of EU and non-EU countries, but not with all countries, based on reciprocal arrangements and an assessment of the economic and cultural gains, as well as security issues. Thirdly, applying a ‘same rules for everywhere’ constraint would tie the hands of Trade Secretary Liam Fox in seeking trade deals around the world, and of Prime Minister Theresa May in the negotiations with the EU.

So British Future recommends that the UK government should be in a position to include migration as an element of economic trade and migration deals which are in the national interest, as long as there is domestic political and public support for the migration that comes to the UK under such deals. In practice, UK ministers may find it useful to be open to negotiating mutually beneficial preferential migration deals for highly-skilled migrants, and for post-graduate opportunities, or those which create reciprocal opportunities for skilled migrants or young people from Britain to work abroad, whether in the EU, Canada, Australasia or elsewhere. There would be relatively limited political or public appetite for low- and semi-skilled migration elements of such deals.

At the same time, the equal treatment of people from any country is the right principle for several types of immigration.

The UK should take refugees based on the need for protection – not refuse them because the country they are escaping can be dangerous. It will also be fair for EU and EEA students to count as international students after Brexit, though they are counter-intuitively classified as ‘home students’ now. It may, however, make sense to have transitional support for UK universities especially affected to adapt.

On family migration, it would also be fair to have the same rules for future EU, EEA and non-EEA migrants to the UK, phasing-out the anomaly where European nationals in the UK have enjoyed superior rights to British citizens and non-EEA migrants, with regard to marriage and family migration. That change should also lead to a review of the current rules and restrictions on British citizens marrying foreign nationals. Protecting the welfare system from dependency is a legitimate public policy goal, but political parties which are pro-family and pro-contribution should seek to apply that approach in a way which takes more care to avoid this fracturing family life, by splitting families up, or forces them to leave the UK.

British Future advocates that the Government and the various political parties support a review of the family migration rules, to consider a range of reforms. This should include taking both partners’ earnings and family savings into account, or reducing the threshold to below median earnings, so that it does not exclude those in full-time work on the living wage, as at present. This review of the family migration rules could form part of the broader Comprehensive Immigration Review that we recommend.

5. Use the money generated by the Immigration Skills Charge on training for UK workers and consider measures to reduce dependence on migrant workers

What is the right balance between developing skills in the UK and bringing in skills that the economy and public services need? What policies are needed to achieve it?

The UK economy needs to attract the world's brightest and best, so as to maintain its competitive advantage and record for innovation. But the dependence of so many sectors of the economy on large numbers of low-, semi- and high-skilled migrant workers shows that migration cannot be addressed in isolation to broader skills, training, housing policy and welfare-to-work provision. Political parties therefore need to address migration alongside these broader social and economic issues.

There are a number of reasons why employers struggle to find staff to fill vacancies. Employers may not be able to find a person with the appropriate skills, and are thus obliged to recruit migrant workers from within and outside the EU. But research suggests that those employed in the UK are much less likely to work for an employer that offers training than are workers in many other EU or OECD competitors[i]. The UK lies fourth from bottom in the EU league table on participation in work-related training, a position that has worsened since 2007[ii] Many thinktanks believe that there has been significant under-investment in work-related training in the UK, by business and by the Government[iii].

Arguably, the ease of recruitment of appropriately-skilled staff from within and outside the EU has meant that employers have had little incentive to up-skill those who live in the UK. In April 2017, the Government brought in the Immigration Skills Charge, where employers who bring in a worker from outside the EU with a Tier 2 (General) visa are obliged to pay £1,000 per head for doing so. This measure was introduced as a deterrent, to reduce dependence on migrant workers from outside the EU. However, the income generated by the charge goes to the Home Office and is not used to train UK residents. If the money that the Immigration Skills Charge generates was hypothecated and spent clearly and visibly on training UK workers, it would generate more goodwill and support for labour migration into the UK.

As well as skills shortages, employers may also struggle to find staff in sufficient numbers. The raising of the school leaving age and increased participation in higher education has decreased the stock of young people seeking full time work. Over the last 20 years there has been an increase in the number of jobs in food processing, but much of this work is located in the UK's more sparsely-populated areas, with a smaller resident workforce from which to recruit. There are also vacancies for work that is seen as unattractive because of low pay, harsh working conditions, or because it is seasonal or temporary in nature, or has fewer opportunities for progression. The proportions of those who are unemployed (and actively seeking work) now stands at 4.8% of the working age population in Great Britain, a record low in most areas. However, unemployment is higher in parts of northern England and the Midlands, although many of those who are unemployed find it hard to move for work because of a lack of affordable family accommodation.

Some 22.2% of the working-age population is economically inactive in Great Britain. About a quarter this number want to work but are unable to do so, perhaps because they lack skills and confidence, or because they cannot find work that fits in with their studies or caring obligations. Employers that state they cannot recruit staff in the UK, but do not offer flexible working, will find that have little political support for recruitment overseas.

Amending the Resident Labour Market Test to incentivise more part-time and family-friendly work is a policy change that should be considered. At present, employers who wish to sponsor a non-EU national to work in the UK with a Tier 2 visa need to show that the job cannot be filled by those already resident in the UK, usually by showing that the post has been advertised for a minimum of 28 days and has not been filled. Requiring employers also to show that a job cannot be filled by students or those with caring responsibilities may help incentivise flexible work.

A Comprehensive Immigration Review and a Migration Day in Parliament would enable much greater consideration about how to reduce the UK's dependence on migrant workers. This is a difficult social issue to solve, and requires the long-term commitment of the Government and employers. In the meantime, business and public sector employers cannot be left high and dry and without the staff that they need.

Migration policy cannot, however, be seen in isolation from other policy areas. All political parties need to show commitment to addressing domestic skills shortages – both for basic skills and for more highly-skilled work. Politicians need to look at ways to increase the stock of workers resident in the UK, through improved welfare-to-work provision and increasing the amount of work that is offered part-time and to fit in with family life and college studies.

6. Uphold refugee protection, improve the system and extend community sponsorship

Are parties committed to upholding the UK's international obligations to protect refugees? What contribution should the UK make to the refugee crisis? What needs to happen to ensure that refugees who do come to Britain get to make their full contribution to our society?

Political parties should make clear, in this election campaign and afterwards, their continued support for this country's tradition of refugee protection. They need to show how the UK should play a full and proportionate role in addressing the refugee crisis, while building trust and confidence in the UK for an asylum system that is both effective and humane. And they should give greater consideration to how we get the integration of refugees into our society right.

Britain's tradition of welcoming refugees who need protection extends back long before the UK's decision to join the European Union. The UK's ratification of the UN Refugee Convention was made by Winston Churchill's government in 1951 and every subsequent government has remained committed to those international obligations. It is

therefore important that the UK plays a full role in addressing the current refugee crisis.

The UK should maintain its commitment to resettling refugees in the UK through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme and the Gateway programme for other groups of vulnerable refugees. Politicians should also look at how more refugees can become economically self-sufficient in their countries of first asylum, preventing them from needing to make dangerous journeys to Europe.

We also need to make sure that the UK's own asylum system is fair, efficient and humane. At present there are too many mistakes and backlogs. Last year, four-in-ten asylum-seekers who appealed against a negative decision were later granted refugee status, a situation that caused anxiety for these refugees while also causing an unnecessary expense for the taxpayer. British Future recommends that the next Government:

- Merge the Home Office budget (for initial asylum determination) with the Ministry of Justice budget (for appeals) - a cost-neutral measure that would incentivise high quality initial decision-making.
- Introduce a sole case owner system where a named immigration officer, educated to graduate level, would deal with an asylum case from start to finish.
- Use detention solely as a measure of last resort, prior to removal from the UK and end the expensive use of indefinite detention.

Efforts to increase the UK's commitment to refugee protection will depend on building broader public confidence in how we make refugee protection work for refugees themselves and the communities that they join. We should be encouraging asylum-seekers – who are not currently allowed to work – to volunteer in the towns and cities where they live. The new Community Sponsorship Scheme offers an important way to improve the integration experience of refugees, and to give local community groups a strong sense of involvement and ownership in the resettlement of refugees, breaking down barriers between 'them' and 'us'.

Small charities or groups of people 'sponsor' Syrian refugees, helping them find work and integrate into their local communities. Equivalent schemes have been run outside the UK, in Argentina, Australia, Canada and Germany for example. In Canada, community sponsorship has been running since 1978. The programme has worked well and has cross-party support. Research shows that sponsored refugees are better-integrated than spontaneous asylum arrivals, because they have a support group from the moment they arrive. The next Parliament offers an ideal opportunity to extend this model in the UK to cover all refugee groups, in a way that can improve outcomes for refugees and broaden public support for welcoming and integrating refugees in the UK.

7. Set a target for increased student migration – so that Global Britain competes to top the league in attracting international students

Should the UK aim to reduce the numbers of international students who come to Britain – or should we maintain or try to increase the numbers? What does the UK need to do to attract the students that it does want?

Education is one of the UK's strongest international exports. Students from across the globe want to study at Britain's world-leading universities: in 2014-15, international students generated £10.8 billion of UK export earnings.

The international student market is growing, but there is growing international competition from Australia, Canada, the US and Europe in attracting students. The UK's Global Britain ambition should be to maintain and increase its share, not to coast along as competitors overtake us.

There is no official cap on international student numbers. But students are included in immigration figures, making up 22% of long-term international migration in 2016 - they are therefore counted towards net migration, the Government's principal measure of immigration and the subject of a target to reduce net migration to the 'tens of thousands'.^[iv]

There is strong public support for international student migration. Most of the public do not consider international students as migrants at all. They believe that they make a positive contribution to British universities, keeping down fees for British students and helping to finance new buildings, and also contribute economically to the areas where they live. British Future research for Universities UK found that only 22% of the public would reduce international student numbers in order to get immigration down.^[v]

The UK should set a target to increase international student numbers and grow the export market for British universities, as competitors such as the United States and Australia have done.

Concerns have historically been raised about 'bogus colleges' providing an illegal route to enter the UK to those with no intention of studying; and about legitimate students overstaying their visas and remaining in the UK to work. Government enforcement action, working with the university sector, has successfully led to the closure of many of these colleges and universities have regulations in place to ensure that those on student visas are in the UK to study.

There is nevertheless a case for better exit data on student migration to ensure an efficient and workable visa system for student migration and build public trust.

The Government should also make it easier for employers to hold on to the best students after they graduate. Current rules place many restrictions on post-study work visas and consequently very few postgraduates remain in the UK after their courses have finished. As part of a skills strategy to rebalance the economy after Brexit, the Government should consider simplifying post-study visas, enabling future entrepreneurs, innovators and the brightest and best STEM graduates to stay. Employers in sectors like engineering and tech are

concerned that they will struggle to get the skilled, entry-level recruits that they need once free movement ends. Bright young people who have just completed a degree at a British University could play an important role in filling these gaps.

Government and universities should also work together on how universities can play help to bridge the social polarisations of post-Brexit Britain, after a referendum which split society by class, place and levels of education. That should mean placing an equal emphasis on the local commitments of universities as much as their international links, so that they can contribute fully to regional growth and integration agendas. Universities make a significant civic and economic contribution to the towns, cities and regions in which they are located. It will be increasingly crucial to ensure universities make a practical and visible commitment to reaching out, across all social classes, to those who might feel very distant from those opportunities, even though they live five or ten miles down the road. Partnerships between schools, universities and local policy-makers could play a crucial role in challenging the idea that British society and politics will inevitably become more polarised along a new ‘open versus closed’ fracture-line.

8. Implement local impacts funding, to ensure that net gains from migration reach the places of most change

What new policies are needed to address the local impacts of migration on public services and housing?

British Future wants all parties to support a fund to manage the local impacts of migration, financed through a tax levy on new migrants and coordinated by local authorities. There should be a guarantee that the majority of this funding goes to schools, policing, healthcare and housing.

The local impacts of immigration on public services and housing are now the main public concern about migration, not only in areas that have experienced high levels of EU migration, but in some of the UK’s multicultural cities as well. In particular, people are concerned that immigration has led to shortages of school places and that poorly maintained privately rented accommodation has led to neighbourhood decline.

Part of the disconnect in the national immigration debate has been that evidence of the net financial contribution made by migrants to the Exchequer did not address these local concerns, at a time of reduced public spending through the Government’s deficit reduction strategy. There is now increased support across all the main parties to make sure that there are workable measures to address the local impacts of migration. In November 2016, the first English local authorities received funding from the new Controlling Migration Fund, which will channel £25 million every year to local authorities in England. There is no equivalent fund in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, although many of the same concerns are held there.

To be effective the new Controlling Migration Fund needs to fulfil some key criteria.

Firstly, the fund needs to channel money to housing and to the frontline services that are affected by rapid population change, including the services that are outside of the remit of local authorities, and covering both revenue and capital expenditure.

Secondly, there should be a numerical threshold to trigger funding which also takes into account the presence of short-term migrants such as international students.

Thirdly, and perhaps most crucially, the work that is funded needs to be visible and effectively publicised, to ensure transparency and accountability about how the money is used, and to demonstrate what is being done to address local public concerns about immigration. British Future recommends that the next Parliament makes sure that the Controlling Migration Fund meets these three important criteria.

9. Increase political accountability on immigration through a Migration Day report to Parliament and the public

How can we secure public confidence and consent on immigration? Are there ways of engaging the public on questions about immigration in a way that builds trust and looks for common-ground solutions?

Immigration will be one of a whole raft of issues on which voters are judging the competing parties in this General Election. It was a much bigger issue, though by no means the only one, behind the vote to leave the European Union last June. And as an issue of public importance, politicians should be judged by the electorate on how they handle immigration.

While the net migration target has been a quite spectacular failure – undermining public confidence in the government’s ability to manage immigration through the making of a promise that could not be kept, to control a number that it could not control – targets can, in principle, play a useful role in holding governments to account for their performance.

What has been missing is any framework of political accountability regarding how immigration targets can be reviewed and reset, and what the policy response should be if targets are missed.

To address this, we suggest that the Home Secretary should present an annual Migration Day report to the House of Commons, just as the Chancellor of the Exchequer has the annual Budget.

This report would set out the pattern and mixture of the previous year’s migration flows; the economic contribution from migration to the Exchequer; and the measures taken by the government to manage impacts and pressures. It would make recommendations for future policy over the year ahead, informed by advice from the Migration Advisory Committee, as well as a national and regional programme of public engagement. In the event that immigration has been higher than the government’s migration target, that should trigger a proportionate increase in the annual resources for local impacts, so that there is a clear commitment to ensure that the necessary public funding goes to public services in the areas of most rapid change.

The House of Commons Migration Day report should become the focal point for a sustained and ongoing commitment to public engagement across the nations and regions of Britain. The government should actively seek submissions about its overall migration target, or its component parts. Parliamentary Committee hearings and public debates in town halls and other settings could scrutinise proposals and recommendations from civil society. These could include proposals for reductions to migration, as well as reports on the economic needs of employers in the private and public sector or on how impacts on public services, housing and integration are being handled.

A sustained commitment to this approach across the next Parliament would have the benefit of normalising a sustained, ongoing commitment to public engagement as part of the annual process of the oversight and review of immigration choices in the UK. This could build on the model of the National Conversation on Immigration, which is currently being conducted and reporting to the Home Affairs Committee.

10. Commit to introducing a national integration strategy

What are the most important ways to improve integration in Britain?

The last year has demonstrated that Britain is a more anxious and fragmented society than any of us would want. The 2016 referendum split the country by place, by generation and by social class, casting new light on more long-standing divisions. Britain is a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society with a mixed record on integration, presenting both successes and challenges.

Yet a proper integration strategy has never been implemented in this country. The General Election manifestos of the competing parties should set out their integration priorities, detailing how their party would work to bring people together and make integration an ‘all of us’ issue, as they seek the support of voters across Britain this June.

Whatever the result, the post-election government will need to offer a full response to Dame Louise Casey’s recent integration review. That should form the basis of a national integration strategy, making clear the leadership role that national government will take on integration and the policies it will seek to implement. British Future recommends that a national integration strategy should include the following key priorities:

A shared language: Ensuring that everyone in the UK either speaks or is learning English should be the starting-point of an integration strategy. “Promoting English language is the single most important thing that we can do”, Dame Casey writes, calling for sufficient funding to be available and echoing the consensus that a common language is an essential passport to full economic, social and democratic participation in our society. Yet even with new government resources recently announced, significant gaps in provision remain for those who want to learn English.

Promoting English language learning should not just be left to the Government. Migrants must take responsibility to learn and be motivated to do so, and there is a role for informal, community-based support to help make this happen. Employers are the chief beneficiaries when migrants come to fill low-skilled and low-paid jobs, and could

take more of a share of responsibility for ensuring that newcomers can become part of the communities where they live. That could mean making language classes available during working hours, for those whose shift patterns make attending adult education classes particularly difficult.

Tackling prejudice: Britain should have a zero tolerance approach to all forms of racial prejudice and xenophobia. It is essential that politicians across the referendum and party political divides make very clear, to the minority who feel that racism can come back into fashion, that Britain voted to leave the European Union in 2016, and not to turn the clock back to 1972.

All parties should commit to review the government's hate crime strategy annually, to ensure there are effective approaches to challenge all forms of intolerance including racism, anti-semitism and anti-Muslim hatred, as well as prejudice against people based on gender, sexuality or disability. This should also include a greater focus on encouraging reporting and prosecution when racist and xenophobic abuse is targeted at Europeans in Britain, as part of the hate crime strategy.

Promoting contact: Within towns and cities we also need to ensure that people can meet, mix and get to know each other better. That has to start in schools. No child should grow up without getting the chance to meet children from other ethnic, faith and class backgrounds. If the promotion of more faith schools makes that more difficult, but still remains popular because parents want more choice, then government and schools must work even harder to ensure they provide opportunities for children to mix outside their own group.

Equality of opportunity: Once they leave school, people from minority backgrounds must have access to the same opportunities as everyone else. That is not the case right now. Ethnic minority Britons are more likely to be university graduates than their white British peers, but less likely to get an interview when they apply for a job. That is not only patently unfair; it undermines efforts to ensure that all citizens feel they have an equal stake and are equally valued across our society. White working-class British boys, who are falling behind educationally and are less likely to go to university in the first place, may feel similarly excluded.

Shared history and identity: We need national action from the top to tackle the things that divide us, but we must also do more to celebrate the things we have in common. Britain's traditions of Remembrance have particular potential to do this. Commemorating the armies that fought for Britain a century ago – and realising they resemble, demographically, the Britain of 2016 rather more than that of 1916 in their multi-faith and multi-ethnic composition, with over a million Indian soldiers including more than 400,000 Muslims – can be a powerful way to discover that we sometimes have more shared history than we realise.

Beyond the campaign – engaging the public on immigration and integration

There are many debates and decisions that will not be resolved during the election campaign. Immigration has been a highly polarising issue and there is no agenda for immigration on which everybody is going to agree. That is equally the case, however, for other major political and policy issues too – such as levels of taxation, public spending or foreign policy. Disagreement about immigration policy is part of our democratic discourse, a debate which ranges from campaigns to increase the numbers of people we accept as refugees, to those which call for reductions to the in-flow of migration. And the job of democratic discourse is not to get everyone to agree – it is to find consensus among the majority.

That is an achievable aim for the immigration debate, too. It would be defeatist in the extreme to write-off such an important issue as uniquely and inherently polarising. Yet it can sometimes feel that politicians do just that when they try to avoid talking about immigration or change the subject when it is raised.

The EU referendum decision is a ‘Reset moment’ for immigration policy and demands a different kind of debate. This new context presents an opportunity to build a new, pragmatic consensus – one which acknowledges that major reforms of immigration policy will be needed after Brexit and which reflects the common ground of public opinion on what those changes could be.

That opportunity presents new challenges to both sides of our traditional immigration argument. Those who want to defend the economic and social gains that migration has brought to Britain need to rise to the challenge of rebuilding public confidence in it. They will need to engage constructively in debates about how to handle those pressures, including how we manage the impacts of migration and promote successful integration between new arrivals and the communities that they join. Those who are sceptical about the scale and pace of immigration will need to move beyond critiquing past failures and offer workable proposals to reduce immigration, in ways that recognise and meet the needs of our economy and public services.

The challenge for politicians, then, is not how to navigate a way around an issue that is so polarised that they cannot intervene constructively. It is rather one of rebuilding public trust after years of unheard concerns and broken promises across Conservative, Coalition and Labour governments. Meeting that challenge will require politicians to engage with the public: understanding their anxieties and seeking consensus on constructive solutions. The National Conversation on Immigration^[1], Britain’s biggest-ever public consultation on immigration taking place in every nation and region of the UK throughout 2017, will offer useful evidence of public attitudes and a blueprint for how the public could be more actively engaged in the immigration debate. [vi]

Most people do not see immigration as a simple, binary ‘for or against’, ‘open or closed’ issue. The pragmatic majority believe that immigration brings pressures on our society but it also brings gains too – and our immigration system should help us to manage those pressures in order to secure the gains.

Just as Britain’s new post-referendum context is a reset moment for immigration policy, it also offers an opportunity for a new kind of immigration debate, too. One which engages the public constructively in a conversation about those pressures and gains; which secures consent for the immigration that we need and decide to keep, and for the controls and targets that we put in place; and which starts to rebuild public trust in an immigration system that is right for Britain as we set out into our post-referendum future.

Notes

[i] http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Vocational_education_and_training_statistics

[ii] <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/skills/uk-skills-system-report>.

[iii] <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/skills/uk-skills-system-report>

[iv] ONS Quarterly migration statistics <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/migrationstatisticsquarterlyreport/feb2017#immigration-to-the-uk-estimated-to-be-596000>

[v] British Future and Universities UK, International students and the UK immigration debate, August 2014 <http://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/BRFJ2238-International-Students.WEB-FINAL.Embargo-25.8.14.pdf>

[vi] The National Conversation on Immigration, coordinated by British Future and Hope Not Hate alongside the Home Affairs Committee Immigration Inquiry, will host 120 conversations in 60 locations across the UK in 2017, supplemented by an online survey and national opinion polling. More information at www.nationalconversation.org.uk

British Future...

*British Future is an independent,
non-partisan thinktank*

British Future
Kean House
6 Kean Street London, WC2B 4AS
Tel: 020 7632 9069
Fax: 020 7632 9061
www.britishfuture.org
info@britishfuture.org